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HOW THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CRISIS, IN THE YEAR 2022, HAS CHANGED AND COULD CHANGE THE BALTIC SEA REGION'S SECURITY POLICY OF THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES

***Abstract:** How do you best describe the consequences of the future Swedish and Finnish membership in NATO? Yes, like a game changer. That might sound like a bit of an exaggeration. However, is it an exaggeration or not? The expansion of NATO with the two Nordic partner countries could be the start of a completely new chapter for Nordic security. But it will be a game-changer on distinct levels. Not only for the two Nordic countries, which are taking the historic step away from non-alignment, which is a far better word than 'non-alignment'. Because the events of the last seven months in Ukraine have shown that there is no freedom in being outside NATO and the defence alliance's security guarantees. In this article, we will analyse, the changes in the security policy in the Baltic Sea Region of Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, because Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on 24th February 2022. Furthermore, the probable future consequences of the Russia-Ukraine crisis in the Baltic Sea Region, we will take into consideration.*

***Keywords:** NATO, Sweden, Finland, Neutrality, Baltic Sea Region, Denmark, February 24 2022, Nordic countries*

The Russia-Ukraine crisis – Thursday, 24th February 2022

On 24th February 2022, Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine. The pretext given by Vladimir Putin for the Ukrainian invasion was the same as the Germans in the German annexation of Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia in September 1938. Protecting German, respectively Russian speakers, and uniting them with their

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homeland. In this context, it is also interesting that the right to self-determination and oppression of Germans, respectively Russians, in the occupied territories, were used in both cases. Russian troops, therefore, crossed the border and air forces violated Ukrainian air territory. The Russia-Ukraine crisis, which began in the winter of 2013-2014, escalated to a hitherto unheard-of degree. Fighting was very intense in the first months, especially around the capital Kyiv and the second-largest Ukrainian city, Kharkiv, near the northern Ukrainian-Russian border.

In the following springtime months, the war became a war of positions around the border of the Black Sea from Kherson in the west to Mariupol in the east and the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. The Donbas area. In August/September 2022, the Ukrainian armed forces are attacking Russian military bases and facilities on the Crimean Peninsula and in the Russian Belgorod oblast near the city of Kharkiv. Furthermore, the Russian army is far from having essential momentum on the Ukrainian steppe land.

In other words, the security political situation changed with great speed at the start of the war and with the rapid suppression of Ukraine in February/March, the Baltic countries and Western Europe had also been under security pressure. But already after a few months, it was clear that Vladimir Putin had made up his mind wrongly and a Ukrainian victory on the battlefield is now possible. From the early summer of 2022 until September there has been no notable change in the previous security balance. Furthermore, Vladimir Putin is running out of both weapons and ammunition, just as the use of nuclear weapons in every respect seems more and more utopian.

The Russia-Ukraine relationship and contemporary events

Politically, Ukraine took advantage of the unique momentum after the collapse of the Soviet Union to finally gain more autonomy and opted for a less obliging membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Since the 1990s the Ukrainian elites tried to steer the nation-building process away from major controversies while maintaining a necessary degree of antagonism with Russia. Although the ruling elite supported the myth of national liberation, it adopted the view that Ukraine is a common home for all its citizens. The Ukrainian Declaration of Sovereignty from 16th July 1990, included a section on 'citizenship' grounded in a civic idea that somehow prioritized the state over the nation, especially defined in ethnocultural terms. This inclusive approach was central to preventing the alienation of Ukraine's multi-ethnic and bilingual population with close links to Russia. Nevertheless, domestic political forces and the cultural intelligentsia advocated the 'national idea' and sought to ground the national identity in the Ukrainian language and culture and reverse the effects of Russification.

However, it is impossible to understand what is happening in Ukraine, without knowledge of its past. Since the 1300s, Russia has considered the territory of Ukraine (especially the area around Kyiv) as the motherland of the Russian people. A Russian territory. Like Western imperial powers had former colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is in that light, the events in the Russia-Ukraine area must be understood. 23rd February 2022, marks the ‘Defender of the Motherland Day’ in Russia devoted to soldiers and patriotism. As mentioned above, on 24th February 2022, Vladimir Putin dispatched troops on a so-called ‘peace-keeping mission’ to save Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. In Putin’s eyes a failed state and a Western puppet state. Besides that Putin named the West as the enemy as well for Russia and the oppressed Ukrainian people. NATO became, hereby, a direct enemy posing a severe threat to Russia’s national security and existence as an independent state. If NATO should expand into Ukraine. Over the years Ukraine and Russia contested territory, history, and cultural heritage, by asserting that specific myths, symbols, or ancestry are part of their distinctive national pasts. The Ukrainian identity debates, which originated in the Tsarist times, contributed to Ukraine’s brief independence in 1917-1919 and later led to the pro-independence movement in the 1980s².

In this light, the war in Ukraine is a reflection going beyond the regional balance of power. For the Russian side, the unification of the Russian world and bringing Ukraine back to Russia marks the completion of Putin’s higher political mission and legacy. For the Ukrainian side, the mass Russian military invasion is a culmination of a long struggle for national self-determination. In this struggle, the harder Ukraine tries to pull away from Russia, the harder the backlash from Kremlin. While the Russian iron grip on the region might prove hard to challenge, many ties between the two countries were already fragile in the build-up to the war – as Ukraine has strived for years to be closer to Europe, by right and by choice³.

During the first month of fighting, Ukrainians repelled many Russian attacks, conducted counter-offensives, and liberated some areas, most significantly around the capital Kyiv. On 2nd March 2022, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution reaffirming Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity with a broad majority. Based on the Russian view mentioned above, this narrative in Russian foreign policy is not new. As early as 1994, at the first post-USSR international forum on NATO enlargement to the East with representatives from the West and the former Eastern-Bloc

² M. R. Olesen, J. L. Schmidt, *Ruslands fremfærd i Ukraine presser de nordiske lande tættere sammen*, <<https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/ruslands-fremfaerd-ukraine-presser-nordiske-lande-taettere-sammen>> (22.08.2022).

³ I. Surwillo, V. Slakaityte, *Ukraine is closer than you think*, <<https://www.diis.dk/en/research/ukraine-is-closer-than-you-think>> (12.08.2022).

