Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström

Statement of Government Policy

in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs,
Wednesday 14 February 2018

Government of Sweden

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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

This year marks 100 years since the Riksdag decided to make the right to vote universal and equal for both women and men.

It is a fitting occasion to remember those who give our democracy its lifeblood: those who carry it forward. The people. Politicians and civil servants. Journalists. Civil society. Those of us in this chamber.

I say this because the merchants of gloom are now peddling the view that the coming election campaign is going to be dirty.

I say to them: it doesn't have to be that way. It is entirely up to us.

All of us, in this chamber, can choose to conduct political activities with dignity. We can choose to debate with respect – for each other, and for the truth.

Democracy is at the core of Sweden's foreign policy. Its task is to create security when the rest of the world is troubled. Foreign policy manages the changes that occur all around us:

climate change, which threatens our security,

countries that are isolating themselves from the world,

and people who are displaced.

Our task can be summarised as follows:

The primary goal of Sweden's foreign policy is to protect our country's security and that of our people.

We do this in partnership with others, through an active foreign policy in which diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation are our most important tools.

Our commitment to free trade, equality, gender equality and our extensive aid are important parts of this policy.

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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 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 through a strong transatlantic link.

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. 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 uphold it.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's security begins in our neighbourhood. Our region must be able to withstand stresses and counter attempts to create division and instability. The Government is working actively to counter such threats, whether they are from terrorism, or are cyber, hybrid or military threats.

Our relations with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are important. This year, we are marking 100 years since they declared independence.

In 2018, Sweden has a particular responsibility for cooperation between the Baltic Rim countries. We hold the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Chair of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and we are leading the Nordic foreign policy cooperation and the Nordic-Baltic cooperation. We want to make our region more secure and sustainable, for example through youth exchanges, innovation and digital transformation, climate-smart cities, as well as combating human trafficking.

Russia is participating in several of these formats. Sweden and the EU are seeking dialogue and cooperation with Russia in areas of mutual interest – for example climate change, trade and disaster response operations. Such contacts also contribute to our security.

Russia bears the responsibility for the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which has resulted in more than 10 000 deaths. We condemn the Russian aggression, including the illegal annexation of Crimea. These flagrant violations of international law are the most serious threat to the European security order since the end of the Cold War. The EU's sanctions must be upheld as long as the reasons for their introduction remain. Domestic political developments in Russia are also negative.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The EU exists for Europe's citizens. If we forget this, we risk losing the people's confidence. Social issues, fair jobs and good working conditions must therefore play a larger role in the EU. This was also the theme of the EU summit in Gothenburg last autumn.

EU cooperation gives us peace, security and growth. Sweden is an active member of the EU and we are concerned over the growing intolerance and declining respect for the rule of law in some Member States.

The EU is our most important foreign policy arena. We are working for an EU that is active in the world – with regard to foreign and security policy, and with a policy for free and fair trade. The EU must have an ambitious climate policy and stand up for climate agreements that have been entered into. It is also important that the EU has a common asylum system that provides legal certainty, is humane and sustainable, and where all countries take their responsibility.

The Common Security and Defence Policy is now being developed. We are contributing to PESCO, the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation on security and defence, whose aim is to strengthen operational capabilities and effectiveness in the area of defence. Together with Finland and Germany, we are leading the development of the EU's civilian capacity to prevent and manage conflicts.

We regret the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, and hope it is implemented in an orderly fashion, and that the EU and the UK continue to have a close relationship.

The prospect of EU accession must be clear for the countries of the Western Balkans, but this requires continued reforms – efforts we support. We also support the ambitions of the Eastern Partnership countries to develop closer ties with the EU and implement necessary reforms.

Developments in Turkey, including recurrent conflicts with Kurdish groups, are deeply worrying, as are the attacks in Afrin in northern Syria. The EU must work with, but also put pressure on, Turkey. The EU should not close the door to membership.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Global challenges require global cooperation. Sweden defends a rules-based international order and we support the UN Secretary-General's reform plans for the United Nations.

