

CHAPTER 5

Candidature Decisions: Six In-depth Examinations

Ann-Marie Ekengren and Ulrika Möller¹

Touko Piiparinen, Tarja Seppä and Anni Tervo²

Baldur Thorhallsson, Jóna Sólveig Elinardóttir and Anna María Eggertsdóttir³

1 Introduction

Why do UN member states seek representation on the Security Council? What opportunities do they expect from holding a nonpermanent seat? Results from the previous chapter underlined the relevance of state size and regional group-belonging for expectations associated with a candidature. The confidence about exercising influence is higher among representatives of big compared to small states, and among members of the WEOG compared to non-WEOG members. Among the power-enhancing benefits, representatives of small states have the highest expectations on a status-enhancing effect from the elected seat. Among small states, the Nordic states stand out as a somewhat more confident group on the expectations to exercise influence.

In this chapter, we are interested in the more fine-grained considerations associated with the candidature decision and related expectations about the opportunities from an elected term. The specific purposes are: 1) to find more details on the three main power-enhancing benefits, 2) to identify additional, related and/or alternative, main reasons for why states embark on the candidature journey, and 3) to detect whether there are similarities within the Nordic group in relation to the other WEOG countries. The analysis is conducted through a focus on actual candidature decisions by a few selected members of the WEOG. Interviews with senior officials and diplomats who were actively involved in the candidatures is the main data. In some of the cases, we combine results from the interviews with written sources. The cases are the same as the forthcoming comparison between successful and unsuccessful campaigns:

¹ The main authors of the introduction and conclusion of the chapter, as well as the section on Sweden and the Netherlands.

² The main authors of the section on Finland and Luxembourg.

³ The main authors of the section on Iceland and Austria.

Iceland – Austria, Finland - Luxembourg, Sweden – The Netherlands. We suggest that it is relevant to focus on members in the WEOG since the frequent use of contested slate in this regional group might sharpen the ideas and arguments for why an elected seat is worth prioritizing. This quality of distinct opinions should be even clearer as we now examine a specific candidature for each of the selected countries.

Specifications of the established reasons include that the expectation to exercise influence is associated with a commitment to the multilateral order and a perceived responsibility to maintain and to develop that order. We also suggest that a successful election and subsequent term not only elevates status but could have a confirmatory effect of statehood for the smallest states included in the comparison. New additions include considerations on how the candidature and elected term bring opportunity to competence building of the foreign services. We suggest that this reflects the views of a small state with high international ambitions, as one out of several possible ways to compensate for size-related disadvantages in world politics that is highly relevant for the Nordic states.

2 About the Interviews

Between January 2018 and June 2020, we interviewed many senior officials and high-ranking diplomats involved in the planning and execution of the candidatures of the six cases we examine. Most interviews took place face-to-face, in a setting chosen by the respondent. A few interviews took place over the phone, due to inability to overcome large distance of location. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, with a selected set of questions like all interviews, but with a free format to discuss in accordance with the respondents' experience and expertise. The average time for an interview was 45 minutes to one hour. We summarized the main content of interviews in a transcript. The interviewees are anonymous in the presentation and only identified through a number or a letter. Some of the interviewees have requested to stay anonymous in the presentation and if we reveal the names of the other persons, it could be possible to identify many or all others as well.

Previous single case studies have detected specific self-interested as well as value-laden purposes for a Security Council candidature. By examining a larger number of in-depth cases, we contribute through inference on the relevance of such specific purposes for a term, in relation to the relevance of the broader power enhancing benefits that our study already has revealed. Further, we also want to push the analysis further on the result from the previous

chapter that the Nordic countries cluster on expectations to network and to gain status from an elected term. We will look for additional similarities among the Nordic states. We present the results pairwise, in the order of their election: Iceland and Austria in 2008, Finland and Luxembourg in 2012, and Sweden and the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2016.

3 Iceland and Austria - Becoming Relevant versus Staying Relevant

Both Iceland and Austria referred to their small size as one of the reasons for running for a seat on the UNSC, for the term 2009-10. However, their approaches to, and motivations for the candidature were very different. Iceland sought a seat on the UNSC based on its ambition to seek status and become more internationally relevant. As a former empire, an ambition to maintain power and remain relevant motivated Austria.

We describe the driving factors behind Iceland's candidature decision through four themes. First, running for an elected seat on the UNSC was viewed as a matter of principle, a way to confirm Iceland's sovereignty, strengthen its status in the international arena, and shoulder its rightful duty to contribute to international politics. It was in this optimistic atmosphere, characterizing Icelandic society and economy, which the Icelandic Foreign Service grew substantially stronger in the 1990s. It underscored the general feelings and arguments that Iceland was now ready to bear increased responsibility on the international level, as well as within the UN.⁴ As an example, in 2007 Prime Minister Geir H. Haarde described why Iceland had decided to run: "The decision to run mirrors a new vision of Iceland's position in international affairs and a new self-confidence and active engagement in foreign affairs. It entails a definition of Iceland as a strong, smaller state but rejects the identity of Iceland as a powerless micro-state. It does not mirror vanity but a natural revaluation and constant attempts to strengthen Iceland's position".⁵

The personal ambitions of politicians and individuals within the diplomatic corps were an important driving force behind the decision to campaign for a seat on the UNSC. This was reflected in public officials encouraging the Foreign Minister, Geir Hallgrímsson, already in the mid-1980s to start preparing for a possible UNSC candidature by becoming more active

⁴ Blöndal, 2006; Gestsson, 1998; Gísladóttir, 2007; Pétursdóttir, 2003; Sigfússon, 2001; Sveinbjarnardóttir, 2006; Sverrisdóttir, 2006; Árnason, 2007b; Ásgrímsson, 1998; Þórðardóttir, 2003.

