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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament elections

The EU should focus on important issues

One of the key topics of the Swedish EU election discussions was *subsidiarity*. A common phrase, seen in different short versions on the posters, was that EU should stick to what it is good at, and leave things that could better be handled on lower level to the member states. The need for the EU to stop its ambitions to deal with all areas came out in different ways depending on the level of euroscepticism of the parties, but even the Liberals (labelling themselves as the most EU-friendly party) claimed that the EU needed a reform leading to closer cooperation in areas such as democracy, human rights, economy, trade, migration, the fight against crime and sustainable development. The EU should, however, not seek to create a common policy on media, tourism and culture. The largest party, the Social Democrats, wanted the EU to focus on jobs, fair terms of employment and the environment. One of the major winners of the elections, the Green Party (Miljöpartiet), as expected, wanted the EU to focus on the environment but also on an open EU with a humane refugee policy.

In the discussion *employment* has been one of the key topics, focusing on the EU's general ability to create new jobs. The Social Democrats' focus on terms of employment stood against the Moderates' view on liberalization. The two parties were, however, united on the need for the EU to work for more free trade and to fight against protectionism. *Climate* and the *environment* were other major issues within the debate and the dominating issue for the Green party, the major winner. Another related topic concerned the *treatment of animals* in the EU.

The Feminist Initiative (Feministiskt initiativ), which succeeded in taking a seat in the European Parliament, brought up *women's issues* in the discussion, which led other parties to address this issue as well. The Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), generally looked down on by other parties, got two seats. Their motto was "Brussels out of Sweden!" They also argue for reduced *immigration*, and are against *Turkish membership* of the EU.

A special feature of the debate was the issue of how to counter the danger in Europe, including Sweden, of the *growing populism and extremism*. Parties united in urging people to vote in order to counter this. The EU front-runners did not play any role in the election process. Their names and profiles were published but there was no reaction.

Scepticism against federalism

In general there was much criticism towards the EU during the election campaign. The EU was recognized for its importance in creating peace on the continent and two parties (the Liberals and the Moderates) profiled themselves on the posters as supporters of the EU. However, in spite of their general EU-positive attitude, they criticized the EU as meddling too much into issues that should be dealt with by the member states.

A middle group of parties, while in principle not deeply EU-critical, argued that the EU needed to be more efficient by focusing on the important issues such as the environment, migration, human rights trade, competitiveness and international crime. They directed much criticism against the EU's meddling into areas that individual persons and decision-makers on local, regional and national level are better fit to decide on. Such areas are taxes, education, welfare, social security systems, culture, natural resources and policies regarding predatory animals. The Centre Party spoke out against "unmotivated federalism" and, among other examples, argued that it should be more important for the EU to go after carbon dioxide emissions than to give Sweden detailed instructions on the hunting of wolves.

A more substantial scepticism towards the EU came only from two parties which both claimed to be the most critical towards the EU. One was the Sweden Democrats, who called the other parties "EU-federalists". They wanted a renegotiation of Swedish membership in the EU and argued that Sweden, like the UK, should have a referendum on this issue. The other was the Left Party. According to this party, the EU helps to save banks but impairs the conditions for trade unions as well as for ordinary people, including women.

Overall, there was more disapproval than praise for the EU. A frequent target of criticism and example of the folly of the EU was the waste of money connected to moving the parliament between Brussels and Strasbourg. The criticism was sometimes sweeping, often not recognizing the difference between "Brussels bureaucracy" and the role of member states. One example of this was the disapproval of the EU's policy on migration and asylum.

Victory for new and small parties

The outcome of the election was a victory for the new and some of the small parties. The Green Party gained 4 percent as compared to the previous EU election, the Feminist Initiative 3 percent and the Sweden Democrats 6 percent. The biggest party, the Social Democrats, stayed on the same figure as in 2009, which was a disappointment, since the party has increased its popularity in the opinion polls during the last few years and is expected to assume power in the upcoming September elections. The major loser was, however, the Moderates, the present leading party of the government, which lost 5 percent.

The analysis centred on the approaches of the parties to the election: it seemed that political messages that were more based on values and less on economic facts were successful in getting attention and attracted particularly the younger voters.

The hope was that this time turnout would exceed 50 percent, a figure much lower than a national election but higher than the previous EU election. This also turned out to be the case. Maybe because of the constant urging to vote, the percentage of voters increased from 45.53 in 2009 to 51.07 percent in 2014.

