

*Speech by the President of the Swedish Transport Workers Union, Lars Lindgren, given at the Second European Summit on Private Security, December 8 2009*

Mr Chairman, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Lars Lindgren and I am the president of the Swedish Transport Workers Union, we are the union in Sweden for security guards working in the private sector.

As I understand it, the idea for this summit conference grew from a document created by the Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) during Frances's chairmanship of the European Union two years ago. In this document, the Scandinavian security services sector was praised as an example to others, and this flattering description is one of the reasons we are here today.

However flattering, this description nevertheless needs qualifying. As a union representative, one is only too aware that Swedish security companies also have their faults. Even so, as a former International Secretary of our union, I am also able to compare my experience with what I've seen of other private companies in Europe and further afield.

A lot of the time, security guards are underpaid and poorly qualified, without much in the way of professional status. In Scandinavia, we have worked hard, together with the major companies, to raise our sector above the standards I have so often encountered in other parts of the world.

On closer analysis, our success appears to be based mainly on three factors – on cooperation between the unions, the State and capital.

Starting with the unions, our main goal is to ensure acceptable wages for all of our members and to prevent wage competitiveness. In a sector where at least 70 percent of the total costs of Security Services are wage-related, it is of vital importance that employers are not allowed to compete with each other by lowering salaries and providing inferior terms of employment. This would quickly develop into a downward spiral of declining conditions and poorer quality of the services produced.

National collective agreements, as well as a planned structure for developing working environments and social security, is an effective way of preventing this from happening.

In the Transport Workers Union we have realised that, in the long run, it is impossible to demand decent wages and reasonable working conditions for an un-qualified service that can be performed by anyone. Far too many security guards across the world sit on a chair next to a doorway, and have no other duties than to monitor the people who come and go.

It is important to remember that there are often other, more complex security-related tasks that need to be performed at institutions that hire security guards. In many cases, some of the simpler tasks can be rationalized by implementing new technology, technology that requires trained personnel.

Our union has always supported this type of rationalization, while at the same time demanding that it lead to proper training for security guards. We believe it is better for one

security guard to perform a more advanced job with acceptable wages, than for two of them to perform simpler tasks with a sub-standard salary.

More advanced tasks lead to better pay as well as a more stimulating and interesting profession. This is why we work continually to ensure that security guards receive more training, to enable them to face the demands of a changing marketplace as well as improve their status.

In future, we hope to be able to continue working with private companies and politicians in developing more advanced training programs that may lead to more advanced services – and securing higher wages for the security guards of tomorrow.

With this in mind, in association with a number of companies, we have established a Security Services School at the upper secondary level, which we hope will be well received by society in general. Looking to the future, we anticipate the need for large numbers of people to work with various aspects of security. It is also a step towards promoting more highly qualified security services professionals, which we hope will be just one of many benefits.

All these things require a certain amount of collaboration with the security services companies.

We may argue with them and complain about their many faults. We may even go out on strike once in a while, but we have to recognise that we have a joint long-term commitment to developing private security services into a sector of highly qualified services that may be charged for accordingly.

Companies operate according to the same simple logic. It is hard to charge a client a decent price for simple services, and when there are many competitors, there is always the risk of price cutting and quote rigging.

Even though we may sometimes have had our differences, we have always agreed to work constructively and develop the work of security guards while also increasing the training element.

During the 1990s, we increased demands on training via collective agreements. Now that the Government has adapted its legal framework, I hope we can go even further, and increase our demands. More advanced services command better pay – for security services companies as well as their employees.

Without State involvement, all this is impossible. Private security services will always be politically problematic. A democratic state should always be wary of developments that lead to the rise of private police-like organisations. It should be even more careful about granting employees of private companies the right to use coercion methods or physical force.

The activities of security and surveillance companies will always border on police work. It is vital that the State establish clear rules, to ensure that the individuals who operate security services companies, or who are employed by them, have no criminal records. Security companies must be subject to strict State-controlled authorization and staff must be thoroughly checked and well trained in the extent and limits of their authority. This sector must, and must continue to be, fully transparent to the public and to society in general.