⁵ Haarde, 2007.

within the UN. This resulted in Iceland becoming a first-time member of the UN ECOSOC, which is considered an important prerequisite and preparatory element to running for a seat on the UNSC. Moreover, Prime Minister Davíð Oddsson, and Foreign Minister Halldór Ásgrímsson were both encouraged by high-ranking public officials in the late 1990s to make Iceland's first run for a seat on the UNSC. One interviewee described the decision to run as being part of "office politics: personal ambitions of individuals", referring to both the Foreign Minister in office as well as high-ranking public officials within the foreign service.⁶ Iceland would once again become an ECOSOC member during the 1997-1998 period. Shortly thereafter, in 1998, the decision to move forward with the UNSC bid was made in government and announced to the general public.

The domestic debate on the candidature expressed both high hopes and deep skepticism, as will be discussed in forthcoming chapter. Up to 1998, Iceland had never participated in the Nordic UNSC rotation, despite being a member of the UN for 50 years, as neither politicians nor civil servants considered Iceland ready. However, with the country's increased economic prosperity, the political atmosphere provided fertile ground for such an endeavor. Initially, the candidature was met with optimism as it was considered a timely event, confirming Iceland's sovereignty and increased status on the international level. Iceland had been hoping for an uncontested campaign, but its positive stance soon changed for the worse when Turkey announced its candidature in 2003, and it became clear that the campaign would be more expensive than initially expected. Doubts began to grow among Icelandic politicians concerning excessive financial resources being wasted on a, perhaps, lost battle, which resulted in the campaign slowly losing momentum and eventually being put on hold for almost an entire year between September 2004 and September 2005. The Foreign Minister, Davíð Oddsson, experienced strong pressure from his Nordic colleagues to proceed with the campaign, as it had been collectively agreed upon that Iceland would run the candidature, not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of all the other Nordic countries, and therefore discontinuation was not a justifiable option.⁷ Iceland's continued campaign was announced in late September 2005 when Geir H. Haarde took office as Foreign Minister, and as it turned out, this changed both the momentum and tone of the campaign.

⁶ High-ranking official C, 2018.

⁷ Fréttablaðið, 2005a, 2005b; High-ranking official B, 2018.

Second, the UNSC candidature was an important component in Iceland's efforts to demonstrate its international commitment to the US authorities, who had shown signs of decreasing interest in maintaining its economically beneficial military presence in Keflavik, as well as to the international community, in general.⁸ The US military base was an essential component of Iceland's defense, a small state without its own armed forces (the only NATO member state without an army). Hence, Iceland's decision to run for the UNSC seat was part of its larger strategy to share the burden of international activities with its allies. Iceland hoped that by spending more resources on international operations, its long-term ally, the United States, would keep its defense commitments to the country and maintain its activities at Keflavik military base.

Third, the decision to become a UNSC candidate was partly justified as being economically feasible since it would create a venue to lobby for vital national interests and build relationships, which could prove economically beneficial.⁹ In this regard, it was mentioned that during the campaign Iceland received visits from powerful people from around the world in connection with the campaign, who otherwise would not have come, such as the leader of the League of Arab States.¹⁰

Fourthly, a completely altered domestic, political, international, and geopolitical environment paved the way for new foreign policy decisions and a much more active foreign policy for Iceland as a small state. Examples of this increased activity is the foundation of the Icelandic International Development Agency in 1981 and in Iceland joining the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994. The first steps towards establishing the Icelandic Crisis Response Unit (ICRU) in the 1990s, when peace building and peacekeeping became an increasingly important part of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs' (MFA) international activities, is relevant also. Moreover, there was an increased willingness among Icelandic policymakers to contribute to world affairs within their field of expertise, rather than focusing solely on direct economic and security gains from overseas relationships.¹¹ Icelandic politicians were becoming more confident that they could have a say within regional and international institutions.

⁸ Bailes and Thorhallsson, 2006.

⁹ Benediktsson, 2008; Sverrisdóttir, 2006; Árnason, 2007a; Ásgrímsson, 2001, 2003a, 2003b.

¹⁰ High-ranking official B, 2018.

¹¹ Thorhallsson, 2009.

We identify four driving factors behind Austria's decision to run for a nonpermanent seat. First, UNSC candidature and membership was seen as a way to remain relevant in the international system and demonstrate the country's foreign policy, its fields of expertise, and its vision. During Austria's 50 years of UN membership, Austrian authorities had put great emphasis on being a devoted and reliable member state, as well as an active member of the international community, known for its long history of work in the fields of international law, development co-operation, peacekeeping efforts, and mediation. Representatives of the Austrian government therefore linked UNSC candidature to the importance of being active and effective in international affairs in order to raise the country's profile and spread Austrian expertise and peacekeeping messages.¹² In the words of one high-ranking official: "Austria is a small country and the SC is a good opportunity to be on stage. It is important to be a part of initiatives regarding security policies. Show the world that there are good politicians in Austria and good initiatives and Austria is not the kind of country that hides behind the trees, but is an active member of the international community".¹³ Peter Jankowitsch (ÖVP), former Foreign Minister, president of the UNSC during Austria's first period on the council, and special emissary of the third candidacy, claimed that because of Austria's limited resources and strong emphasis on the EU, the country hardly existed to a large part of the world. According to him, the UNSC was the best platform for states to present their profile and demonstrate what they stand for. At that time Austria had few embassies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, and consequently in Jankowitsch's opinion, the UNSC was the ideal place to showcase Austria's effectiveness on the international stage.¹⁴ In addition, the Austrian government, perhaps because of their identity as a reliable member state, saw the candidature as a service to the UN and the international community.¹⁵ This is reflected in Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik's words about the candidature being an act of respect for diversity and in recognition of the need for unity, a service rendered to the UN by a candidate that inspires confidence and evokes a sense of partnership.¹⁶ Finally, in the words of one official, seeking membership within the UN's most important institution was "for Austria an essential part of taking responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. We wanted to prove that countries like Austria could have an impact on the work of the Security Council...".¹⁷

¹² Machreich, 2008a; News, 2005.

