

# **Swedish and German Security Policies within the European Union: A Comparative Assessment**

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Sweden and Germany are engaged in European Union politics from very different national perspectives. Germany is a founding member of the original European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community and is a long time member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Sweden, in contrast, only joined the European Union in 1994 and has maintained a self-chosen policy of neutrality since the end of the Napoleonic wars. The central issue this paper addresses is whether these differences matter in each country's involvement in decisions affecting the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the more recently implemented European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). Does Sweden, as a neutral nation, maintain greater distance from common security engagements within the EU than Germany? Or have their policies converged? If so, why?

These questions are prompted by complex decisions rules governing CFSP contained in the Amsterdam Treaty. Article 14 of the treaty authorizes the Council to adopt "joint actions" that "address specific situations where operational action by the Union is deemed to be required. [Joint actions] shall lay down their objectives, scope, the means to be made available to the Union, if necessary their duration, and the conditions for their implementation." The same article affirms that member states are committed to

support joint actions “in the positions they adopt and in the conduct of their activity.” In addition, article 15 empowers the Council to adopt “common positions” on foreign policy issues of a non-operational nature. Such positions will constitute a joint approach “to a particular matter of a geographical or thematic nature. Member States shall ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions.”

Different rules govern operational and non-operational policies. Council decisions on military and defense issues are subject to the unanimity principle, although Article 23 of the Amsterdam treaty qualifies this requirement as follows: “Abstentions by members present in person or represented shall not prevent the adoption of such decisions.” In the case of an abstention, a member state “shall not be obliged to apply the decision, but shall accept that the decision commits the Union. In a spirit of mutual solidarity, the Member State concerned shall refrain from any action likely to conflict with or impede Union action based on that decision.” If more than a third of the member states abstain, however, no decision is reached.

Non-military decisions concerning joint actions and common positions are based on qualified majority voting in the Council. The adoption of such measures requires at least 62 affirmative votes cast by a minimum of 10 member states. Member states retain the right of an implicit veto in such decisions, however. If one of them declares it intends to oppose a decision “for important and stated reasons of national policy,” no vote is taken. Instead, the Council “may, acting by a qualified majority, request that the matter be referred to the European Council for decision by unanimity.”

Concretely, how do these rules govern Swedish and German involvement in CFSP and EDSP decisions? Does German membership in NATO facilitate its

endorsement of common positions and joint actions? Conversely, has Swedish neutrality prompted the government to resort to the Amsterdam Treaty right of constructive abstention in avoiding commitment to potentially compromising collective security measures?

### NATO Membership Versus Neutrality

German security has been firmly embedded in the North Atlantic community since the early years of the escalating Cold War. The Western (especially American) military presence and political commitment to postwar democratization helped ensure the rise to power of pro-Western political elites and the economic and political viability of what emerged by 1949 as the Federal Republic of Germany. Despite domestic protests against rearmament, Konrad Adenauer and his cabinet cohorts brought the Federal Republic into NATO in 1955. Subsequently, German security policy and armed forces became firmly institutionalized within the military command structure of the Alliance. Until the current war in Iraq, Germany has been supportive of Western defense postures against the former Soviet Union and subsequent military actions in Southeastern Europe. Principal citizen-level exceptions have involved opposition to the deployment of nuclear missile weapons on German soil during the 1970s.

Sweden is a more nuanced case study. Successive governments from monarchical to democratic times have pursued a policy of non-alignment in military alliances following the loss of Finnish territory to Czarist Russia in 1809 and the transfer of political control over Norway from Denmark to Sweden in 1814. After the peaceful

declaration of Norwegian independence in 1905 and more conflictual Finnish independence from Russia in 1917, the Scandinavian countries proclaimed a joint policy of neutrality during World War I. Alone among the Nordic states, Swedish neutrality prevailed during World War II in the face of a Soviet attack on Finland in 1939 and Nazi Germany's invasion of Denmark and Norway the following year. The early postwar years witnessed both Danish and Norwegian membership in NATO as an alternative to a proposed Nordic defense community and the reaffirmation of Swedish neutrality (along with that of treaty-based neutrality with the Soviet Union on the part of Finland).

Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme floated the idea of membership in the then-European Economic Community in the early 1970s, in tandem with Denmark's and Britain's decision to join the EEC, on the condition that Sweden could negotiate a mutually acceptable "neutrality clause" as part of an accession treaty. Such a provision would have allowed Sweden to abstain from policy commitments that might have restricted its capacity to maintain a credible policy of non-alignment in the event of an overt East-West conflict. Domestic opposition within rank-and-file members of his Social Democratic party and other domestic organizations squelched the prospect. Nonetheless, Sweden attuned its domestic policies increasingly to those of the EEC, with former Economics Minister Kjell Olof Feldt proclaiming in the mid-1980s that Sweden must "harmonize" its economic policies with those of the EEC.

