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Minister for
Foreign Affairs

Statement of Government Policy

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Government Offices
of Sweden

Statement of Foreign Policy 2013

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Mr/Madam Speaker

Sweden's foreign policy begins in our own part of the world.

In the Nordic region, where history's wars have given way to today's ever closer cooperation.

Around the Baltic Sea, where people and trade link together some of the world's most competitive economies.

And in the Arctic, with its melting ice, its fragile natural environment and its potential.

Between Spitsbergen in the north and Szczecin in the south lie countries with which we share common values and interests. Both a history and a future. We are devoting special attention this year to this increasingly important neighbourhood.

On 1 January, Sweden took over the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Growth and competitiveness are in focus. In May we will be holding a Nordic jobs summit.

We are increasing our efforts to protect the Baltic Sea environment and are cooperating with our neighbouring countries within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Ferry lines, transport corridors and fibre optic cables are linking the old Hanseatic network back together, ushering in a new age of prosperity.

This year, Sweden will also be leading the informal foreign policy cooperation in the Nordic and Nordic-Baltic groups.

Much has already been achieved. Almost two years ago, a Nordic declaration of solidarity was adopted as a complement to both our own and our neighbouring countries' security policy choices.

But more can be done. And in the spring, the Government will present a report to the Riksdag on how we can further strengthen Nordic cooperation in the area of foreign, security and defence policy.

We are working to achieve closer cooperation between the Nordic foreign services.

We are pushing for enhanced Nordic emergency preparedness.

And we are building deeper cooperation on military operations and capabilities.

In Afghanistan, we are working side by side with important neighbouring countries, and we are planning Nordic cooperation in new action areas. We are conducting extensive exercises with the Norwegian, Finnish and Danish air forces. And together with Finland, Sweden has also offered to participate, by way of exercises, in the surveillance of Icelandic airspace that Norway will be responsible for in early 2014.

Sweden is also leading the Arctic Council in the first half of 2013.

At the ministerial meeting in Kiruna, which will conclude our chairmanship, we want to sign a new international agreement aimed at protecting Arctic waters from oil spills. We would like to see new commitments on short-lived climate pollutants. And working with the other Arctic states, we would like to formulate a new and ambitious common vision for the future.

During our two-year chairmanship, we have seen increased international attention being paid to the northern polar regions. But instead of becoming an arena of geopolitical confrontation, the Arctic – through the Arctic Council – has become an area for a unique form of international collaboration that we wish to strengthen and further develop.

Mr/Madam Speaker

The European Union has contributed to uniting our continent. It has grown to become the world's largest integrated economy. And it has become recognised as a force for peace, freedom and reconciliation around the world.

We must not forget this when countries' difficulties dominate the headlines.

In Sweden's view, there is no doubt: we want to be an active part of a strong, united and open Europe.

Economic integration, with the single internal market and the euro area, is of fundamental importance. It requires common institutions, joint decisions and common regulations.

During the years of economic crisis, we have succeeded in strengthening the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact to avoid new, excessive public deficits in the Member States. We have adopted a fiscal compact.

Cooperation is constantly evolving. New challenges create new opportunities and pose new demands.

We want to enhance the overall competitiveness of the EU. We want to further deepen the single market – which can contribute significantly to growth and employment – not least as regards trade in services and the digital agenda. We want to improve action against cross-border crime. We see environment policy as an increasingly important part of Europe's present and future.

EU cooperation is based on the understanding that our nation states cannot solve on their own many of the major challenges of our globalised age.

This applies not least to European foreign and security policy, which is based on universal values of freedom and democracy.

As the world shrinks, European cooperation can make us larger.

We need a strong European External Action Service, with a long-term vision for Europe's strategic choices.

This is why Sweden, along with Italy, Poland and Spain, has taken the initiative to invite leading European think-tanks to formulate a proposal in 2013 for a European Global Strategy.

We would also like to see modern European development assistance, a new European peace institute and the continued development of the European structures for crisis management.

Mr/Madam Speaker

The door to the European Union must remain open to all European democracies that want to and can fulfil the obligations that come with membership.

The enlargement process is in the interest of the candidate countries, and in our own interest too. We will keep our promises but at the same time make tough demands, not least with regard to human rights. This is the only way we can ensure a quality union with quality members.

We strongly support Iceland's ongoing accession negotiations. Impressive progress was made in 2012. We look forward to the day when another Nordic country takes a seat at the European negotiating table.

We welcome Croatia's EU entry on 1 July 2013 as the EU's 28th Member State and hope that its accession will contribute to the efforts needed in other countries in the region.

