



MID-TERM FOR THE SWEDISH PRESIDENCY

At the end of October, following an extremely protracted round of informal preparatory talks at various levels and between different European players, the first formal summit between the heads of state and government of European Union member states to be held during the Swedish presidency took place.

Whereas the Swedish prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, unsurprisingly declared himself satisfied with the results of the summit, some Scandinavian observers were more critical in their appraisal of the Swedish presidency's performance up to that point. The Swedish daily newspaper, the *Dagens Nyheter*, said that "the typical shortcoming of Swedish politicians has been confirmed: the EU presidency cannot be successful only by listening, compromising and always seeking agreements that are shared by all 27 member states" (1). The article also says that in order to avoid the the loss of control for which Stockholm stands accused, also by other commentators, following the summit at the end of October (2), it is necessary to display more determination than has hiterto been the case.

But what were the priority issues that needed to be faced? From Reinfeldt's statements on the eve of the October summit, the presidency-by-turn had a double priority: to clarify Europe's position in international talks on the climate and the future of European institutions in the context of the Lisbon Treaty. But the Swedish head of government also spoke of the final vote on the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea. (3).

1. The presidency's pilot project: a new European strategy for the Baltic Sea

Despite the fact that Stockholm set the adoption of a new EU strategy for the Baltic Sea as a top priority for the Swedish presidency, the initiative received little coverage in the three Scandinavian countries. Even the "felicitous outcome of one of the four top priorities on the agenda for the semester" (4), namely the final vote of approval, failed to spark the interest of the main Danish, Swedish and Norwegian newspapers.

The new strategy covering the entire Baltic region is considered to be a "pilot project" for the development of a new kind of regionalised cooperation within the

EU – a type of cooperation that could then be adapted and implemented for the regions of the Danube and the Black Sea. It basically consists in better coordinating the resources and funds currently being used in the region to respond more effectively to specific demands, namely, in the case of the Baltic Sea, the protection of the marine environment and the improvement of the region's competitiveness and security.

As Hans Mouritzen of the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) also points out, the future and potential of the Baltic region are conditioned primarily by Russia, in that the primary geopolitical questions in the area are determined by decisions made in Moscow (5). Russia, however, is not involved in Europe's strategy in its current form and the Baltic states deal piecemeal with the various issues raised by its presence. This is a key problem for the successful outcome of a coordinated strategy for the area.

2. The road to COP15: the obstacle of financing the climate

With Europe's targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions having already been set, Europe's politicians at the EU summit at the end of October might have focused on the other fundamental issue for reaching a satisfactory agreement at the UN climate conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 (COP15), namely how to finance a global agreement. The poorer countries need more funds in order to contribute to the struggle against climate change, but also to adapt to changes which have already occurred or will do so in the near future.

In his speech to the General Assembly on 23 September, the EU president-by-turn indicated financial support for developing countries as the first step on the road to resolving the global climate problem (6). For his part, the Swedish environment minister, Andreas Carlgren, noted that, while waiting for a more substantial commitment by the USA and China, the EU's ability to continue to lead the way and inspire both in terms of climate-related objectives and legislation and on the issue of financial support for the world's poorer countries remains crucial (7).

Consequently, Sweden has invested heavily in brokering a deal between EU member countries. Following the European summit in October, doubt remains concerning the prospects for a suitable international agreement, and the Scandinavian press has observed that the Swedish objective has only partially

been reached. This has led to an increased tendency to view with concern the progress of European and international climate talks, and to fear failure at the summit in Copenhagen.

This trend was already in evidence in September and October, especially in the Swedish and Danish papers, where much attention was devoted to the process of preparing for the COP15. Unsatisfactory results in one summit after the next over the past two months have led the Swedish presidency to reiterate the need for insisting on a global agreement (8) and having more ambitious agreements at EU level (9) in order to reach the objective of limiting temperature growth to two degrees centigrade.

