

## Swedish Presidency Ambitions and ESDP (ARI)

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**Theme:** The Swedish Presidency of the EU has been promoting the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) during its six months at the centre of European politics.

**Summary:** The ongoing Swedish Presidency has presented a number of ESDP issues on which it would like to maintain momentum. Its ESDP priorities cover areas like capability development, increased coherence between crisis management instruments, ongoing operations, European armament cooperation and EU relations with other international organisations such as NATO and the UN. Of these areas, three key issues are characteristic for ESDP priorities, namely *usability*, *capability* and *operations*. The Swedish Presidency has primarily focused on improving existing ESDP instruments and structures rather than creating new ones. In line with its overall approach to the EU, and the Presidency in particular, Sweden seems to prize efficiency and usability rather than providing a more visionary leadership in the area of ESDP. These issues faithfully reflect Sweden's practical approach to the EU and crisis management: ESDP is an instrument that needs to be developed and used.

### Analysis:

#### *Introduction*

We are now well into what is likely to be one of the last rotating EU Presidencies as we have so far known them. The Irish 'Yes' to the Lisbon Treaty marks the start of a new era for the Union. The Treaty drastically reduces the Presidency's influence over both the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

Today, the Presidency has several roles to play during its six months in the spotlight. Researchers usually point to four such general roles. As an administrator it is responsible for running the Councils' work, chairing and leading meetings, etc. The Presidency plays an important role as a mediator between Member States. It also represents the Council externally and internally vis-à-vis the other institutions. Finally, in the role of agenda-setter, the Presidency sets political priorities and seeks to promote policies of common (and usually national) interest.

In the summer of 2009 Sweden embarked on its second Presidency of the EU. To understand the Swedish Presidency's priorities it is necessary to briefly touch upon what

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characterises Sweden and what forms and influences Swedish politics in the EU. Sweden, which joined the Union in 1995, has high ambitions in its commitment to the EU. As a relatively small country, Sweden still actively tries to shape the Union and its policies. Regarding ESDP, Sweden has been active and engaged, not least in operations, but keeps at a safe distance from common defence due to its non-alignment policy.

Sweden has taken over at a time of turmoil. The financial crisis has forced itself to the top of the agenda, overshadowing virtually all other policy areas. The Irish referendum and the future of the Lisbon Treaty could boost the Union's dynamics and legitimacy but it remains to be seen if, how and when the Treaty will be implemented. The Swedish Presidency will also have to oversee the election of a new Commission and work with a new European Parliament. The importance of an effective and stable EU Presidency has perhaps never been greater.

As any other Presidency, the Swedish agenda is marked by both national priorities and predetermined processes. For example, Sweden has to move forward on other Presidencies' initiatives, it has to take into account the 'EU timetable' and it has to represent all 27 Member States. Furthermore, unexpected crises or any hiccups towards the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty would surely force the Swedes to rethink their priorities.

Leading up to the Presidency, Sweden has coordinated its priorities with several other actors. In the area of ESDP, consultations have been held with, for instance, the Council secretariat and different Member States. Nationally, Government departments and agencies have coordinated their activities and priorities.

In this context, the Swedish Presidency has identified the economy, including employment, and climate change as key challenges to be dealt with. Additionally, the Presidency has chosen to focus on the Stockholm Programme, the Baltic Sea Strategy, institutional and constitutional questions and what has been labelled 'the EU, its neighbourhood and the world'.<sup>1</sup> The Eastern dimension, enlargement and climate change are traditional Swedish priorities that are once again being promoted.

#### *Swedish ESDP Priorities*

ESDP is unarguably an issue to which Sweden attaches great importance.<sup>2</sup> Sweden may be a non-aligned country outside NATO but it has been a keen supporter of ESDP and a loyal contributor to EU-crisis management since ESDP's creation 10 years ago. Sweden has participated in every EU civilian mission and military operation to date. The EU, along with the UN, is currently the country's most important foreign policy arena and ESDP is generally recognised to be an integral part of Sweden's foreign and security policy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, visit the Swedish Presidency website: <http://www.se2009.eu>. See 'Work Programme for the Swedish Presidency of the EU 1 July – 31 December 2009', <http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/08/93/60/22265db4.pdf>, and 'Important Defence Policy Issues During the Presidency. Fact Sheet July 2009', [http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly\\_fs/1.9435!menu/standard/file/faktablad\\_eng.pdf](http://www.se2009.eu/polopoly_fs/1.9435!menu/standard/file/faktablad_eng.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, *Regeringens proposition 2004/05, Vårt framtida försvar* [Government Proposition 2004/05, Our Future Defence], 23/IX/2004.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Sweden and CFSP see for example 'Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs', Wednesday, 18/II/2009. <http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/12/07/58/ac82be40.pdf>.

