

*Mr Carl Bildt  
Minister for  
Foreign Affairs*

# Statement of Government Policy

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REGERINGSKANSLIET

**Government Offices  
of Sweden**

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Mr/Madam Speaker,

The last few decades have in many respects been a period of extraordinary progress.

There have been fewer wars, there are more democracies, diseases have been forced into retreat and many hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty.

A world in which we have gained new opportunities through globalisation has become a much better world for more and more people.

Not least in Europe – at the present time – we have cause to recall the great progress made, and the model for peaceful cooperation between free countries that Europe has thus become for the world.

At the same time, it is clear that we are facing major challenges – in the wider world and in Europe.

In the wake of the economic difficulties, we are seeing forces that are turning away from openness and cooperation – and that seem to believe that we can meet the future by going backwards.

We must never take this path. Sweden must continue to be a strong force for open societies, for an open Europe and for an open world.

We want to build new bridges and we want to open new doors.

This also means that we want to be a committed and constructive force in European cooperation. Sweden aspires to be at the core of the European Union.

This is how we can best look after our national interests as well, and this is how we can best promote the universal values by which we stand.

It is clearly in our interest that the euro area is strong and stable, and that the countries affected by serious economic problems are also able to solve these with the help of others. Ultimately, this is about keeping Europe together and avoiding serious social tensions.

The fact that we too will be part of the new fiscal pact is an expression of our aspirations.

We want to see more forceful measures for growth and competitiveness in Europe as a whole, as a complement to more immediate crisis management. It is important, after all, not just to discuss current challenges, but also to address the conditions for security and welfare in the future.

Sweden thus organised a British–Baltic–Nordic cooperation forum – the Northern Future Forum – to discuss key growth issues. These include women’s entrepreneurship and demographic changes.

To secure growth in Europe, we also want to broaden and deepen the common internal market, invest more in research and development, and safeguard our openness towards the rest of the world. One example of this is Sweden’s commitment to the European Spallation Source (ESS) in Lund.

A stronger European economy is primarily important for Europe itself, but it also strengthens our credibility as a global actor.

We are convinced that a stronger European voice is needed in work at global level. This applies to issues from climate change and peace efforts to the protection of personal freedom.

Sweden is driving for a common European foreign and security policy that safeguards respect for human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law.

We want to work for a strong European External Action Service and a clear vision of the European Union’s strategic role. This is why we want to see a new and modern European security strategy, as well as a European peace institute and a modernised European aid policy.

We want Europe to be a strong voice and a clear force for peace, freedom and reconciliation in both our own region and the world as a whole.

This has become even more important with the developments we have seen in the Arab countries over the past year, but it continues to apply just as much in our eastern neighbourhood as well.

I am referring here to the darkness in Minsk as much as the dictatorship in Damascus.

The door to our cooperation must remain open for all European democracies that want to and can fulfil the obligations that come with membership. The Union’s values, such as

freedom of expression and fundamental human rights, must be respected by all Member States.

We welcome the fact that Croatia will now become the 28th member of our Union. This also sends a strong signal to the other countries in the region.

Serbia deserves the status of candidate country, and it should be possible to begin accession negotiations with Montenegro in the relatively near future. We hope that Bosnia's new government can take the measures required for applying for membership of the European Union, and following the judgment of the International Court of Justice it should be possible to begin negotiations with Macedonia. Albania and Kosovo need our support in their work to embark upon the same path.

Sweden supports Turkey's efforts to live up to all of the membership criteria – not least respect for human rights – through continued reforms and a new constitution. It is clear that considerable work remains to be done, just as it is clear that attempts to exclude Turkey will slow down these reform efforts.

With Turkey as a member, the European Union will be stronger, both politically and economically.

A solution to the Cyprus question is more urgent now than ever before, and would contribute to stability in the eastern Mediterranean region.

It is a given that we strongly support Iceland's accession negotiations. We eagerly await the day when one more Nordic democracy can take its place at the European Council table.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's security policy remains firmly in place.

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 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 in a position to both give and receive support, civilian and military.

