

**RESPOND**

## **Working Papers**

### **Global Migration: Consequences and Responses**

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## **Conflicting Conceptualisations of Europeanisation**

### **Sweden Country Report**

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## About the project

RESPOND is a Horizon 2020 project that aims at studying the multilevel governance of migration in Europe and beyond. The consortium is formed of 14 partners from 11 source, transit and destination countries and is coordinated by Uppsala University in Sweden. The main aim of this Europe-wide project is to provide an in-depth understanding of the governance of recent mass migration at macro, meso and micro levels through cross-country comparative research and to critically analyse governance practices with the aim of enhancing the migration governance capacity and policy coherence of the European Union (EU), its Member States and third countries.

RESPOND will study migration governance through a narrative which is constructed along five thematic fields: (1) Border management and security, (2) Refugee protection regimes, (3) Reception policies, (4) Integration policies, and (5) Conflicting Europeanisation. Each thematic field reflects a juncture in the migration journey of refugees and is designed to provide a holistic view of policies, their impact and the responses given by affected actors.

In order to better approach these themes, we divided our research into work packages (WPs). The present report is concerned with the findings related to WP6, which focuses specifically on processes of Europeanization in the light of mass migration.

## Executive summary

This report explores how recent processes of immigration have changed discourses about Europe and migration in Swedish political speeches and newspaper editorials 2011-2018.

In the period up to September 2015, political speeches and editorials reflected a dominant humanitarian discourse and Sweden was expected to strive for a better and more coordinated EU policy approach in relation to refugees. The prevailing image was of Sweden as a forerunner and role model for other EU member states. The right-wing populist party the Sweden Democrats (SD) represented a counter-discourse, instead emphasizing as a main problem that Sweden diverged from other European countries in maintaining a more generous approach towards migration. Immigration, in this party's rhetoric, was further taken as a core example of the alleged problem with the EU project as a whole: the inflows of migrants were said to show that member states had lost their national autonomy and control over their borders and their sovereignty.

The large increase of asylum seekers in 2015 triggered a swift and fundamental change to the political dynamics and discourses. In short, the counter discourse previously voiced only by SD, that the relatively more generous approach to asylum policies in Sweden was a problem, was now adopted by a majority of the parliamentary parties and became the dominant discourse. In November 2015, Sweden introduced border controls and restrictions on asylum. The restrictions were first presented as a temporary measure to cope with a crisis, but over time there was a growing understanding that Swedish asylum policies must become stricter and be adjusted to "the EU-minimum level", on a more permanent basis. Similarly, the material reflects that, post-2015, the idea of Sweden as a role model and moral super power became a target of criticism and even mockery, while the ambition to promote a common asylum policy for the EU was, if not abandoned, at least no longer the prioritized goal. The crucial issue was instead to make efforts to avoid that Sweden stood out as more generous than other European countries.

In Sweden, liberal ideas and rhetoric about Europe dominate the political discourse. Political speeches analysed in this report reflect images of Europe as an "open society"; the aim being to incorporate diversity in the European project along with the fundamental approval of human rights based on the liberal platform of respect of individual dignity. The material analyzed in this report gives relatively few examples of framings characteristic of conservative ideas of Europe. One reason for this may be that, given the dominance of the liberal discourse, even right-wing populist party representatives (Sweden Democrats, SD) tend to frame their messages and proposals in a liberalist language. There are however recurrent examples of arguments and framings – used by SD as well as other political parties – focusing on the alleged threat that external migration represents, to Sweden and/or to Europe, and there is an indication of an increase in this type of frame in the second part of the studied period (2015-2018).

## Introduction

This report presents data from the Swedish country case and is part of a subproject (Work Package 6) of the Horizon 2020 EU project RESPOND: Multilevel governance of mass migration in Europe and beyond. The aim of this subproject is to examine how conflicting elite discourses on Europeanisation have emerged in the context of increasing external migration. It aims to capture the recent evolution of discourses on Europeanisation; to develop a comparative perspective on framings of Europeanisation in the context of migration; and to look at the construction of political claims about these issues. Rather than concentrating on policy developments, the endeavour of this sub-project to the larger Respond project addresses is how increases in external migration have created a new ideational focus for elite-level contestation regarding the European project(s).

This report focuses on the Swedish case and seeks to explore (1) how political actors are constructing views about Europe in relation to ideas and claims revolving around refugee-immigration and (2) how the same themes are interpreted and discussed in the mass media. Due to circumstances related to Covid19, the planned data gathering (a focus group interview) that was planned to cover aim (3) to explore how these themes are deliberated by the project's stakeholders, was unfortunately cancelled. The third aim will therefore not be discussed in the present report.

