"Carl Bildt: Security policy a self-evident part of EC cooperation" from Svenska Dagbladet (9 August 1992)

Caption: On 9 August 1992, in an article in the daily newspaper Svenska Dagbladet, Carl Bildt, Swedish Prime Minister, explains that the recent geopolitical changes in Europe require that Sweden change the course of its security policy in the framework of the European Union.

Source: Documents on Swedish Foreign Policy 1992. Volume I: C: 42. Stockholm: Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1993.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/"carl_bildt_security_policy_a_self_evident_part_of_ec_cooperation"_from_svenska_dagbladet_9_august_1992-en-f3dafc82-f55a-4637-a781-3710de3d88db.html

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Security policy a self-evident part of EC cooperation

Ambassador Sverker Åström, who played a key role in formulating and defending the Swedish doctrine of neutrality in the postwar years, makes it very clear in his 'Focal Point' article (9 August) that Sweden has entered a new phase in its security policy.

His conclusion is that 'from now on, discussion in Sweden should be less about the obvious conflict between neutrality and membership [of the EC] and more about the possible alternatives to a neutrality policy that no longer serves its purpose'.

That there is a conflict between retaining a policy of neutrality and joining the European Community is too obvious to need pointing out. Nor was it a coincidence that Parliament, in its new and important decision on security policy in the spring (Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 19), was not prepared to endorse motions, tabled by the Left Party and individual Social Democrats, that called for a reaffirmation of the oft-cited statement of opinion which Parliament adopted in 1990, about seeking membership of the EC while retaining our policy of neutrality.

Transitional phase

Instead, Parliament emphasized that we are now in a transitional phase as regards security policy, with two characteristic features. The hard core of our policy—non-participation in military alliances—still remains. At the same time, we wish to be fully involved in building a new European security order, with all that this may entail.

The Government thus received clear support for the line we have been pursuing since taking office last autumn.

Sweden's policy of neutrality was something that could be taken as read during the decades of bloc confrontation in Europe. It served our national interests first and foremost, but it also helped to ensure relative stability in northern Europe. Strongly supported as it was by our military defence, it was undoubtedly the right policy then. Those who sought to disparage it at that time had a poor understanding of the security realities of Europe as they then were.

Totally new situation

Today, however, the situation has changed fundamentally. A major war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, which was basically the only war possible in Europe at that time and which our policy of neutrality was designed to keep us out of, has now been completely eliminated as a possibility. The Europe of two blocs, to which the neutrality policy of those years was a response, no longer exists, nor, consequently, do the threats which that policy was intended to counter.

In their place, a broad spectrum of new risks and threats can now be discerned. While the risk of a devastating major war, overshadowed by the menace of escalation into a nuclear conflict, is no longer with us, we are seeing one conflict after another arising from unresolved national, economic or ecological problems. Not as serious as a great war, but sufficiently devastating to demand solidarity and determination on the part of the other countries of Europe.

In the Europe of bloc confrontation, avoiding foreign and security policy ties of any kind was a cardinal principle of our policy, since such ties could have compromised our chances of remaining neutral in the major war that everyone feared.

Now time for involvement

In the new situation in Europe, however, it is by involving ourselves in the foreign and security policy cooperation that is emerging, rather than isolating ourselves from it, that we can most effectively promote

peace for ourselves and for the rest of Europe.

In doing so, we are reaffirming an element of Swedish foreign and security policy which is in fact older than the strict neutrality approach of the cold-war decades, namely an endeavour to achieve collective and common security.

It ought to be evident that it is only by cooperating more closely in every area that we can tackle the broad spectrum of threats to the peace of the new Europe. Just as the EC has consolidated peace in Western Europe by its efforts to establish an ever closer union between its societies, so, in the decades ahead, we must extend this cooperation to Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe so as to help resolve the conflicts and problems of those regions before they result in all-out war.

Other debaters this summer have highlighted the instability existing in various parts of Europe and the risks for the future which it entails. The more concerned we are about this instability, the more vital it would seem to be to broaden our cooperation.