Despite the emphasis on European security and defence cooperation, ESDP did not make it to the top of the Swedish Presidency's priorities. However, this is not that surprising. While Sweden, as stated above, is generally ambitious and strives to implement existing ESDP instruments and structures, it generally keeps a low profile and is not one of the most visionary Member States in the development of ESDP.

The so-called 18-month programme, presented by the Trio of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden, gives some broad inputs as to what has been prioritised in the ESDP area during the three Presidencies (18-Month Programme of the Council, Doc. 11249/08). From the official statement it seems that the Trio has identified a need for reflection and consolidation within ESDP. For instance, the programme stresses the need for better lessons-learned processes, further capability development, improved evaluations, strengthened cooperation with NATO and the UN and improved civil-military cooperation. As is often the case, unforeseen issues have played major roles during the period. The French Presidency, initially marked by the Irish 'No' to the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, had to deal with the Georgia crisis. The Czech Presidency, struggling with national turmoil, faced a significant challenge with the Gaza crisis.

The last time Sweden held the EU Presidency, in 2001, civil-military cooperation, civilian crisis management and EU-UN relations were some of the issues that were emphasised and they are still important to Sweden. The Swedish Presidency's Work programme allows us to draw up a list of prioritised crisis management issues. These are not explicitly stated as ESDP priorities but are likely to be dealt with in the policy framework and cover areas such as capability development, increased coherence between crisis management instruments, ongoing operations, European armament cooperation and cooperation with other international organisations such as NATO and the UN. The Presidency has also identified a number of important defence policy issues that embody its ambitions. Here, areas like the Battlegroups, civil-military capability development, EU-NATO cooperation, EU operations and maritime security are laid out with more concrete initiatives and work programmes. This is not an exhaustive list of Swedish ESDP priorities but represents what the Swedish Presidency can be expected to focus on during 2009.

Out of these areas three key issues have been identified as characteristic for the ESDP priorities, namely usability, capability and operations. To exemplify these three areas, we have chosen some prioritised initiatives which are discussed at greater length below.

**(a) Usability.** As Sweden strives to strengthen EU capabilities and efficiency within ESDP, usability is vital. A more flexible use of EU Battlegroups is one of the top ESDP priorities for the Swedish Presidency and a good example of how usability can be enhanced. Sweden fully adopted the Battlegroup concept and became one of the more faithful believers in Battlegroups as a tool for transforming the Armed Forces. The Swedish military are using the Battlegroup concept as a means to move from a territorially-based conscript system to a more mobile, professional military, with a focus on expeditionary capabilities. The Swedish-led Nordic Battlegroup (NBG), on standby in the spring of 2008, is generally seen as an ambitious and successful implementation of the concept. Sweden has already committed to creating at least one more NBG, in 2011.

The Presidency has posed two main questions regarding the future of the Battlegroups: (1) are the Member States ready to use them?; and (2) under what circumstances? Hence, the Swedes want a political discussion on the future of the Battlegroups to include, among others:

- Should the Battlegroups be used for other operations than rapid response operations?
- Could Battlegroup capabilities be used to cover shortfalls in Force generation?
- Should they be used as a reserve for ongoing missions?
- Should there be a standardisation process for the Battlegroups?
- Should the Battlegroups be financed jointly or should the participating countries bear their own costs?

