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Nordic Battlegroup questioned

By Susanne Palme

This week officers from the new reaction force Nordic Battlegroup participate in a military exercise in Enköping (VIKING '08, ed.) near Stockholm in Sweden. This unit is at EU disposal in 2011. But the Social Democrats and the Environmental Party have changed their position and do not want Sweden to send military units to EU.

- We should participate with smaller number, maybe a hundred soldiers, but not be in any leading role which will cost exceptionally sums of money. We have demands for savings and here we are talking about huge expenses. Maybe we should not always take the lead, according to Anders Karlsson, Speaker for the Social Democrats in the Parliaments committee for Defence.

From January to June this year the old Nordic Battlegroup was ready to deploy on behalf of EU. Sweden contributed with more than 2,000 soldiers and the bill for Sweden ended at 1,2 billion Swedish Kronar. This is too expensive according to the Social Democrats.

But then again, it was the former Social Democratic government that decided that Sweden should contribute.

Every 6 months EU has two battlegroups standing by, but the force has never been used, and Peter Rådberg, the Environmental Party representative in the Defence Committee, state that this is a waste of money.

- It is not justifiable to throw out 1,2 billion Kronar to build up this force and then not use it.

Does it affect other areas of the Defence?

- Yes, of course. There were not enough uniforms, no firing practice and so on since all resources went to the Nordic Battlegroup, says Peter Rådberg.

Brigadier General Stafan Andersson is the new commander for the Nordic Battlegroup that will be ready in 2011. He thinks that Sweden can afford the cost and that it's all about political will.

- Either you choose to sit on the sideline and look at a crisis area like Eastern Congo and claim that it is terrible what happens and hope that somebody else takes care of it. Or we take responsibility because we can afford it. I think this is the price we have to pay to be a serious and credible member of the EU-family, says Stefan Andersson.