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Sweden's Rejection of Neutral / Non-Aligned Status Or Why Ukraine's Membership in NATO Should Have No Alternative

Having proclaimed its neutral status in 1834, Sweden has long followed a special trajectory that allowed it to distance itself from participation in armed conflicts and military-political blocs. In the context of preparations to join the EU, the Swedish political discourse shifted from neutrality to the principles of 'non-alignment' and 'military non-alignment'. At the beginning of the 21st century, neutrality virtually disappeared from the official documents of the kingdom.

At the same time, Sweden was undergoing demilitarization, which was not hindered even by the war in Georgia in 2008. Only with the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Swedes resorted to increasing military spending, military personnel, shifted focus from the foreign activity of the country's armed forces to territorial defense, and also intensifying cooperation with NATO.

A qualitative transformation of the official Stockholm approaches to the implementation of state policy in the field of security and defense emerged after the start of Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine. In May 2022, contrary to the long-standing tradition of neutrality / non-alignment, official Stockholm applied for the country's accession to NATO.

Keywords: Sweden, neutrality, non-alignment, Russia, Ukraine, NATO, security and defense.

Відмова Швеції від нейтрального / позаблокового статусу або чому членство України в НАТО не повинно мати альтернативи

З проголошенням у 1834 р. Декларації про нейтралітет, Швеція впродовж майже двох століть дистанціювалася від участі у військових конфліктах. В умовах II світової війни та блокового протистояння офіційний Стокгольм, зберігаючи відданість політиці нейтралітету, проявив виняткову гнучкість та зумів запобігти втягуванню себе спочатку в збройну, а згодом – політико-ідеологічну конфронтацію.

У контексті підготовки Швеції до вступу в ЄС, дискусії шведських політичних еліт у I половині 90-х рр. XX ст. концентрувалися головним чином навколо «позаблоковості» та «військового неприєднання», натомість обговорення класичного нейтралітету відійшло на другий план. На початку XXI ст. нейтралітет фактично зник з офіційних документів королівства. Паралельно у практичній площині тривав процес демілітаризації, який не зазнав змін навіть після російсько-грузинської війни 2008 р.

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Початок російської агресії проти України шведи розцінили як виклик для міжнародного права та загрозу для безпеки європейського континенту. Відповідно офіційний Стокгольм вдався до системних кроків, які мали на меті посилення обороноздатності країни. Поряд із підвищенням витрат на військові цілі, збільшенням військового персоналу, зміщенням акцентів з закордонної активності збройних сил країни в бік територіальної оборонної, вони включали активізацію різнопланової співпраці з НАТО. При цьому попри зростання підтримки шведами вступу в Альянс, відмова від принципу «позаблоковості» не ставилася керівництвом держави на порядок денний.

Кардинальна зміна підходів королівства до реалізації державної політики у сфері безпеки і оборони відбулася після 24 лютого 2022 р. Реагуючи на широкомасштабну агресію Росії проти України, шведи збільшили витрати на військові цілі, відмовилися від принципу, відповідно до якого Швеція не постачає зброю державі, яка перебуває у стані війни. Найбільш ґрунтовна трансформація у оборонній сфері, безумовно пов'язана зі зміною підходів керівництва держави до політики позаблоковості. У травні 2022 р. всупереч довготривалій традиції, офіційний Стокгольм подав заявку на вступ країни до НАТО. Попри те, що станом на квітень 2023 р. Швеція ще не є членом альянсу, однак перебіг подій свідчить про можливі позитивні зміни у цьому сенсі впродовж відносно короткого часу.

У липні 2023 р. у Вільнюсі відбудеться черговий саміт НАТО, в ході якого одним із ключових буде українське питання. В цьому контексті, беручи до уваги приклад Швеції, українська дипломатія повинна докласти максимум зусиль для ухвалення реальних рішень, які відкриють Україні шлях до членства в Альянсі.

Ключові слова: Швеція, нейтралітет, позаблоковість, Росія, Україна, НАТО, безпека та оборона.