Security and collaboration in our Nordic neighbourhood are particularly important. In April last year, a Nordic statement of solidarity was adopted as a complement to both our own and our neighbouring countries' security policy choices.

Sweden continues its commitment within the European Union's battlegroups. We are working for these battlegroups to be placed at the disposal of the United Nations when necessary, including in the event of major disasters.

The European Union's ability to assist with crisis management, state-building and humanitarian support in vulnerable countries contributes to a strong and unified Europe. Sweden takes its responsibility for an active European role in such operations. We demonstrated our ability to make an effective contribution to crisis management, following a decision by the UN Security Council, by sending Swedish Gripen aircraft to join the NATO operation in Libya last year, along with extensive humanitarian support.

Being in a position to quickly and flexibly contribute to operations when the need arises is important for Sweden. We want to be a credible partner, regardless of whether operations are led by the UN, the EU or NATO.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

A new and effective instrument in people's fight for freedom and democracy is access to the free flow of information. This access can help to liberate people from oppression and reflects the desire to exchange knowledge, ideas and opinions.

This is why Sweden is pushing for the right and opportunity of all people to communicate openly and securely on the Internet.

Freedom on the Internet is the new front line in efforts for freedom in the world.

The universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law must guide the global debate on norms for cyberspace.

Increased demands for regulation and control, and censorship and surveillance, risk creating a new digital divide between those who have freedom of expression on the Internet and those who do not. People's freedom of expression on the Internet is the best way to combat the misuse of the Internet by authoritarian regimes for anti-democratic purposes.

Sweden has been proactive in putting the issue of freedom of expression on the Internet on the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Sweden will also host an international conference in Stockholm in April this year on how freedom and openness on the Internet can also promote global economic and social development.

Moreover, we will take the initiative for a European strategy for freedom on the Internet.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

This year it is one hundred years since Raoul Wallenberg was born. At a time when more people need to stand up against persecution and xenophobia, he is an exemplary figure in the fight against anti-Semitism and a reminder of the importance of personal responsibility and civil courage. Sweden is celebrating Raoul Wallenberg this year, both at home and abroad. As long as abuse and persecution remain a reality in far too many parts of the world, his actions continue to have relevance for each and every one of us.

No one can have failed to notice in the past year that freedom and democracy are vital forces motivating individual people. It is an important responsibility for Sweden and the European Union to uphold human rights, international law and the principles of the rule of law.

Sweden is standing for the United Nations Human Rights Council for the period 2013–2015. Membership of the Council would put Sweden in an even stronger position to pursue vital rights issues at global level and to make a constructive contribution to strengthening the role of the Council.

Sweden continues to support the International Criminal Court, other international courts and measures to prosecute and combat genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Sweden works actively to support journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders around the world. Sweden is a candidate for UNESCO's Executive Board for the period 2013–2017 and wants to prioritise the global issues of freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

We want to work for a world with greater gender equality. Sweden will play a leading role in ensuring respect for equal rights and protection of equal opportunities for all people.

Freedom of religion and conviction is at the heart of an open society. Increased violence and discrimination against people belonging to religious minorities are cause for concern and must be combated. The same applies to attacks on people belonging to ethnic minorities and LGBT people.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Cooperation between Sweden and our Nordic and Baltic neighbours has deep roots. Together, we have achieved peace and freedom throughout our region, and today we can combine our forces to propel these values beyond our own borders.

Next year Sweden will assume the responsibility for coordinating both Nordic and Nordic–Baltic cooperation. Sweden is preparing a broad programme of cooperation in the Nordic Council of Ministers, focusing particularly on growth issues. We also continue to develop our work on the Baltic Sea Strategy.

As Chair of the Arctic Council this year and next, Sweden will play an important role for intergovernmental action in a region whose importance is clearly growing.

It is a matter of better conditions for the peoples of the region and of protecting nature and the environment in a region that is more sensitive than most.

