

FLATTERING ALLIANCES

Flattering Alliances

Scandinavia, diplomacy, and the Austrian–French
balance of power, 1648–1740

Peter Lindström & Svante Norrhem

Translated by Charlotte Merton

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Introduction

This study concerns an era of state formation. This formative phase was characterized by competition and conflict, and of recurrent, protracted war. As a result, the geographical extent of the Scandinavian countries shifted, sometimes growing, sometimes shrinking. The neighbouring countries of Denmark, which also controlled Norway, and Sweden, which also comprised present-day Finland, had been enemies ever since the late Middle Ages. The largest bone of contention was the Baltic Sea and its lucrative trade. Their enmity, and the endless wars it spawned, lasted right up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Today when we speak of the Scandinavian countries, we are referring to five independent, nation-states—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—and it is almost exactly two centuries since one Scandinavian country was last at war with another. The status quo, which was once competition and conflict, has been transformed into cooperation and peace. For most people living in the Scandinavian countries today, the idea of a war between them is almost absurd.

At the same time as Denmark and Sweden competed for power in northern Europe, countries across the Continent fought one another in similar power struggles with their neighbours. Many of these conflicts were too far away to affect the Scandinavian countries, or were of too little interest in engaging Scandinavian policymakers. A conflict, however, which did affect large parts of the Continent—including the Scandinavian countries—was the struggle for European hegemony between France on the one hand and Austria and its allies on the other, which ran from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 until the 1740s. The great powers' struggle drew the Scandinavian kingdoms into European high politics and forced them to take a position. What we have been interested in studying is how this happened, and how it affected Denmark and Sweden.

The book is aimed at anyone interested in international relations during the early modern period, with a particular focus on Europe. We address the role of diplomacy, the great powers' attempts to find and keep allies, and how the Scandinavian countries and their political elites responded. The study is thus very much part of modern diplomatic history and the discussions about state formation in early modern Europe.

We have chosen to address an international audience in the hope that comparisons can be drawn with other countries or regions. In order not to overload the text, we have relegated many of the particulars to the notes. Those interested in the fine detail should study them carefully.

In the course of writing this book, we have been greatly assisted by our colleagues. Åsa Karlsson Sjögren at Umeå University read parts of the manuscript; Leon Jespersen, of the Danish National Archives in Copenhagen, the same, and he has also been an invaluable help in recommending Danish source material and relevant Danish research; and in the final stages, Marie Lennersand at the National Archives in Stockholm took on the task of reading the entire manuscript. We owe a debt of thanks to all three for their very useful comments. Elise Dermineur (Umeå) and Evelyn Leuf (Vienna) have helped us with some tricky moments in French and German documents. For this we are very grateful. We would also like to thank our colleagues at seminars and conferences, who contributed interesting and important remarks on our work, and all the knowledgeable staff at the libraries and archives we had the privilege of visiting. Our special thanks go to the members of the Umeå Group for Premodern Studies for inspiring meetings and conversations.

Last, but not least, we would like to thank Charlotte Merton, who did the translation, and Annika Olsson at Nordic Academic Press, who has patiently helped us through the publishing process.

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Based on an initial example of the great powers' attempts to exert influence over the Scandinavian countries in the late 1600s, the purpose of the study and the issues in question will be specified in greater detail.

Danish–Swedish diplomacy in action— royal marriage negotiations in the 1690s

Copenhagen was abuzz with rumours of a royal marriage in the spring of 1696. As early as February the secretary of the French embassy, Bort, reported that the king's personal physician had confided to him that women close to the king's official mistress, the Countess of Samsø, had as good as said that the king's daughter would be engaged to the King of the Romans.¹ The news, or rather the rumour, was a setback for French diplomacy, not only in Denmark, but also for its wider ambition of reconciling Denmark and Sweden and creating a triple alliance with France. In a report later that year, Bort could send word that he had managed to identify the person on the Austrian side who had first raised the matter as a certain Countess von Königsegg, the Imperial ambassador's wife.² It seemed for a time that the Emperor's diplomacy had beaten the French king's.