Increasing Russia's geopolitical weight has been one of Vladimir Putin's key goals since he came to power. One of the means to achieve this goal has been and remains efforts to strengthen control over the countries of the so-called "near abroad", primarily Ukraine⁴. Vladimir Putin clearly demonstrated his readiness to fiercely defend his interests in this area in August 2013. Then, in response to the Ukrainian government's declarations of readiness to sign an association agreement with the EU, Russia resorted to an economic blockade of Ukraine. It is worth emphasizing that such a step was taken during the 'Yanukovich era', during which the Ukrainian government systematically made concessions to the Russian side⁵. When Ukrainian forced Viktor Yanukovich to give up power during the Revolution of Dignity, contrary to the interests of official Moscow, Russia resorted to armed aggression against Ukraine.

The criminal political regime of the Russian Federation, whose representatives do not stop at any "red lines" to achieve their goals, the support of the Russian society of the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy, the state border with Russia that is more than 2,000 km, and other factors require the Ukrainian leadership to find real solutions to guarantee the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. In this context, it seems useful to us to study and popularize the evolution of official Stockholm's approaches in the field of security and defense.

Sweden's security and defense policy is not among the topics of high interest to Ukrainian researchers. Among the scientists whose research covers the relevant issues are Marianna Gladyshev, Mikhailo Pashkov, and Darya Puhachova-Lakishyk. Taking into account the results of scientific research of the above-mentioned scientists, our goal was to analyze the evolution of official Stockholm's approaches to the policy of neutrality, and later – non-alignment from their introduction to abandonment in 2022. The objective of the paper involves addressing the following tasks:

- to reveal the challenges faced by Sweden in terms of maintaining its neutrality policy during World War II and the Cold War period;

⁴ Гурак, І., Цепенда, І. (2022), Нові тенденції у внутрішній та зовнішній політиці путінської Росії на початку XXI ст. (Частина 2). *Історико-політичні проблеми сучасного світу*, vol. 45, p. 60-63.

⁵ Hurak, I. (2016), Ukrainian-Russian Interstate Relations during the Presidency of Viktor Yanukovich – "Honorary Moon Period" or "Coercion to Marriage". *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska. Sectio Balcaniensis et Carpathiensis*, vol. 1, p. 104-107, 112.

- to highlight new conceptual approaches and practical steps in the field of Swedish security and defense that emerged in the period from the end of the bloc confrontation to the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war;
- to analyze the transformation of official Stockholm's approaches, which, starting in 2014, materialized through a departure from demilitarization tendencies and ultimately led to Sweden's application for NATO membership.

Former Marshal of Napoleon's army and since 1814, the Swedish monarch Charles XIV John proclaimed the Declaration of Neutrality of the Kingdom on January 4, 1834. This document, among other things, stated that the state should refrain from direct or indirect participation in wars and support of any of the belligerents during wars⁶. In the following decades, despite the existing temptations, official Stockholm maintained its commitment to a neutral position. As a key marker in this regard, it is worth noting the Swedes' refusal to accept the offer from Great Britain and France to join the anti-Russian coalition within the framework of the Crimean War and to settle scores with the Romanov Empire for previous defeats⁷.

The period of World War II was an exceptionally challenging test for Swedish neutrality. Reacting to the outbreak of hostilities, the Swedes proclaimed another declaration of neutrality on September 1, 1939⁸. Despite significant internal and external pressure⁹, the leadership of Sweden, while providing significant military assistance and financial support to the Finns, refrained from participating in the Winter War of 1940¹⁰. At the same time, under increasing pressure from Berlin, the Swedes agreed to transport personnel and military equipment of the 163rd Wehrmacht Infantry Division to the border with Finland using state railways during July-August 1941, which later took part in the attack on the USSR¹¹. In the following years, despite the official Stockholm's refusal to implement the recommendations of the anti-Hitler coalition countries to break-off diplomatic relations with Germany, the leadership of Sweden agreed to the use of their airspace by Great Britain for attacks on Germany¹².