We are now working on implementing the Swedish strategy for the Arctic region that the Government adopted in spring 2011.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We share our European identity with our neighbours to the east. The European Union's Eastern Partnership is based on the vision that eastern European partner countries will one day be able to participate to the full in European cooperation. We all stand to gain from increased mobility, trade and cross-border cooperation. But moving closer to the EU also means that democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law must be respected.

Progress is being made in Georgia and Moldova. In Belarus, in contrast, gross violations of human rights continue. Sweden is a driving force for vigorous European measures against the regime, and at the same time we are strengthening support to the country's democratic forces. In the past year, Ukraine has also acted in a way that calls into question the country's respect for the rule of law and Sweden will therefore be reviewing the direction of its development assistance.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

A year ago hope was kindled that several countries in North Africa and the Middle East would also be transformed into open societies and open economies.

Since then, we have seen free elections in both Tunisia and Egypt, the dramatic overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya and increasingly brutal and bloody repression on the part of the regime in Damascus, whose days everyone knows are numbered.

What all the countries in the region need are open and representative political systems that respect the right of all to freedom. Economic reforms to deliver jobs and welfare to the rapidly growing populations are essential for a positive development. The rights of women must be ensured and minorities must be protected against abuse.

It will be a crucial task for Europe in the years ahead to provide all the help we can to achieve this.

We must work together internationally to stop oppression and violence.

The focus is now on developments in Syria.

Our position is clear: the violence must be stopped, President Assad must step aside, and a process of democratic transition, representing all parts of Syrian society, must begin immediately.

This is the only way to avoid a civil war, which would be devastating for the entire region.

The EU fully supports the endeavours of the Arab League and its peace plan. We deeply regret the fact that two vetoes prevented the UN Security Council from adopting the same position.

At this time, the Arab League wants the support of the United Nations, and it must receive that support.

Now we must increase pressure on the regime and support to those who are working for a peaceful transition to a democratic Syria.

The sanctions will be tightened. Humanitarian support must be increased.

Sweden will take part in the formation of the Friends of Syria group in Tunis on 24 February. We are appointing an ambassador to develop dialogue with and support for the democratic opposition in Syria.

We want to actively develop our cooperation with Egypt. We are seeking dialogue with all the democratic forces in the country and look forward to the day when Egypt has a civilian government and a democratically elected parliament.

We also want the European Union to begin negotiations on deeper free trade agreements with Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, as soon as the necessary conditions are fulfilled.



We are deeply concerned about the lack of progress in efforts for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We see considerable danger for the future in current developments. This applies not least to the continuing settlement policy.

We are providing political and concrete support to efforts to build a viable, contiguous and democratic Palestinian state. We look forward to the day when Israel and Palestine can live in peace with other, and when Israel can live in peace and security with the entire Arab world.

This is why we want to have a strong European force for peace in the region. It is when we continue to work together on the basis established in December 2009 that we have the possibility to influence developments.

Sweden will continue to work for a strong and united European policy on this crucial issue.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The United States is the European Union's principal strategic partner. In times of economic crisis and turbulence around the world, our mutual dependence and the importance of transatlantic cooperation become clear. Our broad cooperation with the United States contributes to security and prosperity, globally and in our own region. The United States is also an important partner in promoting Internet freedom and security. Sweden is working for deeper economic integration and free trade between the European Union and the United States.

At a time when demands for political and economic modernisation are growing in intensity, it is in the interests of Sweden and the European Union that Russia develops into a true democracy that makes a constructive contribution to solving common global challenges.

Russia's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be an important step towards integration into the global economy and a genuine economic partnership with the European Union.

Sweden and the European Union have a growing relationship with China. China's increasingly prominent role in the international arena requires it to take greater responsibility on global issues such as the environment and climate, security and poverty reduction.

This responsibility also includes respect for human rights and democratic principles. This respect has further deteriorated in recent times.

The growing role of India is central to long-term stability and security in the region. The European Union's strategic partnership with India builds on shared values of democracy and the rule of law.

During the past year, major steps have been taken towards a free trade agreement and the dialogue on global issues such as security policy, open trade routes, human rights, the environment, energy and the economy is deepening.