Vladimir Putin spoke of Crimea as a temporarily tolerated territory of Ukraine. At the time, as an advisor on international affairs to St. Petersburg Mayor's office, Putin stated that 25 million Russians were forced to live as second-class citizens because of the Union's collapse, adding that Russia only agreed to tolerate these developments due to diplomatic reasons⁴.

Vladimir Putin's views have only radicalized during the three decades that followed, especially concerning Ukraine. Inspired by the Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin as well as the Russian General Anton Denikin, and their shared lack of belief in the basis for an independent Ukrainian state, Vladimir Putin on several occasions expressed the opinion that "Ukraine is ancient Russian soil", and that "Russians and Ukrainians were one people – a single whole". He reiterated his stance in an essay published in 2021 'On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians'. In this piece, Putin argued that Ukraine never truly had statehood and that the Ukrainian nation itself was manufactured by Lenin by carving people out of Russia, thereby artificially dividing one nation. The history of Ukraine is, therefore, marked by a complex struggle for independence from Russia. In this centuries-long process, Ukrainians not only faced the challenge of establishing independent statehood but also a deeper sense of national distinctiveness from their Russian neighbour. The Ukrainian identity has been formed in opposition to Russia, seeking to distil the difference and establish what lies at the core of being Ukrainian⁵.

Sweden – abrogation of two hundred years of neutrality

The legacy of Olof Palme (Social Democrat) rests heavily when it comes to protecting the freedom of alliance and not joining NATO. In his 1968 May Day speech, Palme stated: "We decide the Swedish neutrality policy ourselves. Its meaning is non-alignment in peace aiming at neutrality in war. That is why we do not join military alliances, do not join any great power bloc. Therefore, through firmness and consistency, we must create confidence in our ability to stick to the chosen line of action, confidence in our willingness not to give way to pressure from a foreign power."⁶

This has been a foundation for social democracy ever since the time of Tage Erlander (Social Democrat) and Palme. Heavy social democratic names such as Göran Persson, Stefan Löfven and Pierre Schori (all Social Democrats) say no to NATO membership. Other representatives of the Social Democrats, such as S-women's chair Annika Strandhäll and Faith and Solidarity chair Sara

⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ O. Palme, *Första-maj tal i Stockholm och Sundbyberg*, pp. 3-4, <http://www.olofpalme.org/wp-content/dokument/680501a_stockholm_sundbyberg.pdf> (11.05.2022).

Kukka-Salam believe that membership goes against the fight for nuclear disarmament. Pierre Schori is on the same line where he links back to Palme and believes that the nuclear weapon states are holding us all, hostage. But even the current SSU chairman Lisa Nåbo believes that “Sweden benefits from being a non-aligned party, between the great powers.”⁷

As recently as during the party congress in November 2021, the party congress decided that the stance that appeared on the party's website would be preserved; “Military non-alignment is a foundation of Sweden's security policy. We do not want Sweden to apply for NATO membership”. But then came Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022.

On 8th March 2022, the issue still seemed to be out of the question when Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson made statements that our freedom of military alliance was still intact and NATO membership was out of the question as it would “further destabilize the situation in Europe”. Three weeks later, however, the attitude changed when the state ministers in SVT were asked about NATO and she answered, “I do not rule out NATO membership in any way”⁸.

Leading social democrats such as Karin Wanngård, opposition councillor in the city of Stockholm and party board member, have since spoken out. She believes that it would be unwise if the social democrats were to oppose NATO membership under the guise of such a changed security situation. She told Aftonbladet that Sweden sends weapons and equipment to Ukraine and that NATO is the only defence alliance that can push Russia back. In this, she meant that Sweden must make a common cause with Finland. Aftonbladet's editorial page, which is independent social democratic, changed sides within a few days of this statement and now supports Swedish membership in NATO. Its political editor-in-chief Anders Lindberg wrote: “Vladimir Putin's war shows that we need to join NATO to guarantee Sweden's security”⁹.

The former foreign minister Margot Wallström is among those who have also changed sides even though she was and is a strong voice against nuclear weapons and military rearmament. To “Dagens Industri” she says on 7th March, that NATO is indeed part of a nuclear weapons doctrine, but now she is more sympathetic to a yes. Finland's stance is decisive here when she says that “I find it difficult to see that we could take a different position than joining NATO”.

Social Security Minister Ardalan Shekarabi is also among those leaning towards a yes. He believes that NATO would be the most deterrent option right

⁷ A. Dybelius, *Elva frågor om NATO och Sverige samt Socialdemokraternes hållning i frågan*, <<https://ju.se/portal/vertikals/blogs/anders-dybelius/bloggposter/2022-05-11-elva-fragor-om-nato-och-sverige-samt-socialdemokraternas-hallning-i-fragan.html>> (11.05.2022)

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

now and contribute with military capacity. However, he has not officially decided or taken a stand.

Defence Minister Peter Hultquist is responsible for the strongest and perhaps most remarkable turnaround. At the party congress in November 2021, he made the following statement about NATO membership; “I will definitely never, as long as I am Minister of Defence, participate in such a process. I can guarantee that to everyone”. On Tuesday, 10th May he told Ekot that “the common defence of the Nordics would be strengthened if Sweden and Finland joined”. Furthermore, he now claims that “then the effect will be that we become stronger together. This is something that could happen if we choose to join NATO”¹⁰. Hultquist also argues for NATO membership by claiming that joint planning around defence would make “Gotland less vulnerable. That is a central point in the Baltic Sea that must not fall into the hands of anyone else”.

As the quick overview shows, the party is in an intense debate and most likely the party will conclude that Sweden should apply for membership in NATO. If this happens, there will be a majority in the Riksdag. An expression of interest can then be submitted. Finland and Sweden will make a joint decision. On 14th May the Finnish Social Democrats will announce their decision according to party secretary Anton Rönholm. After that, it can go fast. “I think the application period can be quite flexible. The only thing I am saying today is that there are no other countries that are closer to NATO than Sweden and Finland”, said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg earlier in April, according to TT. After the expression of interest is submitted, it must be reviewed by NATO. Since Sweden and NATO already have close cooperation, it can be ready in a few days. All 30 member states must then accept Sweden as a new member. How long the entire application process will take is difficult to say but should the Social Democrats and a majority say yes to membership, Sweden could be a member of NATO this fall¹¹.

