

# Means, Goals, and Sources of Foreign Policy: The Case of Sweden

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## **Abstract:**

The paper will aim at discovering the relative significance of means, versus goals, versus sources of foreign policy. Most states, in comparison to others in the international arena, are not “powerful” and, still, some conduct relatively successful (efficient and/or legitimate) foreign policies. Lacking the sources (e.g. territory, natural resources, population, military and non-military/e.g. economic strength, or great/renowned history), they can set themselves only little or moderate goals. However, as the paper will argue, the choice of means can significantly determine their success. Foreign policies are perceived and evaluated not only by their substantive outcomes (or past achievements) but increasingly also by their style, form, or message. Thus their legitimacy may become a key condition for efficiency. And asking how may be more useful than what or why. The case of Sweden is significant as the, in many aspects, small and peripheral country has been able to run a highly influential and appreciated foreign policy. To conclude, the paper will by the use of foreign-political analysis and a case study present an interpretation of the relative significance of foreign-political means for “smaller” (hence the majority of) states.

**Keywords:** foreign policy, Foreign Policy Analysis, sources/means/goals, non-material factors, Sweden, neutrality, globalization

## Introduction

Throughout the past decades, many countries have learned that possession of abundant material sources, i.e. *power* in the traditional sense, or as perceived by realism or liberalism, does not automatically convert into successful, i.e. effective *and* legitimate, foreign policy (cf. Burchill et al., 2009:233). How such a situation can be explained or, better, understood and which lessons can be learned, has become an underlying question in political, as well as academic discussions. The author suggests that success in foreign policy depends on both its efficiency and legitimacy which are interdependent. This rather commonsensical assumption/conclusion can have, nevertheless, implications for real foreign policy and, here above all, for its analysis. Particularly when analysing foreign policies of numerous “small states” (in fact, the majority of countries in the world can be denoted as “small”), some of which have recently become rather active and successful on the international scene, a focus on non-material factors or means/goals rather than material factors or sources of foreign policy is useful and telling. The paper will portray, from this point of view, the foreign policy of one of such countries – Sweden.

Sweden undeniably belongs to the category of small countries – perhaps not as for the size of its territory (the 5<sup>th</sup> largest country in Europe), its geopolitical position (between the East and the West), or even its nominal GDP (circa 20<sup>th</sup> in the world) but, paradoxically, again for its geopolitical position (on the Northern periphery of Europe), or population size (less than 10 million, or circa 0.14 % of world population). In addition, it might be seen as “small” owing to its foreign policy of “neutrality”, traditionally disregarded by “powers” and highly contested also today (cf. section 3). Nevertheless, Sweden has punched above its weight. The country has consistently succeeded in being heard/appreciated placing itself on front positions in various rankings or indexes, evaluating countries’ policies (e.g. foreign, social, or economic policies) or perceptions of their image in the world. For example:

- In the “European Foreign Policy Scorecard” by the European Council on Foreign Relations, published yearly from 2010/2011, “for a second year running, Sweden ranked just below

the big three [Germany, France, United Kingdom] in terms of the number of times it was ranked leader” (European Council on Foreign Relations 2013).

- In the “Country Brand Index” by the FutureBrand (a branding agency), published yearly already for the seventh time, Sweden occupied twice the 10<sup>th</sup> position (in 2008 and 2010) and, in the period of 2011-2012, the 7<sup>th</sup> place in the world (cf. FutureBrand 2009).
- In the “Country RepTrak” ranking published in 2012 by the Reputation institute (a reputation management consultancy), Sweden was the 3<sup>rd</sup> World’s Most Reputable Country (cf. Reputation Institute 2012).
- According to the Swedish Trade and Invest Council, in 2012 Sweden was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most competitive country in the world (cf. Swedish Trade and Invest Council 2012).
- In the “Global Dynamism Index” published in 2012 by the GrantThornton (an assurance, tax, and advisory firm), Sweden placed 3<sup>rd</sup> globally (cf. GrantThornton 2012).
- In the “Global Innovation Index” published in 2012 by INSEAD (a business school) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (a UN agency), Sweden was the 2<sup>nd</sup> most innovative country (cf. World Intellectual Property Organization 2012).
- In the “Global Creativity Index” published in 2011 by the Martin Prosperity Institute (a think tank), Sweden was the top country as to creativity (cf. Martin Prosperity Institute 2011).
- In the “Better Life Index” published continuously by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Sweden performed “exceptionally well in overall well-being” as it ranked “among the top countries in a large number of topics” (4<sup>th</sup> in the world) (OECD 2013).
- In the “Cities of Opportunity” ranking published in 2012 by the PwC (an audit and assurance, tax and consulting services firm), the Swedish capital Stockholm ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in overall social and economic performance and 1<sup>st</sup> in the intellectual capital and innovation indicator (cf. PwC 2012).