After the end of World War II, Sweden's neutrality faced new challenges brought about by growing bloc confrontation. The Swedish idea of creating a defensive alliance that would include the Scandinavian countries failed. The accession to NATO of neighboring Norway and Denmark, with whom negotiations on this issue were underway, put Sweden in a rather difficult situation. This situation was determined by the positioning of the state between NATO's northeast flank and neutral Finland, which, according to the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with the USSR, had certain obligations before Moscow. Sweden's response to such a situation was a new doctrine, approved in 1949. It provided that Sweden would maintain its policy of neutrality, and an alliance with other states would be possible only in extreme cases, primarily under the condition that the kingdom's neutrality was threatened. Thus, we can talk about the preservation of the policy of neutrality, which was at the same time supplemented by the principle of non-alignment¹³.

Without a doubt, ideologically, Sweden was definitely close to the West. The country's functioning capitalist principles, adherence to democratic principles and freedom of speech, and orientation towards NATO standards objectively opposed the official Stockholm to the Soviet Union and its authoritarian satellites from the socialist bloc. In the USSR, the pro-Western character of Swedish neutrality was clearly realized, and it was believed that the kingdom could join the bloc of democratic

⁶ Кан, А. (отв. ред.) (1974), *История Швеции*. Москва, Наука, p. 364-365.

⁷ Kuldkepp, M. (2019), National Revanchism at a Critical Juncture: Sweden's Near-Involvement in the Crimean War as a Study in Swedish Nationalism. *Scandinavica*, vol. 58, Issue 2, p. 122-123.

⁸ Tepe, F. (2007), Swedish neutrality and its abandonment. *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, issue 11, p. 186.

⁹ Scott, C.-G. (2002), The Swedish Midsummer Crisis of 1941: The Crisis That Never Was. *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 37, № 3, p. 389.

¹⁰ Pashakhanlou, A., Berenskötter, F. (2001), Friends in war: Sweden between solidarity and self-help. 1939-1945. *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 56, issue 1, p. 91.

¹¹ Scott, C.-G. (2002), The Swedish Midsummer Crisis of 1941: The Crisis That Never Was. *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 37, № 3, p. 389.

¹² Wahlbäck, K. (1986), *The Roots of Swedish Neutrality*. Stockholm, the Swedish Institute, p. 66.

¹³ Czarny, R. (2018), *Sweden: From Neutrality to International Solidarity*. New York City, Springer International Publishing, p. 58.

countries, especially if a conflict arose¹⁴. However, the corresponding situation, as well as Sweden's accession to the Marshall Plan and persistent encouragement of the Swedes to join the North Atlantic Alliance by the US, did not convince Stockholm to abandon its policy of neutrality¹⁵. Sweden's "well-armed neutrality" allowed the kingdom to be an independent player on the geopolitical map of the world and, under certain circumstances, make critical statements against the leaders of both military-political blocs¹⁶.

The end of the bloc confrontation was marked by new trends in the approaches of Sweden's leadership to neutral policy. Some politicians and experts insisted that the country should abandon neutrality and become part of the Western security system. In practice, this would mean transforming the pragmatic pro-Western neutrality of official Stockholm into official pro-Western policy with membership in Western political and security structures.

The corresponding scenario has been partially implemented since the days when the USSR was present on the political map of the world. In particular, in the fall of 1990, the Swedish parliament passed a resolution that initiated the preparation of countries for accession to the European Economic Community. A year later, the new government headed by Carl Bildt called for a reconsideration of approaches to the kingdom's neutral policy. From his point of view, Sweden's traditional policy of neutrality hindered the Swedes' desire to realize themselves within the framework of the European community and was not fully appropriate in the context of the official Stockholm's foreign policy at that time¹⁷.

In the early 1990s, a rather interesting trend emerged in the context of Sweden's preparation for accession to the European Union. Swedish political elites often discussed the term "military non-alignment". Instead, classical neutrality was on the sidelines of political discussions. At the same time, Swedes continued to partially implement the basic principles of "active neutrality policy" during the "cold war" era and were ready to participate in regional defense initiatives of the European Union and the United Nations¹⁸.

