Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström

Statement of Government Policy

in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs,
Wednesday 15 February 2017

Government of Sweden

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement of Foreign Policy 2017

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

Sweden and the world are experiencing a paradoxical time of rapid and significant change.

Ten years ago, the number of displaced people was half of today's 65 million. Syria was a tourist destination. Russia had not attempted to change the borders of Georgia and Ukraine by force.

China's economy was a quarter of the size it is today. Brexit was an unknown term. There were no tweets from the President of the United States because Twitter had only just been created.

Rapid global change can spread liquid fear – and at the same time lay the foundation for crucial progress. For every minute I speak, some 120 people are lifting themselves out of extreme poverty. The Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda provide a roadmap for a sustainable future. Thanks to the peace agreement in Colombia, South America can become a continent of peace.

There is a legend that serves as a parable for these times, when amidst the darkness there are glimmers of light.

A grandfather says to his grandchild: "There is a battle between two wolves inside me. One is evil; he is arrogance, ego, lies and despair. The other is good; he is peace, compassion, truth and hope. This battle is inside us all."

The grandchild asks: "Which wolf wins?" The grandfather replies: "The one you feed."

In difficult times, Sweden's foreign policy rests on a solid value-based foundation of human rights, democracy and multilateral cooperation. Simply putting one's own country first would be selfish and unwise. What is good for the world is good for Sweden.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

After the war ended in 1945, a multilateral world order was created, founded on universal values. As global 'centres of gravity' shift, the world order we have become accustomed to is being challenged. Norms, power balances and global stability are being affected.

To navigate today's global challenges we need to consider how peace, freedom and reconciliation can be achieved in our part of the world. This is why the European Union remains so important to us, and the Government will work vigorously for an EU that is cohesive and principled.

Developments in the EU and in the world around us are putting the European project to the test. Economic recovery is uneven; xenophobic and populist forces have gained ground.

Later this year, our Prime Minister and the President of the European Commission will host a summit in Gothenburg on fair jobs and growth. We need a more social Europe, with functioning labour markets, effective and sustainable social protection systems and improved social dialogue.

Migration issues have become increasingly important and the EU must act together for a sustainable European asylum system based on a fair sharing of responsibility by all Member States. We need to sharpen the focus on the root causes of displacement and on conflict prevention, and increase support to the UN Refugee Agency and the International Organisation for Migration.

The Government regrets that the United Kingdom has chosen to leave the European Union, and we want our good relations to continue. When negotiations begin we will act on the basis of what best serves the common European project and Swedish interests.

The EU is our most important foreign policy arena. The EU Global Strategy will play an important role in crisis management capacity using both civilian and military means. Sweden will actively seek to strengthen the Common Security and Defence Policy. We welcome the strengthening of EU-NATO cooperation, and we want the EU to work even more closely with the UN.

The Government gives priority to both a stronger Eastern Partnership and continued enlargement processes in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Cooperation with Turkey remains strategically important for the EU, but developments in the country in terms of human rights, respect for the rule of law, and the situation of the opposition and the media are deeply worrying. The peace process to resolve the Kurdish issue must be resumed. This would contribute to peace and security both in Turkey and regionally.

The reunification of Cyprus is within reach. We encourage the parties to continue their efforts to achieve this goal.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Common security – building security in collaboration with other countries and organisations – is a cornerstone of Sweden's security policy.

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

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 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. Our country must therefore be in a position to both give and receive support, civilian as well as military.

Our first line of defence consists of a foreign policy that we pursue through diplomacy, mediation, conflict prevention and confidence-building. This increases Sweden's ability to promote détente and stability both in our neighbourhood and globally.

Conditions for protecting the population and maintaining critical infrastructure have changed. Military threats, armed conflicts, cyber threats, terrorism, violent extremism and organised crime create continuous risks in an increasingly complex and interconnected world, but pandemics, antibiotic resistance and natural disasters also affect Sweden's security. To respond to these developments, in January the Government adopted a national security strategy based on our national interests.

Modern society is increasingly dependent on a secure energy supply and robust transport and infrastructure. Climate change is a threat to human existence. Inequality, environmental threats, water issues and resource scarcity are other long-term challenges. The implementation of the strategy is a priority and lays the foundation for enhanced security efforts.

The brutal terrorist attacks around the world underscore the need for deeper cross-border cooperation based on solidarity. International cooperation also facilitates efforts to prevent radicalisation.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

In view of the serious international situation, the Government is urging global actors such as the United States, China, India and Russia to take greater responsibility – both towards each other and towards the rest of the world.