¹³ Interview E, 2018.

¹⁴ Machreich, 2008a.

¹⁵ High-ranking official F, 2018.

¹⁶ Bundesministerium, 2006; 2008a.

¹⁷ Interview G, 2018.

Secondly, the decision to campaign for a seat on the UNSC was based on national and regional security incentives. Austria's small state status, limited military capabilities, and declared neutrality were presented as explanations for Austria's steadfast dedication to the functioning of the multilateral system, the rule of law, and the primacy of international law¹⁸, thus making Austrian representation at the UNSC a rational policy to be sought on a regular basis: "A small state is not a military power. But involvement in multilateral structures is the best security guarantee for countries like Austria, who are also not part of any military alliances. Therefore, it makes sense for us to have a seat on the Security Council every 20 years or so. Then you have to declare yourself, take position and responsibility".¹⁹ Moreover, this was not considered a contradiction, to be both neutral and in possession of a seat on the SC, as the country had a clear foreign policy and showed consistent dedication to international law, human rights, and democracy.²⁰

Thirdly, the candidature served the country's economic interests, founded on the work that had been done to establish Austria, and Vienna in particular, as a *security centre*. The economic significance of strong Austria-UN relations could not be ignored, as Deputy Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel referenced in the Austrian Federal Council (the upper house of the Austrian parliament) in 1997, stating that it contributed billions to the country.²¹ Austria is the only EU country to host a UN headquarters as well as e.g. the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (ODCCP) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These were the pillars for Austria's campaign when stressing the importance of Vienna to global security, making the capital what they repeatedly referred to as a *security centre*. The Vienna-based OSCE headquarters was also mentioned on several occasions in this respect. Moreover, Austria lobbied for increased UN presence in Vienna throughout the campaign period. As an example of this, Foreign Minister Plassnik announced Austria's support for creating a new International Renewable Energy Agency, proposing Vienna as the location, as well as the creation of a new regime, placing all enrichment facilities under the control of the Vienna-based IAEA.²²

Finally, it can be said that a seat on the UNSC was perceived as a way for Austria to work towards strengthening the EU's position in the UN, and thus Austria's status and role within

¹⁸ Plassnik 2007, 2008.

¹⁹ Die Presse, 2007a.

²⁰ Die Presse, 2007a; Interview F, 2018.

²¹ News, 2005.

²² Ferrero-Waldner, 2002, 2003; Fischer, 2005; Plassnik, 2005b, 2006, 2007, 2008.

the EU. The main point of departure in one of Plassnik's addresses at the UN General Assembly was the EU's *United in Diversity* slogan, thereby emphasizing the role of the EU in building peace on the European continent, how well it worked with the Austrian emphasis on the dialogue of cultures and religions, and how that slogan should also be the guiding principle in the work done by the UN.²³ Furthermore, Austrian authorities often highlighted the country's leading role in developing EU's competences, engagement, and relationships with the UN in the fields of peacekeeping, development aid, EU-Africa relations, and women's rights. It was also a way to show commitment to their EU partners by advocating for increased EU influence on the work of the UN, both within the Security Council, as well as the importance of the EU having a formal role on the UN's Peacebuilding Commission.²⁴ When Federal Council MP Harald Himmer asked Plassnik in 2005 about EU's chances of obtaining a seat on the UNSC, Plassnik replied that a mutual seat on the SC for the EU as a whole certainly was a long-term goal, and in her opinion, it was a logical conclusion for the EU to have a shared voice on the UN's decision-making level, and thereby intensify the common grounds on which they operated.²⁵ It can be argued that this was a way for Austria to win the support of their EU partners, as well as a way to establish itself as a 'regional power,' with a global reference, and an expert in the field of security, which in turn strengthened their own status within the UN.

To summarize, Iceland maintained that despite being small, the country had grown strong and was therefore capable of assuming the responsibilities of serving on the Security Council. The candidature was a milestone in confirming Iceland's sovereign status and an attempt to climb the ranks in the international system. However, Austria's approach maintained that, due to its small state status and military weakness, it was important to support multilateralism and the rule of law with their expertise and experience through the UNSC. Thus, Austria's bid was a rational part of the country's security and foreign policy, a tactical move reflecting the status Austria should have and a necessary measure in order to maintain influence and remain relevant, internationally. This reflects a high level of confidence built on history and culture.

Both states emphasized the importance of assuming international responsibility as one of their reasons for running, but while Iceland was taking its first steps, Austria was confirming its continued engagement in multilateralism. Both had economic incentives for running, albeit

²³ Plassnik, 2006.

²⁴ Bundesministerium. 2008b. ; Plassnik, 2005b, 2007, 2008.

²⁵ Parliament, 2005.

quite different ones. Iceland was motivated by being able to maintain the US military base in Keflavík through demonstrating an increased commitment to international activities, as well as building relationships which could prove economically beneficial. Austria had direct economic interests in working towards an even clearer status as a *security centre* in Europe, proposing that Vienna assume an even broader role as a UN host country.