On the other hand, alongside its involvement with non-military international organizations, official Stockholm has embarked on the path of establishing close cooperation with NATO. The first practical step in this regard was the signing of an agreement in 1994 with the North Atlantic Alliance on Sweden's participation in the Partnership for Peace program¹⁹. In the following years, Swedes tried to take every opportunity to actively engage with NATO structures, and official Brussels considered Stockholm a privileged partner²⁰.

Becoming a member of the EU in 1995, Swedes supported a common security and defense policy²¹. At the same time, the process of deepening cooperation between Sweden and the North Atlantic Alliance continued. At the same time, the term "neutrality" is finally disappearing from the Swedish political discourse, replaced by the formulations "non-bloc policy" and "military non-alignment". This conclusion is suggested by an analysis of the Government's report on foreign policy from 2003. The document emphasizes the principle of "non-participation in military alliances", without mentioning the

¹⁴ Рупасов, А. (2014), «Сползающая маска нейтральности». Советско-шведские отношения в конце 1940-х – начале 1950-х гг. *Новейшая история России*, №1, р. 158.

¹⁵ Karlsson, B. (1995), Neutrality and Economy: The Redefining of Swedish Neutrality, 1946-52. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 32, №. 1, р. 41.

¹⁶ Пашков, М. (2009), Шведська модель безпеки: миролюбний, добре озброєний нейтралітет. *Національна безпека і оборона*, № 1 (105), р. 41.

¹⁷ Address given by Carl Bildt on Sweden's European policy (Bonn, 13 November 1991), р. 6. 13.11.1991, available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/address_given_by_carl_bildt_on_sweden_s_european_policy_bonn_13_november_1991-en-6db568e6-4182-4e7f-bee2-f978a61c2d0b.html (accessed 18.02.2023).

¹⁸ Huldt, B. (2003), Comments on the Swedish positions [in]: Ojanen, H. (ed.), *Neutrality and non-alignment in Europe today. FIIA Report*, № 3, р. 47.

¹⁹ Пугачова, Д. (2017), Специфіка взаємодії країн Скандинавії у сфері зовнішньої політики: безпековий вимір. *Електронний науковий журнал S.P.A.C.E (Society, Politics, Administration in Central Europe)*, № 2, р. 90, available at: <http://dspace.onua.edu.ua/bitstream/handle/11300/7317/Pugachova%20SPACE%202017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed 07.02.2023).

²⁰ Dahl, A.-S. (2012), Partner number one or NATO ally twenty-nine? Sweden and NATO Libya. *Research Paper*, № 82, р. 1.

²¹ Гладиш, М. (2019), Еволюція безпекової парадигми Скандинавських держав протягом XX століття. *Вісник Львівського університету. Серія міжнародні відносини*, issue. 46, р. 32.

term “neutrality”²². A further departure from the rhetoric of neutrality by Sweden is even more pronounced within the framework of the 2004 Security and Defense Strategy. The relevant document of the Ministry of Defense emphasizes that Swedes do not intend to be neutral in the face of armed aggression against a member of the European Union²³.

The end of the Cold War for official Stockholm materialized in new approaches regarding quantitative indicators of the Swedish armed forces, their financial support, and the departure from the policy of ‘total defense’. Steps aimed at reducing military personnel were outlined in Sweden since the early 1990s²⁴. Since the mid-1990s, it has been accompanied by a reduction in the cost of maintain the army with a simultaneous shift in emphasis from defending the state to expanding participation in “international peacekeeping operations”²⁵. At the beginning of the 21st century, the trend towards reducing funds for military purposes persisted. At the same time, based on the fact that the leadership of the country considered threats to its territorial integrity and sovereignty unlikely, among the tasks assigned to the Swedish Armed Forces, the participation of Swedish soldiers in foreign peacekeeping operations came to the force²⁶.

