

Long Event Report

Finland, Sweden & NATO. Did Trump Change Everything?

15th February 2018

Stockholm, Sweden

The main objective of the project was to discuss whether the current US administration's foreign and security policy has had an effect on the changed security scenario in the Baltic region and on the willingness of Finland and Sweden to join NATO and to participate in NATO-led exercises. In order to provide an answer to this question we invited speakers: Andras Simonyi, who is managing director of the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the School of Advanced International Studies of John Hopkins University in Washington, D.C.; Anna Krolund, who is a postdoctoral researcher at the John Morton Institute of North American Studies at the University of Turku, Finland; Magnus Christiansson, who is a postdoctoral researcher at the Swedish Defense University and University of Stockholm, Sweden; Katarina Tracz, who is managing director of Stockholm Free World Forum.

The speakers had the chance to discuss the above mentioned issue in two different occasions, first at a breakfast meeting at the Parliament of Sweden and then at a seminar at the Centre Party's National Office. The breakfast meeting was an informal roundtable discussion between the speakers and parts of the Centre Party's Executive Board. The latter consisted of Member of Parliament and spokesperson for Foreign Affairs Kerstin Lundgren, Member of Parliament and spokesperson for Security and Defense Daniel Bäckström and General Secretary Michael Arthursson. The breakfast was also attended by Swedish People Party's Member of Finnish Parliament Anders Adlercreutz, political expert from Svenska Bildningsförbundet Jaan Siitonen and Centre Party's International Assistant on behalf of the Centre Party's International Foundation Nicolò Branchesi.

The seminar was hosted in a brand new seminar hall at the Centre Party's National office in central Stockholm. The audience consisted of around fifty attendees from the Swedish political, diplomatic and mediatic world. In this sense, the event managed to bring together different high ranked personalities to have an open and honest debate on the issue. Among the audience there were the Romanian and Hungarian ambassadors; French, German, Finnish, Lithuanian and US diplomats; Finnish and Swedish politicians; representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and media.

The event received very much attention in the local diplomatic, political and mediatic world. In fact, Sweden's biggest newspaper Svenska Dagbladet wrote about the seminar a couple of days later, ELF was of course mentioned in the article. We also received compliments from the attendees that appreciated the openness and straight-forwardness of the event. This is due to the fact that the security and defense discussion in Sweden is highly politicised, in this sense, the strong and honest positions provided at the event were perceived as refreshing and very much needed in the Swedish debate.

The European perspective was also much discussed. In this sense, there has been a debate on whether EU defense policy development and integration is enough to ensure the security of Finland and Sweden and whether EU defence policy should be an alternative or a complement to NATO. Needless to say, the debate's outcome was that European defense policy alone isn't enough to ensure the two countries' security and that the EU should develop its defence capabilities as a complement to NATO, given the US unique military power and to avoid double structures.

As for the event's main question "Did Trump Change Everything?", the answer is no, he didn't. First of all, because Trump is not equal to the United States. In fact, Finnish-Swedish-US security and defense cooperation hasn't been destabilized by the current American administration. Second of all, if Trump has had an impact on the region's geopolitical situation, it has been a positive one, since it made Europe realize that it's time to invest more in defence; and Sweden (less Finland) to have a more positive attitude towards NATO-membership.

With this said, the event was a success both content and organization-wise. The speakers were very happy with all the arrangements and as already mentioned we received many compliments from the audience. This signals the effectiveness and potential of such events in Sweden.