

Nordic-Baltic region praised by the US

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On 4-5 September, ahead of the G20 meeting in St. Petersburg, US President Barack Obama substituted his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin with a visit to Sweden. It was the first visit an American president has made in this country. Obama held bilateral American-Swedish talks and met the prime ministers of the Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden). The talks covered economic issues, the TTIP, climate protection as well as international and security issues. With regard to security policy, a joint US-Nordic statement put emphasis was put on the importance of co-operation between the countries of the region and the US and among the Nordic countries and other partners, including the Baltic states. The establishment of the US-Nordic Security Dialogue was also announced. The dialogue will be the framework for discussions on co-operation in the area of global and regional security. In the US-Swedish statement the development of relations between NATO and partner countries (one of which is Sweden) was announced.

Commentary

- Barack Obama's visit to Stockholm is a symbolic token of recognition from the US to Sweden and the Nordic states which, despite being a small actor on the international arena (25 million inhabitants in total), are highly active within the EU, NATO and the UN. They also co-operate among themselves (and with the US) on issues such as humanitarian aid, development co-operation, security sector support in fragile states, UN diplomacy as well as NATO, EU and UN operations.
- Through their global involvement, the Nordic states are seeking to strengthen their international position and to be recognised by the US as effective partners in international security policy. Their objective is to maintain close relations with the US and thus to confirm and reinforce American security guarantees in the regional dimension. This is important also for Sweden and Finland who are not NATO members but co-operate with it. It is noteworthy that Obama's visit to Sweden, which was made possible because Obama withdrew from the Russia-US summit due to the scandal over Edward Snowden, happened in the context of the debates over Swedish defence policy and the potential military threat from Russia that have been underway for several months.
- Despite the fact that the heads of the Baltic states were not present at the meeting (the meeting of the presidents of the Baltic states and the US took place on 30 August this

year at the White House), they were mentioned in the statement as special partners of the Nordic states and the US in the area of security and defence. Nordic-Baltic military co-operation is best seen in the joint participation in the Nordic Battlegroup and co-operation in Afghanistan. The Nordic-Baltic political co-operation can be seen in the activity of the NB8 group. The NB8 groups together eight Nordic and Baltic states - on 3 September their foreign ministers issued a joint statement on chemical weapons use in Syria.