The Countess of Samsø's confidante had clearly come to the wrong conclusion. There was no engagement, much less a marriage, between the king's daughter Sophie Hedvig (1677–1735) and the Holy Roman Emperor's son Joseph (1678–1711). It was certain, however, that throughout 1696 and the following year there were what appear to be serious negotiations about a marriage.³ Those who watched over French interests in the Scandinavian countries had every reason, like Secretary Bort, to follow the discussions with great interest.

In Stockholm too, Swedish politicians and the French king's ambassador kept a keen eye on developments in Copenhagen, and when it became increasingly clear in 1697 that there would be no marriage alliance, primarily because of religious objections, they drew a collective sigh of relief. A Denmark in close alliance with the

House of Habsburg would not have been in Sweden's interests—nor in France's either.

In Denmark, eyes were now turned towards Stockholm.⁴ Denmark's *gehejmekonseil* (Cabinet) went over the case made by the French king through his ambassador Bonrepaus for a Swedish match.⁵ With strong support from France, they sounded out the possibility of a Danish–Swedish marriage. When the Swedish king, Charles XI, died in 1697 he was succeeded by his only son Charles XII (1682–1718) who was only fifteen years old. His older sister was sixteen. The idea was that Charles would marry his Danish cousin Sophie Hedvig, best of all if his sister were to marry Sophie Hedvig's brother. With the support of pro-French circles in Stockholm, the French and Danish ambassadors made common cause. Siding with France was a majority of the royal councillors, and a majority of the five-strong regency council that ruled until Charles XII came of age later in the year. Some of the country's leading politicians in key positions had also previously been recipients of French pensions. Also, there were people at court who had an interest in supporting a Danish–Swedish marriage. Countess von Königsmarck, widow of Pontus Fredrik De la Gardie, and her daughter were not only pro-French; the countess also had financial interests in the Danish part of Holstein, and was therefore eager for good relations with Denmark.⁶ The countess, together with other leading figures, was to act as a mediator of contacts and information for both the French and the Danish ambassadors.⁷ The years 1697–9 saw an intense correspondence between Stockholm and Versailles, Versailles and Copenhagen, and Copenhagen and Stockholm, with news of the different strategies, and successes and setbacks.

Both in Copenhagen and Stockholm there were also strong anti-French interests. The Danish Cabinet—the absolutist answer to the old Privy Council—was itself split between pro- and anti-French voices. In the Swedish Royal Council too there was a powerful anti-French element. In terms of votes they were in the minority, but because the people in question were Queen Dowager Hedvig Eleonora, the new king's grandmother, and Count Bengt Oxenstierna, president of the chancery and thus responsible for foreign affairs, they formed a formidable counterforce. Together they operated

closely with the Imperial ambassador to Stockholm, Franz Otthar von Starhemberg. The queen dowager had very much her own agenda, and was very active in negotiations aimed at binding her grandchildren, and thus Sweden, closer to the House of Holstein-Gottorp, her own family.⁸ Just as there were pro-French sympathies at court, the Danish ambassador was also to find that there were those who were just as strongly opposed. One of the chamber maids at court, Juliana Schierberg—that cursed Julianisen, as an enraged ambassador called her—was just such a force to be reckoned with, one who used her personal influence to prevent a Danish–Swedish marriage.

In Copenhagen and Stockholm alike, those who supported France and those who supported France's opponents rallied to their causes. The ins and outs were far more lengthy and complex than has been described here, but to go into every detail would take too long. Suffice to say that in the diplomatic reports we encounter royalty, councillors and their wives, officials at various levels, courtiers and ladies-in-waiting, personal physicians, attendants, artists, clergymen, and diplomats and their wives. Using flattery, offers of one-off backhanders or long-term pensions, gifts both large and small, and promises of favours, they all pursued a diplomatic game that in this particular case was about a possible marriage alliance, but was also part of something much bigger.

