

Swedish Foreign Policy

Swedish foreign policy is based on a long-standing national commitment to non-alignment in peace time and neutrality in times of war. For nearly two centuries, Sweden has remained outside the major European and world conflicts that have devastated Sweden's neighbours.

In recent decades, this policy has been supplemented by an equally strong commitment to improving the world order through support for the United Nations, disarmament, environmental co-operation, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and assistance to developing countries.

Various initiatives, including large contributions to UN peacekeeping forces and the donation of 1% of Sweden's gross national product to assistance programs, have won Sweden a special standing in international affairs. Traditionally, Swedish governments have sought to establish all-party consensus on foreign policy issues and to consult and work closely with their Nordic partners.

The most important current challenge for Swedish foreign policy is the relationship with the European Community, in view of the EC integrated market starting on January 1, 1993. Sweden considered joining the EC in its early years, but saw membership as incompatible with Sweden's policy of neutrality. Instead, with the other European Free Trade Association countries, Sweden concluded a free trade agreement with the EC in 1972. EC countries now receive more than 50% of Swedish exports.

Pressure within Sweden to join the EC has grown quickly in recent years. Business strongly favours such a move, the trade unions are largely reconciled, and most Swedes now consider membership not only an economic necessity but a logical step towards a more integrated Europe.

These factors, combined with the rapid flight of investment from Sweden to the EC countries, led Prime Minister Carlsson to announce in October 1990 that Sweden would seek accelerated entry into the EC. An application to join could be made as early as the fall of 1991. The earliest possible effective date of EC membership would be 1995.

The conditions of entry into the EC, but not the principle, will be an important issue during the campaign leading to the September 1991 Swedish elections. How to reconcile EC membership with the policy of neutrality remains an unresolved question, but one which has diminished sharply with the end of the Cold War.