The fall of communism throughout Central Europe and the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991 made possible a formal Swedish application for membership in the EEC. On January 1, 1994, Sweden became a member of the European Union alongside other neutral states of Austria and Finland. With accession, the Swedish government

affirmed its continued adherence to a policy of non-alignment to avoid involvement in military conflicts.

### CFSP Decision Processes and Constraints

Unlike neighboring Denmark, which negotiated an “op-out” clause authorizing the country to abstain from participation in common foreign and security measures in exchange for citizen endorsement of the Treaty on European Unity in a second referendum in 1993, Sweden is obligated by the TEU, the Amsterdam Treaty, and the Treaty of Nice to accept full obligations of the European Union’s CFSP and ESDP. The same holds for Germany. How, then, have decision-making rules and procedures under these treaties affected the formation of common policies and consequences for both countries and other member states of the EU?

According to informed government representatives of Sweden and Germany, the formal rules governing common positions and joint actions on the part of the EU virtually dictate consensual outcomes. “When CFSP decisions concern remote regions, such as the violation of human rights in Latin America or South Africa,” one observed, “EU members have no problem reaching an agreement.” Much more problematic are conflict zones closer to the European heartland and, in recent weeks, especially Iraq. Bureaucratic politics appear the norm, with intensive negotiations among member states on policy resolutions leading to a mix of decisions and non-decisions. A closely related problem is that ministerial politics on the national level are typically fragmented, with foreign ministries, defense ministries, economics ministries, and cabinet officials often divided in

their commitment to diverse aspects of European political, economic, and military integration.

Established CFSP decision-making flows involve consultations among working groups of national experts in Brussels, which are forwarded to the EU's Political and Security Committee (PSC) and—if agreement is reached at that level—from there to Coreper II, which is charged with preparing Council agendas concerning CFSP. Coreper II either agrees that a matter goes to the Council or does not. If it does not, the outcome is tantamount to a non-decision. The consequence, as one diplomat noted, is that the most members seek agreement at “the lowest common policy denominator,” comparable to norms sanctioned by the Luxembourg Compromise of 1966. These procedures obviously condition and constrain EU common security decisions—including those by Sweden and Germany. An important consequence is that apparently no explicit recourse has been made to the formal treaty right of constructive abstention. As one diplomatic representative observed: “Decisions primarily involve texts and documents produced on the basis of prior intensive inter-governmental consultation. No one raises their hands.”

### Sweden's Sea Change

Within the framework of the EU's institutional arrangements and decision-making rules governing CFSP, Sweden has moved closer to EU and even NATO norms in its involvement in European affairs. The key milestone was a joint governmental and parliamentary declaration in 1992 that “neutrality is an option.” This does not mean a literal abandonment of the country's traditional policy of non-alignment in the event of

war but, instead, signals Sweden's willingness to engage in collective military actions under the EU umbrella (and, indirectly, that of NATO) involving peace-keeping operations in Europe. As a Swedish expert noted: "The only limitation concerning military cooperation involves giving or receiving security guarantees." Specifically, this means that Sweden cannot as a matter of national policy accede to Article 5 of NATO obligating it to respond to a military threat against a member of the Alliance.

This shift in Swedish policy entails significant implications. One is that Sweden has actively participated as the first and only non-NATO neutral country in the international force created in Bosnia in December 1995. Subsequently, Sweden joined in a Nordic-Polish brigade in the region (alongside Finland, Denmark, and Norway) in which heads of the battalion rotated in command among the participating nations. At this stage, the brigade was integrated on the field in the NATO chain-of-command (a first for Sweden). Second, Sweden is actively involved in fleshing out the EU's military capabilities under the TEU and the Treaty of Amsterdam. Sweden's primary commitment is to ensure that CFSP and ESDP involve "conflict prevention and crisis management."

German policies, in contrast, are more congruent with long-established practices. Official priorities are to promote common foreign and security policies within the EU and institutional reforms to facilitate CFSP and ESDP implementation (which are not at all discordant with Swedish preferences since 1992). Both countries affirm further institutionalization of shared capabilities, common decision-making structures, and procedural norms "to make things happen." As a German official noted: "We are still in a period of setting things up. It's important to do something within the European Union without antagonizing others (notably, the Americans)." The war in Iraq is an entirely

different matter, with Germany opposing military conflict while Swedish officials have repeatedly affirmed collective action on the basis of United Nations resolutions.

### Concluding Assessment

This overview of Swedish and German security policies underscores two principal findings: (1) decision-making processes and bureaucratic politics encourage a consensual but constraining style of decision making with respect to CFSP and ESDP; and (2) an unexpected convergence of Swedish and German policy priorities and commitments within the European Union despite the two countries' highly divergent traditions of security orientations in previous decades. An important conclusion is that Sweden's policy of neutrality has been fundamentally redefined since the early 1990s to embrace active involvement in EU collective security engagements.