

Chapter 30 : “Foreign Office waters”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs divides the worlds countries into three groups: First circle (neighbours), second circle (great powers) and others. CG makes state visits, official visits, unofficial visits, public relations and goodwill trips, incognito visits, private visits and holidays. What is what is often difficult to discern. However, this chapter is about pure state visits in the spirit of the Vienna Convention. The idea is that every time a state changes head of state, other heads of state should confirm their friendly relations. Politics is no longer that personality-centred but state visits remain as courtesy visits and political legitimization. State visits also have a long term economic and cultural significance.

As a young man king Gustaf VI travelled extensively. However, later years he stayed within Europe. The program for his state visits was a mixture of nineteenth-century traditions and personal interests. His last state visit to West Germany in 1972, he was 89 years old, consisted of the usual mix of receptions, sightseeing and banquets. He met the President and Chancellor of West Germany, visited the grave of the unknown soldier, was shown two archaeological sites and an art exhibition, attended the Embassy's reception for the Swedish colony and concluded the visit with a minor dinner. In the meantime, there were many meetings. Foreign Minister Wickman was asked about the effect. Wickman saw the visit as a political signal. It created goodwill and allowed political deliberation. However, the significance for trade was doubtful. The trade delegations were managed separately by Prince Bertil.

*

The first circle are the Nordic countries (Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland) and the countries with a royal house that CG is related to (the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium) - these were the countries that were first in line for a state visit at CG's accession. He visited them in turn 1974-1977. Silvia participated in the last two state visits to the Netherlands and Belgium.

At CG's accession to the throne, there was strong pressure from the mass media to make the state visits more public-friendly than during Gustaf VI. Steps in that direction were that CG arrived in Finland and the Netherlands on the destroyer Halland escorted by two torpedo boats and a minelayer and, of course, Silvia's entry onto the stage. CG and Silvia also gave interviews which Gustaf VI never did. That said, the court bureaucracies of the various countries seem to have been difficult to manage. The program consisted of welcoming ceremonies, parades, exchanging gifts and Orders, visits to key venues, audiences, banquets, military honours, and concluded with a royal dinner. My own wishes were badly seen. In Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom, after the state visit he was allowed to visit the Swedish colony, research institutes and industries. In the UK, CG wanted to include points in the program of agricultural and forestry character, but these environments were considered unsuitable for a royal. Both parties were interested in an audience for the ceremonial element. CG's visit to the UK therefore began in Edinburgh where they were not as blasé as in London. CG also wanted an audience for the other program items, much like at a Swedish national tour, but he didn't get that.

After the UK, there was discussions on how to push through a modernized, public-friendly state visit with an emphasis on support for the export industry. The cultural component of the incoming state visits was curtailed under opposition from most. Likewise the military honours. The argument of the opposition was that Sweden could not unilaterally change an

established practice. “The [visiting heads of state] may perceive the new Swedish style as somewhat frugal in relation to what other countries do.” Swedish culture (exhibitions, performances and memorials) was also struck off in the outgoing state visits on the grounds that it was better to devote yourself to the culture of the host country than the diaspora. The same discussion took place about the Swedish business abroad. Would CG visit Swedish-owned factories or devote himself to the host country even here? The disadvantage would be that by unilaterally concentrating on the host country, the visit would neither interest the home audience nor the country's Swedish colony.

The discussions were summarized prior to the state visit to the Netherlands. What everyone felt lacking was a broader approach, with an increased exchange of people at all levels between the countries concerned.

At a dinner with Queen Juliana in mid-March [1976], both she herself and Foreign Minister van der Stoep raised the issue with me and they both emphasized the importance they attached to the forthcoming Swedish state visit, not least in the light of the above. While the socialist countries and the third world were sticklers for the old-style formal protocol – it was interpreted as a sign of respect – the protocol could be relaxed – become more media-friendly – when the Swedish king was visiting.

Later, Crown Princess Beatrix (via Princess Christina) also expressed hope that the Swedish royal visit would be significantly different [from the Danish state visit recently during Queen Margarethe II], and the same tones were heard not least from the government. Both Prime Minister Uyl and, as I said, the Foreign Minister have expressed their constitutional and political concerns about the lack of timeliness of state visits. Similar views have been expressed on the Swedish side, both by the royal family and within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from many other quarters. The wish was that there should now be a broader, more outward-looking state visit that would become a manifestation of Swedish-Dutch friendship and contribute to the peoples' increased knowledge of each other.

It was therefore decided to abandon the traditional approach whereby the host country unilaterally makes its mark on the program, while the visiting Head of State at most in secret has the opportunity to make contact with the activities of his own countrymen under some unofficial bracket.

...

