



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
Sweden

Mr Carl Bildt  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

## **The European Union's Soft Power: A Force for Change**

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It's truly an honour for me to come here to ELIAMEP to make a few remarks on some of the challenges facing us in the months, years and decades ahead.

I do so as a long-standing admirer of the work that ELIAMEP has done over the years in South-Eastern Europe.

The annual Halki International Seminars – which I have unfortunately only attended once – have created a network of friends across this volatile region that is already becoming a strong force for reconciliation and peace.

And coming to Greece is always something very special for me – as it is for almost everyone in one way or another.

As a young student I was standing in Omonia Square as jubilation swept the square, the city, the country and the continent as democracy came back home to Greece again in 1974.

What is now the European Union had its origins in the conviction of an immediate post-war generation of leaders in the West of Europe that only integration could bring the prospect of a stable peace.

But for my generation, the real source of inspiration for our commitment to European integration has been the drive to secure freedom and democracy in every part of Europe deprived of those rights.

In that sense, it was a new phase of European integration that came into being as democracy came back home to Greece those spring weeks more than a quarter of a century ago.

Greece, followed by Spain and Portugal, was soon to join what was then the European Communities.

And as history moved on, the ideas of freedom and democracy, as well as the urge to “return to Europe”, grew stronger. Before long, we were facing entirely new challenges.

In the summer of 1994 I returned to Greece for another important milestone. As my country's Prime Minister at the time I signed our Treaty of Accession to the European Union on the beautiful island of Corfu.

Sweden became a member of the European Union somewhat more than a decade after Greece had joined.

But that summer our two countries became partners in the endeavour to create a truly new system of peace and prosperity in our part of the world.

Those were not easy years.

War was raging for the third successive year in Bosnia. Major UN forces were deployed in Croatia. There was the fear that Kosovo was going to explode any day.

Millions of people had been forced to flee their homes. Flames had consumed one village after the other in the beautiful valleys of the Balkans.

My country has experienced peace – defined as the absence of war within our borders – since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. We share with the United Kingdom the distinction of having a capital never occupied by foreign armies at any time in the existence of our nation.

But as we entered the European Union we did so committed to making our contribution to the peace, democracy and stability of our continent. The Balkans may have been a place that most Swedes at the time knew little about, but it was not a faraway place.

More than a hundred thousand people fleeing the carnage there found refuge in our country.

Today, the first and only Bosnian in the European Parliament is a Member elected from a constituency in the north of Sweden – and represents my party.

And the course of events took me on a number of different missions from the mid-1990s to the early part of this decade, trying to help bring true peace and reconciliation to this troubled part of our Europe.

Sometimes you do indeed need the hard power of military might to stop wars or to separate armies. But again and again in the Balkans, we had to relearn the lesson that while hard power can win wars, it is not adequate to the task of building peace.

There are many lessons to be learnt from our experiences in the Balkans over the last two decades or so.

One is to be aware of the fundamentals of any given issue. Short-sighted policy has a tendency to bring short-sighted results.

Another is to tread with a certain caution, and be aware that one action sometimes leads to other actions taken by other parties. The Balkans is a bad place for unilateralism – however well intended.

A third would be the need for a very clear compass coupled with a fair dose of strategic patience. You must have an idea of where you want to go, but you must be prepared to accept that getting there might take quite some time, and might test your patience and tax your resources more than you might initially think.

At the beginning of the Balkans conflicts the US famously declared that it had “no dog in that fight” while others proclaimed it to be “the hour of Europe”.

Well, in the end the US could no longer stay on the sidelines, while the Europeans had to accept that the hours involved were far more numerous, far longer and far more difficult than they had believed.

Today, it's years since I had to hear the heavy guns around Sarajevo, see the villages burning in Kosovo, listen to the machine guns in Tetovo or watch the sniper positions at Bujanovac.

Today, I believe that we have a very real prospect of moving ahead with the European integration of the region that is the only lasting guarantee of its peace and its prosperity.

But I also believe that today we face profound challenges that will require both caution and determination.

Croatia is well on its way in its accession negotiations. I expect them to be concluded within the next few years.

The challenges we face now are primarily those centred on Sarajevo, Belgrade, Pristina and Skopje.

And most acutely, the issue of the future of Kosovo.

It's obvious to each and every one of us that Kosovo cannot forever remain the sort of United Nations protectorate that it is today. That can never have been the intention behind UNSCR 1244.

And it is equally obvious to each and every one of us that there is simply no way in which an authority of Belgrade can or should be reasserted over the area.

But that does not mean that immediate and full independence for Kosovo is the solution to all the challenges of the region.

And – labels aside – nor is it something that has been suggested by anyone.