After the Soviet collapse, Sweden reduced its territorial defence capabilities and shifted the focus of its military planning to international peace operations. In 2008 the Russian invasion of Georgia energised NATO defence planning for the Baltic states, which had implications for Sweden. NATO concluded that it would need access to Swedish territory in operations to defend Latvia, Lithuania, or Estonia. Gotland is strategically important in such scenarios, as the deployment of surface-to-air missiles on the island would help a military power gain control of the southern part of the Baltic Sea. Sweden has a long history of military non-alignment. The country declared its neutrality at the start of the second world war and built a strong national defence capability during the cold war without joining NATO. After Sweden joined the European

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

Union in 1995 – a move made possible by the fall of the Iron Curtain – the concept of Swedish neutrality became obsolete¹².

Tanks on the streets of the medieval tourist city Visby this spring. Other military deployments on the strategically important island of Gotland, in the Baltic Sea. Swedes are waking up to security challenges in light of Russia's troop movements and threats against Ukraine. Although a direct military attack on Sweden seems unlikely, the Swedish debate on NATO membership has been reignited by Russia's actions. Because of the serious global security situation following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there has been an agreement on enhancing Sweden's preparedness. The Swedish Armed Forces have adapted readiness measures and, among things, strengthened their presence on Gotland. Since 2015, the capabilities of the Swedish Armed Forces have been significantly heightened, including through the 2015 and 2020 defence resolutions, and an overall increase in appropriations of 80 per cent.

In April 2022, the Riksdag decided that Sweden's defence capability will be boosted and the scale-up accelerated. According to the Riksdag decision, the appropriations to military defence for 2022 will increase by a further SEK 2 billion, while the Swedish Armed Forces authorisation framework for military equipment orders will receive an additional SEK 30.9 billion. In the 2022 Spring Fiscal Policy Bill, the Government proposed an increase in the appropriations to the civil defence of SEK 0.8 billion. The Government has also instructed the defence agencies to present proposals for a step-by-step investment plan for military defence appropriations reaching two per cent of GDP.

Sweden has always been described by NATO as one of the most important and active of the alliance's cooperation partners. In 1994, Sweden joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP). The partnership aimed to build trust between NATO and other states in Europe and the former Soviet Union and would also improve the ability of partner countries to cooperate with NATO. Through the partnership, Sweden has participated in PARP, Planning and Review Process, which is a defence planning process for partner countries in which cooperation capabilities are developed¹³.

Since the 1990s, the Swedish Armed Forces have increased their ability to cooperate with NATO by adopting NATO standards, for example, English as the command language. Through participation in NATO operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq, the Swedish Armed Forces have also

¹² A.-S. Dahl, *Svensk forsker: Sverige og Finlands medlemskab af NATO er en gamechanger i Østersøen*, <<https://www.altinget.dk/forsvar/artikel/svensk-forsker-sveriges-og-finlands-medlemskab-af-nato-er-en-gamechanger-i-oestersoen>> (20.06.2022).

¹³ M. Engström, *How the Russia-Ukraine crisis could change Sweden's security policy*, <<https://ecfr.eu/article/how-the-russia-ukraine-crisis-could-change-swedens-security-policy/>> (02.06.2022).

adapted to NATO. Since 2013, Sweden has participated in NATO exercises relating to collective defence and Article 5 scenarios, i.e., scenarios with an armed attack against one of the member states. In 2014, Sweden and Finland became Enhanced Opportunities Partners to NATO, which means, among other things, a deepened security policy dialogue about the Baltic Sea area and access to more information. In 2016, Sweden signed an agreement on host country support with NATO. The Host Country Agreement makes it easier for Sweden to receive support from NATO in the event of a crisis or war and regulates what happens if a foreign troop under NATO command is on Swedish territory. This has made it easier for Sweden to host joint international exercises.

For Sweden, the application for membership in NATO on 18th May 2022, was not only a giant step after 200 years of first neutrality and then non-alignment, but also completely unexpected. Finland's and Sweden's application for membership in NATO has been described as a new period in European history and one of the biggest paradigm shifts in security policy since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But what will it really mean when both Finland and Sweden, by all accounts, become members of NATO? What does this mean for the security of Denmark, the Nordic region and Europe? Could it be an advantage for the common Nordic foreign and security policy, the Nordic role as a power factor in NATO (and vis-à-vis the USA) and in European security policy in general? Will it affect the balance of power and geopolitics between East and West in Europe? And how should we expect Putin to react?¹⁴

An important factor in discussions as well as in applying for membership in NATO was the Swedish public sentiment for membership. In the last decades, support for NATO membership has been between 35% and 40%. As recently as January 2022, support was only 37%. The events in the Ukraine area totally changed the Swedes' view of NATO influence in Sweden. In less than two months, support increased to over 50%. Only the Swedish left-wing parties demanded a referendum on possible membership. At the end of April, support exceeded 60% and at the final admission application, more than 62% were in favour of membership. Following the completion of the talks, Allies are due to sign the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden at NATO Headquarters on 5th July 2022. The Accession Protocols will then go to all NATO countries for ratification, according to their national procedures. Membership is therefore a reality in autumn 2022.

For Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson (Social Democrat), her government and party, non-alignment – however, they use the word ‘non-alignment’ – has always been a matter of ideology and almost part of the social democratic DNA. So, it has not been easy for the Swedish Social Democrats to change gears either. Magdalena Andersson still repeats, somewhat

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*

nostalgically, the traditional mantra that military non-alignment has been serving Sweden well. Only a short time before the historic decision to apply for membership in NATO, Magdalena Andersson had also rejected the possibility that Sweden would follow suit with Finland. Such a change in Swedish security policy would lead to a destabilization of security in the Baltic Sea region, according to the Swedish prime minister. And that was exactly what Putin wanted to hear in Moscow¹⁵.

Solidarity with other Western democracies is a fundamental part of Sweden's security policy. During the current Russia-Ukraine crisis, NATO states such as the Netherlands have demonstrated their ability to help Sweden defend Gotland from a Russian attack. Such cooperation has been the focus of several recent exercises. So, at a time when Russia seems poised to invade Ukraine, why shouldn't Sweden join NATO if it already cooperates with the alliance so closely? Opponents of Swedish accession to NATO argue that such a move could increase tensions in the Baltic region, that non-membership will provide Sweden with greater strategic flexibility in the long term, that NATO's nuclear policy would undermine the country's long-standing commitment to nuclear disarmament, and that it would be unwise to join an alliance that offers security guarantees to Turkey. Proponents of membership argue, inter alia, that this would formalise the sides' close cooperation, that only Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty (on mutual defence) would provide Sweden with enough security, and that widespread misgivings about membership are overstated¹⁶.