The paper draft draws on the first, reviewed draft of the author's dissertation thesis titled "Development and Changes in the Security Policy of Sweden in the Context of Globalization", namely on its second, applied part titled "The Security Policy of Sweden in Global Context – A Case Study".<sup>1</sup> The case study asks a key question "Which possibilities does currently offer the Swedish neutrality?" (as a specific foreign- and security-political position) and several other questions outlined here in section 3. The paper aims to verify the method and conclusions of the dissertation case study by looking at a similar issue through a different angle. It will focus on non-material factors or means/goals of the Swedish foreign policy because "hard" factors or material sources of the Swedish foreign policy are relatively absent and, hence, do not help to understand a relative success of the Swedish policy. Then, it will present the Foreign Policy Analysis (and its sub-fields) as a suitable tool for the case. Secondly, it will briefly sketch the non-material factors or means/goals through the prisms of national identity and image. Thirdly, it will evaluate their significance and use in the Swedish foreign policy. Finally, it will conclude that the lack of material sources and the concurrent need and determination to focus on ideational factors and means/goals of foreign policy have empowered Sweden (and other similar countries) in a transforming world and society.

## 1 Foreign policy (of neutrality): analysis, theory, methods

The following section aims at presenting the theoretical and methodological framework of the above-mentioned case study. It will explain why the particular approach has been chosen.

The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations defines foreign policy as an activity which entails actions, reactions, and interactions of state actors. It is a "liminal" activity in the sense that policy-makers exist on a frontier between two worlds – the domestic politics of state and its external environment. Their task is to mediate between these two worlds (Evans and Newnham

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<sup>1</sup> Hence, in this paper, "the case study" or "the study" denotes the second part of the author's draft of dissertation thesis, "the paper" denotes this text for the purpose of the ISA 2013 convention.

1999:179). In light of the definition, it is possible to identify following features of foreign policy as a practice and a concept (cf. Druláková and Drulák 2007:9–11; Kratochvíl and Drulák 2009:21–23, 329–331):

- Foreign policy belongs to the field of International Relations, as well as to history, political science, regional studies, sociology, or psychology (multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity). Modern foundations of the concept lie in the seventeenth century (although reflections on it go as far as to Thucydides (1977) or Machiavelli (1997)). The nineteenth century gives birth to the reflection of “higher and more important form of policy” connected to safeguarding the national interest (or survival of the state).
- It is a means of positioning of the state (society) toward its surroundings, hence, toward other states or other players. Realism understands foreign policy as rational behaviour of a unitary actor (state), while liberalism focuses on preferences of individuals or groups within the state and their influence on its external action. Constructivism understands foreign policy as a feature of national identity, it studies the role of norms and the constitution of identities (e.g. socialization of actors), and their influence on national interests.
- It is a liminal activity and a category between domestic (inner) and foreign (outer, external) environment (so called inside—outside assumption).
- It is characterized by specific goals and means which lead to the goals (e.g. military versus non-military means). This is a feature of special interest for this paper.

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) denotes “[a subfield of International Relations] which attempts to explain the processes which underpin foreign-political decision-making of states” (Kratochvíl and Drulák 2009:21). It is studied for example by decision-making theory, cognitive and psychological approaches, realism, neoliberalism, or social constructivism. The analysis in the case study and in this paper adopts a pluralist approach and interlinks neoliberal ideas (of norms, institutions, and cooperation) with conventional constructivist approach (norms and identities, socialization, interests). From a relatively broad field of foreign policy, it deals particularly with its security

aspects, represented practically by the policy of neutrality which can be understood and analysed as a specific foreign- and security-political stance (cf. Goetschel 2011:314). For the Swedish case, the following “alternative and complementary” applications of Foreign Policy Analysis (cf. Agius and Devine 2011:275) are most relevant:

- The prism of so called *small states* (cf. Druláková and Drulák 2007:50–62) – represents a traditional approach to the study of neutrality, popular particularly from the late 1950s to the 80s. Neutral countries classified as “small states” were often analysed in historical and realist writings of the International Relations discipline as “weak” and “vulnerable” in material and geopolitical sense (cf. Agius and Devine 2011:272). With ideas of other than material sources of power (e.g. norms, culture) or about other than power politics (e.g. cooperation, institutions), the category of “smallness” becomes highly relative. Accordingly, Goetschel (1999:133) conceives “a small state as one whose position towards its international environment is characterized by a relative deficit in influence and in autonomy compared to other states. Its foreign and security policy is assumed to minimize or to compensate this power deficit and the result is subject to a psychological feedback about the state’s ‘smallness’.” The case study and the paper treat Sweden as such a small state.
- The prism of *two-level games* – derives also from the Foreign Policy Analysis which identifies various levels, at which politics is played (typically the individual, state, and systemic level of analysis) (cf. Waltz 1959; Singer 1960; Rourke and Boyer 2009). Political elites at the (sub)systemic level (e.g. within the European Union – EU) play a different game than the one presented in domestic environment (e.g. to the Swedish public) – what leads to distorted perceptions of performed policy (e.g. to a “myth” of neutrality) and to a deficit in legitimacy of adopted measures (cf. Devine 2011:336).
- The prism of *the relationship between foreign policy and democracy* – continues in the problematique of the previous point. As Lödén (2012:273–275) suggests, the relationship between foreign policy and democracy is defined by so called incompatibility hypothesis

- “democratic control of foreign policy is restricted by the principles of bargaining, supreme interest and remoteness.” The foreign and security policy is, in this context, doomed to an inherent, latent democratic deficit. Such is again the case of Sweden (especially the secret cooperation between Swedish governments and the West/NATO during the Cold War, the tactics of persuasion, leading to the acceptance of the country’s EU membership or of the Lisbon Treaty).
- The prism of *discourse politics* – also follows the previous two prisms. Reality is constituted and reconstituted by discourses/narratives which compete and lead to power relations between them. Some are dominant, hegemonic (e.g. the so called realist discourse of neutrality as a policy by the “weak”, “irrational”), other are inferior (e.g. the idealist discourse of neutrality connected to its normative or peaceful potential) (cf. Agius 2011:373–375). Similarly in political practice discursive games are played, in which opponents choose various discursive/narrative/argumentative strategies to achieve their goals (e.g. political elites try to convince the public about something or, on the contrary, they do not inform them – the concept of so called meaningful silences) (cf. Devine 2011:336–339). For this purpose, the case study quotes number of Swedish politicians, diplomatists, documents, newspaper articles, etc.

In more general terms, the above-mentioned second part of the author’s draft of dissertation thesis is virtually a qualitative single case study (cf. Creswell 1997:73–75; M. Kořan in Drulák 2008:29–61).<sup>2</sup> A case study, as Kořan (in Drulák 2008:33) suggests, “is a detailed analysis of a case which was selected as a research object. Its goal is to provide a deep understanding or a causal explanation of the selected case<sup>3</sup>. It has to take into consideration the whole context of an event

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<sup>2</sup> The author’s reason for a qualitative approach is straightforward: The object of study is a specific part of *social* reality, not easily susceptible to quantification (cf. Creswell 1997:15–16, 36–39; Hendl 2005:48).

<sup>3</sup> A case is defined by Kořan (in Drulák 2008:32, 33) as “a sufficiently framed aspect of a historical period or a sufficiently framed historical period itself” or “a certain object, a closed system which has clear boundaries and its own logic of functioning and its specific nature.” Creswell (1997:73), in his classics, defines case study research as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes.”

or an object (social, political, historical), phenomenon, or process and, simultaneously, it has to provide a complex picture – as many variables as possible have to be included.” The author believes that it is possible to understand as a case – seen as “a sufficiently framed aspect of a historical period” – the origins, development and, above all, the transformation (since the 1990s) of a specific, Swedish foreign and security policy (labelled as “neutrality”). The analysis pays attention to the historical context of the phenomenon (the historical development of Swedish neutrality in the context of international development), as well as to the political context (neutrality as a security-political tool), and the social context (neutrality as a means in relations with other states and a domestic feature, or integral part of national identity). The case study studies both internal variables (the nature and development of Swedish politics, economy, and national identity) and external ones (geostrategic position, the influence of the development of international vicinity, relations with other states and, in particular, with international organisations and non-state actors, etc.). In relation to a more general theoretical framework, the study oscillates between understanding and explanation (cf. Barša 2010:13–15), especially according to which factors (material or non-material/ideational) have been relevant in a given era or context of the development of neutrality.