Sweden has completed the first year of its two-year membership of the UN Security Council, where we have participated in efforts to prevent war and conflict.

We are making a difference. Right now we are negotiating a resolution on a ceasefire in Syria to continue to ensure humanitarian assistance to the millions of people in need. We have a leading role on issues concerning children in armed conflicts. We have considerably strengthened the UN's work on women, peace and security.

At Sweden's initiative, a unanimous Council condemned the violence against the Rohingya people in Myanmar, and we are working for a solution to the crisis and for those who are guilty of crimes against humanity to be brought to justice.

A burning issue on the Council's agenda is North Korea's nuclear weapons ambitions. The country's nuclear weapons and missile programmes are a serious threat to global peace and security. We are pushing for a peaceful solution and the implementation of the sanctions imposed on the country.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The Doomsday Clock, which shows the risk of a global catastrophe such as nuclear war, was recently set forward to two minutes to midnight.

Today, almost all nuclear-weapon states are modernising their stockpiles. Concerns remain over the important nuclear deal with Iran.

This Government is working on disarmament and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons by bridging the divide on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and strengthening its disarmament dimension. We will also move forward with measures for risk reduction and increased transparency.

The nuclear-weapon states, in particular the United States and Russia, have a particular responsibility. It is alarming that the use of tactical nuclear weapons is being discussed as a possibility. We urge them both to negotiate further reductions of nuclear weapons arsenals and comply with the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

A new disarmament initiative is the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. An inquiry will examine the consequences of any Swedish signing and ratification.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The autumn was characterised by an unparalleled movement. It can be summed up in two words: me too.

Throughout the world, women are neglected in terms of resources, representation and rights.

This is the simple reason why we are pursuing a feminist foreign policy – with full force, around the world.

In Saudi Arabia and Iran, we are educating women to enhance their economic empowerment. In Rwanda, we have initiated a public debate on the role of fathers. Members of our women's mediation network are working with Syria, Afghanistan, Colombia and Ukraine.

Sweden is one of the largest donors in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, through contraceptives, maternity care and safe abortions. We are working to stop female genital mutilation.

These are some examples of our feminist foreign policy in action. And other countries are following suit.

We are building more alliances, strengthening more women's rights advocates, and improving the lives of more people.

On Wikipedia, there are four times more articles about men than there are about women. On International Women's Day, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and some 50 embassies are hosting edit-a-thons to increase the number of articles about women.

In April, the Government, in cooperation with the Swedish Institute and in dialogue with the Riksdag, is holding the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality – a major international gender equality conference bringing together grassroots and high-level delegates from around the world. The goal is to share results, learn from each other and inspire political leaders.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are being challenged around the world. This means that people have less influence over their communities and less power to shape their own lives. Security in the world is in decline.

This picture has been confirmed by the 135 country reports published by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs last year on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These reports provide

the basis for our dialogue with the countries concerned. We have also appointed a human rights ambassador and presented a written communication to the Riksdag on these issues.

Sweden stands up to all forms of racism and hate. In our work throughout the world, we support human rights defenders, LGBTI activists, journalists and other people in vulnerable situations. We will never accept attacks based on ethnicity or religion.

Trade union rights are a matter of democracy. The Prime Minister has launched the Global Deal to promote good relations in the labour market. To date, more than 75 actors have joined, including 18 countries. This year we will establish a long-term structure for this work.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden has bilateral relations with almost every country in the world. Through dialogue, both with close friends and with those whose values we do not share, we make Sweden safer.

Relations with the United States are very important for Sweden's foreign and security policy, and for our growth. We will therefore continue to develop them on the basis of common interests and values.

Latin America is making progress. We want to continue strengthening our relations with the countries of the region, and therefore we are now presenting an action plan for cooperation with Latin America.

While the peace processes in Colombia have inspired hope, the situation in Venezuela is very serious.

Developments in Asia are opening up new opportunities. We are increasing political and economic exchange with India and Japan. We are a strong driving force behind the EU trade agenda with Asia and Oceania.

Our relations with China are extensive. The country's role in the world is growing, and with this comes greater responsibility, including protection of human rights.