With Joe Biden (Democrat) in the White House, at least until 1st January 2025, Swedish policy on EU defence is unlikely to change much. Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist (Social Demokrat) is a strong supporter of cooperation with the US, while many Swedish senior military officers have received training there. Swedish defence industry cooperation with the United Kingdom, including on fighter aircraft, contributes to scepticism about greater cooperation with EU member states such as France. However, if US democracy remains unstable and Trump-style politicians gain even more momentum, Sweden may gradually change its position on EU defence. Were this to happen, there would suddenly be a parliamentary majority for accession to the alliance. In any case, Sweden will likely accelerate its efforts to strengthen its military capabilities in the coming years. Much will depend on how the Russia-Ukraine conflict continues to change Swedes' concept of security.

But, in the long term, the Swedish position might not be as fixed as it first seems. As with many other EU member states, Swedes have doubts about whether the United States' commitment to European security will outlast the

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*

Biden administration. In parallel, France has a growing interest in the Baltic region. In recent years, the country has increased its military presence in the Baltic states and conducted many exercises in the area. Sweden has joined the French-initiated European Intervention Initiative (EI2). And Sweden and France recently signed a Letter of Intent on defence cooperation.

Daniel Färm – editor-in-chief of the Social Democratic Party magazine *Aktuellt i Politiken* – has argued for a more positive Swedish view of EU defence. Referring to former US president Donald Trump, he asked: “What happens if and when Sweden and Finland find themselves in a difficult security situation, and an American president either acts weakly towards Russia or concludes that it is not a sufficiently strong US interest to support our countries against Russian aggression?” Even supporters of NATO accession are nervous about Trump or someone like him gaining the presidency¹⁷.

Finland – the changed neighbourhood with the Russian bear

On Wednesday morning, 18th May 2022, the Finnish Ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Mr Klaus Korhonen and the Swedish Ambassador to NATO, Mr Axel Wernhoff, handed in Finland and Sweden’s official letters of application in the Alliance’s Brussels headquarters. The applications were filed after months of national domestic debates on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24th February. In his remarks, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the requests, saying that this was a good day, at a critical moment for our security. The Norwegian Secretary-General continued that every nation has the right to choose its path¹⁸.

Like in Sweden, an important factor in discussions as well as in applying for membership in NATO was the Finnish public sentiment for membership. In the last decades, support for NATO membership has been between 25% and 30%. As recently as January 2022, support was only 28%. The events in the Ukraine area completely changed the Finnish people’s view of NATO influence in Finland and the rest of Scandinavia. In less than two months, the support increased to over 51%. Only the Finnish left-wing parties discussed a referendum, but not in the Finnish parliament on possible membership. At the end of April, support exceeded 57% and at the final admission application, more than 75% were in favour of membership. Following the completion of the talks, Allies are due to sign the Accession Protocols for Finland and Sweden at NATO Headquarters on 5th July 2022. The Accession Protocols will then go to

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Finland’s application for NATO membership*, <<https://um.fi/finland-is-applying-for-nato-membership>> (31.08.2022).

all NATO countries for ratification, according to their national procedures. A membership is like Sweden, therefore, a reality in autumn 2022, when the parliaments of all member states have ratified the agreement with the two Nordic countries¹⁹.

On the eve of the Madrid NATO Summit on 28-30 June 2022, the outcome was far from certain, as an ascension of any country to the alliance will need to be unanimously accepted by all members. Previously Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had threatened to veto membership talks in response to Finland and Sweden's refusal to extradite alleged members of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is designated as a terrorist organization by the US, and the EU. To mitigate risks during the precarious ascension period, Finland and Sweden sought and received security guarantees from France, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom. However, ahead of the NATO leader's Summit, Türkiye lifted its opposition to Finland and Sweden's NATO bid after long negotiations and signed a trilateral memorandum to support the invitation of the countries to NATO. Finland and Sweden have long had close security cooperation as militarily non-aligned Western countries. With shared values and widely integrated economies, both countries joined the EU in 1995, thus ending their status as politically neutral nations.

That being said, both countries had previously decided not to join NATO, opting to keep NATO membership as an option. Since the end of the Cold War, Finland and Sweden have shared similar political paths; they differ, however, in terms of their choices related to defence preparedness and spending. Sweden downsized their military capabilities after the collapse of the Soviet Union, culminating in the steep reduction in the number of conscripted servicemen from a peak of nearly 37.000 annual conscripts in 1994, to a low point in 2007 when only 4.730 attended conscription service. Ultimately, Sweden abolished their conscription service during peacetime in 2010 and transitioned to a small yet nimble professional military. Finland, on the other hand, never abandoned their stance of keeping up a credible independent military deterrent. Even though economic downturns, like the financial crisis of 2009, had significant detrimental effects on the Finnish economy and government coffers, the support for a relatively strong, independent conscription-based defence force never waned. The support for mandatory conscription is shared across the whole political spectrum in Finland and is commonly argued for on economic, historic and geographic grounds²⁰.

¹⁹ J. V. Bendtsen, *Sverige på nippet til NATO: nu kommer det store opgør med selvforståelsen*, <<https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/udland/sverige-paa-nippet-til-nato-nu-kommer-det-store-opgoer-med-selvforstaaelsen>> (12.05 2022)

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

Sweden came to a turning point in its approach to national defence with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. That was a wake-up call for most eastern European countries of a possible aggressive Russian foreign policy that included the use of military force to drive its national agenda. Sweden explicitly linked its increase in national security resource allocation to Russia's military assertiveness. This led to Sweden increasing its military spending and a partial reactivation of mandatory military service. Simultaneously, this development led to a new form of enhanced bilateral Swedish-Finnish security collaboration. This alignment in thinking and resources was based on a shared situational awareness of the increased Russian threat and an understanding of the need for broader and deeper military collaboration, which was not achievable through the European Union in the short term.