In the final stage of preparation, some friction arose between the embassy and the Trade Secretary's Office due to differences in the assessment ... of the way in which the state visit was to be used from a commercial point of view.¹

The embassy was concerned that the state visits should not be overly commercial in character. CG was king and not a younger version of Prince Bertil. Hopefully the media could be so directed. The newly formed Export Council (prop 1972:31) with its Chambers of Commerce and Trade Secretary offices was also a direct competitor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with its embassies and consulates. Recognizing the importance of the Export Council during state visits would weaken the Foreign Office. Moreover, the Swedish model of state and business in cooperation was not uncontroversial abroad. Better to hide it.

¹ T Hagen. Några reflektioner kring statsbesöket [i Nederländerna]. Utrikesdepartementet, protokollet, 1976- 11-02.

In Belgium, CG opened a symposium on energy-saving measures in various types of industries that the Swedish and Belgian Confederation of Industry had organized jointly. This seems to have been the first of CG's many contact-building industry initiatives. Otherwise, it was sightseeing and cultural activities as usual. "From the outset, it was clear from the Brussels Embassy that the commercial elements must of necessity be balanced with clearly non-commercial manifestations, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The effect we wanted to achieve ... was to allow for a certain amount of smile and relaxation."²

*

The second circle are the G5 countries, the countries that in the mid-1970s were the world's leading economies (Great Britain, the United States, France, West Germany and Japan), and the two major powers, the Soviet Union and China. CG first visited them was in 1975-1981. The initial visits were followed by several. On these CG generally followed a political and cultural program. His entourage of politicians, scientists and business leaders had their own programs. The purely commercial elements were outside the program but benefited from the attention. An example from China in 1981:

Swedish manifestations in Beijing in connection with the state visit

During the Swedish State Visit to China, three commercial and technical-scientific activities were carried out.

Some 20 Swedish companies participated in an energy exhibition, organized by the Sweden-China Trade Council (SCTC). The exhibition lasted 10 days and was opened in the presence of The King and Queen on September 16, 1981. In addition, a Swedish-Chinese energy symposium was held with about 15 Swedish participants from the Ministry of Industry and state authorities such as Vattenfall, the Board for Energy Production Research, the Board of Supervisors for Technical Development etc. From the Chinese side, the State Economic Commission and the State Energy Commission attended.

The Sweden-China Trade Council visited China during the state visit with a 25-member delegation led by SCTC chairman Tom Wachtmeister. The delegation hosted the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT).

The idea of these activities taking place at the time of the state visit has of course been that this could increase the public interest. This applies in particular to the energy exhibition and the symposium.

As far as the energy exhibition is concerned, it must be noted that this could hardly have happened unless the State visit had had taken place. The waiting period for exhibitions in Beijing amounts to about 2 years and the Swedish energy exhibition was only planned a year ahead. The King and Queen's presence at the opening of the exhibition helped to ensure that the Chinese side felt compelled to make more of an effort than usual to ensure that the arrangements were implemented satisfactorily. This was noted during the preparations, for example, to determine the appropriate premises. Even during the exhibition, our impression is that the Chinese appeared somewhat more obliging than usual.

² Finn Börjesson. Svenska statsbesöket i Belgien. Utrikesdepartementet, protokollet, 1977-06-01.

A valuable feature of the Swedish energy exhibition was presented by the Swedish Institute through its pictorial display on energy in Sweden. This general introduction raised interest in the exhibition in its entirety. A notable feature is that exhibiting companies hold technical talks for smaller groups (20-25 people). Chinese audiences attended 19 such lectures. In general these contacts provide very good opportunities to carry out technical sales to a relevant target group. In total, nearly 400 Chinese technicians have gained familiarity with Swedish energy know-how during the exhibition. A common objection against this activity, which has also been heard this time, is that the audience consists of designers rather than end users of the respective product or service.

In addition to technical talks, the exhibiting companies' representatives were able to conduct business talks with various Chinese organizations. A large number of these were carried out. These opportunities to give technical talks and to meet Chinese representatives in business talks are often rightly regarded as the real value of the exhibition.

...

The energy symposium may be seen as a long-term technological-scientific cooperation activity. In this there are both Chinese and Swedish interests.³

All parties felt that the media-reporting on the State visits was unsatisfactory. The journalists trailed CG & Silvia, without them seeming to accomplish anything significant. Everything important took place somewhere else and was (semi)secret. In the end everyone was frustrated. The journalists because they were only allowed to write about parades, the distribution of Orders, gala dresses and banquets. CG because he felt unappreciated. Tempers ran short in both camps. On March 16, 1994, the foreign correspondent of Expressen, Ulf Nilson, published a critical article on CG's efforts during an official visit to France.⁴ Nilson was seconded by former Maoist Peppe Engberg at Resumé. Then followed replies by former editor-in-chief of Svenska Dagbladet, then chamberlain at the court, Gustaf von Platen;⁵ by chairman of the Swedish Industrial Association Peter Wallenberg;⁶ by head of the courts press service Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg;⁷ a radio debate between Nilson & Tarras-Wahlberg⁸ & a concluding Republican - or at least anti-old-elites - call for action by Nilson.⁹

The debate is difficult to summarize. Nilson had some years earlier described CG as “a reluctant exhibition piece”: Uninvolved, poorly read, blunt, snotty, bursting with self-importance & unhappy. He felt sorry for the guy. Here and now, there was more of the same. Nilson: “The speech writers bring the king down to kindergarten level. The court's response to criticism is to sound like squealing pigs.” Maoist Peppe Engberg: “The man is a disaster. If he had applied for the job as king, he would have been rejected out of hand.”

