Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström

Statement of Government Policy

in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs
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Government of Sweden

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr/Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sweden's security begins in Europe. EU cooperation gives us peace, stability and growth. It is also crucial in tackling the threat of climate change.

Yet the Europe we know is changing.

We can no longer take for granted that all EU Member States believe in the values that are the foundation of European cooperation.

Nationalists and extremists are challenging political systems across our continent, across the world.

Those of us who have faith in the future must now rally together to fight insecurity.

In a changing world, our task is to pursue a foreign policy that creates security in Sweden and around us.

To do this, foreign policy during this electoral period will have three priorities: the promotion of democracy, shared responsibility for peace and security, and active diplomacy.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Around the world, democracy is in decline. Today, more people are living in countries with authoritarian tendencies than in countries making democratic progress.

Journalists, elected representatives and human rights defenders are being harassed, persecuted and killed. Agitation and hate are poisoning public debate. Democratic processes are being undermined. Many people are losing confidence in the democratic system as the global elite becomes ever richer and social inequality grows.

In response to these developments, we are now launching a drive for democracy. We will do this together with the Riksdag, and will encourage other countries to join us.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Our democracy drive will be reflected in all areas of our foreign policy. It will involve providing support and sustenance wherever democracy can grow, and expressing criticism when it is eroded.

We will increase our democracy assistance and stand up for democracy's defenders and institutions.

We must involve more young people in the debate on democracy as the best solution to society's problems.

And we will require that all EU Member States respect democracy and the rule of law.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Fully functioning democracy is impossible without human rights, and Sweden has a crucial responsibility to promote these rights.

We will continue to produce country reports on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We will shortly publish updated reports on 29 European countries.

Persecution of religious minorities occurs in many parts of the world – this is unacceptable. We are strengthening efforts against anti-Semitism, and will organise an international conference on the Holocaust in 2020.

We will protest when freedom of expression is curbed, when journalists are silenced and when human rights defenders and LGBTI people are persecuted.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

There is a connection between growing social inequality and decreasing confidence in democracy. That is why we need more equality and fewer disparities within countries.

The world's resources must be spread in a spirit of solidarity. The goal of Sweden's aid policy is to reduce poverty. While other countries are cutting back, Sweden continues to allocate one per cent of GNI to aid. The focus areas are democracy and human rights, conflict prevention, climate, environment and gender equality. We will continue to build sustainable peace by linking humanitarian aid and long-term development cooperation.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals can only be achieved through synergies between economic, environmental and social sustainability.

We must improve the social dialogue between states, employers and employee organisations. The International Labour Organisation, which celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2019, is one important actor in this. Now that the OECD has become the home of the Prime Minister's Global Deal initiative, it will be further developed and have an even greater impact. This is how we build fair societies.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

An important part of our democracy drive is to continue our efforts to ensure that women enjoy the same rights, resources and representation as men.

The Government will continue to pursue a feminist foreign policy – wholeheartedly, throughout the world. We see that a growing number of countries are being inspired and are following our lead.

Sweden is a leader when it comes to giving greater attention to women, peace and security in the UN, the EU and the OSCE. Our network of women mediators is being expanded, and similar networks are being created, including in the African Union. They are pursuing conflict resolution in a number of countries.

We will continue our extensive support to sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example by funding initiatives for legal abortions, contraceptives and sex education.

We will work against trafficking in human beings, combat violence against women and share our experience of the Swedish Sexual Purchases Act.

We will promote women's political engagement and economic empowerment.

The Government's international gender equality conference will be followed up in Tunisia this spring, and Sweden will provide organisational assistance.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Our second priority is shared responsibility for peace and security.

Climate change, nuclear weapons and terrorism know no national borders. They must therefore be addressed by sharing responsibility for our collective security.

Climate is the defining issue of our time. Science predicts frightening consequences if we do not take action. We are still far from being able to meet the challenge.

Sweden will continue to show leadership in international climate efforts and will be the world's first fossil-free welfare nation. We will seek forms of cooperation to tackle climate-related security risks.

The level of ambition in our climate efforts must be raised if the world is to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Sweden is fulfilling its commitments on international climate financing and is continuing its engagement for the oceans and biodiversity. Through our development assistance, we are investing in renewable energy, energy efficiency and climate-sensitive agriculture. At the 2019 UN Climate Summit in September, Sweden will be proactive in showing the possibilities to combine climate action with economic growth.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's security policy remains firmly in place. Our non-participation in military alliances serves us well and contributes to stability and security in northern Europe. It requires an active, broad and responsible foreign and security policy combined with enhanced defence cooperation – particularly with Finland – and credible national defence capabilities.