4 Finland and Luxembourg – Business-as-Usual versus Political Zeal

Both Finland and Luxembourg referred to a wish to take part in multilateralism as a motivation to run for a seat on the Security Council, for the term 2013-14. Having a seat on the UNSC is as an opportunity to develop a multilateral approach further. Multilateralism does not necessarily conflict with national interests²⁶, but the ways in which the two countries presented and pursued their campaigns and motivations differed from one another.

We suggest that “business as usual” captures Finland’s motivation in the sense that it was essentially a technical rather than a political candidature. It was considered natural to run for the seat; The candidature was part of the Finnish UN policy, which, in turn, formed an integral part of the Finnish foreign and security policy.²⁷ The candidature was not questioned politically, not even by the opposition, nor was it much discussed publicly, as opposed to the campaigns in Sweden and Iceland.²⁸ The candidature was described as given to Finland, in a way, due to the Nordic rotation system of applying for a seat on the Security Council.²⁹ Running for the seat was self-evident, and the general assumption was that Finland would be elected, as it had been twice before during other contests.³⁰

Further, this could be one reason for the significant lack of political commitment in the Finnish campaign.³¹ This could not be interpreted as a lack of commitment to the candidature as such, on the contrary: it was considered important³², but there were different views of responsibilities

²⁶ See e.g. Brown 2015.

²⁷ Interview 7.

²⁸ Interviews 2; 4; 7; 12.

²⁹ Interview 4.

³⁰ Interview 2.

³¹ Interviews 2; 7; 11; 12.

³² Interview 1.

attributed during the campaign, i.e. who should be in charge of campaigning: politicians or officials.³³

Finland's "business as usual"-approach is integrally related to the rotation system among the five Nordic countries; it was "Finland's turn" to run for the candidature of the UNSC nonpermanent seat for the period 2013–2014. In this sense, the rotation became a motivation as such. As one interviewee mentioned, there was no reason for Finland to step away from the Nordic rotation.³⁴ If Luxembourg was campaigning to gain the membership to the UNSC, then Finland was campaigning because it had no reason not to, since it was its turn. Luxembourg had to provide a reason and motivation for running, whereas Finland would have had to provide a reason for not running, due to the Nordic rotation. Perhaps, what Finland was missing was a clearer, or additional, motivation to run.

In addition, the Nordic rotation system entailed a cautious and passive approach during the early stages of the process, as Iceland was still campaigning for its own candidature.³⁵ The planning of the campaign began in a steering group within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, led by Ambassador Marjatta Rasi, before the establishment of the official unit for the campaign in 2008. Finland refrained from campaigning earlier because of Iceland's candidature. This partly explains a difficulty by Finnish interviewees to name the exact date of the candidature decision.³⁶ However, Finland publicly announced its candidature in 2002 and Luxembourg in 2001.³⁷

This could partly explain why there was no such "passion", zeal or energy in the later stages of the campaign, as were present in Luxembourg's campaign. However, Finland's campaigning efforts did accelerate towards the end of the competition.³⁸

Finland and Luxembourg engaged both politicians and officials, as well as other stakeholders, but Luxembourg used politicians very skillfully and actively, thus showing that it was more politically committed to its candidature than Finland. As officials held the primary

³³ Interviews 2; 4; 7; 8.

³⁴ Interview 11.

³⁵ Interviews 12;8.

³⁶ See Chapter 7 in this book.

³⁷ Interview 3.

³⁸ Interview 1.

responsibility for the Finnish campaign, it could be described as a technical project and even bureaucratic in the sense that “politics” was removed from the campaign, although the UNSC is essentially a *political* body which makes political decisions.³⁹ In addition, as the Security Council campaigns have gotten more competitive, the contributions of politicians and high-level politicians have become much more necessary.⁴⁰

The interviewees also mentioned that developing multilateralism, as in being able to influence the UNSC agenda, was a motivation for Finland's candidacy. Finland fluctuated between being a small state and a middle power, being “greater than its size”, as will be discussed further in Chapter 7: it had middle power ambitions (see also Ekengren-Möller in this chapter). Adopting a middle power status by stressing peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and mediation was perhaps somewhat unintentional. Even though many of the interviewees stressed that Finland was a small country, with one even saying that Finland has the soul of a small country, it became evident that Finland boasted additional qualities over those of a small state.⁴¹

It could also be argued that a nonpermanent seat on the Security Council would offer the chance to network, and this was already seen during the campaign process. Finland tried to connect with geographical areas and countries where contacts had not yet established. However, if the politicians been more willing to travel, networking could have been done more effectively.⁴² The task of networking was done successfully by the Finnish special envoy to the Caribbean, and extremely well by Luxembourg, which had four regional envoys compared to Finland's one.⁴³ In addition, Luxembourg's Foreign Minister Asselborn was extremely active and personally travelled to all continents except for Australia.⁴⁴

For Luxembourg, the main motivation was to have a seat on the UNSC, for the first time in its history. Luxembourg was a founding member of the UN but had never held a seat on the UNSC. Luxembourg was a defender of the UN values, multilateralism, and equal sovereignty, which were also central to Luxembourg's foreign policy. The candidature showed Luxembourg's willingness to take part in defending international peace and security, and the country was

³⁹ Interviews 2; 11.

⁴⁰ Interview 11.

⁴¹ Interview 2.

⁴² Interview 2.

⁴³ Interviews 1; 2; 4; 7.