Sweden and the European Union also look forward to continued cooperation with strategic partners such as Brazil, Japan and South Africa.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

Sweden's involvement in Afghanistan is a long-term commitment based on broad political consensus.

During 2012, Sweden's military presence will be reduced as the Afghan people themselves take over responsibility for security. The Swedish military mission in its present form will be concluded no later than summer 2014. We are open to continued contributions to training the Afghan security forces.

At the same time, Sweden will expand its development cooperation with Afghanistan, with a view to strengthening civil society organisations, among other aims. The focus will be on peaceful and democratic development, and on promoting gender equality and the role of women in development. The transition to civilian leadership of all Swedish operations will take place during the spring.

Respect for human rights and freedoms in Iran continues to deteriorate. The number of executions has risen dramatically over the past year. This policy is barbaric. Sweden is playing an active role in the European Union and the United Nations to draw attention to and influence the situation.

There is a great need for democracy and respect for basic human rights in Cuba. Support to the democratic forces must be reinforced and the pressure on the regime must be maintained.

In Burma prospects appear brighter. Important steps have been taken recently towards what we hope will be real democratic change. However, much remains to be done, including the unconditional release of remaining political prisoners, full respect for human rights, and free and fair by-elections during the spring.

Sweden enjoys strong relations with many African countries. We want to contribute to a European policy on Africa that emphasises openness, respect for human rights, democratic governance and increased regional trade. While we welcome sustainable

progress in many cases, continued poverty, oppression and intractable conflicts remain a reality in parts of Africa.

Developments in the Horn of Africa in 2011 were dominated by internal conflicts and the massive humanitarian disaster in the wake of the drought. Great efforts are still required to help the region.

In Somalia, which in addition has been severely affected by attempts to block aid consignments from around the world, the political and humanitarian challenges are enormous. Sweden is part of the core group working to strengthen the support of the international community for peace and development in Somalia and is one of the leading actors in this work.

The formation of a new state, South Sudan, creates new possibilities in the region, even if great tensions still remain. The needs are substantial and Sweden will continue to contribute to development in both countries.

Developments in the Great Lakes Region affect the entire region. The systematic abuses against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo must stop.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

To a great extent, the current threats to human security are global. This requires cooperation and institutions in which all countries participate. It also requires norms and international agreements that are respected by everyone.

A strong United Nations and effective multilateralism are, and will remain, cornerstones of our policy.

Working for continued reforms of the United Nations is therefore an important contribution to efforts to address cross-border challenges. The composition of the Security Council does not reflect the world of today, and must be changed.

The G20 has begun to take on an increasingly influential position in world politics. Our influence will be secured through the EU, the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD.

The global environmental and climate issues are among the most decisive challenges facing our world. The fact that the participants at Durban backed a legally binding agreement was the result of the European Union's driving role. We now have a renewed roadmap for a new climate agreement that includes all the countries of the world. But the level of ambition must be raised if Sweden's and the European Union's climate objectives are to be met.

Sweden is one of the initiators of global cooperation to reduce levels of black carbon, methane and ozone in the atmosphere.

Sweden and the European Union will continue to push for the strengthening of the institutional framework for sustainable development ahead of the summit in Rio de Janeiro, Rio+20, later this year. At this conference, Sweden will work to ensure that the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – are handled in an integrated way.

An important step on the road to Rio+20 is the Stockholm+40 conference, 40 years after the first United Nations conference for the environment and sustainable development was held in Stockholm in 1972.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction is still one of the most serious threats of our time.

Membership of the Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) increases Sweden's opportunities to play a constructive role to prevent the unauthorised proliferation of nuclear weapons.

We support the efforts for a zone free of weapons of mass destruction throughout the entire Middle East. An international conference hosted by Finland is planned for this year.

The IAEA, with Sweden on the Board, has expressed concern about possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear programme. The European Union and others have imposed sanctions as part of the policy geared towards dialogue and agreement on this issue.

It is crucial that the Non-Proliferation Treaty is fully respected. Iran must accept a broader presence of IAEA inspections as a way to instil confidence in its declared peaceful intentions.