Sweden's foreign and security policy builds on cohesion in the EU and increased cooperation on a broad front: in the Nordic region and the Baltic Sea region, in the UN and the OSCE, and through partnership with NATO.

Sweden will not remain passive if another EU Member State or a Nordic country suffers a disaster or an attack. We expect these countries to act in the same way if Sweden is affected. We must therefore be able to both give and receive support, civilian as well as military.

Our security is dependent on the European security order being respected, and we will act through the EU, as well as in the OSCE and the Council of Europe, to maintain it.

The transatlantic link is of crucial importance to Europe. We will uphold our bilateral relations with the United States, and cooperate based on values and interests. We regret that the United States has chosen to withdraw from a number of international agreements.

Nordic cooperation is a priority for the Government and will be further strengthened. We will strive for tangible improvements for those of us who live, work and study here, for example by removing more border barriers. This will make our region more secure and sustainable.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The Government's policy towards Russia is based on two tracks:

On the basis of international law, we condemn the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine, which resulted in more than 10 000 deaths, and the illegal annexation of Crimea. This is a breach of international law and challenges the European security order. We are critical of attacks such as that last year in the town of Salisbury in the UK. We are pushing for the EU sanctions against Russia to be maintained for as long as the reasons for their introduction remain. We support the reform efforts in Ukraine.

At the same time, we – like the EU – have contacts and dialogue with Russia and Russian society. We need to cooperate where we have common interests. We support Russian civil society and encourage stronger people-to-people contacts. The Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Arctic Council are forums in which we have concrete cooperation.

Arctic issues are important to global security. During the year, Sweden will renew its Arctic Strategy and host the EU's first Arctic forum.

The important Eastern Partnership will celebrate its 10th anniversary this year. We support the participating countries' development towards stable democracies.

Shared responsibility for peace and security also means jointly addressing attempts to create division and instability in our societies. The Government is also working together with other countries to address non-military threats, such as terrorism or those of a cyber or hybrid nature.

Equality and democracy play important roles in building common security. A society characterised by social justice and confidence in its institutions is better equipped to cope with the security challenges of our time.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The European Union is our most important foreign policy arena. A strong and united EU is of crucial importance in a time of uncertainty around the world.

We must strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy. We will hone the EU's instruments, including diplomacy, military and civilian crisis interventions, and development assistance and trade. We are contributing to the Permanent Structured Cooperation, which strengthens operational capabilities and effectiveness in the area of defence. We have played a crucial role for the Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy Compact.

The Government will continue to work to ensure that all Member States respect and uphold the EU's common values.

The elections to the European Parliament in May will be important. We need a Europe for fair jobs, a more ambitious climate policy, gender equality and social equality. Inequalities must decrease, and prosperity increase.

It is also important that the EU has a common asylum system that provides legal certainty, is humane and sustainable, and in which all countries take their responsibility.

We regret the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, and are working for an orderly withdrawal. This will provide the best conditions to ensure that the UK's future relationship with Sweden and the EU will be close and trusting.

There must be clear EU prospects for the countries of the Western Balkans, but this requires continued reforms that strengthen the countries' institutions and develop democracy – work that takes time, and which we support.

Developments in Turkey are very worrying. The EU must both cooperate with, and place demands on, Turkey.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Global problems require global solutions. Sweden is a friend of the UN, and sees the need for reform.

On 31 December, Sweden ended its two-year term on the United Nations Security Council, where we were deeply engaged in the world's most serious crises.

In a polarised Security Council, Sweden stood up for international law, human rights, gender equality and humanitarian responsibility. We put the connection between climate and security on the Council's agenda.

At the beginning of our term, Sweden was often a lone voice for women's participation in peace and security efforts. Today, more and more Council members see the necessity of including women and girls to achieve sustainable peace.

The UN's and other international peace operations fulfil an important function in war-torn areas, and Sweden's contribution is appreciated.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

For almost 80 years, humanity has lived under the threat of nuclear weapons. In recent decades, this threat has been limited through various agreements. This has contributed to a safer, more secure world.