The Europe of alliances

With the signing of the Peace of Westphalia, the balance of power in Europe changed irrevocably. The Holy Roman Empire, which was connected to the Spanish Empire by dynastic ties, was forced to accept the Protestant principalities within its borders, and thus had to abandon the idea of creating a world-encompassing Catholic empire. Spain's power began to recede, and in its stead emerged a stronger France. Instead of having to deal with the two Habsburg empires' claims to power, Europe's attention was now held by France's growing strength, which its enemies believed must be balanced as best they might. Thus 1648 saw the advent of a system of sovereign, secular, territorially demarcated principalities that all wanted to

ensure that no one state dominated the rest.⁹ Sweden and France were meant to guarantee the peace, but real permanence could not, after all, be achieved. Boundaries between European kingdoms often remained unclear and shifting. The subjects of dispute were many, and the need to find solutions seemingly endless.

The balance of power was a concept that recurred in diplomatic reports from this time onwards. Franz Paul de Lisola, for a time the Emperor's envoy to the king of Sweden in the 1650s, later wrote in 1667 in an influential work that unless a counter-force could be mobilized in Europe that was able to balance French power, the aggression and contempt for international agreements would 'destroy the whole Commerce of mankind, and render humane Societies as dangerous as the company of Lions and Tigers'.¹⁰

Knud Jespersen, in his history of Danish foreign policy, points to three of the important implications of the Treaty of Westphalia for Scandinavia: the development of a more complex diplomatic system by which the balance of power could be guaranteed; the greater internationalization of what had previously been seen as Scandinavian regional policy; and, finally, the emergence of a system of great powers.¹¹ The sum of all this was that Denmark and Sweden to an even greater degree than before were drawn into a European system of states, which meant that relations between the Scandinavian kingdoms became increasingly interesting for countries outside the region, while the Scandinavian countries found that relations with states outside their own region became increasingly important for them. The balance of power between France and Austria was one almost all countries in Europe had to relate to throughout the period beginning in 1648 and ending well into the 1730s—and that included Sweden and Denmark.¹² It was in everyone's interest, except the two principals, to ensure no state achieved hegemony. Meanwhile, there was still the need for a balance of power between the two Scandinavian kingdoms of Sweden and Denmark. Even here there were outside interests who wanted to prevent one party gaining sole control of the important waterways into the Baltic Sea.

The peace of 1648 meant that Imperial aspirations to hegemony were replaced by French aspirations. It is in the light of the continuing rivalry between Bourbon France and Habsburg Austria that

their interest, and other kingdoms' interest, in Denmark and Sweden should be seen. Britain and the Netherlands, the so-called sea powers, had good commercial reasons to be reluctant to see either of the Scandinavian kingdoms grow so strong as to control the Sound and the Baltic trade. France, for its part, sought to bring Denmark and Sweden together, with the hope of establishing a strong Scandinavian ally to the north of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus it was that Austria found itself to have the same interests as the sea powers, or at least with one of them, since it was in Austria's interest to oppose French policy. The Austrian historian Michael Hochedlinger writes that Austria's emergence as a great power at this time had to do with the sea powers' common cause against France, where Austria became a key ally on the Continent, compounded by Austria's success in repelling the Ottoman Empire when it attempted to take Vienna in 1683. From that point until the 1720s, the Habsburg Empire was a force to reckon with in the struggle for power in Europe.¹³

For France, Austria's newfound strength from the early 1680s onwards was an problem. The French policy was expansive and aggressive, and was aimed at achieving hegemony on the Continent, and all that was thrown into doubt when the opposition were suddenly found to be stronger. France's enemies were in even greater accord in 1689, when the Grand Alliance was formed by Austria, the Netherlands, and Britain. The following year Spain joined, and in 1691 Savoy, Brandenburg, Bavaria, and some other German areas.¹⁴ French ambitions met with some very real opposition.

The system of alliances in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century must be seen against the background of the situation in Spain. King Charles II was childless and sickly, and it was widely expected that he would die at any moment. His legacy was a rich one—the whole of the Spanish Empire with its vast colonies—and the marriage strategists of the day had engineered it so that the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I and the French King Louis XIV had each married one of the heiresses. Both monarchs thus considered themselves to be Charles II's rightful heir, and both were preparing to claim part of the legacy.