Schemes on the table talk about Kosovo's external security being the responsibility of Nato and a significant part of its internal development being under some sort of European Union authority for years to come.

One of the uncontested results of the 'status process' so far is the recognition that the future status of Kosovo will have to involve a number of different arrangements – both external and internal – some of which are already on the table.

As Kosovo moves away from being a UN protectorate towards some sort of independence, it should be in the interest of each and everyone that this process is associated with as little confrontation and tension in the region as possible.

But this cannot mean that we can ever give intransigence a veto over the future of the region.

It must however mean that reasonable efforts must be made to bridge or at least start closing the gap between the positions of the responsible leaders of the region who will have to take responsibility for the future of their countries in the years ahead.

As I understand it, this is also the focus of the present 'troika' process. It will come to a conclusion on December 10, and although I do not believe that everything will be resolved by December 11, I do not see that much can be gained by dragging out this process much longer.

In much the same way as I think it is important for all to recognise that the troika process now is a genuinely new process, it is important for them to recognize that it is the process that will bring the issue to a resolution.

It's not for me to try to predict where we will be at the beginning of December, but I believe that we have to work for a truly European solution to what is a truly European problem. I believe there will be support from the United States, and I sincerely hope that the Russian Federation will see itself as part of the effort to create stability on our common continent.

By now we should all have learnt that the Balkans is as bad a place for unilateral moves as it is for vetoes rooted in intransigence.

It is imperative for the future stability of the region that we see it as a whole and not just as a number of different bits that can be dealt with separately from each other.

However successful and determined our efforts are, it is unavoidable that we will see a build-up of tension across the region associated with the Kosovo issue. In view of this we must now accelerate our efforts at securing stability throughout the region as a whole.

Bosnia can serve as an illustration. It must not be left out of the European perspective.

Faced with the question of whether or not to recognise a Kosovo that has not been anchored in some sort of wider European or UN-sanctioned arrangement, it is easy to see that the country risks becoming even more deeply bogged down in a dangerous political stalemate.

The future of Serbia is obviously key to the future of the wider region. A stable Serbia will project stability in the region – an unstable one will obviously project the reverse.

I salute the courageous leaders of Serbia for having delivered two Presidents and approximately 50 other more or less senior individuals to the International Tribunal in The Hague.

But they clearly must make it credible that they are living up to their commitment to do everything in their power to help in apprehending the remaining four fugitives, notably Radko Mladic.

With that behind them – and I sincerely hope this will be very soon – I see Serbia moving rapidly towards a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, and I fail to see why they should not then move fairly quickly towards candidate status and, after that, accession negotiations with the European Union.

By that time I must assume that Athens and Skopje will have come to a mutually acceptable agreement which will enable us to avoid calling your northern neighbour FYROM in multilateral fora.

And that we will be able to see the entire region from Skopje to Sarajevo move clearly into a more determined long-term accession process toward the European Union.

When that is the case, the full soft power of the European Union will start to make itself truly felt throughout the region.

But in view of the challenges ahead, there clearly has to be a somewhat sharper edge to these soft powers of integration.

It's not enough to just agree to different provisions, there must also be a demonstrated ability to turn them into reality, thus truly transforming the region and its respective economies.

Such a sharper edge to our soft powers is clearly in the interest of these nations themselves.

They have no use for a process that just takes them into commitments that no one really cares about and that are not really implemented.

They have an interest in the European institutions and the Member States being truly committed to helping and assisting in their genuine transformation into modern, open and competitive economies and societies.

The same obviously applies if we broaden the perspective from the mountains and valleys of the Balkans to the wider region of the Eastern Mediterranean.

That this region is part of Europe is not a point that needs to be argued in Athens.

You know better than anyone that virtually every aspect of our European civilisation has its deep roots in the Eastern Mediterranean. A Europe cutting itself off from the Eastern Mediterranean is a Europe that is cutting itself off from key parts of both its history and its future.

The issue of Turkey will continue to loom large in the years ahead as it is one of the key nations in that area.

Today's Turkey is a modern nation that has emerged out of the debris of the Ottoman Empire – and sometimes the wounds from its painful birth are still visible in its evolving political culture. This, in different ways, applies to us all. Nations exist in time as well as in space.

There is little doubt that in recent years Turkey has re-energised its efforts at European integration and modernisation in a most impressive way.

Whether this effort is dated back to the Young Turks of 1908 or to the election of the AK government in 2002, the strategic direction of change in the society and economy of Turkey is obvious to everyone.

Again, we see Europe's soft powers of transformation at work, even if Turkey of course has its own independent reasons for the transformation it is undertaking.

But again, it is clear that there is a need for a sharp edge to these soft powers in order to truly assist in carrying the transformation forward.

