

## Northern Flank by Tore Fredin

### A new 'Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact'

*Sweden and the West are pushing the Baltic states to capitulate to Russia, despite their tough talk.*

On April 11, the German daily *Die Welt* published an interview with Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt headlined "Russia Has No Right to a Voice in the Baltics." "Spheres of interests are incompatible" with the new Europe after the breakdown of communism, Bildt stated. He explicitly warned the Russians not to play upon the problems the Baltic states have with Slavic minorities, who, according to Bildt, were sent by the Soviets to undermine these states from within in the first place.

This militant language from a normally neutral Swede against the superpower Russia not only reflects megalomania on the part of Bildt, but also a new role Sweden is playing in the West's handling of its security policy regarding the northern flank. On March 28, the conservative daily *Svenska Dagbladet* leaked the report that an informal top diplomatic group has been meeting regularly and secretly in Stockholm at least every third month. It consists of participants from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and the European Union Commission.

The group is named "The ad hoc Stockholm Group" and, despite its informal nature, it is deciding western policy toward the Baltic states. All problems related to the Baltic countries are discussed, including the Russian minorities, and economic and social issues.

Bildt's hard line emerged clearly on Nov. 17, 1993, when he declared that Sweden would not remain neutral in case of a Russian threat against the

Baltic nations. With this statement, Bildt, according to *Svenska Dagbladet*, made clear that the Baltic countries are considered as the "near abroad" for Sweden and the West—part of their sphere of influence.

For some time, Bildt has been pushing for stronger European-wide support of the Baltic states (see *EIR*, March 18, p. 53). *Svenska Dagbladet* quoted a Swedish source who stated that it is in Sweden's self-interest to involve other countries in the Baltic states so that Sweden and Finland will not be isolated in a crisis. According to this source, a firm network is now established, which might explain Bildt's militant language.

Despite this positive commitment, the other side of the coin is that Sweden is scheming, along with the West, to get Latvia to accept the Russian demand to use the Skruna military base for four more years. This is pure appeasement. The military base has no strategic importance for the Russian military, but the West is pressuring Latvia because the United States fears that Russia will make similar demands on it to withdraw its forward bases elsewhere. In other words, the first priority is the "new Yalta" deal.

This analysis was put forward in the April 8 *Svenska Dagbladet* by Stefan Hedlund, a research professor on eastern Europe at Uppsala University. Hedlund is an outspoken critic of the policy of the Swedish establishment (and Bildt) to push International Monetary Fund shock therapy on eastern Europe, which is destroying their economies.

Sweden is similarly playing a du-

bious game with the military capability of the Baltic states. One example is the recent decision not to sell them military equipment, despite the fact that the unofficial embargo by the West has been lifted. The reason, Swedish Foreign Minister Margaretha af Ugglas told Swedish state TV April 10, is: We don't want to provoke the Russians as long as they have military personnel in the Baltic states, period.

Hedlund also asks why Latvia should feed and keep 35,000 so-called retired Russian military persons, many of whom are well-trained, armed officers and elite troops 35-40 years of age. Last spring, the Russian troops in the Baltic states held a military exercise, aimed at occupying and holding key positions until the main body arrives. One must examine the irregular pattern of incidents which have occurred between Russian military and Baltic authorities in this context. The most recent took place outside Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, on April 7, when Russian troops were conducting exercises without having notified the Estonians. This occurred the day after negotiations between Estonia and Russia over the Russian withdrawal broke down, because the Russians said that they will not leave on Aug. 31 and that Russia alone will decide when the troops leave.

It seems that at least some officials in the Baltic countries have seen through Bildt's hard-line posturing against the Russians. When Bildt was on a whirlwind visit to Riga, Latvia on March 29, trying to arm-twist the Latvians to agree to the Russian demands on the military base, Aleksander Kirsteins, the chairman of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Latvian Parliament, stated: "Bildt wants us to agree to a new Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact." And the largest daily of Latvia, *Diena*, wrote that Bildt's visit was "stirring up bad blood."