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 did not significantly affect Swedish security and defense policy. Official Stockholm continued to reduce military spending, the arsenal was reduced, and conscription was canceled²⁷. Trends related to a shift in emphasis from national defense to expeditionary military activities within the EU and the UN, and the continued ‘optimization’ of defense spending can be seen through the prism of the Military Doctrine of 2012²⁸. As a result of such approaches, Sweden’s military spending in terms of GDP has more than halved since the end of the period of bloc confrontation and as of 2012 was 1.2 %²⁹.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in 2014 has led to significant changes in Sweden’s approach to identifying threats to the country. Interpreting Russia’s actions as undermining the authority of international law, weakening the security and defense situation in Europe, and, in particular, threatening to destabilize the Baltic region³⁰, the official Stockholm began to move away from the demilitarization policy that had lasted for more than two decades. Aware of the country’s vulnerability in the context of the Kremlin’s growing aggressiveness in the international arena, Sweden has launched a systematic effort to strengthen the country’s defense capabilities. The list of measures included increased military spending, an increase in military personnel³¹, and a shift in emphasis from foreign (expeditionary) activity of the country’s armed forces to territorial defense³².

The above-mentioned processes went hand in hand with an active public debate on the feasibility of further adherence to non-alignment. This situation was natural in the context of the changes that were taking place. The fact is that during the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014 Sweden

²² Statement of Government Policy presented by the Prime Minister, Mr Göran Persson, to the Swedish Riksdag on Tuesday, 14 September 2004. 14.09.2004, available at: <https://www.government.se/49b72c/contentassets/a5a3777450bd4c2d805b99e7e954a108/statement-of-government-policy> (accessed 23.01.2023).

²³ Gotkowska, J. (2013), Sitting on the fence. Swedish defense policy and the Baltic Serregion. *Point of view*, № 33, p. 12-13.

²⁴ Totalförsvarets utveckling till och med budgetåret 1996/97 samt anslag för budgetåret 1992/93. 25.02.1992, available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/proposition/totalforsvarets-utveckling-till-och-med-budgearet_GF03102 (accessed 28.01.2023).

²⁵ Totalförsvaret i förnyelse Proposition 1995/96:12. 05.10.1995, available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/proposition/totalforsvar-i-fornyelse_GJ0312 (accessed 13.02.2023).

²⁶ Regeringens proposition 2004/05:5. Stockholm den 23 september 2004, p. 251.

²⁷ Lindberg, M. (2019). *Why Sweden Suspended Military Service: The Policy Process from 1990 to 2009*. Lund, Lund University, p. 47.

²⁸ Militärstrategisk doktrin med doktrinära grunder (MSD 12). (2011), Stockholm, Försvarsmakten, 164 p.

²⁹ Military expenditure (% of GDP) – Sweden. (n. d.), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=SE> (accessed 03.03.2023).

³⁰ Försvaret av Sverige. Starkare försvar för en osäker tid. (2014), Stockholm, Elanders Sweden AB, p. 14.

³¹ Kunz, B. (2015), Sweden’s NATO Workground: Swedish Security and defense against the backdrop of Russian revisionism. *Focus stratégique*, № 64, p. 22; O’Dwyer, G. (2018), *New Swedish government advocates for greater defense spending*, available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/09/12/new-swedish-government-advocates-for-greater-defense-spending/> (accessed 17.02.2023).

³² Militärstrategisk doktrin MSD 16. (2016), Stockholm, Försvarsmakten, p. 31.

signed a Host Country Agreement³³ with the Alliance and became an Enhanced Opportunities Partnership country³⁴. In practical terms, this materialized through the participation of Swedish representatives in the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in May 2016³⁵ and the deepening of military cooperation with the Alliance³⁶. The Aurora 17 military exercises held in Sweden in September 2017 were particularly noteworthy in this regard. These were the largest military exercises in the country in the previous 23 years, involving about 19,000 troops from Sweden, Finland and NATO member states³⁷.

It is also worth noting that since 2014, there has been a several-fold increase in Swedish support for the country's accession to NATO (from 17% in 2012 to 41% in 2017)³⁸. However, at the same time, the country's leadership declared that the state does not intend to apply for membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, which was quite clearly emphasized in January 2019 by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven³⁹.