We are continuing our long-term commitment in a sorely tested Afghanistan. Through our support we are strengthening state- and peacebuilding, and women's participation.

The list of conflicts in the Middle East is long. The suffering they have caused is immeasurable.

We support an inclusive process in Syria for a political solution in which women participate in the negotiations and the decision-making. We are one of the largest humanitarian donors in the Syria crisis.

Sweden is working for reconciliation and stabilisation in Iraq now that Daesh has been defeated. This also applies to relations between Baghdad and the autonomous Kurdish region. We are contributing in the areas of military training, security sector reform and aid.

We are a driving force on the UN Security Council for finding a long-term political solution in Yemen and alleviating the acute humanitarian crisis.

Increasing tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are fuelling instability in the Middle East. Political dialogue between the two countries is needed.

The Government is working for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, based on international law. In this regard, Sweden – like the rest of the EU – sees Jerusalem as the future capital of two states. We have a long-standing friendly engagement in Palestine. We are contributing to its democratic statebuilding and providing support to refugees through UNRWA. We are a friend to Israel and stand up for its legitimate security needs.

Developments in Africa are multifarious. Some countries are experiencing strong growth. The African Union is being strengthened and regional cooperation is increasing. At the same time, war and humanitarian crises continue to force people to flee.

Conflicts and climate change are worsening the security situation in the Sahel region. Instability is a breeding ground for radicalisation. We believe in cooperation and are participating in UN and EU missions in Mali, supporting the building of the Sahel countries' own security force and increasing aid to the region.

We are seeing positive signs in Somalia, yet at the same time the Horn of Africa is suffering from protracted conflicts and tensions. We are increasing aid and working actively to prevent conflicts and strengthen vulnerable groups.

The transfer of power in Zimbabwe is a historic opportunity. The new government must keep its promises of political and economic reform.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the political and humanitarian crisis is acute. We are working for a peaceful and democratic transfer of power and are particularly highlighting the importance of women's participation.

Last year, UN experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp were murdered while on assignment in DR Congo. We are working tirelessly to ensure that these murders are investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

By promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction, we are promoting security in the world. Sweden will therefore be a leader in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

We are one of few countries that give one per cent of gross national income in aid, and we are working to ensure that more countries reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNI in aid.

Tax revenue is fundamental to building a functioning society. In May the Government will host an international conference on building tax capacity in developing countries.

Climate change has become one of our greatest security challenges. Extreme weather conditions are forcing people to flee, and a lack of natural resources increases the risk of conflict and war. The gap between current commitments and the required emissions reductions under the Paris Agreement is 'alarmingly large', according to research.

Sweden is taking responsibility. We have the world's most ambitious Climate Act and provide major contributions to developing countries' measures on climate, environment and oceans.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's foreign trade provides us with 1.4 million jobs. Trade contributes to the security of our people.

The benefits of free trade and freedom of movement are at times called into question, and protectionism is on the rise. We are not taking that path. We will stand up for free trade while also promoting social protection and an ambitious environment policy.

Through its export strategy, the Government supports opportunities for Swedish companies to increase exports and reach new markets. We want more good investments in Sweden.

The Government's intention is for Sweden to take part in the World Expo in Dubai in 2020.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The staff of the Swedish Foreign Service work tirelessly and around the clock to provide support to Swedes in emergency or crisis situations abroad. Most of them are helped quietly.

We are dealing with some very difficult cases, and some names are well known to everyone in this chamber. We always act in their best interests.

This year we will launch a consular initiative in the area of family conflicts, focusing on child and forced marriage.

A modern Swedish Foreign Service should reflect modern Sweden. We will take further initiatives to ensure that people of different backgrounds are recruited to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

On the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Astrid Lindgren wrote the following in her diary:

...*this earth could be a lovely place to live*.

Isn't this, in the end, what all people want? To have the security to shape and live their lives.

Let's not settle for less. Let's act with courage and patience. Let's address the world's concerns with a policy for security and confidence in the future. In Sweden and in the world.