Through the growing importance of alliances, the Scandinavian countries found themselves being dragged more and more into the

Continental power game. It is also important to note that for long periods both the Danish and the Swedish monarchs were vassals of the Holy Roman Emperor, and thus, at least in a formal sense, directly involved in the Empire's political goings-on. For Denmark, this was mainly a question of the Danish kings' sovereignty over parts of Holstein; for Sweden, several German lands, including, variously, Swedish Pomerania, Bremen, Palatinate-Zweibrücken, and Hesse-Kassel. This meant that the Danish and Swedish kings at times could find themselves in a foreign policy conflict as princes of somewhere other than Denmark and Sweden proper—conflicts that did not strictly have anything to do with Denmark or Sweden. Things were further complicated by the fact that the Swedes, in conjunction with the coronation of Queen Christina in 1650, demanded an oath of allegiance from the Danish king as Count of Delmenhorst and heir to the Count of Oldenburg—areas the Swedes said fell under the newly conquered Archbishopric of Bremen, and therefore under Queen Christina. The Danes protested, unsurprisingly, and asserted that the Emperor alone was liege lord over those lands.

France, which was in need of allies, began to cast about in northern Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. Its goal was to try to achieve a triple alliance with the two Scandinavian kingdoms of Denmark and Sweden. In this way, any further expansion into the Baltic by the sea powers would be prevented, and lead to a weakening of the Grand Alliance. In Vienna too there was greater attention paid to Copenhagen and Stockholm. Wherever the French wanted to extend their reach, the Austrians had to try to block them. At the Habsburg court, it was believed that Swedish politicians were in such financial straits after the Great Reduction¹⁵ (the re-entfeoffment of the nobility's land by the Crown) that there was a good opportunity to control them by buying them off, but at the same time it was realized that others could do the same.¹⁶ They had to seize the moment.

When it came to marriage alliances between Denmark and Sweden, neither France nor Austria was particularly successful.¹⁷ There were also negotiations about other pressing concerns: military alliances, subsidies, and trade. Instead of the triple alliance the French had hoped for, in 1700 the Great Northern War broke

out. The following year saw the outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession, which brought more than a decade of armed conflict between the two contestants, France and Austria. Denmark was to join Austria and the sea powers in open war against France. Sweden was also allied to the sea powers, but chose not to join in the war against France, but instead fought Russia and Saxony. In the initial stages of the Great Northern War, the Swedish occupation of Saxony and the presence of a large number of Swedish troops there was a serious worry for Austria, which thus had to keep its own troops on its border for fear of a Swedish attack. The diplomatic offensive in the Scandinavian countries in the 1690s is therefore difficult to evaluate in terms of success or failure, at least from a French or Austrian horizon.

After the War of the Spanish Succession ended in 1713 and the Great Northern War in 1721, other actors pushed forward and changed the political situation in Europe. Britain in the west and Russia in the east, and in-between Prussia, emerged as great powers in their own right, worthy opponents of the polar opposites, France and Austria.¹⁸ Denmark's and Sweden's roles changed accordingly.

Neither Charles XII nor his Danish cousin Princess Sophie Hedvig married. Even so, the endless chops and changes in the attempts to arrange a marriage between them, or indeed with any other suitable candidate, are a revealing example of the diplomacy and international relations of the time. Men and women of different social classes and with different positions in life were involved in different ways. The negotiations thus also provide an insight into how the European power struggle between France and Austria affected the individual Scandinavian countries and the relationship between them. It is this that is the main theme of our study.

The aim of the study

The initial example of the marriage negotiations between Denmark and Austria and between Denmark and Sweden shows how the question of alliances involved states, families, and individuals at multiple levels. The Danish and Swedish royal families interested other royal houses and states, which used their diplomatic envoys to connect with

Scandinavia's politicians at the highest level (categorized as friends or foes according to the states they were thought to support); the Scandinavian states found that their main political bodies were the forums where other states pursued their own particular interests, and in a way in which relations to other states were the sole issue, and actors from highest to lowest levels at both royal courts were involved, along with other individuals.