Sweden, together with Mexico, is chair of the Article XIV Process, which aims to see the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) enter into force.

We also support the efforts for continued reductions in global nuclear weapons arsenals, including tactical nuclear weapons in our part of the world.

Sweden supports the important work to secure and destroy various forms of nuclear material, and will participate in the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The world's economies are becoming increasingly interlinked. Trade and investment generate growth and employment.

The multilateral trading system has proven to be robust in times of economic turbulence. Cooperation within the WTO has been largely responsible for making it possible to counteract protectionism. A conclusion of the Doha Round would provide a well-needed boost to the world economy.

In 2012, the conditions for the powerful promotion of Sweden are being strengthened in important growth regions, through, for example, the newly established consulate in Mumbai, India. Our embassies in Angola, Argentina, Malaysia and Vietnam can continue their important promotional work.

Openness and an effective regulatory framework for free trade lay the foundations for dialogue and democratic development. Swedish companies have an important role to play through their ability to combine business with broader social responsibility.

In the EU, there is a special focus on eCommerce, and on strengthening compliance with the common regulatory framework.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The long-term objective of eradicating poverty and oppression is far from being achieved. We have a moral responsibility to support people who are vulnerable and living in poverty. After 50 years of Swedish state development assistance, we can note that the conditions for development policy have radically changed. Considerable steps have been taken to adapt development cooperation to today's world, but much remains to be done. The reform of Swedish development assistance will therefore continue. The development assistance framework in 2012 is estimated to amount to one per cent of GNI.

Growth is a prerequisite for a lasting reduction of poverty. Which is why Sweden's development cooperation is to be growth-oriented and focused on the poorest countries and people.

But growth alone is not enough. The clear emphasis of Swedish development cooperation on democracy and human rights and freedoms is central to modern development assistance.

Civil society actors have a key role in achieving poverty reduction and democratic development.

Last autumn, a new global partnership for development was created at the high-level meeting on aid effectiveness in Busan, South Korea. The participation of new actors created new opportunities for lasting development and growth. Together with these actors, and with our European partners, Sweden will continue to work for sustainable development as well as transparent and generous development assistance characterised by a clear focus on results.

The point of development cooperation is not to compensate for shortcomings in other policy areas. Which is why the Government, both nationally and within the EU, is endeavouring to strengthen the work on policy coherence for development.

The Government attaches great importance to gender equality and the role of women in development cooperation. Women are a driving force for increased democratic rights and freedoms, which we witnessed during the upheavals in the Arab world. Sweden gives special priority to the implementation of United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, as well as Resolution 1820 on sexual violence in conflict situations.

The UN Millennium Development Goals will be evaluated in 2015. It is expected that it will be possible to achieve several of the goals, but major challenges remain. The Government is therefore making a concerted effort to strengthen Sweden's contribution, not least in Africa. A reduction in infant mortality and improved maternal health are in focus. Work to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights continues.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

We are travelling more than ever before. Every day, more than a quarter of a million Swedes are outside Sweden's borders. This is a challenge for our Foreign Service, which has an important task of providing assistance to increasing numbers of people in distress or being held in detention. From painful experience, we know that we must also have the capacity to deal with major disasters abroad.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has built up an organisation that can respond to these challenges by rapidly deploying resources to the area in question. Collaboration across borders is also required in consular work.

Efforts to bring about the release of Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak are continuing. The two Swedish journalists who have been imprisoned and sentenced in Ethiopia should be released.

Mr/Madam Speaker,

The internal challenges facing the European Union will not be easy to handle. But they also offer the opportunity for us to reflect on the core of our cooperation, our foundations, our basic values. In a world of shifting balances of power and interests, our values – human rights, peace, freedom and democracy – are needed more than ever.

These values shape our Swedish foreign policy. And Sweden will, with European partners, continue to promote them in our own region and globally.

I began by referring to the essentially positive developments we have experienced during recent decades.

Our task is to help see to it that these developments can continue.

And that more and more people around the world can have a better life.