Although it could seem that neutrality (not only) as an academic theme is *de facto* dead (cf. section 3), for example Agius and Devine (2011:275) offer a broad and representative overview of approaches which deal with it – from international law (neutrality as a legal status), through the research of small states, classical realism (neutrality as a choice of “small”, weak states), Foreign Policy Analysis (the connection between national and foreign policy, the focus on actorness and sub-state level of analysis), social-constructivist and normative approaches (the domestic sources of identity linked to politics and practice, “normative leadership”), to historical treatments (the reports of commissions sponsored by the Swedish government). From methodological point of view, until the end of the Cold War, rationalist approaches/positivist methodology is dominant while, later, alternative, pluralist approaches appear but neutrality in the academic discourse fights for its relevance and it is often perceived as only “a historical footnote”. As the authors,



nevertheless, suggest, “although acknowledged as state-centric, the study of neutrality can go beyond this using different approaches that support analysis of potential contributions to reducing conflict at the international level, and the agency of supra-state and sub-state actors in processes of conceptual and policy change” (Agius and Devine 2011:274).

The analysis above suggests a relatively heavy mixture of theoretical and methodological approaches in the case study. The author is aware of the complexity and ambiguity of such a prism; however, he believes that *plurality*, where it is useful (efficient), is justified (legitimate). After all in the issue-related area, it has been recently possible to identify an substantial renaissance of “synthesis” – for example between deconstruction and constructivism, liberal and constructivist theory, conventional constructivists and “strong” liberals and (critical) constructivists, realism and constructivism, or between traditionalists with conventional constructivists and critical constructivists (cf. Agius and Devine 2011:275). Each student of International Relations or researcher in the field stands in front of a question how to choose among theories which can see the world from very different angles (cf. S. Smith in Dunne, Kurki, and Smith 2010:10–13). Theories can be perceived as lenses of various colours, through which we look at the same world but everyone sees a different picture. There is one world but there is not one truth about it. Accordingly, it is not possible to provide only one interpretation of the issue in the study. In this light, the author chose liberal theory and constructivism as his two crucial starting points. Their objects of interest, or ontological views – institutions/norms, cooperation (liberalism), norms/identity/culture, actorness/construction (constructivism) – to a certain extent, intersect and, in the rest, complement. In the end, conventional constructivism is typical of a rationalist epistemology (so called scientific realism), and so is liberalism.

## 2 Non-material factors or means/goals of foreign policy: the Swedish national identity and image

The Introduction argued that a lack of material power/sources does not necessarily reflect in “weak”, passive, or unsuccessful foreign policy. This part will identify some non-material factors or means/goals, especially through the prisms of national identity and image.

With respect to the author’s analysis of the Swedish foreign and security policy, or neutrality (cf. Rolenc 2008; or the dissertation draft), and in line with other researchers (e.g. Miles 1997b; Beyer and Hofmann 2011), it is possible to assume that the character of a particular national policy of neutrality depends on sets of the following factors:

- Geostrategic and historical experience of the country (great power, small state, success, failure) and related cause and timing of the institutionalization of neutrality (forced, voluntary);
- The form of institutionalization (*de jure*, *de facto*);
- The understanding of neutrality (relationship to national identity, relation between elites and public opinion).

From this point of view, Swedish neutrality can be described by the following features, or values:

- Voluntariness;
- Activity;
- Flexibility;
- Normativity.

In all historical instances, neutrality was a *voluntary* choice for Sweden (cf. with the cases of Finland, Austria). Beyer and Hofmann (2011) claim that in such cases it is possible to expect that there will be no will to abandon the policy. It is true that, despite all crucial changes in the Swedish foreign policy (especially in the past two decades), Sweden has not yet explicitly renounced neutrality. Although “voluntary”, the choice was made pragmatically or realistically, owing to a

disenchantment with foreign-political failures and unfavourable geostrategic development (from Viking travels, through a regional Baltic or even European great-power position, to a definite “defeat” in Napoleonic wars).<sup>4</sup>

The reminiscence of historic successes and “glory” but also of the relative successes of neutrality and Swedish foreign policy in both World Wars were mixed with “social engineering” of the Swedish model, welfare state, belief in freedom, equality, democracy, progress, and modernity.<sup>5</sup> They led to a foreign-political *activism*, or internationalism reflected in Sweden’s work for the UN, its role of mediator, provider of “good services”, protector of peace, tireless evaluator and critic of the world, fighter for the ideals, etc. Swedish neutrality was never, however, codified, nor was it guaranteed by others (cf. the case of Switzerland). This “*de facto*” position enables and, on the contrary, the effort to be active predestines it to considerable *flexibility* (Sweden typically emphasizes its freedom of manoeuvre – *handlingsfrihet*) what, however, limits its credibility. This opens a circle, at the end of which Sweden is forced continuously to strengthen the credibility by means of emphasizing its prowess and successes on the international field.<sup>6</sup>

