

Northern Flank by Tore Fredin

Swedish elite wants to join the EU

Security guarantees and fear over a destabilized Russia are playing the bigger role in the upcoming referendum.

In the official picture presented to explain the twists and turns around the European Union (EU) negotiations for expanded membership, the emphasis is on petty economic details. This goes for all four countries now seeking membership: Austria, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. Looking more closely, one finds that the threat from a destabilized Russia has been a far more important factor.

The emphasis on the economic aspects of the negotiations is particularly false if one understands why Sweden and Finland reached an agreement with the EU, and why Norway was left behind. In order to understand this, one must include the security situation in the high north.

Norway, already a NATO member, has military security guarantees, while both Sweden and Finland are in a much more exposed security situation. This is particularly true for Finland, which has a 1,000-mile border with Russia, but Swedish territory is also of strategic importance for the defense of continental Europe. As any NATO expert knows, southern Sweden could be turned into a virtual aircraft carrier, from which all of Europe can easily be reached.

This is the reason why the Germans, at the end of the EU negotiations, pushed through the agreement by making Sweden an offer it could not refuse. The economic concessions were made over objections from both Spain and Greece, who argued that Sweden, being one of the wealthiest economies in Europe, should be able to fully pay its way from the beginning.

The Finns did not get as good an economic deal as the Swedes. This can partially be explained by the fact that Finland, in its membership application, had no reservations against having common foreign and security policy with the EU, while Sweden, in its application, stated its old conditions for maintaining its policy of neutrality. During the negotiations, this neutrality clause was watered down. At the end of the negotiations, it was silently swept under the rug.

The Swedes were more or less pushed into this new position because of the more straightforward approach toward NATO taken by the Finns. The Finns first dropped all security demands in their EU membership application, and then, later, openly turned to NATO by buying, to the dismay of the Swedes, the U.S. F-18 jet fighter instead of the Swedish Gripen. Since then, the Finns have taken the lead in defining the security policy in the Baltic area, something which used to be a Swedish monopoly. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the reconstitution of the three sovereign Baltic republics, Sweden, under Prime Minister Carl Bildt, has been pushing for more European-wide support of the Baltic states. During the EU negotiations, Sweden succeeded in broadening European understanding for the Baltic states. The northern flank of NATO is now not only conceived of as Kirkenes, the Kola Peninsula, and the Barents Sea, but also includes Finland, the Baltic states, and the Baltic Sea.

This has been confirmed mainly by the Germans. According to *Sven-*

ska Dagbladet on Nov. 21, 1993, there is now a division of labor between Germany and Sweden, where Sweden takes care of the Baltic states' security interests, while the Germans orient toward the eastern European countries more to the south.

The Swedish interest is to prevent the Russians from using the Baltic states as a springboard for a military invasion. However, the main concern of the Swedes is to not become isolated in future conflicts. In order to secure EU support for this policy, the Swedish establishment is now fully mobilized to force through the decision for Sweden to become a member of the EU. If the Swedish electorate decides against membership in the EU in the upcoming referendum, Sweden will become very exposed because of the commitments to the Baltic states made by Prime Minister Bildt.

That dimension explains why the Swedes got a favorable agreement with the EU that will enable the Bildt government to get all four parties in the coalition government to support the referendum. This was secured by agreements reached with the EU in regional economic and agricultural policy areas which are crucial for the old farmers party (Centerpartiet), which so far has maintained a very negative attitude to Swedish membership in the EU. Part of the agreement is to buy off an opposing political layer within the farmers' electorate.

As things now stand, it will be the social democratic votes which will decide the outcome of the referendum, paralleling the situation in Denmark concerning the Maastricht Treaty, whose eventual passage created the EU. The leadership of the Social Democratic party is for a yes vote, but the majority of their base is against Sweden entering the EU. The party is split, and the outcome of the referendum is anybody's guess.