Membership negotiations with Montenegro began last autumn but the country must take vigorous action to combat organised crime.

While progress has been made in the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo, more is required before a start to negotiations with Serbia and the next stage of Kosovo's EU integration process.

Macedonia must maintain internal political stability and make efforts to resolve the name issue to secure the otherwise well-deserved opportunity to begin its negotiations.

And in Albania and Bosnia, concerted political responsibility needs to be taken to ensure that the countries do not fall behind in their European integration process.

Reconciliation after the devastating wars in the Balkans is key to peacebuilding efforts in our Europe.

Turkey is an increasingly important partner – in foreign policy as well – and we welcome Turkey's ongoing modernisation as a step towards full membership. We hope that a new constitution will ensure full rights and freedoms for everyone. We welcome the additional steps that have been taken to improve the rights of Kurds.

We want to strengthen protection for, and bring about an effective review of, respect for human rights – not only in the EU countries but in Europe as a whole.

Our vision of Europe is a vision of collaboration where diversity in, say, London and Istanbul is united by common rules and institutions to secure common values and protect common interests in an increasingly globalised world.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Europe does not end at what is today the outer border of the European Union.

Sweden, together with Poland, initiated the Eastern Partnership and we continue to be a driving force in this work.

Developments in the region have not been unequivocally positive.

Moldova is making progress, while Ukraine is standing still and Belarus is choosing to isolate itself. Reform policies in Georgia must continue, and we are concerned about growing strains between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In 2013, the EU is contributing just over SEK 5 billion to support the Eastern Partnership countries, and Sweden is contributing a further SEK 600 million. We will also appoint a special ambassador tasked with advancing this work, both in the EU and in the region.

Our hope is that as many of our partner countries as possible will be ready for association agreements and comprehensive free trade agreements with the EU when we meet for the Summit in Vilnius in the autumn.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Two years have passed since the hope of freedom and democracy was reignited in large parts of the Arab world.

We saw a revolution led not least by young people's rising expectations. Of freedom. Of dignity. Of economic development.

And we have seen enormous progress. Free elections. Free media. New possibilities.

But today – let us be honest – it is the tragedies and the challenges that dominate.

The peace process in the Middle East has stood still for far too long. Developments in recent years, with settlement after settlement in occupied territory, have moved us further away from lasting peace. Divisions between Palestinians, attacks on Israeli territory and excessive use of force against Palestinians create additional problems.

This vicious circle must be broken before it destroys the potential for a two-state solution and leads the region into new devastating wars.

All parties must refrain from violence and provocative actions. It is a matter of securing both the rights of the Palestinian people and the security of the Israeli people.

We view developments in Egypt with concern and hope that the entire country, in consensus, will find its way to full democracy – including freedom of religion – and economic development.

And the civil war in Syria is becoming increasingly difficult.

What began with peaceful demands for freedom has, through a brutal regime's violence, developed into a civil war that is destroying a country, tearing a society apart, forcing millions to flee and threatening an entire region.

It is not weapons that should determine the future of Syria.

Today, the prospects for a political solution appear slim. Nevertheless, this is precisely what we must try to achieve.

Here, the UN Security Council has an absolutely decisive responsibility.

All its members have a responsibility to reconcile the differences that have so far blocked the political process.

We strongly support the UN and the Arab League's special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi.

We are working to see the establishment of an opposition with a vision of a future Syria in which all ethnic and religious groups have a home.

And we are making significant efforts to help those in distress.

Sweden recently contributed a further SEK 150 million in extraordinary humanitarian assistance to the war victims – in addition to the approximately SEK 250 million for food and medicine we contributed in 2012.

It was a revolution of rising expectations that propelled the Arab awakening.

But if opportunities do not materialise, we risk a revolution of disappointed expectations.

The EU has taken the initiative for new reform dialogues with such countries as Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt. Billions in support are available. We are open to comprehensive free trade and cooperation agreements.

But our commitment is not naïve; we are setting demands, not least concerning the rights of women and minorities, and we know that the difficulties will remain considerable for a long time to come.

Mr/Madam Speaker

The United States is the European Union's principal strategic partner.

We share many values and interests, and our combined weight is considerable. Together, the European Union and the United States account for half the world's GDP.

Continued broad cooperation with the United States contributes to security and prosperity both globally and in our own region. Sweden has pursued increased free trade with the United States, and welcomes President Obama's announcement tonight regarding American readiness to launch talks on a comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union.

We are also striving for closer and broader contacts with Russia.