⁴⁴ Interview 10.

willing to contribute to the functioning and values of the UN. Luxembourg also considered itself competent for the job, despite its small size.⁴⁵

In Luxembourg, the candidature was viewed as a national project and a foreign policy priority.⁴⁶ There was little public debate regarding whether to run for the candidacy, the government was committed, and the parliament was interested in the campaign and how it was proceeding. The campaign had limited financial resources, so it had to be well planned.⁴⁷

Already in 2001, Luxembourg introduced its candidature, showing a firm intention of winning the seat and bearing the responsibilities it would entail.⁴⁸ Luxembourg's foreign policy values coincided with UN values: Luxembourg had contributions to make on the substance and values of the UN and a desire to further develop the UN. Luxembourg also considered itself a bridge-builder and a voice for other small countries.⁴⁹ Luxembourg believed that it was possible for a small, engaged country to accomplish a lot on the UNSC, even in spite of its size, and Luxembourg would thus be capable of influencing the UNSC agenda.⁵⁰ The sculpture portraying a knotted gun, a gift previously given to the UN by Luxembourg, perfectly captures this idea of commitment to maintaining both international peace and security.⁵¹ Finland had similar ideas but presented them a bit differently.

The political commitment was strong in Luxembourg, demonstrating a clear intention and motivation to win the seat. The campaign was well planned and dedicated. It showed the kind of determination that the Finnish campaign lacked.⁵² Luxembourg also campaigned up to the very last minute, showing its strong will to win the seat, and nothing was taken for granted.⁵³ Finland did not consider it necessary to campaign after the first voting round.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ Interview 6.

⁴⁶ Interview 12.

⁴⁷ Interview 10.

⁴⁸ Interview 6.

⁴⁹ Interview 6.

⁵⁰ Interview 10.

⁵¹ Interview 6.

⁵² Interview 2; 7.

⁵³ Interviews 6; 10.

⁵⁴ Interview 7.

Luxembourg's campaign was especially personified by Foreign Minister Asselborn who used his personal contacts widely and wisely.⁵⁵ In addition to this, Ambassador Lucas, together with Foreign Minister Asselborn, were active and respected by their peers.⁵⁶ Networking also played an important role for Luxembourg, as other countries lacked knowledge about Luxembourg. Foreign Minister Asselborn and special envoys travelled extensively, and they were welcomed at the highest political level.⁵⁷ As opposed to the Finnish campaign, which took for granted that other countries already knew about its activities and achievements, the Luxembourg campaign took a more active approach.

To summarize, Finland and Luxembourg both believed they could influence the agenda of the UNSC and that they had the necessary confidence (see Ekengren Möller in this chapter) to win a seat. Winning a seat at the UNSC would bring increasing possibilities to network and gain status e.g. through increased visibility. Both wanted to pursue normative goals and acknowledged that the seat would promote their national and strategic interests. National and global interests were thus not in conflict. The UNSC is an important place, where even nonpermanent members can have an impact on global politics and gain power.

5 Sweden and the Kingdom of the Netherlands – Comeback in UN-politics versus Playing the Established Role

Both Sweden and the Kingdom of the Netherlands' referred to the opportunity to influence as a motivation to running for a seat on the Security Council for the term 2017-18, with emphasis on ambitions to contribute to the multilateral order. However, these ambitions were formulated from different positions: Sweden's decision reflected the Nordic turn-taking order, with a subsequent levelling up of ambitions for UN-politics from a new coalition-government, whereas the Netherlands had an established and coherent view of the candidature as an appropriate step for national purposes, as well as with reference to the EU membership. We describe the driving factors behind Sweden's candidature decision through six themes.

- 1) *Influence*. Sweden's main reason to run for a seat revolved around the chance to hold sway in matters of grave importance for world politics.⁵⁸ The Security Council is

⁵⁵ Interviews 7;10.

⁵⁶ Interview 2.

⁵⁷ Interview 6.

⁵⁸ Interviews SWE 1; SWE 2; SWE 4; SWE 5; SWE 6.

referred to as the main organ where authoritative decisions could be made, and therefore it was deemed vital for Sweden to take part in the decision-making. The UN is viewed as representing a multilateral, liberal world order, and to be part of the decision making there was extra important for a small, liberal state aiming for a rule-based world order.⁵⁹ Sweden, like many of the other states, referenced being a small state when arguing for a campaign on the UNSC. However, Sweden's ambition was to have real influence, like any other state, and to be just as involved in the decision-making, and on equal terms, as more powerful states. This line of reasoning is not typical to small state behavior but reflects a small state with a medium-sized state identity, believably capable of using a seat on the SC to make a difference.

- 2) *Status/prestige*. Sweden also argued more in line with expected small state behavior in terms of a seat leading to increased status and prestige.⁶⁰ Being elected was seen as confirmation of a certain status level, and as a sign of a country's relevance. The status increase was believed to be more important for newer states.⁶¹ An increase in status was considered fragile which needed to be defended through committed work once elected.⁶² The ambition to construct a more expansive brand for Swedish foreign policy was in line with this motivation.⁶³ Confirming a certain status helped Sweden to gain both material and non-material favors, as in how Swedish identity was perceived and how trade agreements were structured.
- 3) *Network*. Running a campaign for a seat, as well as having a seat, was important for Sweden in terms of connecting with many different actors.⁶⁴ It was believed that communication, the backbone of diplomacy, was refined through a campaign and the eventual winning of a seat; Swedish diplomats and politicians talked to new actors, they explained Sweden's commitment to the campaign, their UN policy, and more general foreign policy. In addition, the hope was that if their campaign was successful, then other states would want to talk to Sweden, since they would be deemed important, and Sweden would learn from others during the talks.

