

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

Promoting the European network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks

E-newsletter of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks

The non-proliferation and disarmament challenges of the Swedish Presidency of the EU, an interview with Thomas Jonter



Thomas Jonter is Professor of International Relations and Head of Department at the Stockholm University. He has PhD in history (cold war history) from Uppsala University (1995) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Organisational Leadership from University of Oxford (2010). His research focuses on nuclear non-proliferation and energy security. He has been visiting scholar at Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Stanford University, and Cornell University.

The Stockholm university plays a leading role in research on the WMD disarmament and non-proliferation. What are its main activities in the field?

We have a couple of researchers dealing with nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation issues. In particular, we are doing research on gender and nuclear weapons and global nuclear governance. Nowadays there is also a growing interest in studying the enlargement of NATO and its implications for the Baltic Sea area. Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons is, for obvious reasons, a central subject of our current analyses. These focus on the prospects of Finland's and Sweden's membership in NATO and on new possible disarmament initiatives within the alliance.

Sweden has been the main promoter of the Stockholm Initiative or Stepping Stones for Advancing Nuclear Disarmament. How do you assess the development of the initiative and its current phase of application?

The present government has, in fact, declared that it will not take any initiatives that might disturb the NATO application process. The Stockholm Initiative was launched by the former Social Democratic government and many believed that the new liberal-conservative government which relies on the support from the far-right party Sweden Democrats wouldn't continue the disarmament path undertaken by the Social Democratic Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström. The prospects for moving forward with various proposals presented by the Stockholm Initiative remain uncertain. The Stockholm Initiative is supported by altogether 16 states, including members and non-members of NATO. But, once again, we cannot expect any kind of engagement from the government before Sweden has become a member of the NATO.

What non-proliferation and disarmament issue do you expect the Swedish government will prioritize during its EU presidency term?

Responding to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Sweden together with Finland applied for membership in NATO. This constitutes the most fundamental security shift in the Baltic Sea region since the end of the Cold War. Contingent on Turkish President Recep Erdogan's eventual approval, Sweden will join the US led western alliance. In joining NATO, Sweden will put an end to its historical legacy as a neutral and military state that has lasted for more than 200 years. Furthermore, joining an alliance reliant on nuclear weapons will challenge its commitment to promote nuclear disarmament. Sweden had a serious nuclear weapon program running during the 1950s and 1960s but abandoned it with the signing of the NPT in 1968. Ever since, and until now, disarmament has played a pivotal role in Swedish foreign policy. The overarching question for the present government is to obtain the NATO membership as fast as possible. For this reason, the government is not expected to take any disarmament initiatives during the EU presidency term.

How might the war in Ukraine impact these priorities?

Given Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons and Turkey's resistance to accept a Swedish membership in NATO, Sweden will do everything possible not to feed Erdogan's skepticism and send signals to other NATO states that the Swedish government do not fully support the alliance's strategy that ultimately relies on nuclear weapons.

Addressing arms diversion in Ukraine

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion in February 2022, European Union (EU) member states have delivered significant military support to Ukraine. Part of this assistance has been funded through the European Peace Facility (EPF), an EU off-budget mechanism which enables the EU to finance the provision of lethal military equipment. So far, 3.6 billion euros have been allocated in support of Ukraine through that fund.

Arms transfers to countries involved in armed conflict bear higher risks of diversion. While this makes concerns about diversion in Ukraine legitimate, the issue has also been instrumentalized. Several alleged reports of diversion in the media were found to be the result of disinformation efforts originating in Russia, unconfirmed media reports, or referred to past cases of diversion without mentioning efforts taken by Ukraine to address the issue. Battlefield capture of Ukrainian weapons by pro-Russian forces could also be used by Russia to feed disinformation efforts.

However, even though open-source information suggests that diversion is not currently occurring at a significant level, especially outside Ukraine, this may change as the conflict evolves. Moreover, if the conflict comes to an end the demand for weapons may drop, leaving significant quantities of surplus arms and ammunition on Ukrainian territory.