In 2014 Finland and Sweden already shared similar security policies, and many forums for collaboration, including through the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEF), civil security collaboration, the EU's defence collaboration, and NATO's Partnership for Peace for non-member collaboration. However, the bilateral security and defence collaboration journey that the countries started went much deeper than any of these previous forms of multilateral collaboration. In 2014, Helsinki and Stockholm published a political action plan, which was followed by a joint report by the Finnish Defence Forces and the Swedish Armed Forces that set a vision for the shared use of naval bases, mutual support for and the partial integration of their respective air forces, and the development of a combined Finnish-Swedish Brigade Framework that included force integration and interoperability. The report highlighted the need for bilateral agreements, the political mandate and the legal arrangements that were needed to achieve this shared vision. Since then, Sweden and Finland have signed many defence cooperation agreements, including a memorandum of understanding on defence cooperation (2018), host nation support for military activities (2022), and military strategic concept for deepened defence cooperation (2019) to ensure that no legislative hurdles put any objections to military cooperation when needed.

The development of these agreements has made military cooperation possible beyond peace, which previously was not part of any multilateral collaboration between the countries. The stated objective is to create permanent conditions for military cooperation and joint operations covering times of crisis, conflicts, and war, without any pre-set restrictions for intensified bilateral cooperation. The plans set in motion in 2014 have already borne fruit, including the establishment of a brigade-size common training exercise for Finnish and Swedish army troops, the Swedish-Finnish Amphibious Task Unit (SFATU), and the Swedish-Finnish Naval Task Group (SFNTG) which will reach full operational capability by 2023. Furthermore, Finland and Sweden train actively

in joint exercises together and with other allies, of which the ongoing Baltic Operations BALTOPS22 hosted by Sweden is the most recent with over 45 ships, 75 helicopters or aircraft, and over 7.000 personnel from 14 NATO allies and two partners. The two countries have also recently agreed on joint procurement of military systems, such as the new Nordic combat uniform, small firearms and collaboration on an R&D program for a common armoured 6x6 vehicle system. These developments not only enhance the operational capabilities of these two countries but also publicly confirms the political alignment on common security of the two nations²¹.

The Finnish Defence Forces have a long history of close cooperation with NATO – in addition to the United States and neighbouring Nordic countries. As Finland chose to replace its current fighter aircraft, the F/A-18 Hornet, with F-35 Joint Strike Fighters from the United States, this cooperation has deepened further and provides an opportunity for enhanced airpower collaboration among the Nordic states. The F-35 variants stand out as a front-runner for most recently announced fighter jet procurement deals for several European NATO countries. The Finnish F-35 project (previously called the HX program), launched in 2015, was started to replace Finland's current fighters at the end of their lifespan by 2030. Requests for information on multi-role fighters were originally sent out in 2016 to the defence administrations of the United Kingdom (Eurofighter Typhoon), France (Dassault Rafale), Sweden (Saab JAS E/F Gripen) and the United States (Boeing F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II). Based on a thorough tendering process and comprehensive testing, the Finnish government decided to procure the Lockheed Martin fighter jets²².

The deal signed in February 2022 is worth a total of 8.4 billion euros (USD 8.9 billion) and it is the largest military procurement deal ever made by Finland and one of the largest in Europe. The contract includes 64 F-35A Block 4-multi role fighters to be delivered during 2025-2030 (EUR 4.7 billion; USD 5 billion) equipped with AMRAAM and Sidewinder air-to-air missiles (EUR 755 million; USD 800 million). The rest of the sum is allocated to maintenance and service equipment and services (EUR 2.9 billion; USD 3.1 billion), construction of operational facilities in Finland (EUR 777 million; USD 820 million) and another 824 million euro (USD 873 million) for subsequent contracts and contract amendments²³.

As part of the deal, an Industrial Participation Agreement was signed with the fighter manufacturer Lockheed Martin and Pratt&Whitney worth at least

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² R. Forsberg, A.-M. Kähkönen, J. Öberg, *Implications of a Finnish and Swedish NATO membership for Security in the Baltic Sea Region*, <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/implications-finnish-and-swedish-nato-membership-security-baltic-sea-region>> (29.06.2022).

²³ *Ibidem*.

30% of the actual contract price, approximately 2-3 billion euros. By industrial participation Finland thus ensures the know-how and material needed to operate the fighter jets under exceptional circumstances and adds local technology transfers which will improve the technological capabilities of the Finnish defence industry. Expected to stay in operation until the 2070s, the F-35 procurement marks a long-term commitment to deeper cooperation between Finnish and US Air Forces and the American fighter jet industry that has endured since the initial order of F/A-18s in 1992²⁴.

Finland and Sweden – two stable Nordic democracies – are the final vital pieces missing from completing NATO’s northern security architecture, where a Finnish and Swedish NATO membership would increase the security of both NATO and the Baltic region. Firstly, geostrategically, Finland has gained over 100 years of valuable experience as Russia’s neighbour, the two sharing a 1.340 km (832 miles) land border. Finland has accumulated valuable intelligence on border activity in the East. The Åland Islands, an autonomous demilitarized region of Finland, together with Gotland, a Swedish island with a military base, are important hubs connecting trade lanes across the Baltic Sea. As members of the Arctic Council, Finland and Sweden have valuable practical insights into operating their societies in sub-Arctic climates with long, cold snowy winters in the north. Secondly, in addition to their critical geostrategic locations, Finland and Sweden as countries are technologically advanced with leading solutions in 5G technologies and cybersecurity. As prospective NATO members, Finnish and Swedish domestic small and medium-sized enterprises with cutting-edge solutions in the defence, aerospace and security sector would have enhanced preferential access to national procurement processes at NATO’s Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD). With seats at the right tables, companies would get their products to market faster and more cost-effectively, benefitting the whole Alliance. As countries across the transatlantic sea renew their capabilities because of a changed security reality, there is a renewed demand for Finnish and Swedish technology. And thirdly, Finland has valuable military leadership know-how generated from its national conscription since the beginning of the 20th Century. Finland and Sweden can manoeuvre and maintain operations in both Arctic conditions on land and in the sea, as well as control the skies in the northern Baltic Sea region. Moreover, as close partners of NATO over two decades, with frequent experience conducting military exercises together – Finnish and Swedish armies are NATO compatible and interoperable.

The northern expansion of NATO would push NATO’s eastern border closer towards two important Russian cities; St. Petersburg, which has an important seaport, and secondly the important military base of Murmansk,

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

where the Russian Northern Fleet with its nuclear submarines resides. The new border would enable a new ring of defence for the whole of Western Europe as anti-air capabilities and early-warning detection could be based nearer to the Alliance's border²⁵.