⁵⁹ Interviews SWE 1; SWE 4; SWE 9.

⁶⁰ Interviews SWE 3; SWE 4; SWE 5; SWE 7.

⁶¹ Interview SWE 5.

⁶² Interview SWE 7.

⁶³ Interview SWE 11.

⁶⁴ Interviews SWE 3; SWE 4; SWE 5; SWE 7; SWE 10.

- 4) *Improving the competence of state officials.* Several interviewees stressed that one reason Sweden wanted a seat was to improve the competence among the diplomatic corps.⁶⁵ In doing so, the state capacity would then increase, which is important for success in other foreign policy areas. A campaign for the UNSC could therefore be described as a training camp for diplomats, which could prove useful in other competitive situations down the line.
- 5) *Turn-taking.* Another motivation for Sweden's election campaign, although not a very prominent one, was the norm of Nordic rotation.⁶⁶ Given the Nordic countries' ambition of a rotating candidature among them, this was a viable, though rather unimportant, argument for the Swedish candidacy. It was important not to disappoint the other Nordic countries, and the presence of a turn-taking norm certainly reinforced the decision to run a campaign, but ultimately, this was not the reason Sweden wanted a seat. The hope of being able to have influence was a much more compelling factor for the Swedes to campaign for a seat.
- 6) *Domestic reasons.* Last, but not the least, there were also domestic reasons for pursuing a seat. Politicians and diplomats acknowledged the gap on this issue between the left and the right in Swedish politics.⁶⁷ The Social Democrats wanted to embrace the UN more so than the parties on the right, like the Moderate Party. The Moderate Party wanted to embrace the EU more, and both parties had an interest in emphasizing this difference. This meant that the Social Democrats had a stronger incentive to work in favor of a candidature and future seat for Sweden. If Sweden could get a seat at the UN, then this was seen as positive for the Social Democrats as a party and would help them carve out a distinctive foreign policy profile.

We have identified four different arguments in favor of the Dutch decision to run for a seat on the UNSC.

⁶⁵ Interviews SWE 1; SWE 3; SWE 9; SWE 11.

⁶⁶ Interviews SWE 1; SWE 2.

⁶⁷ Interviews SWE 1; SWE 8.

- 1) *Influence*. A seat was associated with a possibility to influence world politics, in a way that was not often the case for states outside the P5. It was believed that a seat on the UNSC could give the Netherlands the chance to promote policies regarding peacekeeping and sanctions, and to be a key player in relation to these issues in global politics.⁶⁸ Australia was a referred example of another state that managed to be influential in relation to a specific issue (Malaysian Airlines flight MH17, shot down over Ukraine). In relation to discussing the possibilities of influencing world politics, the acknowledgment of the UN as a firm defender of multilateralism, and a world order where multilateralism was an important value, was another important departure for the Dutch candidature.
- 2) *Status/prestige*. A seat would bring status to a certain country through increasing visibility.⁶⁹ As part of the Security Council, a country becomes more visible when important issues are discussed, and that was seen as important to how the country is viewed and evaluated by others.
- 3) *Network*. A candidature, as well as a seat, would increase a country's ability to connect with others.⁷⁰ The improved contacts you receive would be helpful even after a country has left the SC. The positive returns from having improved networks were believed to offer advantages beyond the issues discussed at the UNSC.
- 4) *Take responsibility/turn-taking*. Finally, we also find evidence that the Dutch decision to run a campaign for a seat on the UNSC was influenced by a wish contribute to the present order, and to take responsibility regarding difficult and important issues.⁷¹ In a way, this argument is about sharing the responsibility with others and doing your part in the global community.

To summarize, both countries had many shared reasons for their respective candidatures. Both countries believed a seat would increase their influence and their commitments to a multilateral order. They believed that, in spite of their size, they could still make a difference by taking part in the decision-making at the UNSC. Both states also believed a seat would increase their

⁶⁸ Interviews NL 14; NL 15; NL 18.

⁶⁹ Interviews NL 15; NL 16.

⁷⁰ Interviews NL 14; NL 15; NL 16.

⁷¹ Interview NL 16; NL17; NL18.

status, mainly through increased visibility, and that they could increase their communication and contact with others, as well as taking on the additional responsibility that would come along with their seat. Both the Swedish and the Dutch bids can therefore be viewed as ways to maintain their places in the global community and as ways of defending their roles as committed members of the UN.

The Swedish candidature was also seen as a way to enhance the diplomatic skills among the Swedish diplomatic corps. This argument was not brought up with the Dutch decision makers. On the contrary, the long campaigning was described as something that drained the different agencies of competent personnel.⁷² Moreover, the Swedish candidature had a more pronounced domestic dimension than the Dutch one. A Swedish seat on the UNSC would more directly benefit the Social Democrats, and their desire to emphasize the role of the UN in Swedish foreign policy.

6 Conclusions

The closer examinations of candidature decisions by six members of the WEOG, of which three belong to the subgroup of Nordic states, have provided further details on the power enhancing benefits of an elected seat as well as revealed additional reasons for why states embark on this political and diplomatic journey. In the context of how they clustered in the comparative analysis in the previous chapter, there are also interesting similarities between members of the Nordic group.