The negotiations involved men and women; people of different nationalities; the highest social elite to the lowest servants. The negotiations thus concerned states, royal and noble houses, and political households, and depending on which one of these an actor belonged to, or represented, there were different motives and driving forces behind the positions each took. In the course of the negotiations, different kinds of information gathering were required, sometimes with the help of money, or the promise of money, changing hands. What is also clear from our initial example is that both Denmark and Sweden had various factions that advocated open alliances with one or the other of the European powers. The marriage negotiations of the late 1690s are thus an example of how foreign powers tried to influence Danish and Swedish conditions, and intervened in their domestic politics in numerous ways.

Our purpose is to use a comparative perspective to study how Denmark and Sweden were affected by the struggle for hegemony in Europe between Austria and France from the Peace of Westphalia from 1648 to 1740.

The questions we ask are:

- What strategies did the great powers use to gain control of the Scandinavian countries and their political elites? Here we consider the different means used to exert pressure on them, and the possible effects. Differences and similarities between the great powers' actions towards Denmark and Sweden are analysed.
- To what extent did the great powers succeed in influencing Scandinavian politics? We look at the various councils' reactions to the superpowers' behaviour, and how Denmark's and Sweden's attitudes to the great powers were affected. We also study the great powers' role, if any, in the emergence of factions within

the political elites. Differences and similarities between the great powers' actions towards Denmark and Sweden are analysed.

- What relationship did the Danish and Swedish political elites—here, again, focusing on the councils—have to the great powers? Which were the points of contact between the political elites and the great powers, and what part did they play in the great powers' opportunities to gain influence? What impact did these points of contact have for the Scandinavian political elites' opportunities to create resources for the exercise of power in their home countries? The study deals with both formal and informal arenas in which individual actors, such as individual councillors or states—different prime movers—could compete with other actors driven by other motivations. In this, questions about gender, familial relationships, and economic conditions will be important.

Ultimately, all these issues turn on the ongoing process of state formation. How do the study's findings relate to the formation of the early modern states?

Periods, sources, and methods

The period studied has been selected on the basis of developments after the Peace of Westphalia until the 1730s, when, as a result of a series of political shifts, Austria's importance in Europe began to wane. A detailed study of all the council minutes and diplomatic correspondence of the period is an impossibility, and therefore three periods have been selected for further study: the 1650s, 1690s, and 1730s. The study thus concerns a period beginning in the 1650s with a stronger Sweden and weaker Denmark, and ending after the Treaty of Nystad in 1721 when a balance of power had been struck between the Scandinavian countries.

The primary sources comprise the correspondence and reports home of the Holy Roman Emperor's and the French king's envoys, and the minutes of the proceedings of the Privy Council in Sweden and the Cabinet in Denmark. Reflecting differences in the scope of the diplomatic sources, runs of material of different lengths have

been examined for the three different decades. For comparison's sake, the years 1656–7, 1697–8, and 1734–5 have been studied for both French and Austrian documents regarding Denmark and Sweden. In addition, Austrian and French financial sources concerning diplomatic activity have been studied for the years 1656, 1697, and 1735.

Diplomatic reports have been used primarily to study French and Austrian strategies towards the Scandinavian countries; the same applies to the financial records. Council minutes are chiefly a source of answers to the question of Danish and Swedish reactions to the superpowers' actions.

Throughout, the same types of source material have been consulted in Austria and France, and information has been sought as much for Denmark as for Sweden to enable as accurate a comparison as possible. Similarly, as far as is possible, the same source material has been consulted for all chosen decades in order for the comparison to be valid over time (it has not been entirely possible to do so, because administrative procedures changed slightly over the years).

In addition to these sources, additional published source material has been used where available. This is the case, for example, for other envoys from the countries in question, or envoys from other countries whose accounts or correspondence have been published (see Bibliography).

Additional studies have been done of Denmark's envoys to Stockholm and Sweden's envoys to Copenhagen in 1697, and the French king's and the Emperor's envoys in Copenhagen in 1730–1, for reasons to be discussed later.