These are topics that have the potential to increase the usability of the Battlegroups. At the same time, they are controversial issues and it is not likely that the Swedish Presidency will find a consensus during 2009. For instance, the question of the standardisation of the Battlegroups, including some sort of certification process, could be very contentious in some Member States where the Battlegroup concept has yet to be implemented.<sup>4</sup>

**(b) Capability.** The second area that has been emphasised by the Swedish Presidency is capability. In order to provide effective crisis management, Member States must make an effort to reduce existing capability shortfalls and improve capabilities. In Sweden's view, there is no need to launch further capability development processes before the existing ones have been implemented. The time has thus come to fulfil the ambitions and goals stated in previous declarations and documents.

During its six months at the helm of the EU, Sweden does not have the ambition to launch a great number of new initiatives within this area. Instead, it seeks to continue the work that was largely initiated by the French Presidency last year. Nevertheless, within the broader context of capability, special emphasis is placed on civil-military capability development and on maritime surveillance.

Civil-military cooperation could be described as a traditional Swedish priority. In Sweden's perception, the EU's unique potential for comprehensive crisis management has not been fully explored and more civil-military cooperation is needed at every level. One aspect of this is the creation of more harmonised civilian and military capability development processes, where an added value can be attained. Potential benefits that have been pointed out by the Swedish Presidency range from a reduced risk of duplication and an increased effect in the field to the identification of possible synergies and common requirements. The sharing of lessons learnt from operations and missions is an important factor with regard to issues such as financial aspects, protection, transport and training.

Maritime surveillance has been highlighted by the Swedish Presidency as another important aspect of capability and as a means of tackling some of the challenges that the Member States face in today's interdependent world, ranging from pollution to terrorism. Sweden would like to stimulate discussion and facilitate the co-ordination of ongoing projects on maritime surveillance in different Member States as well as cross-pillar arrangements within the EU.

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<sup>4</sup> 'The Case for a More Flexible Use of the EU Battlegroups', Informal meeting of EU Defence Policy Directors, 2-3/VII/2009, Stockholm, Sweden, annex 1.

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The Presidency has, among others, drawn attention to the current Sea Surveillance Cooperation in the Baltic Sea, where Sweden has a leading role.<sup>5</sup>

**(c) Operations.** Prior to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, every Presidency will have to pay a great deal of attention to ongoing and coming operations. Effective engagement of a Presidency in a crisis can leave a positive mark on those six months, while failure to act in the face of a crisis has the potential to cast a long shadow over an otherwise successful Presidency.

As stated above, Sweden sees ESDP as a central tool in its foreign and security policy and, as a result, Swedish contributions have been substantial in both civilian and military ESDP operations. When comparing the Trio it is obvious that while France stood for the grand vision, Sweden, and even more so the Czech Republic, have had more modest aspirations. President Sarkozy spoke about increasing available EU troops, improving common transport assets and revising the budgetary models for ESDP operations, but the French push for deeper integration has not been picked up by either the Czech or the Swedish Presidency.

The Swedish prioritisation of operations rests more on a continuation of initiatives and processes that are already in course. Sweden is focused on running operations smoothly and on ensuring a continued follow-up of ongoing operations. As a balance to France, however, Sweden is seeking to boost EU's operational capabilities on the civilian side. Sweden has often advocated the need for a strong civilian capability in the crisis management tool box and has committed substantial civilian resources to operations.

Unlike the discussion on the usability of the Battlegroups, the need for strengthening the civilian dimension has come mainly from operational experiences. It has been difficult to find people with the right competencies and several missions have taken far too long before they have been able to function properly. Hence, strengthening the supply of personnel is a key question, eg, by improving national strategies for recruitment and capability development. Rapid response and issues such as equipment, financing of operations and human resources are other areas in which Sweden will seek to strengthen ongoing processes in the civilian dimension. Internal EU coordination and cooperation between the second and third pillar has also been identified as a priority in order to strengthen the EU's operational capacity on the civilian side. These issues are of course closely interlinked with the push for the development of capabilities within ESDP and they are well in line with the Declaration of the Council of the European Union on strengthening capabilities of December 2008.

## Conclusions and the Way Ahead

### *A Presidency by the Book*

Generally, Sweden has high ambitions for its Presidency and tries to make the most of its six months as the chair of European politics. The Presidency is an important task and a responsibility borne very seriously by the Swedish government. However, it must be said that, as in 2001, Sweden does not represent the most visionary of Presidencies in the area of ESDP.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Maritime Surveillance', Informal Meeting of EU Defence Policy Directors, 2-3/VII/2009, Stockholm, Sweden, annex 2.