The aims of the report are

- To capture conflicting ideas of Europe in the Swedish context;
- To assess the impact of post-2011 migration on claim-making about Europe in the Swedish context;
- To help develop a comparative account of the impact of these questions on domestic politics and audiences;
- To develop a perspective on the role of media in domestic audience-making in this context.

## Methodology

The report is structured by a comparative methodology developed as part of Work Package 6. Building on a shared template, it allows comparative analysis across all participating countries.

This report builds on research involving collection and analysis of two empirical datasets, one containing political speeches and the other editorials from national newspapers. The sampling and analysis were carried out in two steps.

The *first* step was to analyse how political elites construct discourses of Europe and immigration over the period 2011–2018. To this end, a number of political speeches by major political actors were identified and analysed. The aim of the analysis was to give an account of how Swedish elite discourses about immigration reflect attitudes and ideas about Europe.

Speeches were sampled following criteria that they should be made by major political actors (leading or serving in government, or official opposition leaders) representing different party-political positions. The speeches were to contain explicit references to developments about the future of Europe and the EU. A sample of in total sixteen speeches was selected. The sample contains speeches retrieved through searches of publicly available databases from the Swedish national parliament ([riksdagen.se](http://riksdagen.se)) and the Swedish government ([regeringen.se](http://regeringen.se)) and searches of other media sources. Speeches were chosen to cover the studied period (2011–2018), and they highlight crucial events during this period, such as election campaigns or important events in relation to immigration. Following the shared work package instructions, analytical tables were used to generate narrative categories on diverging discourses about Europe in reaction to increased external migration. Political claims (slogans, sayings, metaphors) were also identified (see appendix 1 for analytical tables of speeches and “priceless quotations”).

The *second* step involved exploring the extent to which we could find indications of broader social and ideological impacts of political elite discourses. How are political leaders’ claims and rhetorical arguments reflected and discussed on other platforms? More precisely, the idea here was to analyse processes of audience-making with respect to political speeches and their interpretation and reception through the intermediation of mass media. Here, the chosen data was editorials in three Swedish national newspapers. Editorials have a role as mediators between political discourse and public opinion, and therefore are arguably a suitable material to study processes of audience-making (cf Linderman & Lovheim 2016; Lovheim 2017; Lovheim & Linderman 2015). Hence, the focus was not to study the media’s presentation of “facts”, but rather to analyse how media contribute in constructing discourses, in this case how immigration is related to ideas and visions of Europe.

Using relevant keywords (including Europe, immigration/refugees and names of Swedish politicians), searches of all editorials from the three largest daily newspapers in Sweden—*Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Göteborgsposten* – in the period 2011–2018 were made via the Swedish national media database Retriever (Mediearkivet). This resulted in a sample of 51 articles. Analytical tables were used to categorize ideas on Europe in the articles pertaining to four broad categories: EU institutions; European values; Migration/Refugees and Identity (see appendix 2, for analytical tables). The sample of editorials was also analysed to identify how and to what extent two famous political speeches were referred to and commented on. One was the speech made by Fredrik Reinfeldt, Prime Minister of the centre-right “Alliance” government in 2014, the other by Stefan Löfven, Prime Minister of the Red-Green government in 2015.

The overarching aim of the above-described analytical steps was to explore how and to what extent ideas related to liberal vs conservative ideas about Europe are present in Swedish discourses, and to give a comparative account of what frames were used by political elites and media editorials over the period studied. The ideal typical notions of liberal or conservative views of Europe have further informed the analysis of the empirical material.

Actors embracing a **liberal view** of Europe are typically pluralists who present Europe as an “open society” and aim to incorporate diversity into the European project. They favour an international humanitarian role for the EU. The European ideal is built around a discourse of human rights based on the liberal platform of respect for individual dignity. In relation to refugees, actors taking the liberal view would typically support ideas of burden-sharing, quotas and reallocation.

Actors taking a **conservative** view of Europe would instead defend Europe based on a “clash of civilisations” between the Judeo-Christian West and the non-Western Other. The imagination of this external antagonist will vary according to national context, but is likely to reference religion, ethnicity or race. Europe is imagined as closed to the external world and actors taking this view will typically favour an approach of non-intervention in external development and humanitarian aid. Strongly security-focused, they would rather favour the notion of “fortress Europe”, with hard external borders and strong police enforcement internally. Further, the conservative view is strongly majoritarian and heteronormative, and opposed to diversity and minority interests.



