



## ESDP and the Swedish Presidency

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*As the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union is coming to an end, it is now time to assess Stockholm's work in the field of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Overall the results are positive and the Swedes pro-activity is what will one remembered when thinking of this Presidency.*

On 1 July 2009, Sweden took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It can be said that most of the EU staff had been looking forward for the change of Presidency since the Czech EU Presidency<sup>1</sup> had shown some difficulties in holding the reigns of the EU during the six previous months. It was with a significant preparation and enthusiasm that the Swedes undertook the role of Presidency.

This Presidency's work on ESDP can be described as thorough and realistic. Presidencies inherit an ongoing dossier, and the Swedes took it on easily, since they had started preparatory work well in advance. The Swedish Foreign Ministry already began to engage the Council Secretariat in June 2008 to deepen its staff knowledge of ongoing ESDP issues and to decide what would be Sweden's priorities when the time would come. Presidencies do not benefit of much leeway on being innovative, and the Swedes followed the programme of the French, Czech and Swedish Presidency Troika agreed on 30 June 2008.<sup>2</sup> However, occupying the Presidency position provides countries with the advantage of being the agenda setter. The items put on the agenda generally represent the countries strategic interest and in Sweden's case, the emphasis was put on the EU Battlegroups (BGs), maritime surveillance capability, civil-military cooperation and civilian capability development. Historically, Sweden has been a fervent supporter of the EU crisis management tools and has been a significant contributor to the Union's missions since the birth of ESDP, 10 years ago. This explains the set of priorities Stockholm chose. As mentioned above, certain items of the agenda are predetermined, but comparative to the Czechs, the Swede's involvement in ESDP development seemed more ambitious and has been more active and determined.

Improving the flexibility and the employability of the European Battlegroups has been a focus of the presidency. Sweden has been one of the Member States most dedicated to the establishment and the use of the BGs. The BG concept has played a key role in the transformation of the Swedish armed forces.<sup>3</sup> The Swedes put forward the fact the EU's BGs had been ready for deployment for a number of years but had never been used. Stockholm therefore called for the BG deployment concept to go beyond the scenario of rapid response. The Swedes proposed to use them as gap filler in the case of personnel and capability shortage in existing operation. Cohesion of the Member States on this issue has proved hard to build. Member States with a less pronounced interventionist culture would rather see the BG concept unchanged while others see the BG as perfectly viable tools which should be used when necessary and which concept should be broadened. On the other hand the Swedes managed to build consensus on the issue of employability of the BGs. The Member States agreed that emphasising coordination and interoperability among armed forces were essential features of functioning BGs. Furthermore, Stockholm encouraged the

<sup>1</sup> See Herz J. , "The Czech Presidency, ESDP and Missed Opportunities", *European Security Review*, No. 45. July 2009. [http://www.isis-europe.org/pdf/2009\\_artrel\\_295\\_esr45-czech.pdf](http://www.isis-europe.org/pdf/2009_artrel_295_esr45-czech.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Council of the European Union, "18 Months Programme of the Council", document 11249/08, 30 June 2008, [http://www.eu2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/ProgrammePFUE/Trio\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eu2008.fr/webdav/site/PFUE/shared/ProgrammePFUE/Trio_EN.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Sundberg A., Nilsson C., "Swedish Presidency and ESDP", ARI 156/2009 – 16/11/2009, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_eng/Content?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/zonas\\_in/ari156-2009](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_eng/Content?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari156-2009)

Member States to further discuss the pooling of capabilities. Work undertaken on the BGs by the Swedes was not orientated to completely re-invent the deployability of BGs but to foster reflections on the concept and to raise awareness of its relevance.

Sweden pushed civil-military cooperation on the EU agenda. The focus was not put on the overall EU CivMil architecture - a more political and sensitive topic - as was done during the French EU Presidency. Instead it was on the CivMil capability development side and on finding synergies between the two spheres, which can be argued, is rather less complicated to federate the Member States on, but remains nonetheless necessary. The Presidency pointed out the benefit of deeper CivMil practical coordination and cooperation to overcome present duplication. The Swedes have put forward their work on maritime surveillance in the Baltic Sea (where regional Member States collaborate among each other as well as with civilian actors) as an example for the EU to follow.

On the issue of capabilities and according to their traditional civilian optic in crisis management, the Swedes have pushed forward the development of civilian capabilities. The emphasis was on capability development initiatives such as pre-deployment trainings which are already in place in Sweden and other countries such as Denmark and Germany.<sup>4</sup> The initiative called for the Member States to develop national civilian recruitment and training systems in order to raise the level and the amount of personnel deployed in missions, which in turn increase the efficiency of the EU missions. The work done on civilian capability development is very fragmented as it is a multifaceted topics, and what was achieved by the Swedes on this particular aspect of the question has proved groundbreaking as the issue had never been properly addressed by previous Presidencies.

In addition the Presidency carried forward previous work started on SSR. The modalities for the deployment of experts and for training and related activities have been completed, enabling the creation of an EU community of experts familiar with SSR questions as a whole and sharing a common approach to SSR. The Presidency has also developed the EU Guiding Framework for SSR Assessments, providing the EU institution with a tool of planning and analysis for future missions. It has to be underlined that document has integrated substantially Gender and Human Rights dimensions, dimensions which have been incorporated in the majority of the Presidency’s work.

As far as the diplomatic corps of the Swedish Permanent Representation to the EU is concerned, the work done has been exemplary. Members of the Council Secretariat felt that the personnel present in Brussels were really in command of the Presidency which was not necessarily the case during the French EU Presidency where the Brussels staff seemed to be more messengers passing on Paris’ words. As previously mentioned, the preparatory work of the Swedes has been thorough, from time to time even too much. Indeed members of the Council Secretariat felt the need for a bit more independence. The PSC team is said to have delivered one the best jobs of all time, directing meetings very intelligently, dynamising debates and pushing for conclusions to be made.

The Swedes did very good job, but it must be remembered that they did not face major crisis, as the Czechs or the French were exposed to. This is not say that the positive judgement made on the Swedes should be levelled down, but the reactions of Presidencies in adversity can affect one’s judgement. It has been the case for the French with Georgia and for the Czech during the crisis in Gaza.

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<sup>4</sup> See ZIF Website <http://www.zif-berlin.org/en/home.html>