Denmark – the apparent embrace of the European Union

Denmark, a founding member of NATO, has stayed on the sidelines of EU efforts to build a common security and defence policy, for more than 30 years, in parallel with the trans-Atlantic alliance. It was one of four opt-out moves that the Danes insisted on before adopting the EU's Maastricht Treaty, which laid the foundation for the political and economic union. The 1992 waiver means Denmark hasn't participated in the EU's discussions on defence policy, its development and acquisition of military capabilities and its joint military operations, such as those in Africa and Bosnia and Herzegovina²⁶.

The Danes also opted out of EU cooperation on justice and home affairs, the common currency and citizenship. The opt-out decision on citizenship, which said European citizenship wouldn't replace national citizenship, has since become irrelevant as other members later adopted the same position. But the other provisions remain intact despite efforts by successive governments to overturn them.

In a 2000 referendum, Danish voters decided to stay outside the eurozone, and 15 years later they voted to keep the exemption on justice and home affairs. This time, however, the Danes appear ready to say goodbye to opting out of common defence. Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen called for the referendum on 8th March, less than two weeks after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on 24th February. She called on citizens to vote 'yes' to abolishing the exception, saying to do so would strengthen Denmark's security. Only, the far right and far left wings argued against²⁷.

The 'yes' side has had a clear lead in polls, with about 40% in favour of dropping the exemption and 30% against. About a fourth of voters say they are still undecided. There is widespread support for dropping the defence opt-out decision in Parliament. Only three small parties want to maintain it, two on the right and one on the left. The Danish government led by Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has announced the country will hold a referendum to reconsider the

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ M. Marcussen, *EU-forbeholdene og det danske mulighedsrum i verden*, <https://politica.dk/fileadmin/politica/Dokumenter/politica_45_4/marcussen.pdf> (20.07.2022).

²⁷ C. Nissen, *Det danske forsvarsforbehold: Hvorfor, hvad og med hvilken betydning?*, <<https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/danske-eu-forsvarsforbehold-hvorfor-hvilken-betydning>> (02.05.2022).

30-year-old opt-out clause that has so far kept Denmark away from the EU common defence policy²⁸.

The referendum was held on 1st June. Frederiksen also said the government will boost its defence spending to meet NATO's 2% of GDP target by 2033, up from its current 1,44% share. The last time the country surpassed the 2% mark was in 1989."Putin's pointless and brutal attack on Ukraine has heralded a new era in Europe, a new reality", Frederiksen said at a press conference in Copenhagen. "Ukraine's struggle is not just Ukraine's, it's a test of strength for everything we believe in, our values, democracy, human rights, peace and freedom". A document signed by Frederiksen's Social Democrats alongside four other parties speaks of a "new security situation" that must be confronted "with our allies in NATO and the EU". Besides changes to the country's defence policy, the parties touched upon Europe's heavy reliance on Russian gas. A tailor-made provision for Denmark, the U-turn is momentous²⁹.

The opt-out clause was introduced at Denmark's behest as part of the 1992 Edinburg Agreement, a text specially designed to allow the Danish country to ratify the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, which Danish citizens had narrowly rejected with 50,7% of voters against. The agreement proposed tailor-made provisions that clarified Denmark's participation in four new fields where the EU had begun to deepen its integration: citizenship, justice and home affairs, the monetary union (Denmark rebuffed the euro and kept the national krone), and defence. Today, the opt-out is still in place and applies to the so-called Common Defence and Security Policy (CDSP), one of the main elements of the bloc's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Consequently, Denmark, which is a NATO member, removes itself from all foreign policy decisions that have defence implications. During the in-person meetings of foreign affairs ministers, the Danish representative usually leaves the room when defence topics are broached. In practice, this means the Nordic country participates in collective action related to, for example, economic sanctions, as has been the case against Russia, but stays clear when it comes to military deployments, such as Operation IRINI, created to enforce the United Nations arms embargo on Libya. These overseas missions are carried out under the leadership and coordination of the EU, but their military forces are seconded by member states on a case-by-case basis³⁰.

Over 5.000 EU military and civilian staff are currently stationed in CSDP missions across Europe, Africa and Asia, with most of them focused on crisis management. A total of 37 operations have been launched since 2003: almost half of them are still ongoing. If Danish citizens vote to repeal the opt-out

²⁸ M. Marcussen, *op. cit.*

²⁹ C. Nissen, *op. cit.*

³⁰ *Ibidem.*

clause, the country will become immersed in the common defence policy and Danish troops will be deployed around the world under a centralised command.

As of 1st July 2022, the Danish defence reservation was lifted. As a result of the defence reservation, Denmark has until then not participated in “the preparation and implementation of the Union's decisions and actions which have an impact in the field of defence”. This has been the case since 1993 when the defence reservation came into force with the Edinburgh Agreement. In practice, this has meant that until the abolition of the defence reservation, Denmark has, among other things, been barred from contributing to military EU missions and operations and from participating in cooperation on the development and acquisition of military capabilities under EU auspices. With the abolition of the defence reservation, Denmark is fully included in European cooperation on security and defence.

The defence reservation came about – like the other Danish EU reservations – after the Danish 'no' in the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. After the referendum, most of the parties in the Folketing agreed on the so-called ‘national compromise’, which meant that Denmark took reservations about EU cooperation in four areas. These reservations were accepted by the other EU countries with the Edinburgh Agreement in December 1992. The Edinburgh Agreement was subsequently approved by a referendum in Denmark in 1993.

As a result of the abolition of the Danish EU defence reservation, as of 1st July 2022, Denmark is fully involved in European cooperation on security and defence. This means that Denmark can choose to contribute to the EU's military missions and operations as well as participate in the permanent structured cooperation in the field of defence (PESCO) and the European Defence Agency (EDA). The EU's common security and defence policy

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) forms an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Through the EU's common security and defence policy, the EU countries can jointly launch civil and military efforts that can contribute to crisis management, conflict prevention and peacekeeping tasks outside the EU's borders. The EU does not have its military forces. It is the individual Member States that make civilian and military capacities available to the Union for the implementation of the common security and defence policy³¹.