It is important to note that the expected benefits – influence, network, and status, occur frequently among the stated reasons for these candidatures. Despite the institutional obstacles that elected members face on the Security Council, a candidature may well rest on the expectations to influence decision-making. The frequent elaboration on influence concerns possible contributions to maintaining and improving the multilateral order. Notably, none of the cases contains expectations of issue-specific and/or interest-based influence beyond the fact that a firmer multilateral order is advantageous to the security of small and medium-sized states. The degree to which a specific national interest is present in the ambition to exercise influence, there are different national profiles related to the multilateral order. For example, Austria and the Netherlands have the highest ambitions to contribute to international law.

⁷² Interview NL 15.

Overall, however, we identify mainly value-laden and normative goals among these states in their wishes to exercise influence as elected members. The idea that their commitment to a multilateral order also constitutes a responsibility to contribute by making themselves available for an elected term is another distinct feature. The results confirm status as particularly important for small states. The two smallest states in our study, Iceland, and Luxemburg, both viewed the candidature for an elected seat as an opportunity to display their capabilities and ambitions as (small) sovereign states (rather than a micro-state). Thus, an elected term in the Security Council would function as status recognition of the statehood of these smaller states. Among the other cases also, there was also a widespread agreement that prestige was at stake in the competition for an elected seat. The utility of a candidature and a term in the Council for building new and improving current relationship is another distinct feature among cases. In terms of additional reasons, we suggest that the ambitions regarding the multilateral order, and the sense of obligation to make regular contributions as complementary as to why and how states want to exercise influence through a term in the Security Council. The Swedish reference to the candidature and term in the Council as an opportunity to competence building of the foreign services is an additional and instrumental purpose. We suggest that this reflects the views of a small state with high international ambitions, as one out of several possible ways to compensate for size-related disadvantages in world politics.

Finally, there are some shared features among the Nordic states. They share the consideration of the Nordic turn-taking order, but in different ways. For Iceland, it is a push-factor for launching a candidature, as the time is considered right. For Finland, and for Sweden, it contributes to viewing the candidature as an established part of foreign policy. In the Finnish case, this seems to have led to an overconfidence of the chances of electoral success also. In the Swedish case, the shift of government generates additional arguments for the relevance of a candidature. All three states consider the candidature as relevant to network and to gain status. Finland and Sweden share a positive view on their respective candidatures as an opportunity to exercise influence. Notably, they share the greater confidence with the two states in the study who alter between the small state and middle power identity, Austria, and the Netherlands.

Bibliography

Árnason, Á. P. Speech 1 in Alþingi, 8 November, 2007a. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from

<https://www.althingi.is/altext/raeda/135/rad20071108T123433.html>

Árnason, Á. P. Speech in Alþingi, 8 November, 2007b. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from

<https://www.althingi.is/altext/raeda/135/rad20071108T154555.html>

Ásgrímsson, H. Speech in Alþingi, 5 November, 1998. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/123/11/r05103406.sgml>

Ásgrímsson, H. Speech in Alþingi, 29 March, 2001. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/126/03/r29105342.sgml>

Ásgrímsson, H. Speech in Alþingi, 13 November, 2003a. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <http://www.althingi.is/altext/130/11/r13103236.sgml>

Ásgrímsson, H. Speech in Alþingi, 27 February, 2003b. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/128/02/r27105147.sgml>

Bailes, A. and Thorhallsson, B. Iceland and the European Security and Defence Policy. In Bailes, A., Herolf G., and Sundelius B., eds. *The Nordic Countries and the European Security and Defence Policy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Benediktsson, B. Speech in Alþingi, 8 April, 2008. *Utanríkis- og alþjóðamál, skýrsla*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/135/04/r08144314.sgml>

Blöndal, H. Speech in Alþingi, 16 November, 2006. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/133/11/r16113756.sgml>

Brown, Chris. *International Society, Global Polity. An Introduction to International Political Theory*. (London: Sage, 2016).

Bundesministerium. Plassnik: "Kandidatur für UNO-Sicherheitsrat als Dienstleistung an der Weltorganisation". 2008a, 26 September 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/das-ministerium/presse/aussendungen/2008/plassnik-kandidatur-fuer-uno-sicherheitsrat-als-dienstleistung-an-der-weltorganisation/>

Bundesministerium. 2008b. *Austria and the United Nations, Official UNSC campaign brochure*.: Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs.

Bundesministerium. Erklärung von Ursula Plassnik vor der 61. Tagung der Generalversammlung der Vereinten Nationen. 21 September, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.bmeia.gv.at/das-ministerium/presse/reden-und-interviews/2006/erklaerung-von-ursula-plassnik-vor-der-61-tagung-der-generalversammlung-der-vereinten-nationen/>

Ferrero-Waldner, B. Statement at UN General Assembly's 57th session, 7th plenary meeting. A/57/PV.7, 2002. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/590/07/PDF/N0259007.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/590/07/PDF/N0259007.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/590/07/PDF/N0259007.pdf?OpenElement)

Ferrero-Waldner, B. Statement at UN General Assembly's 58th session, 12th plenary meeting. A/58/PV.12, 2003. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/531/39/PDF/N0353139.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/531/39/PDF/N0353139.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/531/39/PDF/N0353139.pdf?OpenElement)

Fischer, H. Statement at UN General Assembly's General Assembly 60th session. A/60/PV.6, 2005. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/511/78/PDF/N0551178.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/511/78/PDF/N0551178.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/511/78/PDF/N0551178.pdf?OpenElement).

Fréttablaðið. *Umsókn um aðild að Öryggisráði Sameinuðu þjóðanna ákveðin fyrir upphaf þings*. 6 September 2005a. Retrieved from <https://timarit.is/page/3860409#page/n0/mode/2up>.