## Party-Political Structure: History and Developments since 2011

In the post-war period, Swedish party-political structure was characterised by the dominance of the Social Democratic party. The party won on average over 42 per cent in parliamentary elections between 1948 and 2002, and from the 1930s until 2006 it was in opposition for just nine years. In 2004, however, the four centre-right parties – the Moderates, the Liberals, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats – formed a pre-electoral coalition, which they called the “Alliance for Sweden” (Allern and Aylott 2009). After the 2006 election, the party leader of the Moderates, Fredrik Reinfeldt, became the first non-Social Democratic Prime Minister in a dozen years, leading the first majority government for a quarter of a century. In opposition, the Social Democrats created their own pre-electoral coalition with the Greens and the Left Party (Aylott and Bolin 2015).

Hence, at the time of the 2010 national elections, Swedish party-political structure had a remarkably strong and formalized bipolarisation between two prospective coalition governments, one on the right and the other on the left. This, however, proved to be the “zenith of ‘bloc politics’, as it is called in Scandinavia” (Aylott and Bolin, 2015), since after the 2010 elections a less regimented party constellation would follow. The ‘red–green’ pact was wound up, and the Social Democratic Party met several challenges. Their party leader (Mona Sahlin) resigned; the new leader (Håkan Juholt) managed only ten chaotic months in the role before he, too, was forced to step down and was replaced by the leader of the metalworkers’ union, Stefan Löfven, who in January 2012 was persuaded to take over the leadership of the party. Even more crucial, the 2010 election meant a success for the right-wing populist party the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), who won its first parliamentary seats (Aylott and Bolin 2015).

The entrance of the Sweden Democrats had particularly far-reaching consequences for the Swedish party-political landscape. Up to the 2010 election, Sweden constituted an exception or deviant case in a European comparative perspective (e.g. Rydgren 2002) given its absence of a successful radical right-wing party. Indeed, in the 1991 national election campaign an anti-immigration populist party New Democracy (*Ny Demokrati*) had won seats in parliament, but their parliamentary representation was brief, and three years later the party lost their seats and was dissolved. A combination of factors account for the long absence of right wing populist party representation in Sweden: (1) the strong salience of the socioeconomic dimension and social class in Swedish party political debates, and a corresponding low salience of the sociocultural dimension and issues of immigration; (2) the relatively marked bipolarization of the party structure, where voters could see clear policy alternatives across the left-right divide and (3) the fact that the leading radical right-wing alternative, the Sweden Democrats, had low credibility and legitimacy and were generally perceived as too extreme a party, with neo-nazi roots and recurrent racist statements being made by party representatives (Rydgren 2002; Rydgren and van der Meiden 2016). However, with a new leadership (Jimmie Åkesson) from 2005 the SD strengthened its position and gained political representation first on the local level (notably in municipalities in Skåne, in southern Sweden), before the party managed to achieve parliamentary representation in 2010, as already noted. Systematic efforts at improving the party’s reputation - e.g. by introducing a so called “zero-tolerance for racism” contribute to explain the success of the SD, together with changes in the general Swedish party-political structure - where mainstream parties tended to converge in socioeconomic issues, thereby “depoliticizing” the previously strong socioeconomic dimension, which meant increased

opportunities to politicize the sociocultural dimension, and most saliently the immigration issue (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2016).

The mainstream parties took a dismissive attitude vis-à-vis the Sweden Democrats.<sup>1</sup> After the 2010 election, the Alliance (i.e. the four right-of centre parties) created a minority government that had to seek external support to get its policies through parliament. In 2011, the Alliance government and the Green Party struck a migration policy deal, with the intention to prevent the Sweden Democrats from gaining influence over immigration policy. Given the profile of the Green Party as one of the most socioculturally liberal parties in Sweden, the agreement moved immigration policy in a more liberal direction and meant that mainstream parties converged on the immigration issue (Rydgren and van der Meiden 2016).

In the 2014 election the Sweden Democrats received 12.8 per cent of the vote and 49 seats. The election resulted in a coalition government between the Social Democrats and the Greens. In the subsequent budget negotiations, the SD, by supporting the opposition's budget proposal, triggered a government crisis. The crisis was eventually solved via the so-called December agreement (*Decemberöverenskommelsen*) between six of the parliamentary parties (only SD and the Left Party were left out). The parties agreed that (1) the leader of the largest party constellation would be let through by the other parties to become Prime Minister and (2) that minority governments would be guaranteed to get their budgets through parliament. Intended to block SD from any influence, this agreement was meant to apply until the election 2022 but was abolished in October 2015, following the Christian Democratic Party's decision to leave it. Although formally abolished, in practice the parties however continued to act strategically to block the political influence of the SD.