I can see in the press in some European countries that there are those that would like this process to fail in one way or another.

Some oppose it openly. Some seem to prefer a policy of strangulation by stealth. Some want this because they feel a need to build barriers between civilisations right through this region – barriers that would then be replicated right through most of our societies. Some seem to want it because they simply lack confidence in the future of Europe in this age of accelerating globalisation.

Whatever the motives and whichever the means, I believe a failure of this process would be a strategic calamity of the first order.

The Aegean would risk being a sea of confrontation forever – instead of returning to the role it had throughout most of history. The prospect of Cyprus ever being reunified would disappear with all the political and human tragedies that would result.

In the decades ahead, we would face strategic drift – instead of strategic stability – in this crucially important region of the Eastern Mediterranean.

This is of course of importance not only for the region itself, but perhaps even more so if we widen the perspective even further.

These days the media is filled with speculation about whether we are heading for policies of revenge or policies of reconciliation between Turks and Kurds in the borderlands between Mesopotamia and Anatolia.

Much is at stake here – and there can be no doubt what we Europeans must strive to contribute towards.

Indeed, it is to a large extent the process of European modernisation of Turkey that has opened up the present prospect of these policies of reconciliation. As Turkey moves away from some of the traumas of its modern birth, and eyes a new European future, it is also increasingly able to handle the complex issues associated with the Kurdish question.

Prime Minister Erdogan has famously stated that it is “more democracy” that is the true solution to this issue.

And it might well be that it is the feared success of these policies that has triggered the recent wave of terrorist attacks and activities.

We strongly condemn the acts of terrorism we have seen, and we strongly salute the efforts aimed at political solutions that we are now seeing. They simply have to succeed.

These tragic and dramatic events have again demonstrated that if we are interested in the stability of the wider region, we have a profound interest in anchoring Turkey in our common efforts at promoting peace, prosperity and reconciliation in the area.

Strategic drift in this region could easily be the recipe for strategic disaster.

From Israel through Iraq to Iran there is no lack of challenges in the months and years ahead.

And for us Europeans this is our immediate neighbourhood.

That's clear to everyone in Athens. But it is nowadays equally clear in Stockholm. In the small town of Södertälje just outside Stockholm we already have more refugees from Iraq than there are in the entire United States. In many ways, our Europe extends into the Middle East – and in many ways the Middle East extends into our Europe.

There may now be a possibility of moving towards a comprehensive peace between Israel and Palestine. We must give this process – however difficult – all the support we can.

I believe the policies of the European Union will be critical to success in these efforts.

We all know that the position of the United States is of critical importance as we approach the crucial meetings now ahead of us, and we should salute the determination demonstrated by Secretary Rice in the last few months.

She has rightly said that what is needed is a Palestine state not in the distant and uncertain future, but more or less right now. But when it comes to actually contributing to that building of a state in Palestine that will also be the key to the security of Israel, I am convinced that the efforts and contributions of the European Union will be as critical as they have been in state-building in the Balkans.

Again and again, we see how the soft power of Europe – the inspiration of our model of integration and shared sovereignty, the magnetism of our process of integration and of building increasingly close relations with our neighbours, the transformational capacity of our experiences in conflict resolution and state-building in complex areas – is becoming increasingly relevant in the world in which we are living.

Our Union is today far more than the regional player it was when first Greece and then Sweden – to mention just these two countries – joined. You joined a community of just nine and we a union of just twelve.

Today, our Union encompasses 27 countries with half a billion citizens living in a Europe that has never been as free, never been as secure and never been as prosperous.

We are the world's largest integrated economy. We are by far the world's largest trading entity. We are a bigger exporter than the number two and number three taken together, and we are the largest market for more than 130 nations around the world. We are by far the world's largest donor of development assistance.

And if there is one thing that has impressed me during the year I have served as one of the foreign ministers in the Union, it is the demand that exists across the globe for an ever stronger role and an even stronger political presence of our Union.

If we look at the big issues confronting our world in the years ahead – climate change, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, economic growth through trade and reforms, international terrorism, energy security, building bridges between civilisations, trying to lift the bottom billion of our world out of despair – it is very difficult to see them being moved towards some sort of solution without more active engagement on the part of the European Union.

I would say that an active role for the European Union is a precondition for moving all of these issues in the direction we all seek – although it is obviously not enough.

We must reinforce our cooperation across the Atlantic with the United States – our traditional and firm partner – but we must also intensify our efforts at building truly strategic relationships with the rising and responsible powers of – to name just a few – India, China and Brazil.

With the Reform Treaty now agreed, we are creating new possibilities for our Europe to live up to its responsibilities as well as its opportunities in these important areas.