Links:

- Liberal People's Party, [EU - Europeiska unionen](#) (Eng).
- Social Democrats, [EU-Politics](#) (Swe).
- Swedish Green Party, [EU Parliament](#) (Eng).
- Feminist Initiative, [EU Election Platform](#) (Swe).
- Sweden Democrats, [EU Platform](#) (Swe).
- Left Party, [EU Elections](#) (Swe).
- Val.se, [Voting Results](#) (Swe).

2. The EU's Neighbourhood

Deep pessimism as regards Russia

In view of the Russian aggression against Ukraine the Swedish government has suspended its military cooperation with Russia and the Russian behaviour has been condemned in strong words. All political parties share the views expressed by the government. This is evident in a report published in May 2014 by the Parliamentary Defence Commission.

According to this report, “[t]he Russian activities confirm the picture of a state leadership with a growing ambition to re-establish Russia as a superpower, controlling as large parts of the former Soviet Union as possible”.

The report furthermore states that “[t]he Nordic and Baltic Sea Region is characterized overall by stability, dialogue and cooperation. The policies pursued by Russia, on the other hand, are unpredictable and destabilizing. It is inconceivable that a military conflict in our region would only affect one country. A separate military attack directly targeting Sweden remains unlikely. However, crises and incidents – including those involving military force – may also occur and in the longer term the threat of military attack can never be ruled out. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine demonstrates that the risk of this has increased also in our region”. (Försvaret av Sverige, p. 21)

The Russian behaviour towards Sweden is also part of the picture. Russia has on two occasions practiced attacks against targets in Sweden (Stockholm and the southern part of the country). Russian ships and aircraft, equipped to gather signal intelligence, have patrolled closer to Swedish shores than previously, during the post-Cold War period. Furthermore, Russia has intensified its attempts to recruit agents in Sweden and gathered a large number of maps of sensitive areas in Sweden.

The response of the Swedish government has been to decide on increased aircraft patrolling and strengthening of the Swedish defence forces. The main opposition party, the Social Democrats, has agreed but argues that considerably larger amounts should go to defence than those suggested by the government. The strong condemnation of Russian aggression is shared by the newspapers as well the general public. Military experts and researchers share the views of the political parties as regards the Russian activities and intentions in Ukraine.

A special concern for Sweden is the island of Gotland, which is of strategic importance in the Baltic Sea and whose defence is now being strengthened. For the inhabitants of Gotland the closeness to the Nord Stream pipeline gives cause for worry, not least the service station, which gives Russia a legitimate reason to be close to the island.

Links:

- Försvaret av Sverige - Starkare försvar för en osäker tid [The Defence of Sweden – A Stronger Defence for a Time of Insecurity], 15 May 2014.
- Svenska Dagbladet, “[Säpo varnar för ryska krigsplaner](#)” [[Security police forewarns of Russian war plans](#)], 7 April 2014.

Eastern Partnership Must Continue

The Eastern Partnership countries are now considered to be even more crucial than before. The view of Carl Bildt is that the EU cannot be blamed in any way for the violence in Kyiv in February this year. It was caused entirely by President Yanukovich and his relations to Moscow.

The Swedish government's view, as expressed by Bildt in a speech in Kyiv, is that the work of the EU within the Eastern Partnership must continue. The EU is under pressure since Russia seems intent on using all instruments at its disposal to persuade its partners to abandon their European path. Bildt referred to Armenia reversing course when, after having successfully negotiated an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU for three years, the Armenian President was suddenly summoned to Moscow and forced to join the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. He also pointed to the threats directed against Moldova and the policies towards Ukraine - first to make the previous administration in Kiev drop the EU agreement and thereafter to wreck the effort by the new government to move Ukraine in the direction it had democratically decided to take. Allowing countries to conduct a policy of smash and grab would, according to Bildt, finally lead to a world of chaos. What is now at stake are furthermore the fundamental principles of the EU and therefore the EU will stand firm.

The Foreign Minister also emphasized that the EU relationship with the Eastern Partnership countries should not be to the detriment of the partners' relations with Russia. On the contrary: the EU encourages them to have good relations also with Moscow, and the Free Trade Agreements that the EU has negotiated are fully compatible with the Free Trade Agreements that the partner countries already have with Russia through the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Swedish EaP ambassador in an interview in April expressed a positive view on the future of the Eastern Partnership, which is also complemented by a Swedish aid strategy for the EAP countries for the coming seven years. (Source:

The policies of the government have the support of the other political parties and there are no opposing views in the general debate or the newspapers.

Links:

- Carl Bildt, "It is not a question of choosing between East and West", 11 April 2014.
- Martin Hagström, [Tre frågor till Sveriges ambassadör för Östliga partnerskapet \[Three questions to the Swedish ambassador to the Eastern Partnership\]](#) 8 April 2014.

