

## Sweden and Finland: Future members of NATO?

Since the beginning of 2014, the security situation in Europe changed significantly, mainly due to the situation in Ukraine. Gradual escalation of the conflict and a lack of cooperation of Russia in the peace process have brought new challenges to defense policies not only of individual countries, but also of international organizations, including NATO. Citing former NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen: "Russian aggression against Ukraine was the wake-up call for us" (Rasmussen 2014). The annexation of the Crimea, the suspension of cooperation between the Russian Federation and NATO awakened not only the Alliance itself, but also the very European countries bordering the Russian Federation, including the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden. These countries have not yet considered joining the Alliance for a number of reasons. However, the situation in Ukraine and Moscow's military activities in their geographic proximity encourage their interest in a closer cooperation with the Alliance. The aim of this analysis is to present factors influencing a potential entry of Sweden and Finland into the NATO. The first part is devoted to the common national aspects interfering with the idea of the accession. The second part will focus on the Alliance itself and its approach to the policy of enlargement.

### **National Aspects in Sweden and Finland**

National security questions that have arisen from the situation in Ukraine are similar in Sweden and Finland, as are the factors influencing their possible accession to NATO, namely: the principle of neutrality; the public opinion and national governments' visions; and activities of the Russian Federation in their vicinity.

### **The principle of neutrality**

Finland and Sweden apply in their foreign policy the principle of neutrality. In the case of Sweden, it is more than a two hundred-year old tradition related to the Napoleon wars (Policy of 1812). In the case of Finland, it is a relatively recent history. After World War II, in 1948, Finland with the USSR signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and Helsinki, under pressure from Moscow declared neutrality. It was a part of the so-called "Finlandizing" when the influence of Russia was visible

in Finnish foreign and security policy spheres, but also in the Finnish society and marked by non-criticising of USSR activities. Despite being neutral, both countries are members of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO). NORDEFECO is not an international organization. It is a form of political cooperation at a ministerial level, which is to provide an overview of the defense policies of individual countries, but especially to promote the mutual sharing of military capabilities, and maintenance of them upon the critical level (NORDEFECO 2014). What's more, NORDEFECO brings together countries that participate in different international organizations, and which guarantee their safety individually on the national level, but also through collective defense at the international level. Norway, Denmark and Iceland are all members of NATO, while Finland and Sweden are not members, but they are, together with Denmark, members of the EU. In addition, Finland and Sweden participate in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. Finland and Sweden have begun to openly present their willingness to establish closer relations with the Alliance after the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation. In the words of Finnish President Niinistö: "Finland is also not a security vacuum, and we cannot afford to become one" (Niinistö 2014). Statements of state representatives about closer cooperation with the Alliance are, however, in conflict with the principle of neutrality. Despite the claims by Sweden and Finland that this type of cooperation does not alter the principle of neutrality in any way, has Moscow rejecting their argumentation. In the words of Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Russian Duma, Alexei Pushkov, "Signing a closer cooperation with NATO ends the neutrality of both countries and can be regarded as a step in pre-accession to NATO" (Izvestja 2014).

### **The public opinion and vision of national governments**

Swedes and Finns are known for their civic participation, and especially in elections, as well as for their negative attitude to the question of changing the neutrality principle of their states. In a recent survey in November 2014, 37% of Swedes were for Sweden's entry into NATO, 36% were against, and 27% remained undecided (Defense News 2014). It was the very first survey in which the majority of Swedes favoured their country's entry into the Alliance. In September 2014 parliamentary elections took place in Sweden in which the centre-left Social Democratic Party wing beat a former centre-right government of former Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. It was the former government which openly supported the idea of joining the NATO which cannot be at all said about the government of the current Prime Minis-

Minister, Stefan Lofven. This attitude is confirmed by the Programme of the Government published in October 2014 stating that: "Sweden will not apply for entry into the NATO" (Government of Sweden 2014). The document's text mentions strengthening of cooperation between Sweden and the Nordic region, the Baltic Sea, the EU and the UN, but does not mention the NATO (Ministry of Defense of Sweden 2004). The last security doctrine of Sweden was published in 2004, and speaks about the strengthening of cooperation with the Alliance within the Partnership for Peace, but currently does not fully reflect the situation in Europe (Government of Sweden 2014). In Finland, the newspaper Helsingin Sanomat published in August of 2014 a survey indicating that more people would now support the idea of joining the Alliance than was the case in March 2014. Concretely, the increase is from 22% to 26% of the citizens for entry. Conversely, 57% of Finns refuse the entry and 17% of citizens remain undecided (Yle 2014). It has to be noted that the survey was conducted prior to the increase of military activities of Moscow near the Finnish border. In addition, of influence is the fact that Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb from the National Coalition openly supports the idea of joining the Alliance, even if a discussion about the matter is left to the future government. In early October 2014, he had to explain his positive statements about future adherence to the NATO to the opposition in the Finnish Parliament after meeting with British Prime Minister David Cameron (Helsinki Times 2014). In April 2015 new parliamentary elections will take place in Finland, which can significantly influence the country's course and its new security strategy.

