

## Address given by Carl Bildt on Sweden's European policy (Bonn, 13 November 1991)

**Caption:** On 13 November 1991, Carl Bildt, Swedish Prime Minister, outlines the reasons why Sweden had previously opted to remain outside the European Communities. He goes on to explain why, given the new geopolitical order in Europe, these reasons are no longer valid in the early 1990s, and he defends the country's decision to apply for accession to the Communities.

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## 'Sweden-from a reluctant to an enthusiastic European' - Remarks by the Prime minister, Mr Carl Bildt, at the Office of the Commission of the European Communities (Bonn, 13 November 1991)

On 12 December last year, our Parliament decided, by a substantial majority, to ask the Government to submit an official application for Swedish membership of the European Community.

This was a watershed event in Swedish history. After decades of self-imposed political isolation, Sweden decided to seek full partnership with the other democratic nations of Western Europe.

Taken together with the other changes in our society, I think it is correct to say that Sweden is passing from one era to another.

Throughout its history, Sweden has been deeply influenced by developments in the rest of Europe.

Indeed, for several centuries we were a continental power. From the Thirty Years War until the end of the Napoleonic era, Sweden had important territorial links to the south and to the east of the Baltic Sea. Western Pomerania was Swedish for 167 years—that is to say, almost as long as it has subsequently been German—and Wismar officially belonged to Sweden until 1903.

After we had lost our territorial links with Europe on the other side of the Baltic, we continued to be shaped by events and ideas in other European nations. During the first half of the 19th century, French continued to be the language spoken at Court in Sweden. During the later part of the same century, like all other countries in Europe, we were influenced by the development of the new Germany. And during the present century, we have increasingly felt the different sources of Anglo-Saxon inspiration that have meant so much for global development.

The first half of the present century in Europe has been marked by the great tragedy which began in August 1914 and did not really come to an end until May 1945. Two world wars destroyed Europe, devastated nations and completely changed the political fortunes and attitudes of nations and peoples.

But Sweden was less affected by this tragedy than most other European nations. Along with the other Nordic countries, we managed to stay out of the first of these wars. But alone among the northern European nations, and in the company only of Switzerland among the European nations, we were not directly involved in the Second World War either.

During these wars, Sweden pursued a policy of neutrality. It can be argued to what extent the policies pursued were as neutral in every respect as they should have been according to the international law textbook. But, for the government of the day, it was a matter of national survival, and the policy was more often dictated by these aims than by abstract principles.

In the eyes of the Swedish public, the fact that Sweden managed to stay out of these wars was largely attributed to the policy of neutrality. Just as the failure of neutral nations like Norway or Belgium to stay out of the war discredited the policy of neutrality, the very same policy became even more deeply engrained in the national political culture of Sweden.

As we all know, the experience of history often shapes the policies of the future.

Thus, when the nations which had been devastated by these wars started to build up entirely new structures of cooperation in order to make another war between them impossible, Sweden stayed aloof because it did not share the experience of these nations and because it believed that a certain amount of isolation from the affairs of the rest of Europe was likely to serve its future security interests.

Sweden was not alone in this scepticism towards the designs of the Schuman Plan and what developed from it subsequently. Winston Churchill, who so eloquently argued for a United States of Europe, saw it as

perfectly natural that Britain should preserve its distance from the continent.

During the 1950s, two competing models of cooperation thus emerged in Western Europe. The loser of these models, based more on the principle of free trade than on anything else, eventually came to assemble seven European nations in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). And there was also the politically far more ambitious effort to bring about an ever-closer union of Europe, codified by six states in the Treaty of Rome.

At the time, it was far from clear which of these rival models for European cooperation would eventually predominate. Today, that debate is over and the issue decided. What we have seen during the last two decades has been one West European nation after the other relinquishing the loser form of cooperation in favour of the politically much more ambitious and promising form represented by the evolving European Communities.

