ABSTRACT

WOMEN, MEN, CITIZENSHIP AND THE NEW SECURITY THINKING IN SWEDEN

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The paper discusses the recent changes in Sweden’s defense and security policy and its ramifications for women, men and the notion of citizenship. We describe the measures taken by the Swedish government since 1996 to seriously cut military spending. The paper argues that giving up neutrality has meant that Sweden is in the midst of carving out a new national identity. This includes that previous notions of citizenship for women and men will also be re-thought and reformulated, as a consequence of changes in security thinking.

The paper also discusses the debate on conscription in Sweden. With only one third of the men going through military training one can hardly speak of male conscription in practice anymore. When conscription is no longer felt to be obligatory, the interest among young men in doing military service is dwindling. The military response to its recruitment problems has been to look elsewhere, i.e. among young women. However, military service is so far voluntary for women in Sweden. Since 1980, the proportion of women in the military has constantly been very small, around 1-3 percent.

Feminists today are torn on the issue of conscription for women. There is an older generation feminists with close ties to the peace movement who are against female conscription. Feminist and Social Democratic politician Inger Segelström argues that women should be exempt from the military duty since women are already doing their duty when giving birth and caring for small children. Younger politicians from the whole political spectrum, left to right, oppose this thinking as archaic: It is time to stop the differentiated citizenship and let men and women have equal rights and responsibilities, they argue.