We welcome constructive cooperation concerning the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. We have close economic relations and are pleased that Russia became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) last year.

But at the same time, we are increasingly concerned to see that respect for human rights is deteriorating, that the scope of civil society is shrinking and that the country's leaders appear to give priority to modernising the armed forces ahead of modernising Russian society.

Our relations with China continue to develop at a rapid pace. China's increasingly prominent role as a global actor also increases our expectations of it taking greater responsibility in global issues. This responsibility also includes respect for the human, civil and political rights and freedoms of its own citizens.

Sweden and the European Union look forward to developing cooperation with other countries of strategic, political and economic importance. These include Brazil, India, South Africa and Japan.

Mr/Madam Speaker

The current international military operation in Afghanistan will be concluded next year and responsibility for security will be handed over to the Afghans themselves.

This spring the Government will host discussions on our overall commitment in and to Afghanistan after the summer of 2014.

We have a long-term commitment to peaceful economic and social development in Afghanistan. We are allocating SEK 8.5 billion over the next ten years. We support the fight against corruption and the promotion of human rights and democratic principles. Women's rights are of particular importance.

These are key issues for the country's future.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Slowly but surely, a new Africa is emerging.

We are seeing growing economies, such as in Nigeria.

We can see a potential change for the better in Somalia, where a new political leadership has taken over.

And we see numerous examples of a move towards more open societies, new approaches and regional African responsibility.

A group of ministers will travel together again this spring to demonstrate our commitment to stronger political and economic relations with this new Africa.

Meanwhile, parts of the continent are struggling with serious problems.

In recent months, we have seen how political instability and lawlessness in Mali have led to fighting and given free rein to organisations with terrorist attacks – like the attack in the Algerian desert – on their agenda.

Sweden welcomes the French operations which, like the African military presence, came in response to the cry for help from Mali's Government. Sweden has offered support with regard to air transport and we are participating in a new EU training mission for the Malian armed forces.

Mali is not the only crisis in Africa today. We must continue to be involved in supporting peace and poverty reduction, not least in eastern Congo and other parts of the Great Lakes region.

But despite the conflicts, we must not forget the positive dynamics and the opportunity to recognise the potential of the new Africa.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Contributing to the nation's security is one of the main tasks of foreign policy.

Sweden's security is built in solidarity with others. Threats to peace and security are deterred collectively and in cooperation with other countries and organisations.

Membership of the European Union means that Sweden is part of a political alliance and takes its share of responsibility, in the spirit of solidarity, for Europe's security.

Sweden's security policy remains firmly in place. 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 similarly affected. We must be able to both give and receive support, civilian as well as military.

In spring 2013, the Defence Commission will present its assessment of security policy developments.

Sweden also wants to be able to contribute to international operations when the need arises, regardless of whether the operations are led by the UN, the EU or NATO.

The Government recently proposed that Sweden once again contribute to the EU Operation Atalanta, a naval force that escorts ships delivering humanitarian aid and represses acts of piracy in the waters off the Horn of Africa.

During the year we also established the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations as a contributory step in the implementation of UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820.

Mr/Madam Speaker

We are pursuing an ambitious free trade agenda and are fighting protectionism.

We want to develop the international trade agenda in the WTO and are pushing for a number of strategic European free trade agreements with Japan, Canada and hopefully also with the United States.

We also support our globalised business sector.

For this purpose, the Government has set up a new and more streamlined organisation: Business Sweden – the Swedish Trade and Invest Council.

We will maintain a high profile in the creative industries, and we are continuing the special initiatives that connect culture and the business sector.

We are also a driving force in efforts to highlight corporate social responsibility in the global economy.

In the long term, this work contributes to the Swedish economy, a stronger Swedish brand and more Swedish jobs.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Another important part of our foreign policy relations is substantial and effective development assistance.

The long-term objective of eradicating poverty and oppression is far from being achieved. We have a moral responsibility to support people who are oppressed, vulnerable and living in poverty. The development assistance framework in 2013 is estimated to amount to one per cent of GNI.

Aid alone cannot solve the world's problems, but it can serve as a catalyst to fight oppression, misrule and corruption.

Civil society plays an important role in poverty reduction, democratic development and strengthening of human rights.

The best possible use must be made of each krona of aid.

Our aim is for Swedish development assistance to be flexible, long-term, innovative and results-oriented. During the spring, the Government will present a clearer focus for development assistance policy, aimed at strengthening the ability of people who are poor and lack freedom to improve their lives.

We also want to streamline multilateral development cooperation and aid in the EU. An important task is to ensure that we, and other donors, work coherently and that the international community meets its commitments.