#### **Activities of the Russian Federation**

Geographical proximity of Sweden and Finland to the Russian Federation undeniably affects the priorities and direction of national policies, and especially in the security field. What's more, the activities of Russia in the Baltic Sea, and disturbance of the airspace of neighbouring countries in the last year have significantly increased. The Report by the British think-tank ELN titled "Dangerous Brinkmanship" presents a summary of close military encounters between the Russian Federation and the West during 2014 (ELN 2014). The report describes forty "very disturbing" incidents, among them three having "high probability of causing casualties or a direct military confrontation" (ELN 2014). Among these incidents is a Russian military exercise held last year simulating an attack on Stockholm and on southern Sweden, which shocked the whole country. Swedish Air Force, concretely Gripen air-

craft, were not able to identify promptly Russian military fighter aircraft Tu-22 accompanied by Su-27. Therefore, two aircrafts from the NATO base in Lithuania were sent to help the Swedish Air Force to monitor the situation (Lithuania Tribute 2013). Swedish army earned much criticism for this failure. Finland is equally concerned about Moscow's activities as it shares 1,300 kilometres of common border with the Russian Federation and had its airspace three times in the week preceding the NATO Wales summit in early September 2014 disrupted by the Russian military aircraft. Citing Finnish Defence Minister Carl Haglund "... it is difficult to attribute these activities to a chance" (Duxbury and Rossi 2014). On top of that, at the end of October 2014 Russian warplanes repeatedly disrupted the airspace of Finland, which has led the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö to express concern over a possible collision of a Finnish aircraft hornet f-18 and a Russian aircraft (Tisdall 2014). He also stated that "the Finnish way of dealing with Russia, whatever the situation, is that we will be very decisive to show what we don't like, where the red line is" (Tisdall 2014). Russian officials repeatedly warned Finland when considering the entrance to the Alliance, regarding especially 100% Finnish dependence on Russian gas (The Economist 2014).

### **Approach of the Alliance**

An aspiration for membership in NATO is not only a unilateral policy of a state with such interest. The situation in Ukraine and the suspension of any civil and military cooperation between the NATO and the Russian Federation have affected the future of the Alliance's policies, including the enlargement policy. Moreover, it has led to a situation when Moscow considers NATO a threat. Mikhail Popov, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation who has for RIA Novosti stated: "I have no doubts that the issue of drawing of military infrastructure of NATO member-countries to the borders of our country, including via enlargement, will remain one of the external military threats for the Russian Federation" (Ria Novosti 2014). The Alliance had to for these reasons reconsider the accession processes with candidate countries, for example with Montenegro. The Summit in Wales highly evaluated progress of all candidate countries, it did not bring specific dates of accessions, although the "door of the Alliance remains open" (NATO Summit Wales 2014a). A new action plan for preparedness of NATO was presented at the Summit (NATO Summit Wales 2014b). This plan consists of "coherent and comprehensive measures needed to respond to changes in the security environment at the borders of NATO and other areas of concern to the Allies. The plan responds to the challenges that Russia has introduced and their policy implications" (NATO Summit Wales 2014b).

It aims to ensure a rapid response in case of need, not only in the territory of the member states of the Alliance. Sweden and Finland have not yet requested the opening of accession negotiations and with regard to internal political changes; it is uncertain whether they would do so. So far, they have decided on the establishment of a closer cooperation, which also took place at the NATO summit in Wales, specifically in the form of Host Nation Support Memorandum of Understanding which allows the activity of units of the Alliance and their assistance in both countries. Even though many analysts consider this memorandum as a pre-accession step into NATO, however, Finnish President Niinistö said that Finland does not want to enter the NATO through the back door (English News China 2014). Any accession negotiations, however, will not be carried out jointly for both countries (Defense News 2014), which is something that was agreed by Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven and Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb at the meeting of the Nordic Council.

#### Recommendations

- Sweden and Finland should adopt new national security strategies, which would specify the long-term and the short-term priorities. This should be the task for the new Swedish government, as well as the future Finnish Government that comes into power after April 2015.
- The Alliance should continue to diplomatically support activities of Sweden and Finland, regardless of their future interest in membership. The steps of the Russian Federation can be seen as demonstrative and sometimes provocative by which Moscow wants to draw attention to the insufficient level of military capabilities in Europe and to demotivate Finland and Sweden from a possible interest in joining the Alliance.
- For this reason, European countries should take strong measures concerning the increases of the national security budgets and ensure their direct effective use. They should set long-term priorities and strategies in the field of security.
- Nordic cooperation with the NATO could be achieved by establishing closer cooperation between the NORDEFECO political platform and NATO. The NORDEFECO is interested in joint projects and military exercises, which would ensure interoperability and maintain it at a high level also through the Connected Forces Initiative (Defense News 2014). Given that NORDEFECO has no legal status, joint exercises and cooperation without a direct membership would not probably cause a negative reaction by the population of these countries.

- In the case of the Slovak Republic, we can see NORDEFCO as an inspiring project for Visegrad Four countries, especially because it is the geographically close countries with comparable economic power and political priorities, which have the greatest potential to create a platform for political cooperation in the Central European area. In view of the changes in international politics, just sharing of the minimum military capabilities would be once again the wrong reason for the implementation of a similar military political platform of the V4. The key to success, however, is political cooperation, without which no platform can be established – and this is exactly where V4 countries have been lagging behind for a long time.

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