In the 2018 election, the Sweden Democrats gained 17.3 per cent of the vote and 62 seats in the parliament and were thus the third largest parliamentary party after the Social Democrats, who gained 28.3 percent of the vote, and the Moderates, with 19.8 percent. The election was followed by record-long negotiations on forming a government. It was not until January 2019 that a coalition government with the Social Democrats and the Greens could eventually be formed, after the Liberal Party and the Centre Party agreed to act as supporting parties to the government, which, in turn, was conditional on the latter parties being promised the enactment of a number of political demands (the January deal, *Januariavtalet*).

What ideas about Europe prevail in the Swedish party-political system? Generally, Sweden has a history of strong EU-critical opinion. Sweden joined the EU in 1995, after a referendum which was highly divisive, where only a very narrow majority was in favour of joining the EU. The negative public opinion towards the EU has also been manifested in the Swedish party system - as reflected in the relative success of Eurosceptical parties in EP elections (Raunio 2007), and in divisions within parties regarding EU-issues (notably, EU-critics in the Social Democratic party have had important political positions). The hard-line Eurosceptics used to be found on the left: both the Left Party and the Green Party campaigned against Swedish EU membership. But whereas the Left party continues to call for Sweden's withdrawal from the Union, emphasizing supranational integration as a threat to the Nordic welfare model, the Green Party is more sympathetic to the EU. Since its entry in parliament in 2010, the Sweden Democrats is the most outspoken Eurosceptic among the parliamentary parties (Raunio 2007; Aylott, 2007). SD constructs its opposition against non-European groups, along the lines of "broader civilizational terms", rather than narrow nationalistic principles. SD recurrently use rhetoric and discourse emphasizing Swedish homogeneity, culture and identity which

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<sup>1</sup>The fact that the mainstream parties took this dismissive approach has been highlighted as one reason why the electoral breakthrough of the party took so long (Rydgren 2010; Dahlström and Esaiasson 2013).

highlights the considerable complexity and contradiction of the ethnonationalist argument: “Swedish homogeneity is simultaneously proposed to be an integral part of the European, Western and Christian cultural communities and an ‘evident part of the Western family’” (Elgenius and Rydgren 2019).

## Media Structure and the Question of Immigration and Europe

According to the Swedish Media Barometer (Nordicom 2019), 64 percent of the Swedish population read a daily newspaper on an average day in 2019 (48% read the newspaper digitally and 31% on paper). Most readers – 51 percent – had the morning newspaper (range between digital and paper newspapers evenly distributed). For evening newspapers, the daily reach was 39 per cent (with readers of digital newspapers in a clear majority).

In this report, the empirical material is made up of editorials from the three largest Swedish national newspapers. *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) is the largest nationwide morning paper (347,000 copies) and their ideological stance is described as independent liberal (here taken to be equivalent to a liberal position), *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) is the second biggest nationwide morning paper (193,500 copies) described as independent Moderate (here taken to be equivalent to a conservative position). *Göteborgsposten* (GP) is a metropolitan morning paper covering the region of West Sweden (242,700 copies), described as liberal (here taken to be equivalent to a centrist position).

How immigration and different migrant groups are discussed in media coverage affects the audiences and has an impact on public opinion (e.g. Eberl et al. 2018). Relevant previous research includes a study on how news on immigration or migrants was reported in Swedish media (Strömbäck et al. 2017), an account of how immigration was discussed in Swedish editorials (Bolin et al. 2018) and studies on media-reporting of the 2015 refugee crisis (Triandafyllidou 2018; Krzyżanowski et al. 2018; Krzyżanowski 2018). While immigration has become a very salient political issue after 2015, there has traditionally been a low politicisation of the immigration issue in Sweden. In one study, Sweden is held to diverge from logics of politicization found in many other contexts in the sense that politicisation of immigration tends to go via policymaking and legitimation rather than through public sphere articulation. “Policy-driven politicization of immigration undertaken by the country’s political mainstream has in fact for a very long time *preceded* strong articulation of immigration and refugee/asylum-seeker-related views in the public sphere in Sweden” (Krzyżanowski 2018).

## Events Impacting on Asylum/Migration Discourse since 2011

As concerns discourses on asylum and migration, the events of 2015 stand out as a clear watershed. In other words, in relation to 2015, there is a clear “before” and “after”. Specific events that were noteworthy for the asylum and migration discourse in the period preceding the 2015 events can be mentioned. For instance, the 2011 deal between the right of centre “Alliance” government and the Green Party to cooperate on immigration policies was an important political event, intended to prevent the Sweden Democrats having influence over asylum policies.