Fundamental changes in the official Stockholm's approach to the implementation of defense policy occurred after the Russian Federation's large-scale aggression against Ukraine. It is worth noting that as of 2022, the situation in the Swedish defense sector was difficult. The country's long-standing demilitarist policy led to the fact that as of 2014, only 1.1% of GDP was spent on military purposes in Sweden. This figure was the lowest among the countries in the region⁴⁰ and more than three times lower than during the "Cold War". Despite the change in approaches to defense funding that began in June 2014, there was no significant increase in spending in subsequent years.⁴¹

A major challenge to the country's defense capability at that time was the lack of an adequate number of trained military personnel and the unbalanced location of strategically important military facilities within the country. For example, the number of trained military personnel did not allow for the operation of even half of the 120 tanks in Sweden's arsenal. Instead, the country's main air defense assets were located in the town of Buden, which is more than 1,000 kilometers from Stockholm and the strategically important island of Gotland⁴².

An analysis of the government's bill "Totalförsvaret 2021-2025" approved by the Riksdag in December 2020 shows that the situation in Sweden's defense sector has not undergone significant qualitative changes since 2014. The document states that military spending will continue to increase, reaching 1.5% of GDP by 2025. Among the goals of the document are a significant increase in the size of the Swedish armed forces, their further concentration on issues related to the country's defense, doubling the number of conscripts and modernization of the military arsenal⁴³.

³³ Yes to memorandum of understanding with NATO on host nation support. 27.05.2016, available at: <https://www.riksdagen.se/en/news/2016/maj/27/yes-to-memorandum-of-understanding-with-nato-on-host-nation-support-ufou4/> (accessed 11.02.2023).

³⁴ NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partners. 29.06.2016, available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/blog/2016/06/29/natos-enhanced-opportunities-partners> (accessed 25.01.2023).

³⁵ Kirk, L. (2016), *Sweden and Finland upgrade Nato relations*, available at: <https://euobserver.com/nordic/133493> (accessed 31.01.2023).

³⁶ Woody, C. (2018), *NATO's biggest military exercise in years just started, but Russia may be more worried about 2 countries that aren't members of the alliance*, available at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/as-natos-big-war-games-begin-russia-is-worried-about-sweden-finland-2018-10> (accessed 07.02.2023).

³⁷ Exercise Aurora 17: Sweden Focuses on Deterrence. 30.09.2017, available at: <https://sldinfo.com/2017/09/exercise-aurora-17-sweden-focuses-on-deterrence/> (accessed 25.01.2023).

³⁸ More Swedes want to join Nato than stay out. 14.09.2015, available at: <https://www.thelocal.se/20150914/poll-more-swedes-now-for-nato-than-against> (accessed 07.02.2023).

³⁹ Когляр, О. (2019), Регіональна співпраця держав Північної Європи у сфері безпеки та оборони. *Політичне життя*, № 3, p. 110.

⁴⁰ Överbefälhavarens anförande i försvarsutskottet den 28 april 2015, p. 1. 28.04.2015, available at: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/6-aktuellt/nyheter/2015/150428-ob-anforande-fou-28-april-2015.pdf> (accessed 17.02.2023).

⁴¹ O'Dwyer, G. (2018), *New Swedish government advocates for greater defense spending*, available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2018/09/12/new-swedish-government-advocates-for-greater-defense-spending/> (accessed 17.02.2023).

⁴² Mikael Holmström: Hur många kanoner har egentligen Sverige? 04.03.2015, available at: <https://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/mikael-holmstrom-hur-manga-kanoner-har-egentligen-sverige/> (accessed 30.01.2023).

⁴³ Swedish Total Defence 2021-2025. 09.04.2021, available at: <https://www.swedenabroad.se/pt/embaxada/netherlands-the-hague/current/news/total-defence/> (accessed 13.02.2023).