The last dimension contrasts the real development and state of the Swedish foreign and security policy and the national understanding of neutrality, or the Swedish public opinion. Here opens the “thirteenth chamber” of Swedish neutrality which was, during its development, recast from the initially pragmatic, strategic choice into a feature, value, or *norm* strongly rooted in national tradition, identity. While Swedish neutrality lost almost everything from its *raison d’être* – it was gradually redefined to non-participation in alliances and later to a mere military non-participation<sup>7</sup> – which is, however, in contrast to a live public idea, or “myth”, that Sweden is a

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, Swedish neutrality is characterized by a feeling of separation, periferiority (on the Northern brink of Europe), as e.g. Miles (1997a:1) underlines, and related continuous attempts to overcome it. It can be, however, objected that, in the course of the twentieth century, it was sufficiently compensated by a leading role in the Nordic region, as well as by a high importance of the country (higher than it would correspond to its territory, population, or economic development) in international politics.

<sup>5</sup> Other traits of the Swedish national identity mentioned here are adopted from (Trägårdh in Hansen and Waever 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Apart from the traditional possibility of maintaining a relatively strong, modern army and defence, and arms industry.

<sup>7</sup> Not to speak of Sweden’s secret cooperation with NATO during the Cold War, as well as the current cooperation with NATO’s Partnership for Peace and relatively strong voices from military/political elites for a membership.

“bridge” (initially between the East and the West, today between the South and the North) (cf. Agius 2011:373, 374; Agius and Devine 2011:271; Goetschel 2011:314), “world’s conscience” (cf. The Economist 2003; Agius 2011:375, 379), “normative leader” (cf. Ingebritsen 2002; Beyer and Hofmann 2011), etc. According to the author, this inconsistency makes harder a prediction, in which direction the current “military non-alignment” or “neutrality” of Sweden will evolve.

Sweden intensely focuses on its image in the world, what should contribute to the projection of Swedish values, or to the care for Swedish national interests (Regeringskansliet - Government Offices of Sweden 2012:1). The Council for the Promotion of Sweden (*Nämnden för Sverigefrämjande i utlandet* – NSU)<sup>8</sup> founded the “Common Platform for the Image of Sweden” (cf. Svenska institutet 2010), within which, during 2005 and 2006, 500 to 600 people worked to specify the Swedish “brand”. The result is a new communications strategy titled “Brand Sweden: The road to an updated image of Sweden abroad” (in Swedish: *Sverigebilden 2.0: Vägen till en uppdaterad Sverigebild*) (cf. Svenska institutet 2010).<sup>9</sup> The strategy defines one key and four corresponding core values which characterize the Swedish tradition in a modern context:

- Progressivity (*progressivitet*), defined in the document as “having strong faith in the future and a desire to gradually make the world a slightly better place.” It is dependent on a so called balanced development based on people’s needs and environmental conditions. In addition, it is aided by:
  - Innovation (*nyttäkande*);
  - Openness (*öppenhet*), explicitly linked by the strategy to international trade, positive relationship to differences among people, cultures and lifestyles, or travelling;
  - Care (*omtänksamhet*), related to a broad commitment to the environment or to international involvement with active work for peace and development aid;

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<sup>8</sup> In which cooperate: The Swedish Export Agency, Invest Sweden, The Ministry of Enterprise, The Swedish Institute, The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and VisitSweden.

<sup>9</sup> The strategy updates a previous document “Images of Sweden Abroad” (*Bilder av Sverige i utlandet*) (Regeringskansliet - Utrikesdepartementet 2005), which was an exclusive initiative by the Government (or by the Foreign Ministry).

- Authenticity (*äkthet*).

### 3 The significance and use of non-material factors or means/goals in the Swedish foreign policy (of neutrality) – an evaluation<sup>10</sup>

Swedish foreign and security policy, or neutrality is on the beginning of a new era. Seen through the prism of so called traditional, or military security, as well as of classical, or realist notion of neutrality, the shift—the end of the Cold War doomed it to failure or, at least, to oblivion. The academic debate quietened and even statements by some Swedish politicians do not suggest a strong inner integrity.<sup>11</sup> It is a paradox that neither Sweden, nor any other neutral country have not explicitly and formally discard their policy of neutrality, while for the Swedish public, traditionally participating and critical in political discussions (cf. the Swedish Euroskepticism or their rejection of the Euro), it remains one of the traits of self-identification, or of national identity, one of the points of view which define their relations to the outer world. This paradox was, in the Introduction, designated as an issue justifying the need of study of the topic. The aim of the thesis is to search for an answer to the question “Which opportunities does Swedish neutrality currently offer?”, as well as to other related questions. A general, symbolic answer shall be that “Neutrality is, above all, about searching for alternatives and means to their implementation.” Other significant answers, provided by the performed analysis, are summed up in more detail in the following paragraphs.

