



Finland and Sweden: two neutral EU member states reacting against international terrorism

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The Governments of Finland and Sweden categorically condemned the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11 immediately after the incidents and expressed their solidarity with the victims and the American people. In both states, the Governments held extraordinary meetings, and, the one in Finland was openly described as a crisis meeting. In the two countries, high level committees were set up to follow the situation and estimate potential threats to each of them. Help and support to the victims of the accident was also offered. As for tangible measures, police authorities started a close co-operation with Interpol and Europol.

During the days after the attacks, the spontaneous condemnations of terrorism in the atmosphere of shock gave way to more profound analyses on the horrendous incident. In this, co-operation within the EU helped to harmonise perceptions and line up statements. Thus, the Prime Ministers of Finland and Sweden – Mr. Paavo Lipponen and Mr. Göran Persson – coincided in the message that the terrorist attacks in the U.S. represented an attack against common values of the Humanity. Further, terrorism, in general, was condemned as a menace to human rights, democracy, constitutional traditions, tolerance, multiculturalism as well as international peace and security. Consequently, responsibility for the fight against terror was seen to lie on the entire international society. For this reason, both countries considered fundamental the participation in forums that permit concerted actions against common threats, such as the EU and the UN.

In Sweden, the instinctive and quick support to the United States expressed by Prime Minister Persson arose indirect criticism among some political leaders of the country. According to these voices, Persson had broken the tradition of previous debate within the Swedish political elite before important foreign political alignments. Such an alignment had been Persson's promise that Sweden would fight against terrorism "together" with the U.S.

In the extraordinary European Council in Brussels, September 21, the four non-aligned countries of the Union - Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden - opposed the original proposal of Belgium for EU support to the military actions against the authors of the terrorist actions. In its draft, Belgium had suggested an EU commitment to "focused"¹ actions along with the U.S. This was, however, unacceptable to the neutral countries. Finally, a compromise was reached and the member states announced their readiness to participate in the struggle against terrorism according to the capabilities of each country.

Although the solidarity and the support expressed by the EU to the U.S. was stronger than expected, both Finland and Sweden have underlined that the EU did not give the U.S. a *charte blanche* to a full-scale war. In many occasions, both countries have stressed the importance of presence of mind and careful consideration in the adoption of military measures.

In the UN, Finland and Sweden have aligned themselves with the rest of the EU countries and given their support to the Security Council resolutions on the struggle against terror. Both countries have also regarded very positive the renewed interest of the U.S. in the UN and welcomed the fresh activism in the world organisation around the prevention of terrorism. In this sense, the granting of the Nobel peace price to the UN and its General Secretary, Mr Kofi Annan, was found most pertinent in this precise world situation.

In Finland and Sweden, the role of the UN in the fight against terrorism is seen central. This is because both countries perceive the UN as the only truly global organisation that can bring together as many countries as possible in the resolution of new international challenges, among them terrorism. In the case of Afghanistan, Finland and Sweden would like to see the UN in a key position in the creation of a stable and democratic Afghanistan in the aftermath of the military operation.

Beyond Afghanistan and terrorism, Finland and Sweden consider important the role of the UN in the new globalised world. The engagement of entire international society is required if challenges such as organised crime, drugs, diseases, prostitution and human trade are to be tackled seriously. Finland and Sweden also argue that the need for global co-operation within the UN is increasing as new potential division lines emerge, for example religions, cultures and uneven distribution of material resources and welfare. This kind of argumentation that gives priority to multilateralism in the struggle against threats that jeopardise international peace and stability could be seen as an alternative to a new super-power alliance or even a gradual escalation to a conflict between civilisations.

In the most recent EU meetings in Gent and Luxembourg, Finland and Sweden have aligned with the rest of the member states in their acceptance of the U.S. military campaign against the Taliban regime. Both countries, however, consider that the retaliation must be proportional and avoid victims among civil population. The importance of humanitarian aid and support to displaced people has been underlined in several occasions. Finland and Sweden also participate in the development of the anti-terrorist policy of the Union. In Finland, researches have warned against too hasty conclusions and insufficient preparation of far-reaching decisions on citizen rights.

Finally, I would like to point out some special outcomes of the actual situation in Finland and Sweden. As for Finland, the recent rapprochement between Russia and the U.S./Nato, on the one hand, and Russian and the EU, on the other, has been regarded very positive. Closer co-operation between Russian and the West is welcomed in Finland as a means to integrate the big Eastern country into international society, in general, and Europe's new security architecture, in particular.

As for Sweden, the initial fierce condemnation of the terrorist attacks by the Government of Göran Persson and his almost unreserved support for retaliation arose assessments that Sweden was abandoning its neutrality. Swedish politicians, however, have argued that when threats are stateless and originate from independent terrorist groups neutrality becomes irrelevant. In this sense, no country can be neutral in front of such challenges. On the other hand, Anna Lindh, the Swedish Foreign Minister, went even further when she suggested the Sweden would be unlikely to stay neutral if an armed conflict should break out nearby.

In Sweden, there has also been more division among the political parties and their opinions vis-à-vis the retaliations than in Finland, for example. Although, both the Socialists and the conservative Moderates as well as public opinion have accepted the

U.S. strike against terror as legitimate self-defence, the Greens and the ex-communist left have taken distance from the common front.

Swedish political analysts have also began to wonder if it is Osama bin Laden who pushes Sweden closer to the hard core of the EU with its monetary union and common currency. There are not yet any decisions but the fact is that the tone in Swedish EU assessments and its integration rhetoric have become more positive after September 11!

In the recent days, discussion on the retaliation and its proportionality is arising in Finland and Sweden. In both countries, researches and ordinary people ask themselves where self-defence comes to its end and become a full-scale war.

Foodnotes

¹ Ciblée, in the original French text.