Three years remain until the UN global Millennium Development Goals on poverty reduction are to be achieved. The Government is therefore increasing support in 2013 for measures that target clean water and maternal and infant mortality. Our work to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights continues.

At the same time, the UN has begun the important process of setting new goals for post-2015. Sweden is playing an active role in this work.

On 1 January, Sweden took over the Chairmanship of the Global Forum on Migration and Development. Our work will focus on policy coherence and migration's contribution to economic and social development.

Sweden is a humanitarian superpower. In 2012 we were the world's third largest national humanitarian aid donor, providing over SEK 5 billion in funding to humanitarian operations. Swedish aid helps people in need in all major crises around the world.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The global challenges must be met through cross-border cooperation. This requires standards, international agreements and institutions that cover, and are respected by, all countries.

Effective multilateralism, with a strong United Nations as the core, will remain a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy.

Climate change is high on our agenda and one of the Government's top environmental priorities, together with preservation of biodiversity, the marine environment and a non-toxic environment. Sweden was also one of the initiators of an international coalition against short-lived climate pollutants, and in September, the eyes of the world will be on Stockholm when the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change presents its fifth assessment report on climate change.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are fundamental principles for our actions, as is respect for international law.

This applies in Havana as well as in Minsk and Tehran.

We are working for a gender-equal world. A world where everyone's rights are respected regardless of gender, skin colour, belief or sexual orientation. A world in which freedom of religion and conviction prevails everywhere, at all times.
We are one of the world's largest donors of democracy assistance.

And we are working actively to support journalists, bloggers and freedom of expression defenders around the world. Efforts continue to bring about the release of Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak.

Sweden is a leader in the fight for all people's rights and opportunities to communicate freely and securely on the internet.

Major progress was made during the past year.

In the UN Human Rights Council, Sweden pushed for a groundbreaking resolution, establishing that the same human rights – the same freedom of the press and the same freedom of expression – are to apply online as well as offline.

We will follow up this work during the year.

We are working intensively to ensure that, in 2013, the European Union adopts a common cyber security strategy, based on the Union's fundamental values.

This year, we will once again organise a major international conference on internet freedom in Stockholm.

And in negotiation after negotiation, we stand up against regimes that, for their own survival, seek to prevent freedom of expression in modern communications.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Rearmament and uncontrolled proliferation of weapons remain a global threat.

We strongly condemn North Korea's nuclear test. North Korea must abolish its nuclear weapons programme, cease the development of ballistic missiles and readmit IAEA inspectors.

Iran must cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency, IAEA, to establish confidence in the country's declared peaceful intentions regarding its nuclear programme. International negotiations with Iran are now entering an important phase. All parties should do their utmost to achieve a peaceful solution.

As part of the work for a world free of nuclear weapons, we would like to see fewer strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

Sweden and Mexico co-chair the Article XIV Process, which aims to see the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty enter into force. We encourage the eight countries that have yet to ratify the Treaty to take their responsibility to ensure this is done. This applies not least to the United States.

Sweden and the European Union support the extensive Arms Trade Treaty that will be negotiated in New York in March this year.

Mr/Madam Speaker

We are continuing to modernise and improve our Foreign Service.

Public diplomacy is becoming increasingly important. Before the end of the month, all of our embassies will be on Twitter and Facebook.

We must be at the absolute cutting edge in digital diplomacy efforts.

This will also provide the Foreign Service with new tools to meet the growing consular challenge.

More than fifteen million trips abroad were made from Sweden last year – an increase of twenty-five per cent since 2009.

The vast majority of trips occur without incident, but sometimes things do not go as planned. People are involved in accidents, are victims of crime or are imprisoned – rightly or wrongly – by the authorities of other countries.

Every year, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm handles more than two thousand cases; many more are handled by our missions abroad.

A central task of the Foreign Service is to provide efficient and legally secure consular support to people in distress. We are constantly developing our preparedness, which also includes cross-border cooperation.

We want a trip to be a memory for life, not a number in the Foreign Service's statistics.

Mr/Madam Speaker

Our world is full of opportunities and risks.

We are convinced that the best way to make use of the opportunities – and manage the risks – is to cooperate with our neighbouring countries and with the other Member States of the European Union.

The region around Sweden offers mainly opportunities.

But in many other places, the risks are considerable.

To meet these challenges, we and the world at large need a united, strong and open Europe.

A Europe that stands for peace, freedom and reconciliation, and that has the will and the resources to promote these values.

This is a central challenge for Europe.

And the central theme of Sweden's foreign policy.