EU member states have an obligation to assess the risk of diversion based on their commitments under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the EU Common Position on Arms Exports, and to ensure that all appropriate mitigation measures are taken. In the context of Ukraine, they have increasingly acknowledged the risk of diversion, and have started taking steps to address it.

The EU has also taken measures focused on transfers of military material to Ukraine funded under the EPF. These include a prohibition to re-export equipment without prior EU approval and a requirement for Ukrainian authorities to grant access to EU representatives for post-shipment on-site visits of military material. The EU has also created a clearing house mechanism to match the requests for assistance made under the EPF. And one of the priorities of the newly set up Support Hub for Internal Security and Border Management in Moldova is to strengthen coordination in preventing cross-border firearms trafficking.

While these steps are needed, the EU and its member states should consider additional mitigation measures, including ones focused on building capacity among the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the fields of border security, record-keeping, arms tracing and recovery, as well as stockpile management. The EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, launched in November 2022, could be used to provide such support.

Following the first on-site visit carried out by the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Ukraine, the EU could also reflect on the role such visits can play in identifying and mitigating diversion risks in active armed conflicts. Strengthening coordination with allies across all assistance efforts, which was highlighted as a key point in the US plan to counter illicit diversion, is also key.

Finally, adopting a coordinated strategy to anticipate, monitor and mitigate the risk of arms diversion, while countering ongoing disinformation efforts and false narratives will be essential to offer effective support to Ukraine in the long run.

Lauriane Héau, Research Assistant, SIPRI

Latest Publications

[The ban treaty, two years after: A ray of hope for nuclear disarmament.](#)

Alexander Kmentt. Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. January 23 2023

[EU Orchestration in the Nuclear Weapons Regime Complex.](#) Megan Dee. Politics and Governance. December 19 2022

[Building a Road to Nuclear Disarmament: Bridging the Gap Between Competing Approaches.](#) Rizwana Abbasi. Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group

Network Calls

The Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP) is recruiting an intern for spring 2023 in the fields of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Deadline: 23 February 2023

More info: [here](#)

EU NEWS

EU-NATO JOINT DECLARATION 2023

ON 10 JANUARY 2023, THE EU AND NATO SIGNED A JOINT DECLARATION IN BRUSSELS. THEY CONDEMNED IN THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE TERMS RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE AND REITERATED THEIR UNWAVERING SUPPORT TO THE COUNTRY.

THE DECLARATION ALSO SETS OUT A SHARED VISION OF HOW THE EU AND NATO WILL ACT TOGETHER AGAINST COMMON SECURITY THREATS. THE EU AND NATO WILL EXPAND AND DEEPEN THEIR COOPERATION ON AREAS SUCH AS: THE GROWING GEOSTRATEGIC COMPETITION; RESILIENCE AND THE PROTECTION OF CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE; EMERGING AND DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES; OUTER SPACE; THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE; AND FOREIGN INFORMATION MANIPULATION AND INTERFERENCE

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

NETWORK NEWS

THE ROMA TRE UNIVERSITY CO-ORGANISES IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NPIHP (NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT) A NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION SUMMER SCHOOL (NUCLEAR HISTORY BOOT CAMP).

AIMED AT TRAINING A NEW GENERATION OF EXPERTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THE ELEVENTH NUCLEAR HISTORY BOOT CAMP IS AN INTENSIVE EIGHT-DAY IMMERSION IN THE HISTORY OF NUCLEAR AFFAIRS, FROM THE EVOLUTION OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY TO THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF DETERRENCE THEORY AND NUCLEAR STRATEGY, AS WELL AS THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF TODAY'S GLOBAL NUCLEAR LANDSCAPE.

THE DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS IS 7 MARCH.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS: SCIENCE · PEACE · SECURITY '23 – TECHNOLOGY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE EXAMINES THE IMPACT, CONTROL AND DESIGN OF TECHNOLOGIES WHICH INFLUENCE PEACE AND SECURITY, AND AIMS TO FACILITATE FRUITFUL DISCUSSIONS ON CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD OF TECHNICAL PEACE AND CONFLICT RESEARCH.

MORE INFO: [HERE](#)



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