It is crucial that both security guards and private companies understand the need to draw a clear line between the police, on one side, and security guards on the other. It is also important that everybody involved agree that what is generally referred to as 'the State's monopoly of legitimate violence' should be maintained in future.

We know that certain security services operators are keen to expand their business, when the police are all too often notable by their absence, a fact that fuels a public sense of insecurity. It is all too tempting to begin doing business in this increasing security vacuum, but I would advise caution.

A mature private security industry needs to realise that its existence depends on maintaining a close relationship with politicians, public authorities, the corporate world and the general public.

If this trust is undermined by a tendency to replace police authority or disrupt 'the State's monopoly of legitimate violence', the entire industry could be destroyed.

One of the main reasons we have been able to develop a functional security services sector in Sweden is that we have made the respective positions very clear. Police and security guards have been able to serve in a joint capacity at party political conventions, for example, while declaring complete agreement on the need to retain clearly defined professional boundaries.

This has gained importance, now that private security guards are often active in various public areas. Up until a short time ago, security guards have been nearly invisible, patrolling commercial premises at night, alerting the authorities and monitoring various processes.

Nowadays, more and more security guards are entrusted with services in malls, hospitals, sports venues, or as door supervisors in bars and so on. As, what we in Sweden call, qualified crowd controllers, they may even have limited police powers and are entitled to act under police guidance, but their training is often sub-standard and, working in bars, they can get dragged into various dubious, sometimes even criminal, activities.

This is obviously completely unacceptable.

Anyone entrusted with even limited police powers must have a spotlessly clean record, and requires extensive training to be able to deal with a very difficult job. This is one area where legislation and control has yet to catch up – our chance of dealing with the problem, through collective agreements, is next to none. In this respect, we need help from Sweden's Justice Minister.

We also need to update the rules regulating the actions of security guards when on duty in a public environment, to determine what they may or may not do. These rules must respect the principles I have already referred to. I do not under any circumstances want to find myself in conflict with the police union – whose president, I notice, is seated over there listening. This is not because I am worried about conflicts, but because I know that both our unions share the same opinion on this matter.

At the same time I, the security companies and the police know that security professionals can do a lot of good, providing the rules and regulations that govern their behaviour are clear and

sensible. The unions, the security companies, the police and the Government need to develop these regulations in a spirit of mutual understanding.

If we are successful in this I am convinced that Sweden and the other Nordic countries will continue to develop a healthy security services industry.

To conclude, I should like to address one final topic that, I believe, cannot be underestimated.

It is in fact the very reason that we are here at Berns today. This conference may in some way be seen as related to Sweden's current chairmanship of the European Union.

We know that the development of free trade in services within the European Union is an ongoing project.

We also know that a harmonisation process has been initiated to facilitate the free movement of companies in the private security sector. This is a natural development, but it is worth noting that the security services industry is very special.

The profession of security guard is termed a 'regulated profession' in the European Union. It therefore falls under the Commission's Directive on Professional Qualifications, which sensibly limits the possibility of selling security services just anywhere in the EU.

If we are agreed in our desire to develop serious and responsible security services companies, that are both able to make a profit and offer good terms of employment, we must surely appreciate just how complex the harmonisation of security services is going to be.

It is important to remember that the legal traditions on which security services are based differ widely within the EU. Since the rights, tasks and educational level of security guards differ so much within the EU, there is justification for some caution when attempting a pan-European harmonization of security services. The need for extreme caution is underlined by the fact that many tasks verge on a form of police work.

A brutal form of harmonisation, based on the principle that what is tolerable in one nation should automatically be allowed in all other countries of the EU, would not only lead to social dumping and lower wages – it would threaten fundamental democratic values.

Something that I doubt any of us here today would like to see.

Thank you for attention.