



An EU Survey on Whole-of-Government Approaches to External Conflict and Crisis

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Sweden Report

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1 | Introduction

When it comes to a whole-of-government approach (WGA), Sweden has taken three relevant actions. In 2003, there was the introduction of a general policy for global development, which aims to be a crosscutting coordinating device (Regeringens proposition 2003). This was followed in 2007 by a strategy for international military-civilian operations (Regeringens skrivelse 2007a). The latter strategy is in line with the scope of this study, while the broader policy of 2003 is often seen as a role model for policy coherence in external policies, providing a background for the 2007 strategy. As discussed below, the policy and the strategy have hardly lived up to the high ambitions they set.

In addition, in 2002, an agency was set up to support international civilian peacebuilding missions by coordinating their Swedish and non-Swedish participants. The agency, which was partly based on pre-existing programmes, was named the Folke Bernadotte Academy. Whereas the proper name refers to an early Swedish peace negotiator, the term 'academy' indicates that one of its major goals is to educate people for these missions.

Returning to take a deeper look at the policy introduced in 2003, we see that it is linked to separate EU and UN initiatives. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were introduced just before the Swedish policy was introduced, and the EU also introduced its principle of coherence in development policy at around the same time. The Swedish policy was later linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the minister for international development cooperation being put in charge of related issues on the

international level and the minister for public administration being tasked with handling related issues on the domestic level. What's more, a number of policies were introduced around the same time to pursue cross-cutting issues and to be advanced by all ministries. Other examples are an elaborate set of environmental goals, regional coordination of national policies, and a general policy of gender mainstreaming.

In general, however, the 2003 policy and its focus on coherence only make sense when viewed in the context of Sweden's particular constitutional structure, which prioritises governing by consensus. To quote *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics* (Persson 2016: 637): "Almost all government decisions [in Sweden] are made collectively – a marked contrast to the situation in most other countries, where ministers make most decisions independently. The strong commitment of the Swedish government to collective decision-making is institutionalized through a joint preparation procedure (*gemensam beredning*) [...]. Moreover, it is common practice to circulate all government bills among ministries [...]. These procedures ensure that all government decisions are prepared jointly and that all relevant ministries are involved."

In other words, Sweden's constitution simply doesn't allow theme- based groups of ministries to work together on an issue. In fact, this strong principle of consensus-based decision-making actually makes it difficult to integrate policies across ministerial boundaries, as no ministries can be excluded. The available option is to introduce general policies, often giving weak powers to the lead ministry, which is what the other ministries accept (Niklasson 2007, 2011, 2015; Niklasson and Barr 2015).

Complicating matters further, there are two highly independent agencies involved in these issues that operate under different ministries (foreign affairs and defence, respectively). The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) enjoys a strong international reputation and is involved in long-term development aid as well as short-term humanitarian aid. The other agency is the armed forces, which have gone through a period of fundamental change, shifting their focus from national defence to international operations (and, more recently, back to national defence). The 2003 policy and the 2007 strategy aim to coordinate cooperation among these agencies and other agencies involved in international operations.

The documents described above were introduced by different governments and have survived several changes of government, which indicates that their content has been embraced by most political parties. But the policies have also been revised, partly to send political messages and partly to deal with the strong criticism from the two national audit bodies regarding the weak design of the policies.

2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

The 2003 policy on global development was an early example of WGA and very similar to the EU principle of policy cohesion in development policy. The government bill describes the global situation, states a set of general aims for Swedish policies related to global development, and outlines 11 policy areas to be involved. However, the most specific part of the text is an outline of the Swedish policy for international development cooperation (aid), i.e. one specific policy area.

The government bill and the stated ambitions in the various areas are in themselves instruments for coordination, especially the statement that the policies must be consistent with each other. In addition, the bill proposes a 'coordination function' in the Government Offices, as the cabinet office is called, and additional work to establish an 'evaluation function' for this policy. The bill proposes continued support for international work to develop an index of cohesion, and argues that conflicts of interest across policy areas should be explicitly stated and acted upon. However, it fails to mention where this should be stated and by whom. In fact, there is no evidence of such a discussion in the official documents, and the bill merely states that the administrative instruments are to be further developed.

The 2007 strategy (Regeringens skrivelse 2007a) was introduced in a report to parliament, which is technically a piece of information on something already enacted by the cabinet, rather than as a proposal for a future policy to be decided on by parliament. After restating the general goals of the 2003 policy, it provides further elaboration on the specific area of international military-civilian operations by spelling out what the relevant military and civilian capabilities are. The strategy also discusses international and national coordination, with the latter being an encouragement (i.e. mandate) for the relevant agencies to improve coordination among themselves.

