

The Social Democrats do not have a veto right against a Swedish NATO membership

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created the biggest security crisis in Europe since World War II. Putin is responsible for thousands dead and millions of people fleeing. We now see a security situation in Europe that is to be defined before and after February 24.

Sweden and Finland, like the rest of the Western world, have sent supplies and weapons to support the defense of Ukraine – an independent and democratic nation. It was an obvious decision for us, and we and other countries should be ready to do more.

But the decision also meant that we made our position clear. We do not accept the Russian violation of Ukraine and the barbaric violence against the population. Russia's aggression also underlines how vulnerable Sweden is without NATO's common and binding security guarantees.

The Social Democratic government is now highlighting Sweden's various bilateral defense co-operations. These co-operations have their qualities, but none of them contain NATO's sharp defense guarantees. It became almost too clear when Ukraine firmly said no to the Russian proposal for a "Swedish" non-aligned model, as Ukraine needs the security guarantees that Sweden today lacks.

The Moderates' view is that Sweden must do everything we can to take the decisive step and become a full member of the free world defense alliance as soon as possible. The other day, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that their close cooperation with Sweden and Finland means that the process of bringing the two countries into the Community can be very short – if we apply. And that, in the meantime, NATO can give our countries the protection they need. This is not a new message, but an important one.

For several reasons, we should carry out this process together with Finland. Those reasons are based on the two countries' mutual history and close geography, and particularly as our countries share many security policy interests in our immediate neighborhood. A joint application process would also show Russia the strength of our democratic response to authoritarian threats and to the values we represent together. This, together with a powerful rearmament of the national Swedish defense, would improve our common military capability in the Baltic Sea area. The agreement on increased defense funding that all parliamentary parties supported this week is a fundamental step in the right direction.

With us as members, the whole Nordic region belongs to the same defense alliance. It increases stability in our part of the world. At the same time, the decision on NATO membership is ultimately our own. We are the ones who finally decide when to take the step. But we see the strength in a coordinated action with Finland. I know that Finland shares our point of view.

The Swedish Social Democrats are now acting far too passively on this crucial issue. Where Finland's process has come a long way, Sweden's has hardly even begun. Perhaps the Social Democrats hope that Finland will land in a no, and thus save the party from even having to

answer the question. Many Social Democrats are still stuck in old notions from the days of the Cold War and neutrality, which they find strangely difficult to leave behind. One can understand that it takes time for parties to get out of old opinions. But we do not have time. It is time for action. A clear political leadership with Sweden's interests at the center is what is required.

Unfortunately, we have seen little of that thus far. Magdalena Anderson's speech regarding a NATO-membership as a "destabilizing" risk will in an unfortunate way restrict both Sweden's and Finland's freedom of action. It might also give Finland the completely wrong impression that Sweden is not to be counted upon.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Moderate party demanded that Sweden must make a new analysis based on the dramatically changed security situation. A parliamentary group was finally set up with the mandate to do so. That is positive and could open an opportunity for several parties to reconsider their previous positions.

Meanwhile the war continues and becomes more violent. In Moscow, Vladimir Putin is isolated, facing severe financial restrictions following the war. This means that the risk of desperate action on his part increases. On our part, this accelerates the need for a carefully prepared and well-thought-out process for a Swedish membership, so that it can be pursued purposefully and at a high pace once the application has been submitted.

Right now, no one can say exactly when that may happen. But a concrete timetable is part of the preparation and should be decided in dialogue with NATO. A reasonable and realistic hypothesis to work towards, is the submission of a formal application in connection with the large NATO meeting in Madrid, which will be held at the end of June this year.

My aim is to reach a broad and "cross-party" agreement on this issue. But if a NATO application were to be blocked by the Social Democrats, while Finland takes further steps towards a membership, we will end up in a new situation. Then the question will depend on what government takes office after the next election in Sweden.

The Moderates are ready to lead Sweden into NATO together with other parties, and we are now preparing for that task in detail. We will appoint our own office in the Swedish Parliament, which, together with external foreign and security policy expertise, will prepare everything that will be required for an application. The office will support our work within the parliamentary committee, so that that process is as constructive as possible. And we will have a very close contact with Finland and other important NATO countries.

Sweden would benefit from a broad consensus on these issues. The government I will lead will submit a NATO application if there is a majority for a membership in the Swedish Parliament after the next election. The Social democrats no longer have a veto on this issue. And they, together with the Green Party and the Left, cannot be given the exclusive right to formulate Swedish security policy given the new era that we are entering.

A government is expected to represent its country's security policy position. However, the present position of the current minority government, where the door to NATO membership

has been increasingly tightened, is not the Swedish position as it lacks support in the Swedish parliament. The Social Democrat's no is not Sweden's no, and their internal party process cannot replace Swedish parliamentary process.

I want Sweden to be an open and constructive party in the discussions that are now taking place to strengthen security in our part of the world in a very critical situation. I therefore call on those parties, that are opposed to NATO or have not yet decided, to reconsider their position. Sweden must go from being a "laggard" to becoming an active partner in the new security policy landscape. And our country must have the defense guarantees that only a NATO membership can provide.

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