The divisions in Western Europe during the 1950s, and the enduring effects they have had in subsequent decades, were thus largely a result of the difference in historical experience among the generations of politicians who shaped this period. But, for better or worse, these experiences are now gradually fading away, as new generations of politicians are taking over the helm throughout Europe and trying to shape their times in accordance with their own experience and with their perception of the needs and demands of the future.

And then no one can deny that the efforts to build an ever-closer union of the peoples of Europe, first laid down in the Schuman Plan and later continued in the Treaty of Rome, have more than stood the test of time. This union has proved its worth in revitalizing our continent and in safeguarding not only peace, but also freedom and democracy. It clearly represents the path to the future.

But differences in historical experience were only one of the reasons why Sweden belonged to the circle of reluctant Europeans for so many years.

Another reason was Sweden's continued economic and social success. Indeed, for a century, from about 1870 to 1970, Sweden was the fastest growing economy of the industrialized world, along with Japan. And this very fast growth of our economy for this prolonged period made it possible to make ambitious and, for their period, far-sighted investments in social reforms, the infrastructure and education that rightly made Sweden the envy of many countries.

Although there was no direct connection, there tended to be a mental correlation of the policy of neutrality in the field of security and the economic and social policies of the 'Swedish middle way'.

It was possible, in the Swedish debate on our policy towards European integration, to find people who could claim that Sweden represented some superior form of society which should not be unduly endangered by cooperation with supposedly less developed European nations.

For a long time, the dominant forces in Swedish politics tended to see Sweden as a country which, through its 'third road' policies, could build bridges between East and West, not only in terms of security, but also in terms of finding some kind of compromise between the two competing social and economic systems.

It goes without saying that there is no longer any room for this sort of policy.

No one wants to be a compromise between a system which has turned out to be a success and another that has turned out to be a historic catastrophe. And since the walls in Europe have tumbled down in recent years, the need which there might have been for bridge-builders has evaporated as well.

In addition, there are the internal failures of the 'third road' policies. If we were one of the leading growth economies of the world during the century up to 1970, we have been lagging behind in subsequent decades. In fact, the growth gap between Sweden and the EC countries has widened continuously in recent years.

Consequently, we are now facing a difficult domestic economic situation in the early 1990s.

The recent elections in my country clearly demonstrated that the electorate want to see things changed. The more a particular political party was seen as resisting change, the more it lost, and the more a party was seen as advocating change, the more it gained.

Sweden today is a society longing for change. And the will to break out of isolation and join the rest of Europe is also an expression of this longing for change within our own society.

The aloofness with which official Sweden looked at the process of European integration in earlier decades also reflected the resistance to change which was the dominant mood of those times, while the enthusiasm with which Sweden now embraces the European ideal also reflects recognition of the need for change on a national as well as on a European scale.

Thus, the transition of Sweden from a reluctant to an enthusiastic European is the result of a number of different developments, some of them having to do with the way our own society has developed, and others very clearly connected with the enormous changes we have seen in Europe during the past few years.

I personally already favoured a Swedish application for membership in 1970, but it must also be recognized that, in the meantime, changes in our own country have made us more open to what European cooperation really means, while developments in Europe at large have made it very clear indeed that this is the only route to take for the future.

We can thus very honestly say that, as a nation, we are now ready to enter the European Community not as reluctant but as enthusiastic Europeans.

If, in the past few decades, our policies towards European integration were mostly discussed in economic terms, over the past year they have mainly been discussed in political terms, thus reflecting the important change in Swedish attitudes and commitments.

Had Swedish attitudes towards the European Communities remained unchanged, we would have been satisfied with access to the single market granted in the recently completed agreement on the creation of a European Economic Area, as this gives us most of the purely economic benefits of membership of a larger European economic and financial entity.

But our wish to become a member of the EC is now much more than a wish to share in the economic benefits of integration. We truly share the ideals of integration and cooperation set out in the Treaty of Rome and the Single European Act, and we see that it is also necessary to go forward with political integration in order to achieve a better future for all Europeans.