The agency set up in 2002 to support international civilian peacebuilding missions is interesting as an instrument for coordinating fieldwork. Its mandate is to contribute directly to the goals of the (narrow) policy of international development cooperation (aid) and indirectly to the broader cross-cutting goals.

However, as discussed earlier, these policies need to be seen in relation to existing barriers to and other mechanisms for cooperation in the Swedish context. A more general mechanism for policy coherence is the consensus decision-making in the cabinet office. As discussed earlier, the constitutional principle of consensus decision-making is carried out through mandatory consultations across the ministries (gemensam beredning). Since all proposals must be agreed by all other ministries beforehand, each ministry effectively has a right of veto. A typical example is when ministries protect 'their' agencies from participating in joint initiatives. The outcome is coherence by the least common denominator. In practice, though, the Ministry of Finance has a stronger position due to its power over the budget, and the Prime Minister's Office also enjoys a stronger position, especially over the legislative agenda.

Furthermore, the consensus-based model also means that all formal instructions to agencies are given by the cabinet as a whole rather than by individual members of the government. As a result, individual ministers are generally not held accountable for what happens in 'their' agencies. In other words, the agencies have (on paper) a high level of independence from the cabinet office. In reality, informal instructions are accepted, which creates the odd situation that the formal instructions are agreed by all ministries, while the informal instructions are only given by the closest ministry.

It should also be noted that a large number of strategies are issued by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, mainly to guide the implementation of programmes by the international development-cooperation agency (SIDA), which results in a very complex structure of instructions (Statskontoret 2011). Hence, there are several other strategies that relate to general ambitions yet add little to this analysis. These include the follow-up on the 2008 Policy for

Global Development (Regeringens skrivelse 2007b), the Policy for Security and Development in Swedish Development Cooperation 2011–2014 (Regeringskansliet 2010), the 2014 Platform for Development Cooperation (Regeringens skrivelse 2014), the 2016 Policy for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance (Regeringens skrivelse 2016), the 2017 National Security Strategy (Regeringskansliet 2017b), and the Strategy for Sustainable Peace 2017–22 (Regeringskansliet 2017a).

3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

Sweden's WGA-related policies state general ambitions of coordination while specifically listings which agencies (policy areas) are required to participate. The government bills are the outcome of negotiations in the Government Offices over who must be involved, which has further consequences for instructions, budgets and other matters. In other words, the policies are examples of high-level coordination to be supported by the previously mentioned working groups.

In addition to development cooperation (aid), the 2003 strategy (Regeringens proposition 2003) mentions 11 policy areas considered to be part of the broader and more general policy for global development: law enforcement, defence, trade, migration, health and social care, finance, education, agriculture and fishery, culture, environment and commerce. The 2007 strategy (Regeringens skrivelse 2007a), on the other hand, speaks more narrowly of military and civilian capabilities. A number of agencies are mentioned as examples of civilian recruitment to international missions: the police, the prosecutors, the courts, the jails, the agency to support the fire brigades, the agency for international cooperation, and the Folke Bernadotte Academy. In any case, there are very few studies about coordination or cooperation at the operational level.

4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

There is a long tradition in Sweden of what is now called multi-level governance. Sweden's WGA-related coordination mainly takes place at the top levels of the agencies and the ministries. Unfortunately, very few studies about coordination on the ground exist, with the study on the Swedish mission to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 (SOU 2017) being a notable exception.

The area of external conflicts and crises can be expected to be different from domestic policy areas, where coordination from the bottom-up is sometimes very pronounced (although it is rarely uniform across the country). Much domestic collaboration is driven by a desire to deal with overlapping missions and funding streams across ministries and levels of government (Niklasson 2007, 2011, 2015; Niklasson and Barr 2015). This is often rooted in a desire to provide efficient services.

In the international context, the agencies provide complementary competencies, while international missions are relatively new to most of them. The agencies probably see a need for collaboration in the field, but it may be difficult to arrange this at home due to bureaucratic inertia or even turf wars.

Coordination-related procedures mainly take place at the ministerial level within the Government Offices. The 'coordination function' for this area has evolved over time. It is mainly an informal group to complement other, more formal procedures as well as an instrument to make the ministries more willing to contribute to a common goal (i.e. to avoid exercising their right of veto).