But the outlook is not entirely bleak. There are those who believe that the conference in December has already had sufficient impact to call it a success regardless of the final outcome: "it has greatly stimulated the development of an economy geared to respect for the environment and green entrepreneurship. And it is this entrepreneurship that will play a decisive role even in the event of a weak agreement in Copenhagen" (10).

3. The final stage in the long Lisbon marathon

After untold deals and unexpected developments, the Lisbon Treaty finally comes into being. Yet, to judge from the coverage of this significant event for the future of the Union, public opinion in Scandinavian countries appears to be so completely exhausted by the Neverending Story of the Lisbon Treaty that it has simply resigned itself to the Treaty. The greater part of the comments were either negative or just tired. The sad comment of one observer of European affairs writing in the Swedish daily *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* that he neither cried nor laughed after the Yes-vote in the Irish referendum was symptomatic (11).

Barroso's reconfirmation as president of the Commission and the question of nominations for the new European offices of permanent President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs are also matters which the Scandinavian press has followed with mixed degrees of interest. Above all, it appears to be Tony Blair who has really caught the attention of experts and journalists who have been following the musical chairs of nominations (12). The other candidates in the field are generally considered to be exponents of the usual weak compromise which is typical of the European Union and has become increasingly dull in recent years (13). Indeed, the stalemate of the last few difficult years appears to have

led analysts in the Scandinavian press to fear the EU's non-decisions more than its decisions. A state of affairs which is reflected in the fact that the election of a strong and potentially extremely divisive figure such as Tony Blair appears to be less alarming than the possibility of choosing a low-profile figure who is unknown not only to the outside world but also to the citizens of Europe (14).

Consequently, rather than appraising the qualities and defects of Blair or the other candidates, the majority of articles have expressed the hope that the final choice will not be made on a negative basis, i.e. not to elect Blair, but rather on the positive and constructive basis of choosing someone on strength of their merits.

(1) A. S. Melin, *Reinfeldt: Dags att driva på*, Dagens Nyheter, 22-10-2009

(2) O. V. Ryborg, *Europæisk flugt ind i fremtiden*, Ugebrevet Europa - Særudsendelse / uge 44 / 30-10-2009

(3) *Weighty issues culminating at EU summit*, Swedish Presidency of the European Union, News articles 27-10-2009,

http://www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/10/27/weighty_issues_culminating_at_eu_summit

(4) *Baltic Sea Strategy successfully landed*, Swedish Presidency of the European Union, News articles 26-10-2009, <http://www.se2009.eu/en/2.543/2.578/2.705/2.731/1.20900>

(5) H. Mouritzen, *Russia as key to the Baltic Sea Region*, DIIS Brief september 2009, http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Briefs2009/DIIS_Brief_Russia_as_key_to_the_Baltic_Sea_region.pdf

(6) *EU Presidency statement by Fredrik Reinfeldt in the UN General Assembly 23-09-2009*, <http://www.se2009.eu/en/2.543/2.578/2.674/2.697/1.15939>

(7) *The EU should lead the way in the climate negotiations*", Swedish Presidency of the European Union, News articles 22-09-2009,

<http://www.se2009.eu/en/2.543/2.578/2.674/2.696/1.15753>

(8) See for instance *"We must pick up the pace in the climate negotiations"*, Swedish Presidency of the European Union, News articles 21-09-2009,

<http://www.se2009.eu/en/2.543/2.578/2.674/2.695/1.15731>

(9) See for instance *Speech by Minister for the Environment Andreas Carlgren to the European Parliament on 20 October 2009*, Swedish Presidency of the European Union, News articles 20-10-2009, <http://www.se2009.eu/en/2.543/2.578/2.705/2.725/1.19950>

(10) E. Rasmussen, *Klimakamp: COP15 er allerede en succes*, Mandag Morgen p.24, 14-09-2009

(11) C. Arvidsson, *Jag varken gråter eller jublar över Lissabon*, Sydsvenska Dagbladet, 05-10-2009

(12) E. Løkeland-Stai, *Yo, Blair!*, Dagsavisen, 30-10-2009

(13) *EUformand*, Politiken, 31-10-2009

(14) *Ibid*