Considering the terrorist threat and the increased level of conflict in and around Europe, the EU's Foreign Representative presented the EU's Global Strategy in 2016, which sets the framework for strengthened security and

³¹ J. Liboreiro, *Explained: Denmark's Surprising U-turn on the EU common defence policy*, <<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/07/explained-denmark-s-surprising-u-turn-on-the-eu-common-defence-policy>> (07.07.2022).

defence policy cooperation. Since then, a few important initiatives on security and defence have been launched, of which the European Defence Fund (EDF), the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Peace Facility (EPF) are among the most important.

In March 2022, the EU's foreign and defence ministers adopted a new strategy for the EU's security and defence for the coming decade – the so-called ‘strategic compass’. The compass is divided into four core sections crisis management, resilience, capabilities, and partnerships. The most prominent elements in the compass are the establishment of an EU emergency capacity of 5.000 people who must be able to react quickly in crises, the creation of a hybrid toolbox and the establishment of even closer EU-NATO cooperation. In the process, Denmark has been particularly active in areas such as hybrid and cyber, maritime security, climate security and strengthened EU-NATO cooperation³².

Denmark could contribute to the EU's military missions and operations, which align with Danish security interests. The decision to deploy Danish soldiers will always require the involvement of the Danish Parliament. In addition, we will in future be able to participate in the permanent structured cooperation in the field of defence (PESCO), which particularly concerns the development of defence capabilities, and the European Defence Agency (EDA), which aims, among other things, to promote EU cooperation on defence equipment. In addition, a large part of the EU's defence cooperation is carried out under the auspices of the EU's wider policy areas, including research, industrial cooperation, and the transport area, in which Denmark participates to a large extent. Denmark also participates in cooperation on military mobility, internal security (Frontex) and cyber³³.

The Baltic Sea Region, the European Union and security policy

The European Defence Agency was established as an intergovernmental agency under the Council in 2004. The purpose of the agency is to strengthen the EU's defence capacity in crisis management, develop and promote EU cooperation on defence equipment, strengthen technology and research in the field of defence and create a competitive European market for defence equipment. It is voluntary for the EU countries to participate in the agency, whose work is financed by the participating member states. The Defence Agency acts as a link between the Member States and the EU's defence policies. The agency also has agreements with several countries outside the EU, including Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, and Ukraine. Within the framework of

³² *Ibidem.*

³³ *Ibidem.*

the EU-NATO joint declaration from 2016, the agency also cooperates with NATO³⁴.

The common security and defence policy has been operational since 2003 when the EU took over the leadership of NATO's military operation in FYROM (today North Macedonia) and the UN's police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since then, the EU has carried out and completed a total of 19 military and civilian crisis management efforts. Currently, the EU has seven military and 11 civilian missions and operations. The specific tasks of the missions vary, but as a rule, these are relatively small engagements with a limited number of deployed. There is a total of approximately 4.000 deployed to the EU's active missions and operations, which are roughly equally divided between civilian and military efforts³⁵.

The EU has four active military training missions (EUTM) in Mali, Somalia, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic respectively. The purpose of these missions is to train, educate and advise military forces in, among other things, human rights, international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. In addition, the EU has two military operations with a focus on maritime security in the waters off the Horn of Africa (EUNAVFOR ATALANTA off Somalia) and in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED IRINI off Libya). In addition, the EU's oldest and largest operation, EUFOR ALTHEA, has been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2004 to train armed forces and support the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina in maintaining the Dayton peace agreement from 1995. The EU also has 11 active civilian crisis management missions that seek to create stability in fragile states through, among other things, building up the judiciary and police, border administration, civil administration, and the like. Geographically, they are deployed to the EU's eastern neighbourhood (Kosovo, Georgia, and Ukraine, which are currently evacuated), Africa (Somalia, Niger, Mali, Libya, and the Central African Republic) and the Middle East (Iraq, Ramallah, and Gaza)³⁶.

The EU and NATO have a lot in common. 21 EU countries are also members of NATO. Both organizations focus on how we can best meet the global security policy challenges of our time. Regular meetings are held between the two organizations where the development of the collaboration is discussed. The work of the two organizations complements each other. NATO stands for territorial defence and is the guarantor of European security, the EU has the tools to deal with threats from, for example, irregular migration, cyber-

³⁴ R. Csernatoni, *The EU's Defense Ambitions: Understanding the Emergence of European Defense Technology and Industrial Complex*, <<https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/12/06/eu-s-defense-ambitions-understanding-emergence-of-european-defense-technological-and-industrial-complex-pub-85884>> (06.08.2022).

³⁵ A.-S. Dahl, *op. cit.*

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

attacks and hybrid threats against, for example, critical infrastructure and military activities in Europe's immediate area. Since 1993, the cooperation has developed to also include broader issues of defence planning and capability development in the field of defence. This development has not changed the premise that the EU's defence policy must always be compatible with NATO's policy³⁷.

The Baltic Sea Region

In a report that came out a few months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we showed in collaboration with Nordic research colleagues, among other things, that Sweden and Finland had already approached NATO and the United States to a significant degree before the invasion, which both countries now considered their most important partner in security policy³⁸.

The Swedish and Finnish decision-makers also increasingly saw Russia as a security policy challenge, as it was then formulated. But at the same time, it was clear at the time that not least the popular reluctance in both countries made the question of NATO membership irrelevant³⁹.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 resulted in a further shift in the threat perception of Russia by Finnish and Swedish decision-makers.

But just as importantly, it led to a fundamental change of mood in the Swedish and Finnish populations. Most significantly in Finland, where support for NATO membership rose from just over a quarter in January 2022 to more than three quarters in May. The development looked just like that in Sweden, albeit less violent. Against this background, both Finland and Sweden applied in mid-May for admission to NATO⁴⁰.

Finnish and Swedish NATO membership holds good opportunities for NATO. Not only does the alliance get to close off the Baltic Sea and, thanks to Swedish and Finnish territory, get better opportunities for defence planning to securing reinforcements to counter attacks on, for example, the Baltic countries.

In addition, both Sweden and Finland have technologically advanced forces whose organization and equipment have been streamlined for years to match NATO's standards. And both countries are stable democracies that fulfil

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ T. Prakash, *Sverige og Finland har kurs mod NATO: 'Jeg tror, at vi i Danmark skal klappe i vore små hænder'*, <<https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/finlaeand-og-sverige-har-lynkurs-mod-nato-medlemskab-det-er-historisk>> (13.06.2022).