Russia's behaviour, when manifested in military action, disinformation and influence operations, remains aggressive and increases tensions. Our response is guided by principles and values, is firm, clear and long-term, and fosters EU unity. The foundation of our approach is a desire to stand up for international law and the European security order.

Domestic political developments in Russia are also regressive, with authoritarian rule, civil society under pressure and a lack of respect for human rights.

Sweden needs a broad approach in relation to Russia. We will maintain a political dialogue, take a long-term view, urge Russia to pursue cooperation rather than confrontation, and promote people-to-people contacts. And we will do so without compromising our principles-based stance.

Sweden condemns Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea. The sanctions must remain in place for as long as the reasons for their introduction remain. By supporting Ukraine's reform efforts and standing up for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity under international law, we will contribute to its aspiration to move closer to the EU.

This year, Sweden will take over the Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. We want to see a Baltic Sea region characterised by respect, trust and security. Cooperation to increase security and tackle challenges such as environmental threats will be promoted, along with better conditions for regional development and contacts between citizens.

Sweden enjoys, and will continue to enjoy, close relations with the United States. Relations with the new US administration remain important for our trade and our security. But the White House's actions raise questions about the role of the United States in the world.

We believe that Sweden, the EU and the US have everything to gain from working for a rules-based world order, from standing up for our common norms and values, and tackling global challenges together.

This is how we will act – with our neighbours, in a coordinated manner within the EU, and with other like-minded countries.

Canada is becoming an increasingly important partner for both Sweden and the EU, not least through the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

Our aim of renewing contacts with Latin America has been welcomed in the region, and in the next few months we will present an action plan for increased cooperation.

Asia is the growth engine of the global economy, and major investments are being made there in the technologies of the future. Our engagement in Asia aims to contribute both to sustainable development and to democracy and respect for human rights.

Relations with China are developing, but the regional security policy tensions and democratic and human rights situation are a cause for concern.

Sweden's cooperation with India is deepening. The EU's free trade negotiations with several ASEAN countries are welcome, and we are working for an ambitious agreement with Japan.

Sweden continues to work for Afghanistan's peaceful and sustainable development. We are maintaining our civilian and military engagement, and we support women's participation in peace and reconciliation processes.

In 2017, the Government intends to adopt a new strategy for development cooperation with Myanmar. It may contribute to peaceful, inclusive and democratic developments in the country, including for the Rohingya minority.

Sweden's strong ties to the countries of Africa are being further developed as the demand for diversified trade and modern development cooperation increases.

Concrete contributions to peace, security and development are being made via our long-term development cooperation, but also through our troop contribution to MINUSMA in Mali and our participation in EU operations in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. We are strengthening our partnership with the African Union and the sub-regional organisations in efforts to prevent armed conflict.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The Syrian regime and its allies have employed a brutal military strategy. Sweden is engaged in helping to find a long-term solution, in part by giving women a voice in the peace process. Our extensive aid comprises both immediate emergency relief and long-term support, including to neighbouring countries that have taken in a large number of refugees.

The UN must play a central role. Our seat on the Security Council offers a forum in which we can work for a ceasefire, humanitarian access, a return to peace negotiations, and accountability for war crimes, serious violations and the use of chemical weapons.

In the first half of this year, the Government intends to produce a new five-year aid strategy for Iraq. Our contribution to the Global Coalition against Daesh will double, from 35 to 70 people.

This year marks 50 years of the occupation of Palestine. Sweden continues to work for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and will appoint a special envoy.

When I visited Palestine in December it was noticeable that hope can turn to despair, and this features heavily in the consultations that Sweden is holding with almost 150 Israeli and Palestinian civil society organisations.

Security Council resolution 2334 on the Israeli settlements, and the international conference held in Paris in January, could, in the best-case scenario, create the conditions for a renewed peace process and a two-state solution.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's feminist foreign policy is producing results for women, girls and entire societies.

Our efforts have contributed to some 20 countries drawing up laws and proposals to strengthen gender equality, to hundreds of thousands of women and girls avoiding unsafe abortions and unwanted pregnancies, to some 90 local communities abandoning the practice of female genital mutilation and to 65 countries and organisations making commitments to combat gender-based violence. Sexual and reproductive health and rights will be an even higher priority.

A new national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, our Chairmanship of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, a strategic initiative on dialogue and peace processes, and a women's mediation network are some of the elements of our work for peace, security and sustainable development.

The fact that we were elected to the UN Security Council by such a wide margin is a testament to the Government's global policy. During Sweden's Presidency in January, it became clear that UN Secretary-General António Guterres supports our ambition for the UN to promote peacebuilding and conflict prevention, dialogue as a tool, and the active participation of women in peace processes.