In these years, Denmark in particular saw intensive negotiations for an alliance between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Danish king, during which one can imagine that the Imperial envoys might well have wanted to bring various sorts of pressure to bear.

Diplomatic reports usually contain descriptions of the political situation in the country where a diplomat is stationed; descriptions of his contacts with interesting people, and what was discussed; attempts to chart people's family relationships, political affiliations, and financial circumstances; news of negotiations; and general descriptions of the country. The reports also often suggest how to proceed towards officials of the country in question. Quite frequently there

are mentions of other diplomatic envoys' actions, and their successes or failures. The reports present several problems from the point of view of source criticism. They may be based on misunderstandings on the diplomat's part, and they might be exaggerations designed to present the diplomat as more successful than he really was. However, for the purposes of this study this need not be a problem. The proposed course of action—to offer someone a gift, for example—was hardly false, even if the person who according to the diplomat should be offered something did not have the hoped-for status. Rumours about bribery could be completely made up, but as rumours did in fact exist. When it comes to the financial records, these were kept so carefully that we believe that the chances are small that a person named as having been in receipt of money did not actually receive it. And while it is important to draw a sharp distinction between those who were offered gifts, and those who can be said with any certainty to have accepted them, the very fact of the offer says something about the giver's strategy for currying favour.

In the study of council business in Denmark and Sweden, it is the councils' minutes that have been used in the first instance. Throughout the period covered in this book, the Swedish Council's were maintained as a detailed record of its deliberations, with the various councillors' opinions taken down more or less verbatim.¹⁹ In Denmark, there was not the same continuity. For our first period, the 1650s, the minutes consist of a limited number of answers to royal proposals, and these responses were formulated collectively. As a supplement for this period, we have used the diary of Council business kept by the councillor Christen Skeel throughout the 1650s, which provides a better insight into the actual workings of the Danish Council at this time.²⁰ For our later periods, the 1690s and the 1730s, we have used the Danish Cabinet's minutes on foreign affairs. These detailed the resolutions passed, and provide a useful insight into Denmark's foreign policy, although individual opinions were not noted down. To sum up, while these sources differ in both the continuity and scope, the differences are not such as to make them unusable for our purposes.

In addition to this political activity, we have also studied the circumstances under which it took place in the shape of the royal

councils of Sweden and Denmark. For this, the normative material has been studied and compared—primarily laws, ordinances, instructions, and oaths. The background on the councils also includes the economic conditions, which have been compared by looking at both countries' central administrations. Finally, biographical material has been studied to judge the degree of transnationality in the councillors' marriage patterns, landownership, and careers.

Definitions and concepts

Family

We have chosen to use the term family instead of dynasty. The term family is used for those who are related to each other by blood, and who perceive themselves as being part of the same family. The reason for this is that the term family has no connotations of gender. You can be part of a family through your mother or your father, it makes no difference. Heide Wunder points out that in the early modern period, a woman belonged to the family she was born into, but could hold a position in a dynasty as the legal guardian of an heir.²¹ The dynasty, according to Wunder, should be seen as part of a state-formation process, in which the dynasty was consolidated internally by affirmation of the principle of primogeniture, and outwardly through marriage alliances—a process of dynasticization.²² The dynasty can be seen as a more agnatic form of the family.

Family is in our definition cognatic—both men and women belong to family equally, and inherit the right to belong to it.²³ However, the family, when referred to as a dynasty, has been construed as male-coded with the advent of surnames in Scandinavia in the seventeenth century, while in the eighteenth century Danish and Swedish women began to take their husband's surname. Genealogists drew up genealogical tables in such a way as to hide women's ancestry, just as women's descendants' ancestry was hidden on the mother's side. However, behind this agnatic screen, there was, at least during the seventeenth century, a cognatic practice that was slightly different. Some specific examples of this show that lineage was not only agnatic. For example, when Carl Gustav, Count Palatine of Zweibrücken was chosen to be heir to the Swedish throne in