The Swedish application for membership was submitted on 1 July by the former Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, and the Commission has recently initiated its work of preparing the opinion it will submit to the Council of Ministers.

It is our hope that this opinion can be submitted as early as possible next year, thus making it possible to start formal negotiations in late 1992 or very early 1993. Since there are relatively few problems of substance to be solved during these negotiations, and much of the ground has been covered in the EEA Treaty, it is our hope that negotiations can be concluded during 1993, that the treaty of accession can be ratified during 1994 and that full membership will be possible by 1995.

There is no denying that this is an ambitious timetable. But, increasingly, it is also considered to be realistic.

The restrictions in terms of time imposed by the provisions of our constitution are an important factor from the Swedish point of view. In order to become members of the EC, we will have to make changes in our constitution, and furthermore the constitution states that the ratification of a treaty handing over specific

rights from Swedish state organs to supranational institutions should be treated as a change in the constitution itself. And, in addition, two decisions by Parliament with a general election in between, are required for a change in the constitution.

In my opinion, there is a great deal of logic in these provisions in our constitution. A constitution lays down the rules for the way we govern ourselves, and it is evident that if you go from a purely national system of government to a system of government that also operates on a European level, this should be reflected in the constitution.

But this imposes important time restrictions on us. The next general election is set for September 1994, and the treaty of accession must then be ready to be ratified in connection with this general election.

In order to fulfill all these provisions, we would thus need to be able to present the treaty of accession and the proposed changes in the constitution to Parliament before the middle of December 1993.

In recent years, there has been an on-going debate within the EC concerning the relative merits of a strategy of deepening integration versus a strategy of enlarging the Community.

Although it is not up to me to interfere unduly in this debate, I fail to see the contradiction. In my opinion, it will be imperative for the Community to deepen as well as to broaden its integration during the 1990s.

The overriding task for all of us for the rest of the 1990s must be to assist in the transition of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe from the devastation caused by socialist policies to the relative prosperity and stability that can only be provided by free market economies and pluralistic political systems.

If we do not succeed in contributing to stability in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s, I fear that developments in these countries will contribute to instability in Europe as a whole in years to follow.

To stabilize Eastern Europe today is to prevent the destabilization of Western Europe tomorrow.

This can only be done by a strong European Community. While other institutions certainly have important roles to play, not least when it comes to security issues, there is no substitute for the Community in the important task of assisting these countries in their 'return to Europe'.

The work now being concluded in the two intergovernmental conferences is a most important step in the process of strengthening the Community in order to make it better equipped to deal with the tasks ahead. It is my sincere hope and belief that the Maastricht meeting of the European Council will be able to take the decisions which are needed to put the Community firmly on the path towards economic and monetary as well as political union. This is in the interest of the whole of Europe.

A logical step immediately thereafter would be to complete—in geographical terms—the process of West European integration, by rapidly bringing in the remaining nations of Western Europe who were willing and ready to enter the Community.

Today, nine out of ten West Europeans are citizens of the Community, and the process of bringing the remaining tenth West European into the Community should not be regarded as unduly complicated.

This would undoubtedly reinforce the ability of the Community to go forward with the great tasks ahead in the rest of the 1990s, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.

Such a limited and rapid enlargement should therefore be seen, on the one hand, as the conclusion of the process that started in the 1950s with the competing ideologies for cooperation in Western Europe, and on the other hand, as an integral part of the efforts to improve the Community's ability to tackle the great tasks of the future in terms of helping and assisting the rest of Europe.

If we look at the two EFTA countries which have already applied for membership—Austria and Sweden—I think it is evident that, due to their positions and traditions, they would strengthen the Community in this regard.