Reacting to the outbreak of Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, given Sweden's limited military capabilities, the official Stockholm stressed that the pace of strengthening the country's defense capabilities had reached the highest levels since the 1950s and declared the goal of reaching defense spending of 2 per cent of GDP as soon as possible⁴⁴. The first steps in terms of putting into practice the tasks related to the growth of financial support for the defense sector took place in March 2022. In particular, following discussions with parliamentary parties in the Swedish Defense Commission, it was decided to increase the allocation for the Swedish Armed Forces by 2 billion SEK. The authorization to order military equipment for the Swedish army was also extended by more than 30 billion SEK⁴⁵.

The fundamental change in the security situation in Europe has led to the fact that for the first time since the Second World War, the Swedes have abandoned the principle that Sweden does not supply weapons to a state at war⁴⁶. At the end of February 2022, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson and Defense Minister Peter Gulqvist announced the first military aid package for Ukraine, which included anti-tank weapons, helmets, and field rations⁴⁷. Over the following months, in accordance with the government's decisions, Sweden provided Ukraine with a variety of weapons in several stages, ranging from sniper rifles to the RBS-17 anti-ship missile system⁴⁸. In total, Sweden allocated €1.13 billion in military aid to Ukraine over the past year⁴⁹. On the other hand, Stockholm joined a British initiative in which 120 Swedish instructors took part in training sessions for the Ukrainian military in the UK from August to December 2022⁵⁰.

Even more fundamental changes have taken place in approaches to non-aligned status. In early March, Swedish elites began discussions about joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). At the time, there were different assessments of how applying for NATO membership would affect the situation in the region⁵¹. On March 8, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson even suggested that such a move would have destabilizing consequences. However, further developments followed a different scenario. Already on 16 March 2022, in accordance with the government's decision, a working group was set up, headed by Foreign Minister Ann Linde, to discuss issues related to challenges to the state's security in the context of Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine. Based on the results of the group's work, an official document titled "Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden" was prepared in early May. In it, the authors conclude that, based on the new security situation, Sweden's accession to the NATO is desirable and will be useful for strengthening the country's defense capabilities⁵².

Based on the group's conclusions, the Swedish government announced its decision to apply for NATO membership on 16 May 2022⁵³, and two days later, Sweden and Finland officially applied for

⁴⁴ Defence appropriation to increase to two per cent of GDP, p. 1-2. 11.03.2022, available at: <https://www.government.se/articles/2022/03/defence-appropriation-to-increase-to-two-per-cent-of-gdp/> (accessed 03.02.2023).

⁴⁵ More weapons and ammunition as allocations increase. 28.03.2022, available at: <https://www.forsvars.makten.se/en/news/2022/03/more-weapons-and-ammunition-as-allocations-increase/> (accessed 09.02.2023).

⁴⁶ Sweden is arming Ukraine – and still fighting over Nato. 14.03.2022, available at: <https://euobserver.com/world/154526> (accessed 11.02.2023).

⁴⁷ Sweden to send military aid to Ukraine – PM Andersson. 27.02.2022, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-send-military-aid-ukraine-pm-andersson-2022-02-27/> (accessed 26.01.2023).

⁴⁸ How Can Swedish RBS-17 Anti-Ship Missiles Help Ukraine? 02.06.2022, available at: <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/06/how-can-swedish-rbs-17-anti-ship-missiles-help-ukraine/> (accessed 19.02.2023).

⁴⁹ Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion. 24.02.2023, available at: https://app.23degrees.io/view/tAuBi41LxvWwKZex-bar-stacked-horizontal-figure-2_csv_final (accessed 10.02.2023).

⁵⁰ Sweden to train Ukrainian soldiers in UK. 07.08.2023, available at: <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2022/08/sweden-to-train-ukrainian-soldiers-in-uk/> (accessed 05.02.2023).

⁵¹ Sweden's PM says push to join Nato would destabilise northern Europe. 08.03.2023, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/297fe2f5-e424-44c5-9f9c-676c02827343> (accessed 09.03.2023).

⁵² Deterioration of the security environment – implications for Sweden. (2022), Government Offices of Sweden. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 39-40.