Fréttablaðið. *Aðild að ráðinu ekki einkamál Íslendinga*. 15 September 2005b. Retrieved from <https://timarit.is/page/3861106#page/n0/mode/2up>.

Gestsson, S. Speech in Alþingi, 5 November, 1998. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um*

utanríkismál. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/123/11/r05115036.sgml>

Gísladóttir, I. S. Speech in Alþingi, 8 November, 2007. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/135/11/r08103150.sgml>

Haarde, G. H. *Staða Íslands í samfélagi þjóðanna*. 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.forsaetisraduneyti.is/radherra/raedurGHH/nr/2709>

Machreich, W. ("Ich tippe auf Österreich und Türkei!“. *Die Furche*, nr. 38/08, 18 September, 2008a. Retrieved from

https://www.genios.de/document?id=FURC__0700850820670720690952008+09181831150004&src=hitlist&offset=0

Machreich, W. Sympathie in Stimmen verwandeln. *Die Furche*, nr. 38/08, 18 September, 2008b. Retrieved from

https://www.genios.de/document?id=FURC__0700850820670720690952008+09181831150002&src=hitlist&offset=0

News. Zum bereits dritten Mal: Österreich bewirbt sich um UN-Sicherheitsrats-Sitz für 2009/10. 9 of August, 2005. Retrieved from <https://www.news.at>

Plassnik, U. Statement at UN General Assembly's 60th session, 2005b. Retrieved from

<http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/60/statements/aus050920eng.pdf>

Plassnik, U. Statement at the General Assembly's 61st session, 2006. A/61/PV.15. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/530/05/PDF/N0653005.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/530/05/PDF/N0653005.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/530/05/PDF/N0653005.pdf?OpenElement)

Plassnik, U. Statement at UN General Assembly's 62nd session, 2007. A/62/PV.11. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/521/21/PDF/N0752121.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/521/21/PDF/N0752121.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/521/21/PDF/N0752121.pdf?OpenElement)

Plassnik, U. Statement at UN General Assembly's 63rd session, 2008. A/63/PV.11. Retrieved from [https://documents-dds-](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/522/72/PDF/N0852272.pdf?OpenElement)

[ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/522/72/PDF/N0852272.pdf?OpenElement](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/522/72/PDF/N0852272.pdf?OpenElement)

Parliament. *Reform der Vereinten Nationen: Beantwortung der mündlichen Anfrage durch Bundesministerin Dr. Ursula Plassnik*. 25 May 2005. Retrieved from https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/BR/M-BR/M-BR_01427/index.shtml

Sverrisdóttir, V. Speech in Alþingi, 16 November, 2006. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/133/11/r16103457.shtml>

Pétursdóttir, S. Speech in Alþingi, 13 November, 2003. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/130/11/r13113922.shtml>

Sigfússon, S. J. Speech in Alþingi, 29 March, 2001. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/126/03/r29144426.shtml>

Sveinbjarnardóttir, Þ. Speech in Alþingi, 16 November, 2006. *Utanríkismál, munnleg skýrsla utanríkisráðherra*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/133/11/r16163947.shtml>

Thorhallsson, B. Can Small States Choose Their Own Size? The Case of a Nordic State — Iceland'. In *The Diplomacies of Small States: Between Vulnerability and Resilience*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper and Timothy M. Shaw. (New York: Palgrave MacMillian 2009).

Þórðardóttir, S. A. Speech in Alþingi, 27 February, 2003. *Skýrsla utanríkisráðherra um utanríkismál*. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/altext/128/02/r27120644.shtml>

Interviews

Interviews with Finnish diplomats or diplomats from Luxembourg.

Interview 1 2018, 9 March, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 2 2018, 15 March, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 3 2018, 6 April, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 4 2018, 4 April, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 5 2018, 5 April, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 6 2018, 6 April, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 7 2018, 26 March, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 8 2018, 19 April, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 9 2018, 3 May, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 10 2018, 21 May, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 11 2018, 27 June, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interview 12 2018, 29 June, Interviewer Anni Tervo.

Interviews 1-13 with Swedish diplomats.

SWE Interview 1 2017, 28 November, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 2 2017, 5 December, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 3 2017, 5 December, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 4 2017, 15 December, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

SWE Interview 5 2018, 22 January, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 6 2018, 5 February, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 7 2018, 6 February, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 8 2018, 6 February, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 9 2018, 26 February, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 10 2018, 27 March, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 11 2018, 27 March, Interviewer Ann-Marie Ekengren

SWE Interview 12 2018, 6 April, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

SWE Interview 13 2019, 3 June, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

Interviews 14-18 with Dutch diplomats.

NL Interview 14 2018, 2 May, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

NL Interview 15 2018, 19 December, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

NL Interview 16 2019, 19 March, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

NL Interview 17 2019, 2 April, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

NL Interview 18 2019, 3 June, Interviewer Ulrika Möller

Interviews A-F with Icelandic and Austrian diplomats.

Interview public official A 2018, 14 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir.

Interview public official B 2018, 15 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir.

Interview public official C 2018, 19 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir.

Interview public official D 2018, 19 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir.

Interview public official E 2018, 19 June, Interviewer A. M. Eggertsdóttir.

Interview public official F 2018, 22 June, Interviewer A. M. Eggertsdóttir.

Interview G Gísladóttir, I. S. 2018, 21 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir.

Interview H Haarde, G. H. 2018, 20 February, Interviewer J. S. Elínardóttir

Interview Plassnik, U. 2018, 17 of September, Interviewer A. M. Eggertsdóttir.