This was the third time that Nilson had accompanied CG on his travels. Once in America. Twice in France. This time he attended the opening of the exhibition “The Sun and the North

³ Sten Bundfeldt. Svenska manifestationer i Beijing i samband med statsbesöket. Utrikesdepartementet, protokollet, 1981-10-05.

⁴ Ulf Nilson. Stackars kungen! Expressen, 1994-03-23.

⁵ Gustaf von Platen. Stackars vår världsreporter! Svenska Dagbladet, 1994-03-26.

⁶ Peter Wallenberg. Kungaparets medverkan outhärlig. Svenska Dagbladet, 1994-03-31.

⁷ Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg & Ulf Nilson. Två öppna brev om kungahuset. Expressen, 1994-03-23.

⁸ Debatt mellan Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg & Ulf Nilsson. Studio ett. P1, 1994-03-31.

⁹ Ulf Nilson. Gör slut på monarkin! Expressen, 1994-04-01.

Star” by CG and President Mitterrand and still wondered what such diplomatic rituals were good for. von Platen knew that the rituals were “writeable” and that the publicity about the exhibition was extensive. Wallenberg knew that the exhibition helped improve the countries' relations - a little strained after the cancellation of the Renault affair - by demonstrating the importance Sweden has always placed on good relations with France. Tarras-Wahlberg also spoke about diplomacy: “It was photographed for 5 minutes, after which The King and the Prime Minister talked for 10 minutes and then followed each other to the Swedish Trade Council, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Association lunch, where they sat next to each other and could talk for another 1.5 hours. ... That's what you refer to as “fraternization of big shots”, but it in turn leads to meetings between business leaders, cultural people and ordinary French and Swedish people. Meetings that take place during these two days, but which also continue within a number of projects.”¹⁰

Nilson countered that CG was too ridiculous as a person and too stripped his majesty to act diplomatically. When France and Sweden had the same interests, they would agree. When they had different interests, they would think differently. Neither God, CG nor he down there could do anything about that. The debate was also broadcast. Nilson continued in the same vein: We have a democratic king. A civil servant. CG could and should be criticized like any other bureaucrat. He was a lousy product and never said anything worth listening to. Remove the royal house! Clean up the Augeas Stables! – “The interesting thing about Buster [von Platens] article is not what it attacked, but what it d e f e n d s. Namely, the Swedish establishment, the nobility, the stock market aristocracy, in short, big shot power and the self-appointed elite: the gang who gathers at royal dinners and Nobel festivities, at each other's 60th birthday, cocktail parties and the baroness af Ugglas diplomatic receptions. Buster von Platen - and a number of others - cling to the royal house to protect the establishment, the old estates - who claims that they no longer exist? - and, finally, their own vanity. This ridiculous Swedish holier than though mentality supports itself in the last analysis mainly by holding on to the monarchy, the very cornerstone of the system.”¹¹

In fact, cleansed of the invectives, the positions of Nilson and Tarras-Wahlberg coincided: (1) CG belongs to a Swedish political elite. If you describe him out of the context of the other politicians, diplomats, industrialists and cultural figures within which he operates, he becomes incomprehensible. (2) Politics, including foreign policy, is not just power games but personal relationships at all levels. Economics is not just money but a way of life and work. You have to know (if not to like) each other and CG is in the relationship business. (3) If one imagines that CG can create business out of nothing, one will of course be disappointed. Such things take time.

*

The other countries are a mixed group where CG has great influence over which countries he visits and when. There is a lot of anecdotal information about these visits that is interesting but does not add anything to CG as a person. The exceptions are the notorious visits to America in 1976 and Brunei in 2004, which have each received a chapter of their own.

In 1987, the Swedish Trade Association was satisfied enough with CG's efforts to award him their gold medal. It was something of a family affaire. The chairman of the Swedish Trade

¹⁰ Elisabeth Tarras-Wahlberg & Ulf Nilson. Två öppna brev om kungahuset. Expressen, 1994-03-23.

¹¹ Ulf Nilson. Gör slut på monarkin! Expressen, 1994-04-01.

Association, CG's former 1st Marshal of the Court Tom Wachtmeister, read the explanatory statement and honorary chairman Prince Bertil hung the medal around his neck. Silvia and daughter Victoria sat on the first bench and applauded.