The Presidency as a whole is characterised by its practical stance. Swedish representatives are often hesitant to adopt a clear, national position. As pointed out, the Presidency has the explicit ambition of boosting ongoing projects and going forward by small steps rather than proposing grand new initiatives. The stance is well attuned to a situation in which Sweden has to ensure some form of stability at a time when great changes are coming.

On the other hand, it could be difficult for Sweden to act proactively and promptly in the event of an unexpected crisis. If put to the test, Sweden can be expected to act fully in accordance with the rulebook and to follow the prescribed steps and procedures. This should, of course, be commended, but at a time of crisis there is often the need for a more flexible and forceful approach. Otherwise, there is both the risk of a late reaction and that the Presidency is overtaken by initiatives from other countries. Another disadvantage of a low-key attitude is that the leadership is perceived to be less stimulating and inspirational by other Member States. For example, the re-appearance of several initiatives from 2001 could be seen as somewhat uninspired.

#### *Sweden and ESDP*

The three areas discussed above –usability, capability and operations– reflect Sweden’s practical approach to the EU and ESDP. Sweden sees ESDP as an important tool for the EU to be a global actor. However, it is more than a symbol of European power or a means to counterbalance global players like the US. It is an instrument which must be used. The Member States have invested much time and money in the project and they must now ensure that ESDP is relevant, useful and effective. Swedish ambitions in the ESDP area show signs of frustration and perhaps also of disappointment with the somewhat slow progress made. The fact that Sweden prioritises both civilian and military ESDP development points to a high ambition but can also reflect difficulties in choosing where the most pressing needs are.

Whether the Swedish Presidency is successful or not depends on a number of factors – some of which will be outside the Presidency’s control–. In a wider perspective, this could be determined by the Copenhagen negotiations or the management of the Lisbon Treaty. In the case of ESDP, more specifically, it will be harder to assess the Presidency’s success or failure. Besides the stated ESDP priorities, the area is highly ‘event-driven’. Crisis management is by nature difficult to plan for and an event like the Georgian crisis during the French Presidency would force the Swedes to re-think their priorities and would require the Presidency to come up with rapid and flexible solutions.

#### *Coming up: the Spanish Presidency*

It is too early to take stock and sum up Sweden’s achievements. However, a few trends can already be identified concerning the main ESDP priorities and what might be left for the upcoming Spanish Presidency to handle. The process of handing over to Spain, the new Trio and the continuity between Presidencies are important aspects in assessing the possible success of the Swedish Presidency.

During the informal Defence Ministers’ meeting in Sweden at the end of September it became clear that discussions on the usability of the Battlegroups would continue after the Swedish Presidency. Several Member States were satisfied with the current status of the Battlegroups, while others wanted to see them put to use, even though there were different ideas as to how to do so. Still, the Swedish Presidency has taken the first steps

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in re-thinking the Battlegroups' potential and role. With the topic on the agenda, Sweden will look to Spain and other coming Presidencies to continue these efforts.

The Swedish focus on civil-military capability development and maritime surveillance has received stronger support. The Presidency presented its ideas on civil-military capability development in a Food For Thought paper that was discussed at an experts' seminar in Brussels on 4 September 2009 and in a Presidency Report for the same Seminar dated 11 September 11 2009. These ideas were further developed at the informal meeting of the EU Defence Ministers in September. The aim is to adopt Council conclusions at the GAERC meeting in November 2009. Civil-military capability is not only a Swedish priority but something that is often perceived as one of the EU's strengths. Further development of coordination mechanisms such as the Comprehensive Approach will be expected from coming Presidencies.

Maritime surveillance was another major issue on the agenda when the defence Ministers met in Goteborg. The Swedish Presidency's initiative was very well received and discussions on the way forward will continue during the autumn in the format of a Friends-of-the-Presidency group. Regarding operations, these issues might revolve more around how the Lisbon Treaty should be implemented regarding ESDP than around the more hands-on approach of today. The integration of existing Commission assets and civilian and military ESDP instruments will be a major challenge during 2009 and subsequently and the Spanish Presidency will have to address the new Treaty's implementation and interpretation.

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