First, what was a specific contribution of neutrality to the foreign and security policy of Sweden? Internally the role of neutrality underwent a crucial transformation: First, in the first half of the nineteenth century, it was a pragmatic choice, or geostrategic necessity for a state which could

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<sup>10</sup> The section is a translation of a conclusion of the case study in the draft of the author’s dissertation thesis. Therefore, it does not quote continuously as usual. Instead a list of sources of the case study is provided in the Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. The Guardian of 9 April 2011 quotes Mr. Carl Bildt, a former Swedish prime minister (1991-1994), diplomatist, and the current minister of foreign affairs (from 2006): „We don’t call ourselves nonaligned, we never call ourselves neutral either“ (Ritter 2011).

only remember its successful past of a *de facto* great power (cf. the era of Viking discoveries and the seventeenth century), which after several centuries lost a strategic part of its territory (the territory of the current Finland) which protected it from (or connected it to) a large and powerful neighbour (Russia which could, by the way, anytime become a very different Swedish destiny – compare to the Finnish experience), which as a compensation gained a country which never accepted the forced merger (Norway), which had to look for and elect a ruler – foreigner (the French marshal Bernadotte) whose agrarian economy fought with unfavourable climate conditions, and which therefore lagged behind the European development. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, neutrality enabled Sweden to escape both World Wars and – although its reputation did not remain unscathed (e.g. Sweden did not avoid suspicions of special relationship with Germany) – contrary to the rest of Europe or the world, to minimize economic losses and to begin to build one of the most generous welfare states. During the Cold War, neutrality enabled Sweden, again contrary to many other countries, to remain out of the spheres of influence of the superpowers and to build relatively easily a positive international image of the country, strongly exceeding its power potential. Such a positive experience with neutrality – although initially it was a result of the pragmatic choice or a choice of necessity – must have swollen the hearts of content and proud citizens of the country. Neutrality undoubtedly became a key and positively perceived feature of the Swedish national identity.

Neutrality was not only successful within but also outside of Sweden. What represents the contribution of Swedish neutrality to the international community? It is possible to suggest that, during almost the whole first half of practicing the specific Swedish security policy, neutrality did not bring *de facto* any substantial practical contribution to the world, what corresponds with the realist image of neutrality as a policy of small, weak states, passive, irresponsible, and irrational ones. Membership in the League of Nations was indeed very controversial in the country and – when first signs of renewed international tensions emerged (e.g. Italy attacking Abyssinia) – Sweden again stepped back and returned to neutrality. It is hard to say if a guilty conscience about cooperation with the Germany doomed to defeat or about the pragmatic avoidance of

participation in war, while the world suffered, already during the War provoked turn to a more activist foreign and security policy (e.g. Sweden's significant help with saving war refugees, especially the Jewish ones). Nevertheless, surely the above-mentioned positive inner experience, or a long-term domestic prosperity and stability directed Sweden toward a higher self-confidence and ideas of inevitability of its active and positive role in international affairs in the post-war era. While the world continued to perceive the neutral Sweden through the realist paradigm, the country understood the idealist, or normative element of security policy and, *de facto* regardless of the nature or the importance of issues (particularly for the superpowers), it decided constantly to aim to ease international tension, reduce conflicts and armament, provide effective post-conflict reconstruction, help to those stricken by disasters (humanitarian aid), or to the long-term handicapped (development cooperation and aid), etc. *Means* chosen by Sweden for its foreign and security policy have a relatively higher significance than these goals – prevention, cooperation (an especially strong support to international institutions, e.g. the UN), respect to agreed rules (international law), negotiation, consensus building (which Sweden knew well from its domestic politics), preference of civilian and long-term solutions over military ones and quick fixes, etc.

With the unprecedented security change, represented by the end of the Cold War, also a change of Swedish security policy arrives. It was personified by a relatively fast (and in Sweden particularly unexpected) decision to join the then European Communities (now EU). Interpreting this change, one has to be cautious, because with a more than twenty-year distance from these moments, it is evident that the surrounding world has not become calmer, more stable but it brings new, more complicated relations complexes, new, different conflicts or threats, some of which we had prepared to ourselves but did not expect, etc. In such a situation it is not possible to speak of a lack of opportunities for an active use of the Swedish foreign and security policy, *de facto* similarly as in the decades after the Second World War. The end of the Cold War cannot be, therefore, regarded as the immediate cause of the transformation of Swedish neutrality. Knowing that, simultaneously, it is not possible to exactly detect what the cause was, the author comes with a thesis that the changed was backed by *globalization* factors. During the Cold War, neutrality