We are a critical friend of the UN, working for a reformed and more transparent Security Council. A more modern, more effective and gender-equal UN system is crucial. We will spearhead the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, both globally and in Sweden. All policy areas must contribute to a sustainable and fair world.

The aim of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is a world free of nuclear weapons. Any move away from this aim must be prevented, and nuclear-weapon states have a particular responsibility in this context. The Government welcomes the fact that a clear majority of the world's countries have taken a stand for negotiations on a global nuclear weapons ban.

The nuclear accord with Iran is of crucial importance to non-proliferation efforts. North Korea is defying the international community with its nuclear weapons ambitions.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden is and will remain a global leader in development policy. Our SEK 6.5 billion in humanitarian aid makes us the world's seventh largest donor in nominal terms. Peacebuilding and statebuilding are at the heart of Swedish aid: without peace there can be no development.

The oceans play a crucial role in the global climate system; if current trends are not halted, by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the sea. In June, Sweden and Fiji will host the first major UN conference on saving the global marine environment.

Alarming climate change reports reach us with increasing frequency. In 2017, Sweden and the EU must demonstrate leadership in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Sweden will be one of the first fossil-free welfare nations. Our contributions to climate action in developing countries are among the largest in the world and thereby play a significant role in other countries' transition.

The Government has reinforced action for sustainable development and cooperation in the Arctic, where in November last year the sea ice shrank by an area twice the size of Sweden.

We are working for better global responsibility-sharing and governance on migration and refugee issues. The fight against human trafficking is being stepped up.

The Government stands firm in its intention that development aid will reach 1 per cent of Sweden's gross national income during this electoral period. The principles that will underpin our development cooperation have been presented to the Riksdag in a written communication.

And should anyone wonder whether these investments are worth our taxpayers' money, I say: have you calculated the cost of war, poverty and the death of our oceans?

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Greater equality in the labour market, decent working conditions, increased productivity and inclusive economic growth are important objectives for Sweden. The Prime Minister's Global Deal initiative is being followed up in cooperation with the ILO, the OECD and others.

At a time when protectionism is on the rise and free trade is being called into question, Sweden is standing up for free and fair global trade with the WTO multilateral trade system as the backbone. The Government will push for the EU to conclude progressive free trade agreements that safeguard social rights, environmental protection, animal welfare and human health.

Sweden is one of the world's most competitive countries, and its exports employ almost one and a half million people. Seventy-one per cent of Swedish exports go to the EU. We are thus contributing to deepening the EU single market. We want to dismantle trade barriers, benefit from the free movement of goods and services, harness the opportunities offered by the increasingly digital economy, and thus promote new business models and greater innovation. Our foreign trade continues to be strengthened by Sweden's export strategy, regional export centres and Team Sweden.

Sweden will maintain strict and effective export controls of military equipment, and the Government will present a bill on this in the first half of this year to tighten the export regulations to non-democracies.

Support to Swedes in emergency or crisis situations abroad and work on individual consular cases are perpetual activities of the Swedish Foreign Service that are always a priority, regardless of the level of public attention a matter receives.

Our efforts to strengthen respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law were presented in the written communication submitted to the Riksdag in December. New country-specific reports on the situation in all regions of the world will be presented in the first half of this year.

These reports highlight issues such as the right to reasonable remuneration for work, discriminatory legislation, violence against women, racism, and discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.

Free speech is under attack around the world; journalists and human rights defenders are being imprisoned and persecuted. Sweden supports those affected and works to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

Mr/Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

In 2016, 'post-truth' was named Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries.

Both functioning democracy and constructive cooperation between states require us to speak with, and not about, each other, to honour agreements and to allow ideas to compete. They also require us to respect science, facts and the media, and to acknowledge each other's wisdom.

I would therefore like to conclude the Statement of Foreign Policy by thanking the Left Party for continually reminding us about the troubling developments in Turkey.

That Sweden must emphasise human rights in its contacts with the rest of the world is something the Liberal Party never lets us forget.

In the battle against what may be humanity's worst invention – nuclear weapons – we can count on the Centre Party.

The Moderate Party is and has been a driving force when Sweden stands up for free trade.

And throughout the years, Swedish aid has had a dependable friend in the Christian Democrats.

The Government does not share the basic values or world view of the Sweden Democrats, and cooperation is out of the question, but we respect your place in the Riksdag.

Thank you to all the driving forces in civil society and in popular movements. Your efforts on the ground and in shaping public opinion make a difference in these difficult times.

We will meet again in searching conversations about how Sweden can contribute to a world founded on human dignity, where despair is conquered by hope.