Turkey still a candidate

The Swedish view, expressed at a visit by Mr Erdogan in November 2013, is that Turkey should be given full EU membership when the negotiations are concluded. Sweden deplored the fact that some countries may open up for referenda.

In February 2014 the Swedish annual statement on foreign policy included a passage on Turkey, mentioning a first step towards liberalisation in the visa area. However, further change and reform were needed in order to strengthen human rights and the independence of the judiciary, including a new constitution and progress in the Kurdish peace process.

The threats to close down Twitter were met with considerable criticism in Sweden. Carl Bildt wrote on Twitter that Mr Erdogan was not only hurting himself but a whole nation with his threats.

Links:

- Carl Bildt, Minister for Foreign Affairs, [Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs](#), 19 February 2014.
- Göteborgsposten 7 November 2013.

3. Power relations in the EU

Germany, the leading country within the EU

Germany is seen as the leading country of the EU and German policy is therefore given much attention. For Sweden, German policy towards Russia is particularly important, since Sweden itself has strong views on the Russian behaviour in Ukraine. A primary issue concerns the perceived difficulty for Germany as a leader to form an overall European perspective on the Russian activities, considering the German vulnerabilities depending on the fact that Germany is highly dependent on Russian energy, which makes the country vulnerable to Russian counteractions, and its exports to Russia are substantial, which makes economic sanctions costly. So far the general view in Sweden is that Chancellor Merkel has succeeded well in doing this. This balancing act may, however, become more difficult as the crisis continues, not least when facing internal and external pressure.

Another important area, in terms of German leadership, is the economic one. Since Sweden remains outside of the Eurozone, it is less affected by German economic leadership than many other countries. The Swedish economy has done well also in times of financial crisis, which is partly attributed to being outside the Eurozone, and the support in favour of joining the euro is now very low. Still there is informal cooperation, such as the meeting between Germany, Sweden, the UK and the Netherlands (the most competitive countries of the EU, according to an OECD report). The meeting, postponed by the Ukraine crisis and rescheduled for 9 – 10 June, will now most probably be dominated by the issue of the new Commission leader rather than by economic and employment issues, as planned. Within this group only Germany is committed to Jean-Claude Juncker and, due to Germany's position, Chancellor Merkel will most probably assume the leading role in the discussions.

Links:

- Svenska Dagbladet, Juncker blir hetast på agendan [Juncker will be the hottest item on the agenda], 9 June 2014.

Austerity Moving Towards Growth

Being outside the Eurozone and at the same time not much affected by the financial crisis, Sweden is not in a position either to be imposing a policy on others or having such a policy imposed upon it. Generally, however, during the crisis, the government's statements in this regard have leaned towards the austerity approach, emphasizing the necessity in some of the affected countries to establish proper systems of administration, such as collecting taxes. Some Swedish economists have on the other hand voiced their concerns as regards the EU's policies, arguing that the austerity approach gives the countries concerned little possibility to get out of the crisis, since it prevents them from generating growth.

The Swedish government has stated its view that at this time when some stability can be discerned in the Euro area, it is important to strike a balance between, on the one hand, the need for consolidating public finances and, on the other, structurally correct measures to support short-term and long-term growth. The government furthermore sees it as important that a strengthening of the European Monetary Union does not risk eliminating market signals for member states that need to implement structural reforms or consolidate their public finances.

Sweden's participation in the Banking Union can, according to the government, only be considered when all the rules for this union have been clarified and under the condition that some requirements set by Sweden have been met.

Links:

- Government Offices of Sweden, [The EMU's Future and the Banking Union](#), 30 May 2014.

"An island adrift in the Atlantic"

British exit from the EU is considered as a possible scenario and, in an interview with the Financial Times, Foreign Minister Carl Bildt warned the British of its consequences. For the EU the effect would be that it would lose a significant element of global clout but it would be an even bigger disaster for the UK, which would be seen as "an island adrift in the Atlantic".

Furthermore, according to Bildt, there is a real risk of "Balkanization" of the British Isles if Scotland becomes independent, which would in turn lead to further separatism within the EU. Generally, newspapers have a negative view on the UK leaving the EU. It is seen as a very valuable country within the Union and it is furthermore believed to harm itself by leaving. One journalist wrote about the UK "desperately trying to roll back time 60 years to the 50s".

Links:

- Rolf Gustavsson, "Desperat försök att rulla tillbaka tiden" ["Desperate Attempt to Roll Back Time"], 8 June 2014.
- Richard Milne, [Bildt warns of British 'Balkanisation'](#), 3 June 2014.