enabled Sweden to focus on “non-traditional” or neglected aspects of security; therefore, Swedish security policy virtually reflected changes in the globalizing security dimension. After the Cold War, especially economic factors did not allow to Sweden to stay on the periphery of an integrating European economy. If Sweden wanted to “save” or at least partially to retain its model of welfare state, it was led by the globalizing logic to a pragmatic decision to remove economic barriers, the frontiers, to integrate itself, to compete, to adjust. In addition, for a certain time, the more intense cooperation within the European project – also in the security realm, hence, for the price of certain compromises on neutrality – became a leverage of Swedish activism, of the Swedish vision of the world, the opportunity to prove the relevance of its specific foreign-political position in a world, in which there is no one to be neutral between. The intense cooperation, however, lead to a socialization (“Europeization”) of Swedish political life, or of (not only) the political elites which were immediately and for long exposed to the influence of the EU. While the cooperation with NATO in the Cold War was a “secret” pragmatic choice of leaders who knew what their people needed, now the Swedish political elites lose restraints and it is possible to hear statements like the one by foreign minister C. Bildt quoted in a footnote above. However, an adjustment of the elites, or of a relatively narrow group of the public (apart from political elites e.g. of Swedish entrepreneurs), does not imply a shift in the whole society – a transformation of national identity is probably occurring but if, only very slowly (compared to its almost century-long construction). The opinion gap between elites and public is widening and pushes Sweden to another of its historic crossroads.

It seems – for example to those foreign partners of Sweden, to whom its policy hinders development of their (e.g. European) ideas, to those academics, who “unbiasedly” evaluate the situation and cannot see any “real” or “rational” alternatives – that leaving neutrality even as a mere “myth” is a pragmatically inevitable choice, such as its inception was two hundred year ago. Here it is useful to quote more extensively the closing paragraph of texts from a special issue of the *Cooperation and Conflict* journal which in 2011 paid attention to the same problematique (Vol. 46, Is. 3, September 2011):



“In many respects, the debate about military non-alignment/neutrality is already written. It is effectively absent from serious academic debate and, when discussed, done so with the expectation that neutrality is simply an inconvenient obstacle on the path to real European integration, which is what everyone must want and support. The discourses deployed in the debates on neutrality are important not simply because they represent a particular ‘reality’; they actively work to reconfigure identity and interests. When the debate and discourse is structured in this way, it is easy to concur that neutrality – whatever form it takes – will inevitably be abandoned. Deeper engagement and activism in European security reconfigures the nature of military non-alignment. Many who suggest that the move away from neutrality signals a positive development need to consider what replaces this form of security cooperation. This is not to say that being neutral has a specific validity or place in international security; being neutral has and will continue to raise important questions that have to do with morality, ethics and practice. However, this does not mean that European security cooperation is also entirely normative and innocent in this respect either. Antje Wiener articulated this problem clearly by arguing that one of the assumptions inherent in the idea of normative power Europe is that of commonality and convergence – a ‘thin cosmopolitanism’ – when it is diversity that makes the EU unique. Norms are interpreted in different ways, as seen in disagreements over Iraq and the UN Charter, and diversity can actually be an asset when responding to threats such as terrorism (2008: 196–210). This question is a broader one, related to ideas of violence and discourses of danger in the international system: the vital point, however, remains, that curtailing ideas about peace and security may be the deeper problem in this debate” (Agius 2011:384–385).

Which opportunities, then, does Swedish neutrality currently offer? The Swedish security policy offers a *via media* between foreign-political passivity, or incompetence and interventionism. Sweden does not bury its head into the sand facing security problems of the current, globalizing world (e.g. economic crises, terrorism, environmental threats, cultural conflicts). Sweden wants

to solve them but does not approach their solutions without discussions, dogmatically, with the label of pressing solutions to urgent threats (put differently, Sweden avoids an excessive “escalation” of threats in political discourse, or an unnecessary “securitization”), without compromise, without assessment of the sacrifices which a solution always deserves. Sweden offers a *via media* between effectiveness – speed, strength, or decisiveness – and legitimacy – flexibility, invention, content, and durability of solutions. The Swedish security policy offers a *via media* between a utopian idea of international institutions as a panacea, and a pragmatic focus on solutions of particular issues and problems in such institutional framework, in which it is possible or necessary. Sweden offers a *via media* between a disrespect of valid, agreed rules, and a resignation that rules of the game cannot be changed. The Swedish security policy offers a *via media* between a supposedly unavoidable and painful surrender of the state and its citizens to global economic (cultural, etc.) powers, and an autarky, suffering, or pride. In this regard, it offers the idea of a common effort to inner cohesion and stability, outer openness and, simultaneously, authenticity, diversity, and self-confidence. It offers a *via media* between an idea of necessity of finding the right place for living, an “ideal climate”, and a fight against *vis major*, randomness, against the Nature. Sweden can reflect the value of adaptability, as well as of continuous effort. The Swedish security policy offers an experience of the one who cannot win but who can and needs to participate.