³⁹ R. Forsberg, A.-M. Kähkönen, J. Öberg, *op. cit*.

⁴⁰ K. Haugevik, Ø. Svendsen, K. Creutz, M. R. Olesen, A. L. Regnér, J. L. Schmidt, *Nordic partnership choices in a fierier security environment*, <<https://www.diis.dk/en/research/nordic-partnership-choices-in-a-fierier-security-environment>> (05.07.2022).

NATO's original objectives of being an alliance for the defence of, among other things, democracy, and the rule of law. For Putin, Swedish and Finnish NATO accession is, conversely, a geopolitical goal of rank. Such a connection was not possible before the invasion, which at once removed decades of NATO resistance in the Swedish and Finnish populations.

The best Putin can hope for is self-imposed restrictions on nuclear weapons and/or foreign troop deployments in the style of the peacetime political reservations Denmark and Norway took in the 1950s⁴¹.

If Finland and Sweden become part of NATO, it will also turn Nordic security and defence cooperation upside down. But at the same time, it is also the culmination of a development that has been underway since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, which brought Finland and Sweden closer to the USA, NATO, and the Nordic NATO countries⁴².

In the report, we have described how similar security perceptions and strategies have made the Nordic countries far more interesting cooperation partners for each other. In addition to increased dialogue at all levels, this has, among other things, resulted in joint exercises and several concrete agreements. Among other things, air surveillance and giving military forces access to each other's territory⁴³.

However, the cooperation has mainly aimed at peacetime and has been limited by the fact that it would formally end in a crisis or conflict situation, where NATO would set the tone for the Nordic NATO countries.

With Finland and Sweden in NATO, the divide that has historically constituted the most fundamental barrier to the depth of Nordic cooperation and defence integration disappears. It provides new opportunities for intensified Nordic security and defence cooperation in both peacetime, crisis, and conflict/war⁴⁴.

The countries' integration into NATO's joint defence planning brings about a wide range of possibilities for Nordic coordination and planning, where areas such as increased cooperation on surveillance and sovereignty enforcement, preparedness cooperation and total defence stand out as some of the most obvious.

This does not mean that Nordic security and defence cooperation must take place exclusively under NATO auspices. NORDEFECO, Nordic Defence Cooperation, for example, remains a relevant forum for Nordic cooperation and consultation.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² J. L. Schmidt, M. R. Olesen, *Det lille store skridt*, <<https://www.diis.dk/publikationer/lille-store-skridt>> (08.06.2022).

⁴³ K. Haugevik, et all, *op. cit*.

⁴⁴ R. Forsberg, A.-M. Kähkönen, J. Öberg, *op. cit*.

However, the central point is that it must be fundamentally rethought and future-proofed based on the new structural conditions that Swedish and Finnish NATO membership constitutes.

Add to this the lifting of the Danish defence reservation and Norway's participation in the EU's defence and security policy cooperation. Overall, this means that the possibilities for intensified Nordic security and defence cooperation are better than at any previous time.

Conclusion

There is right talk of Finnish and Swedish decisions of historic dimensions. But at the same time, it is also a relatively small step, because over the past decades – especially after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 – the two countries have moved as close to NATO politically and militarily as is possible for non-members.

Geostrategically, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden will lead to a significant improvement in NATO's position in the Baltic Sea, with Russia being the only country in the region that is not a member of NATO. NATO will also find it easier to draw up credible defence plans for the Baltic countries because it will be easier to get reinforcements, which has been a significant headache for the alliance so far. In the long term, it will probably also lower the risk of military confrontation in the Baltic Sea region, because it will create clarity about the security policy position of the two countries and make them less vulnerable to Russian intimidation attempts.

In the short term, the situation is of course different, as the transition period from non-aligned to NATO member is difficult. Here, Denmark can play a role by facilitating as short and problem-free a process as possible. For example, through sharing experience for more than 70 years as a Nordic NATO member – even with their own experiences with Turkish resistance in NATO in connection with Anders Fogh Rasmussen's candidacy for the post of Secretary General. And you can help through political support for Finland and Sweden within the alliance.

This has also traditionally been the role that the aspirant countries' neighbours with NATO membership have played in previous enlargement processes. The Danish-Norwegian-Icelandic guarantee that they would assist Finland and Sweden with all necessary means should they be subjected to aggression on their territory, before they obtain NATO membership, should be seen as an example of this.

A united Nordic in NATO benefits Denmark and provides opportunities for increased Nordic security and defence political cooperation. In recent years, Nordic cooperation has gained momentum after the Russian annexation of Crimea, which meant that the Nordic countries gained a more similar

perception of security in the form of a strengthened focus on the immediate area, the view of Russia and the value of a close partnership with the USA. It has, among other things, resulted in Nordic agreements on access to each other's territories in peacetime, on air surveillance as well as various educational and operational measures, for example within the framework of NORDEFECO.

However, the NATO divide, with three countries inside and two countries outside, has always been the central barrier to Nordic defence integration and the depth of cooperation. The interest in closer operational cooperation in the Nordics has been challenged by the fact that NATO would set the tone for Denmark and Norway if a crisis were to take hold in the region. Also, for that reason, even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it was a central priority for Denmark to link Finland and Sweden as closely as possible to NATO. Here they fought, among other things with other NATO countries wanting to maintain a clear distinction between members and non-members.

The Nordic countries have already announced that considering Finland's and Sweden's decisions to apply for NATO membership, they want to increase cooperation and renew NORDEFECO. This is not surprising in a situation where the divergent affiliation of the countries to NATO no longer sets limitations. In this regard, Denmark should buckle down to take advantage of the favourable conditions to further intensify Nordic cooperation within the framework of NATO both within and outside NORDEFECO auspices.

This does not mean that all Nordic security and defence policy cooperation must necessarily take place within a NATO framework. NORDEFECO will continue to be a relevant forum for regional Nordic cooperation and consultation, but the cooperation must be future-proofed. A Finnish and Swedish membership of NATO constitutes such a major shift in the basic prerequisites for Nordic cooperation that a complete rethinking is necessary. Concretely, the new prerequisites for cooperation in both peacetime, crisis and conflict/war, as well as Finland's and Sweden's integration into NATO's joint defence planning, contain a wide range of possibilities for Nordic coordination and planning in areas such as increased cooperation on surveillance and sovereignty enforcement, emergency cooperation and total defence.

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