At one point, the coordination function was the responsibility of a single civil servant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Criticism led to the setup of a group at the head-of-department level, together with a working group dealing with the issues in a more hands-on fashion. This was merged in 2018 with the group tasked with coordinating the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

There is some integration with and within parliament on these issues. For example, a joint committee for defence and foreign affairs formed in 2001 deals with issues pertaining to both committees. In addition, every committee can ask for input from another committee. There is also some informal coordination to decide where an issue belongs.

A 'council' of nine agencies was introduced in 2013, which includes the nine agencies in the 2007 strategy (listed above) in addition to the coast guard and the armed forces. The ambition was to encourage cooperation and to find synergies across these agencies' operations. The council is an informal partnership, which is a format applied in several areas where the government wants to encourage inter-agency collaboration.

Since 2016, there has also been a joint funding mechanism for this area. The relevant agencies receive a joint instruction on how to use some of the funds allocated in the budget, while no mandate is delegated to the agencies to decide on who gets what. More specifically, it refers to a section of the aid budget to be used by the police, the agency for prosecutors, the agency for jails, the agency for courts, the agency for civilian emergencies, and the Folke Bernadotte Academy. While the funding itself is already divided by the government into specific amounts for each agency, the use of a joint instruction underlines the need to take other agencies' operations into account. It is an atypical instrument in the Swedish context, where, as noted, the autonomy of each agency is a constitutional principle (Niklasson 2007, 2011).

This high degree of autonomy often becomes a barrier to coordination from the top, and the instruments designed to overcome this fragmentation are often weak. Instead, the government often encourages bottom-up coordination in the form of local or regional partnerships. In the area of external conflicts and crises, there is little mention of such instruments, whether they are encouraged by the government or introduced by the agencies themselves or their staff.

5 | Conclusions

Sweden's WGA-related policies have been severely criticised. The 2003 policy was investigated by the Agency for Public Management (APM) in 2014, which argued that the goals are too visionary and fail to specify what should be done and by whom. Furthermore, the APM concluded that the policy is too much of a statement on aid policy rather than on a broader spectrum of policies and instruments – in other words, that it isn't really an example of a

genuine WGA. The APM suggested that the other ministries should report on how their policies relate to the common ambitions and how they can contribute further to their achievement. In addition, it said that the inter-ministerial working group has an unclear mission, especially in relation to the home ministries, and it argued that the promotion of certain values in and the development of other countries need to be further supported via standard mechanisms of domestic coordination (which, for example, are more focused on short-term funding). Lastly, the APM noted that more resources must be devoted to fostering better coordination. At the time of writing, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs had one civil servant tasked with coordinating a number of ministries. The coordination function was redesigned in 2015 and 2018, and the biannual reports to parliament were structured along the lines of the SDGs in 2016 and 2018 (Statskontoret 2014).

The 2007 strategy (Regeringens skrivelse 2007a), on the other hand, was investigated by the National Audit Office (NAO) in 2011. This agency argued that the strategy's goals are too general in that they only indicate which missions Sweden should contribute to rather than what they should achieve. Furthermore, the NAO argued that there should be a comprehensive report on what the missions accomplish that relates to the strategy, noting that it is reasonable to expect the same level of analysis as the government demands for its aid policy. The funding streams are fragmented, the NAO continued, which makes it difficult to control costs. Other criticism were: that only parts of the military-related costs are reported and decided by parliament; that it is unclear what the government expects from collaboration; that the format is insufficiently defined; and that a lack of coordination in the Government Offices leads to a situation in which field officers are left with the task of performing any needed coordination themselves. Lastly, the NAO argued that the Folke Bernadotte Academy has insufficient resources to perform its ambitious mandate (Riksrevisionen 2011).

In 2011, the Agency for Public Management also carried out a general evaluation of the instruments used by the Government Offices to guide its agencies in the area of international development cooperation. The evaluation's general finding was that there were too many overlapping strategy documents, and that this reduces the overall effect of the messages sent by the cabinet (Statskontoret 2011). Some of the problems have been noted in other reports on the situation in Sweden (see, e.g., Veron and Sheriff 2018; Prontera 2016).

In sum, one can say that Sweden's instruments of coordination are generally weak compared to the forces for the autonomous pursuit of the goals of individual organisations. These include, for example, the constitutional autonomy of the agencies and the ministries, the results-based management of each organisation, and the lack of staff rotation across ministries and agencies.

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