

2003-01-15

SWEDEN AND THE FUTURE OF THE EU¹

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The Swedish position in relation to the future of the EU, will in the following note be taken to mean: the Government's position, those aired by the Swedish representatives to the Convention on the future of the EU and those approved by the national parliamentarians in the report on the future of Europe. The focus will be on the views of the Government and individual ministers but, where appropriate, the positions of other relevant actors will be given as well.

The Swedish position can be characterised as a solid defence of the status quo albeit with a minor propensity to tinker with institutions and content of policies. Moreover, the initial approach to the Convention by Government representatives reflected a wish to downplay the importance of the Convention and instead stress the importance of the IGC. Beforehand, the Government's strategy in the Convention was to try to first address questions of policy and once these matters had been settled to move on to questions regarding institutional reform. Initially, it was also stressed that institutional issues should not dominate the Convention. This can be characterised as wishful thinking or a misjudgement of the task and of the potential importance of the Convention will have for the upcoming IGC and the future of the EU, though there are some signs that the Government and Parliament are beginning to take matters more seriously.

The starting point for the Swedish approach can be found in the joint parliamentary report from the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Constitutional Committee which states that the Swedish position shall be guided by three principles;

- a pragmatic approach rather than aiming for *politique finalité*;
- decreased use of terminology; and
- support for the status quo.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies.

With these guiding principles it is not surprising that it is difficult to find firm positions in favour of reform or that the Government tries to reduce the importance of the Convention. Furthermore it makes the Government's position in relation to specific proposals difficult to assess since it is impossible to judge whether the position taken is strategic or merely tactical.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

On the whole the Swedish government's position is that the current institutional balance works well and that there is no need for fundamental reform of the system. The only major institutional reform that the Swedish government views positively is the creation of an EU-president, i.e., a president of the Council (see also below). Even though it is not entirely clear why this position is taken one can imagine that the approach is partly based on the idea to harness the power of the Commission and promote the intergovernmental elements of the EU. This would in part explain the Government's opposition to the idea of an elected president of the Commission, in particular by the European Parliament, or any other reforms of the Commission besides those agreed in the Nice Treaty. The other underlying reason for objecting to an elected president of the Commission is that such a reform would profoundly upset the existing institutional balance which the government has set out to preserve.

Regarding reforms relating to the European Parliament, the Swedish position is that the Parliament's powers should not be extended but other measures that would increase participation in the EP elections are to be welcomed. On the issue of team presidencies, the Swedish position is cautiously positive without being firmly committed. Apart from these proposals the Swedish position is in line with the guiding principles above, i.e., no change.

PROCEDURAL REFORM

The proposed procedural reforms are incremental in character and include extension of QMV to encompass asylum and immigration policies and to increase the transparency of the Council. The latter proposal would include holding Council meetings in public when the Council acts in a legislative capacity. In other matters of procedural reform, the position of the Swedish Government is that the traditional methods of co-operation and legislation function well and that the open-method of co-ordination should be used in the areas of employment, welfare and education.

EXTENSION AND RETRENCHMENT OF COMPETENCIES

Regarding the distribution of competencies between the EU and the Member States the starting point is that the current balance is more or less correct and that subsidiarity should be the guiding principle for the exercise of competencies. However, the Swedish Government sees a greater role for the Union in the area of foreign and security policy, while at the same time emphasising the intergovernmental character of cooperation in this field. A greater coherence in external policy is to be achieved by increased political co-ordination and possibly a merger of the proposed president of the Council and the High Representative. Furthermore, the Swedish foreign minister has argued for the introduction of a contract between the Member States to combat terrorism entailing mutual assistance in the case of terrorist attacks.

Regarding the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the Treaty, the Swedish position is that it may well be integrated in the Treaty but on the condition that it does not undermine the standing of the European Charter for Human Rights. However, the priority is to seek accession by the Community/Union to the ECHR.

The Swedish position is that the Convention should devote particular attention to asylum and migration policy, judicial co-operation and so as to further underline the exceptional position of the Swedish Government it was up until recently strongly argued that the Convention should dedicate itself to reform of the CAP and cohesion policy. It is also worth mentioning that the Government has come out in favour of a Treaty based right for Union level strike action.

Finally, it is notable that the position on tax harmonisation, i.e., to keep the veto, is endorsed by all the Swedish members to the Convention regardless of partisan affiliation.

THE PUBLIC DEBATE

The Swedish debate has so far been at best lukewarm and now runs the risk of being completely overshadowed by the upcoming referendum on the Euro in September 2003. The debate has mainly dealt more with the absence of debate than with the questions posed in the Laeken Declaration. During the campaign leading up to the election in September 2002 European issues were hardly touched upon and there have not been any major changes since. However, there are some signs that the focus of the debate may be shifting towards more substantial issues. The Government has set up a parliamentary commission to promote and

stimulate public debate on the future of the EU. The activities of this Commission include arranging seminars and hearings, producing accessible analyses of key topics, and to distribute grants to organisations, trusts and schools. The Commission should also strive to create points of contact between the Swedish public debate and the corresponding debates in other member states. So far the Commission has failed to turn the tide of disinterest among the public and it has been stated that they have not received sufficient support from the politicians, e.g., it is difficult to raise interest in a topic which the leading ministers deem to be working satisfactorily while the opposition is either nodding in assent or simply wants to leave the Union.

CONCLUSION

The Swedish position can be characterised as a solid defence of the status quo and those reforms that are proposed are generally in line with a less supranational conception of the EU. Furthermore, the Swedish Government's view of the Convention, *per se*, reflected until recently the belief that it should ideally remain a forum for discussions and instead of producing a blueprint for a constitution it should produce a range of policy options to the subsequent IGC. It seems that the Government has argued that, since it is finally the IGC that has the power to revise the Treaties, one should not pay too much attention to the Convention; this approach runs the risk of contributing to the marginalisation of Sweden in the Convention and putting Sweden in an awkward position should the Convention succeed in producing a draft constitution.

That the Government's preference has not been met has so far has not caused the Government to reassess its strategy towards the Convention, for example by substituting the representative of the Prime Minister with the foreign minister as has been the case in several other countries.