Apart from the risk of human error causing a human disaster, we are facing a number of problems:

Firstly, tensions between major powers are increasing now that the United States and Russia have suspended the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty on disarmament following Russian non-compliance. Security in our neighbourhood is

deteriorating. The nuclear-weapon states must take joint responsibility and make concrete disarmament commitments.

Secondly, the most central agreement – the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons – is endangered by nuclear-weapon states developing new capabilities and not complying with the agreement to disarm.

Thirdly, North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programmes are a serious threat to international peace and security.

Finally, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, is now at risk. Iran's nuclear weapons capability has been reduced considerably since this deal was signed. The EU is now taking concrete steps to protect the deal.

The inquiry report on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has been circulated for comment.

The Government's objective remains a world free of nuclear weapons. We will therefore start a new initiative and bring together a wide circle of countries in this work for shared responsibility for nuclear disarmament.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Our third priority is diplomacy. This means that we will seek dialogue and cooperation, even with countries whose values we do not fully share. We will prioritise our participation in multilateral organisations and stand ready to participate in peace processes.

Well-functioning international cooperation is the foundation of a rules-based international order founded on international law.
Sweden is now a venue for talks on disarmament and peaceful conflict resolution on the Korean Peninsula. With persistent diplomatic efforts, and good relations with all parties, we will continue to try to help remove a serious threat.

The political process for peace in Yemen took a decisive step with the Stockholm Agreement in December 2018. We will continue our engagement. In a few weeks,

we will host a humanitarian donor conference in Geneva for the third time. The suffering must be brought to an end.

When the Government launched an action plan for relations with Latin America and the Caribbean during the last electoral period, the trend of democracy-building had been positive for many years. Since then the situation has worsened.

Venezuela is one of the countries where democracy has been eroded over a very long period of time. The situation is desperate. The EU is now taking joint action, together with Latin American countries, to find a peaceful and democratic solution. Sweden is participating in the new contact group.

The Government is working for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, based on international law. Sweden – like the rest of the EU – sees Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. We have long-standing, friendly engagement with Israel and Palestine. The Government contributes to democratic statebuilding in Palestine. We stand up for Israel's legitimate security needs.

Sweden's broad engagement in Afghanistan will continue, including by strengthening women's participation in peace processes.

Sweden supports the new Iraqi Government's reform efforts. Relations between the country's various ethnic and religious groups, such as Christians, as well as the status of the Kurds, are crucial for long-term peace and stability in Iraq.

Some 13 million people have been displaced in Syria. Sweden has given more than SEK 3 billion in humanitarian support since the outbreak of the war and supports the UN-led process to achieve sustainable peace.

I will never forget the appalling testimonies by Rohingya women on abuses in Myanmar. Sweden is pushing for accountability.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We are strengthening our partnerships with African countries and with the African Union.

Our work in the Security Council is being followed up in the Horn of Africa. The protracted conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea has been replaced by a historic

peace. The Government has decided to double our development assistance to Somalia, where the situation is vulnerable. We will continue to work for positive developments in the region around the Red Sea. Our broad relations enhance our opportunities to contribute to reconciliation and development.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has undergone a historic transfer of power, but the country's challenges remain. Sweden is working for women's political participation and a strong civil society.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

India is playing an increasing role in the world and is an important partner for Sweden in trade and innovation.

China's stronger international position brings both opportunities and challenges. Trade with China creates both jobs and growth in Sweden. The democracy and human rights situation in China is very serious. The Government is working on developing a new China strategy.

But the winds of protectionism are blowing ever stronger. The trade conflict between the United States and China is a threat to the multilateral trade order.

Diplomacy is also promotion of our trade. Exports increased during the previous electoral period. The Government launched an export strategy that included a number of initiatives to strengthen the business sector's internationalisation and our economic relations with the rest of the world. This strategy will now be developed with a focus on economic, social and ecological sustainability.

Sweden stands up for free and fair trade. We defend the multilateral trade system, of which the WTO is a central part.

The Swedish Foreign Service is handling a number of consular cases. Some of them are politically difficult. Most people are helped in secrecy. We always act with their best interests at heart. The work to help Swedish citizens in distress abroad continues around the clock, every day of the year.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The worries of the world can sometimes make it seem like doomsday is close at hand.

But the world can be made safer and more secure – with more democracy, more solidarity, more cooperation, more sustainability.

Hope is not a feeling, but a way of acting.

Let's not forget that. Let's fight the doomsday feeling with a policy for hope and faith in the future – in Sweden and in the world.