Sweden's position in Northern Europe makes it well placed to assess and assist developments in the newly independent Baltic states and in the important and populous north-western areas of Russia. With its position and traditions in the very heart of Europe, Austria is equally well placed when it comes to the important developments which lie ahead in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

I am thus convinced that Sweden can become a net contributor to the Community, not only in financial but, more importantly, also in political terms. If Sweden is the applicant which, throughout the history of the Community, has presented the EC with the least problems of substance for its inclusion in the existing frameworks of cooperation, there is still a question mark in the minds of many politicians inside the Community as regards the compatibility of Swedish security policies and the long-term aims of the Community.

It was clearly stated by the past government, and has been repeated even more forcefully by the new government, that we adhere to the political aims of the Treaty of Rome and the Single European Act and that we are ready and willing to work towards the realization of the decisions that will result from the present intergovernmental conferences.

It will obviously be necessary to adjust the conduct of our foreign and security policies, both in this light and in the light of the new European realities.

I think three conclusions are important in this context.

The first is that it is obvious that the term 'policy of neutrality' can no longer adequately be applied as an overall description of the foreign and security policies we wish to pursue within the European framework. We will pursue a policy with a clear European identity.

The second is that Sweden has as great an interest as other European nations in the building of a new security architecture in Europe in order to be able to handle, contain or solve the security threats and tensions we are likely to face in the future. We will be ready to enter into a constructive dialogue on how we can contribute towards this end.

The third is that this in no way relieves us of our responsibility to be able to independently safeguard our large air, sea and land territory, with its strategic location between the North Atlantic and north-western Russia. To assure this, we will be increasing defence spending in real terms in the next medium-term defence plan.

The security architecture of Europe is now undergoing dramatic changes. We see the emergence of a framework of interlocking institutions in which the EC, the CSCE, the Council of Europe, NATO and the WEU complement each other in a constructive way.

The invitation issued in its Rome Declaration by NATO to the Soviet Union to join not only in a political declaration but also in the setting up, together with other former members of the Warsaw Pact and with the Baltic states, of a North Atlantic cooperation council certainly signals the dimensions of the changes under way.

The setting up of the new security architecture of Europe will inevitably be an evolutionary process. At the moment, we cannot even be certain how many independent states there will be in tomorrow's Europe.

The conclusions of the Maastricht European Council on one important contribution which the Community can make to this development are thus unlikely to be the last word on this subject in the present decade. On the contrary, I believe we can look forward to a discussion which, under the influence of the developments

in Central and Eastern Europe, will make a new intergovernmental conference on the subject necessary in the not too distant future.

In my opinion, the discussions concerning the future security architecture must take into account different conditions in different parts of Europe.

In the Mediterranean countries, it is obvious that the developments along the southern shores of the Mediterranean give cause for concern, and that the influences exerted by the situation in the Middle East must always be taken into account.

In South-Eastern Europe we are likely to be confronted with a prolonged period of tension and perhaps conflicts, as the region tries to solve its social and economic problems at the same time as it accommodates the growing national aspirations of its various peoples.

In Eastern Europe, the effects of the second Russian revolution will be felt for a long time to come. It must be recognized that just as the first Russian revolution was followed by a long period of uncertainty, it is likely that it will take time before we can be certain of the shape and the contents of the political and economic systems that will follow in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet state.

In Northern Europe, we have a clear interest in the political stability and economic prosperity of the three Baltic countries, and a desire to prevent a situation where they find themselves in a security vacuum which could one day endanger their very existence as independent states.

We also continue to be aware of our proximity, not only to the St. Petersburg area, but also to the concentration of strategic nuclear assets which are still there on the Kola peninsula.

I doubt that it will be possible to devise a single structure which can take care of all of the diverse security needs of these different parts of Europe by following some standard recipe. The framework of interlocking institutions that we see today will probably continue to be required.

But it is equally clear that the evolving European Union, and its various bodies, is bound to play an increasingly important role and to assume increasingly heavy responsibilities in these respects.

Sweden will play its part in the devising of these new structures of European security. With common values throughout Europe, we now have a real chance to build a genuine common security.

Common security without common values never works. That is the lesson of history. But common security with common values does. Although this often tends to be forgotten, the success of the European Community is a good example in this context.