Those who take the view that Sweden should not be involved in this endeavour must surely consider that no one else should either. What is wrong for us surely cannot be right for others. But the consequences of such a policy should be easy to see. If, instead of cooperation, new barriers and frontiers were to be erected between the nations of Europe, peace would become increasingly fragile for us all.

It is self-evident that this cooperation must include foreign and security policy. That is true within both the CSCE process and the EC. Sweden has been an active force within the CSCE, and we have every reason to welcome the significant steps now being taken by the EC towards increasingly firmly based foreign and security policy cooperation. In both contexts, further steps will no doubt be necessary in the years to come.

Quite clearly there is also a defence dimension to this. The economic, social and ecological dimensions of the security problems facing us have become increasingly apparent, but the military dimensions are still there.

The decisions taken at the CSCE summit in Helsinki established a more prominent role for various types of peacekeeping operation in Europe, not least so as to ease the burden on the United Nations in a number of situations.

Case-by-case decisions

This certainly does not mean—as those opposed to cooperation would have it—that Swedish soldiers could be compelled to take part in combat operations in other countries without our having any say in the matter. Involvement in peacekeeping operations is dependent on decisions taken in each individual case, and on volunteer personnel. That is the case today, and will remain so.

In public debate, future membership of the EC is often made out to be a liability to our security policy. Those who make such claims, however, do not appear to have thought through the new situation that has arisen. It is difficult to imagine situations in which membership of the EC and participation in its foreign and security policy cooperation would not in fact be a significant asset from the viewpoint of our security policy.

As the Government and Parliament have emphasized, we still retain the possibility, if we wish, of remaining neutral in the event of a war in our vicinity. But at the same time it is clear that the range of possible conflicts in which it would be natural for Sweden to declare itself fully neutral under international law is becoming narrower.

Stopping aggression

It goes without saying that neutrality is not an option for Sweden in a conflict of the kind we are now seeing, with Bosnia-Herzegovina the victim of Serbian-controlled and supported aggression. We have every reason

to make whatever contributions we can to stopping this aggression before it sparks off a conflagration in the Balkans worse than the one we have already witnessed.

But even as regards our immediate vicinity, it is no longer possible to draw any automatic conclusions about how we would respond in different situations.

When Stalin fell upon Finland in December 1939, with the aim of recapturing our neighbour for the Great Russian empire, neutrality was an impossible policy for Sweden. Finland's cause became the cause of the Swedish people, and our official policy was limited to that of being a nonbelligerent.

Discussion about possible serious challenges to our security policy in the years ahead often centres on the danger of an authoritarian regime in Russia with revanchist designs on its neighbours. Preventing such a situation from arising is a key objective of the moves towards closer cooperation in Europe.

Should these moves fail, every situation would have to be assessed in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time in question. But it is not improbable that a future Sweden would have the same feelings as in 1939 in the event of a Russian attempt, in a fictitious situation of this kind, to do something along the lines of what the notorious Russian demagogue and presidential candidate Zhirinovsky has already spoken of publicly. He wants to put pressure on Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and preferably to reconquer them all.

Who would dare to assert that neutrality would automatically be Sweden's policy in such a situation?

More in-depth debate

Sverker Åström calls for a more in-depth debate about our security in the Europe of tomorrow, and wants us to give careful consideration to the perhaps unique opportunity we have now been offered to find new arrangements, through EC membership, by which to enhance the protection of our peace and freedom in the longer term. The fact that he is saying this is of particular significance.

I entirely share his assessment that we now need a debate, and that that debate should be about tomorrow's opportunities for Sweden, rather than yesterday's limitations. Otherwise the danger is that the discussion will degenerate into a mechanical mumbling of formulas that have now lost their meaning. Trying to assert that nothing has changed and nothing needs to be changed is, at best, self-delusion and, at worst, a deliberate attempt to withhold from the public the truth about what is happening.

Opening up now are new opportunities to work towards what are the self-evident goals of our security policy: to preserve our own freedom and peace by contributing to freedom and peace in the Europe of which we are so obviously a part.