⁵³ The Government has decided today that Sweden will apply for NATO membership. 16.05.2022, available at: <https://www.government.se/articles/2022/05/the-government-has-decided-today-that-sweden-will-apply-for-nato-membership/> (accessed 11.02.2023).

membership in the Alliance⁵⁴. As of April 2023, Sweden, unlike Finland, had not yet become a member of the Alliance due to Turkey and Hungary's blocking of its accession⁵⁵. At the same time, the convergence of official Stockholm and Ankara's positions suggests that this may happen in a relatively short time.

The Declaration of Neutrality of 1834 opened a new page in Swedish history and gave rise to radically new approaches to the implementation of the Swedish national security and defense policy. During the Second World War, despite the extremely difficult conditions in which the official Stockholm had to operate, the Swedes demonstrated maximum flexibility in terms of interaction with the warring parties and managed to preserve their independence on the one hand, and refrain from direct participation in hostilities on the other. With the outbreak of the Cold War, in 1949 Sweden once again reaffirmed its neutral status. While actively cooperating with leading Western countries and being mentally part of the "collective West", the Swedes refused to join NATO, supplementing their neutrality with the principle of non-alignment.

The new geopolitical realities that emerged after the collapse of the USSR gave rise to a change in official Stockholm's approach to neutral policy. In the early 1990s, in the context of Sweden's preparations to join the European Economic Community, the discussion of classical neutrality faded into the background. Gradually, the principles of "non-alignment" and "military non-alignment" became more and more central to the discussions of Swedish political elites. In the early twenty-first century, the principle of neutrality was virtually ignored at the level of official documents, and the 2004 Security and Defense Strategy even included a statement that the Swedes did not intend to observe neutrality in the face of armed aggression against a member of the European Union.

At the same time, Sweden embarked on a course of demilitarization, which since the mid-1990s has been accompanied by significant reductions in military spending. The shift in emphasis from national defense to expeditionary military activities within the EU and the UN, continued "optimization" of defense spending, and reduction of the military arsenal continued after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008.

The reverse processes in Sweden began after the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014. Interpreting the Kremlin's illegal actions as a challenge to international law and a threat to the security of the European continent, the official Stockholm took systematic steps to strengthen the country's defense capabilities. They included increased spending on military purposes, an increase in military personnel, and a shift in emphasis from foreign activity of the country's armed forces to territorial defense. At the same time, Sweden intensified its diverse cooperation with NATO, and political elites revived the debate on the feasibility of further adherence to the principle of "non-alignment".

A fundamental change in the Kingdom's approach to implementing state policy in the field of security and defense occurred after 24 February 2022. In response to Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, the Swedes stepped up efforts to strengthen the country's defense capabilities. In this regard, the increase in military spending was essential. The Swedes also abandoned the principle that Sweden does not supply weapons to a state at war. As a result, Ukraine has already received several packages of Swedish military aid. However, the most fundamental transformation in the defense sector is undoubtedly related to the change in the state leadership's approach to the non-alignment policy. In response to Russian aggression, in May 2022, the Swedes, contrary to a long tradition of neutrality/non-alignment, applied for NATO membership. Although as of April 2023, Sweden is not yet a member of the Alliance, the course of events indicates that positive changes in this regard are possible in a relatively short time.

In July 2023, Vilnius will host the next NATO summit, where one of the key issues is "to keep NATO's door open" for Ukraine's membership. In this context, taking into account the example of Sweden, Ukrainian diplomacy should make every effort to avoid repeating the failures of the Bucha-

⁵⁴ Formal request for NATO membership signed and presented. 18.05.2022, available at: <https://www.government.se/articles/2022/05/formal-request-for-nato-membership-signed-and-presented/> (accessed 27.01.2023).

⁵⁵ Sweden Hopes Turkey Approves NATO Membership After May Election. 18.04.2023, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/sweden-hopes-turkey-approves-nato-membership-after-may-election/7055396.html> (accessed 18.04.2023).

rest meeting in April 2008 and to make real decisions that will open the way for Ukraine's membership in NATO.

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