Here it is necessary to notice that, what counts, is not how things are called (neutrality, non-alignment, post-neutrality, etc.) but how things *are* and how those who have them, treat them. What counts, is not whether Sweden (or any other neutral state) will abandon the “label” of neutrality, although it is evident that *it* can play a highly symbolical role for its holders’ identity. It is tempting to use the well-known Alexander Wendt’s statement (1992)<sup>12</sup> and, together with Agius (2011:376), to reformulate it: *Neutrality is what Sweden makes of it.* (And *vice versa* – what Sweden did or does, can be called neutrality; as well as does not need to.) The value of Swedish neutrality

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<sup>12</sup> “Anarchy is what states make of it,” in the original.

does not rest in its “brand”, behind which the real Swedish know-how, reputation, uniqueness, image, or goodwill is hidden.

The author is aware what a “big story”, or metanarrative with a strong value potential, he has presented here. Therefore, in conclusion, he turns also to the last, “adverse” question: What else if Swedish neutrality offers yet no opportunities? In that case, Sweden could remain quiet about it (since the last declaration in the 2002 foreign policy statement, no other statement has mentioned it) or it could explicitly abandon it. In the context of such a pragmatic discourse, this would necessarily mean an attempt to join NATO. That step would threaten an ever more fragile Nordic balance (Finland would probably act similarly) and probably it would provoke Russia’s reaction what cannot be predicted within this paper. Inside NATO Sweden would be only one of *de facto* equal small, weak countries. Repercussions would be, however, broader. In the European Union Sweden would lose the last – although declaratory or discursive – leverages which predestined it as one of a few countries to bringing alternatives in numerous areas of the integration process (not only security or defence ones but also e.g. social, or environmental ones). This step would be also probably perceived as disregard of the efforts invested by Sweden in the work and support for the United Nations – its traditional freedom of manoeuvre reflected for example in a loud critique of great powers (“world’s conscience”) and perhaps also Sweden’s trustworthiness predestining it to specific tasks (mediation, provision of good services, “bridge building”) would be restricted. The step would also have certain internal repercussions, probably a “crisis of identity” and political legitimacy – another widening of gaps between the public and political elites, as well as other disintegrations of a traditionally stable Swedish political system. On the other hand, Sweden would receive formal security and defence guarantees which it, nevertheless, already has. It would probably get rid of the label of a “troublesome power” but perhaps for the price of a new one – a “flip-flopper”. Sweden’s voice would sound louder but for many (e.g. for other neutrals, or Third World countries) more suspicious. The consistence and credibility of the Swedish foreign and security policy are a result of, among other, two centuries of building “neutrality” while a turnabout does not offer many alternatives, and additional benefits

are uncertain. It is not, therefore, in Sweden's interest to change its long-term and current direction of security policy.

## Instead of a conclusion

Countries with low or relatively absent material sources used to be traditionally considered small, weak, dependent (on great powers or centres, alliances, etc.), or doomed to a risky or an unsuccessful foreign policy. However, the world has been transforming in various ways (cf. the roles of science and technology, production, communication, information, institutionalization, or globalization) which have relativized the significance and success of material sources, or capabilities. Power is not only "hard" but also "soft", *potestas* has to be complemented with *potentia*. Effective threat or use of force has been gradually *delegitimized* as foreign political factors. Moreover, "foreign policy" in the transforming "international" environment is conducted not only by the sovereign states. Other actors often outperform the states (e.g. large TNCs) but, above all, they introduce various different means to multiple ends.

This is why the author thinks that the "small" states fit into the changing world better. They can virtually convert their handicaps into advantages. The relative lack of material sources forced them to focus on ideational factors or means/goals and convert them into "sources" of their foreign policies. In a globalizing world, they are one step ahead.

Also Sweden felt forced to adopt a specific foreign and security policy of a small state (neutrality – but of the Swedish way) but gradually internalized it and has used it actively as an opportunity rather than as a burden. The specific foreign policy has provided Sweden with legitimacy and success which have compensated for the scarcity of hard power.

The author believes that this is, indeed, a suitable strategy for the traditional "great powers". In the world of today, they are virtually besieged by a multiplicity of such "small" actors which also

form the “international” environment. They also *source* the “foreign policies” of the nowadays world. Their goals and *modi operandi* cannot be ignored.

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