There are other important policy-decisions that might be understood as events impacting on the discourse, or as results of the discourse, depending on the analysis. In 2012, the Migration Agency decided that Syrian asylum seekers would only get temporary residence (which was a deviation from the general Swedish principle that people granted asylum get permanent residency), justified as a necessary response given the increase in asylum migration. However, the year after (in 2013), this decision was revoked, and the Migration Agency instead announced that all Syrian asylum seekers would get permanent residence in Sweden (since there was little hope the war in Syria would end in the near future). Generally, in this period there was a clear divide between all established parties, taking a common stance that Sweden had responsibilities towards refugees, while the Sweden Democrats campaigned for a drastic restriction of immigration. Hence, the humanitarian position on welcoming refugees stood comparably strong in the Swedish discourse. The question was more on whether politicians, Swedish and European, were doing enough to assist refugees, and not so much whether they did enough to regulate migration (cf Hagelund 2020).

The “refugee crisis” in 2015 was experienced as a dramatic event in Sweden, mirroring the case of other European countries. In a comparative perspective, the 2015 events arguably had larger impact on the public discourse in Sweden than elsewhere, since it meant a significant challenge to the prevailing approaches towards asylum and migration. Just like elsewhere, Sweden introduced restrictive measures as a direct result of the “refugee crisis”. However, unlike in many other states, these restrictions represented a clear break with the policy path that had remained remarkably resilient over many years (Borevi 2014; 2017). For instance, whereas the post-2015 restrictive measures in Denmark and Norway were in line with a policy path these states had already taken, in Sweden they represented a fundamental challenge to the current policy principles (Borevi 2018; Hagelund 2020).

This situation is reflected in the discourse. The portrayal of Sweden as a frontrunner on humanitarian immigration policies was very strong, and restrictive changes were legitimised “as a move of international collaboration, stimulating more countries to take their share of the responsibility – quite opposite of a ‘race to the bottom’” (Hagelund 2020, 15). To justify restrictions, policy actors emphasized they were “being forced by events beyond government control, necessary to provide acceptable reception conditions, to prevent the welfare system and other vital aspects of Swedish society from collapsing completely (‘we cannot cope’), and as temporary measures that were horrible and painful to implement: in other words, necessary evils brought about by an extreme situation and by the lack of solidarity of other EU member states who were not accepting their part of the burden” (Stern 2018).

The 2015 refugee crisis provoked rapid changes of the public discourse and can be characterized as a “three-part narrative” (Dahlgren 2016). The first part of this narrative started with the emergency and crisis seen from the point of view of *the refugees*. During this phase,

media would publish headlines and images, e.g. of long columns of refugees walking through country roads and the iconic picture of the Syrian boy Alan Kurdi lying dead on the beach. Mainstream media strongly emphasized Sweden's traditional generosity towards refugees, reproducing versions of the prevailing discourse about Sweden's welcoming stance. The Prime Minister proclaimed his stance of "My Europe does not build walls" (see further analysis below), in which the death of Alan Kurdi played a central role.

In the subsequent phase (starting late September/early October 2015), the focus moved more towards what was understood as a crisis *for Sweden*. The society could not manage so many refugees and therefore there was a need to alter the situation quickly. This is when the administrative difficulties, and the gap between the number of arrivals, and the capacity of the reception apparatus, became the main themes, e.g. with reports about problems finding shelter, asylum seekers having to sleep under open sky, and municipalities struggling to provide schooling, health and social services to an increasing number of arrivals (Dahlgren 2016; Ericson 2016; Hagelund 2020; Peterson 2017). At this stage, there was also an increased focus on security – a securitisation of the discourse – revolving around border controls, criminality and terror attacks. At a press conference on 19 November 2015, concerns were for instance reported that a terrorist had crossed the border into Sweden, it was emphasized this suspicion must be taken seriously, and the Prime Minister Stefan Löfven held that "Sweden has been naïve" (Ericson 2016).

Finally, a third discursive phase may be identified, starting with the changes to the traditional policy and the closing of borders. This is when policy measures, that were first presented and justified as being temporary and related to crisis management of an emergency, transform into new approaches and ways of looking at migration and asylum policies. This is reflected in preparations and political negotiations to undertake permanent changes of immigration and asylum policies, resulting in a new focus on strict immigration control and protection of borders towards incoming asylum immigration. This phase, that is still ongoing, has been held to involve "a transformed collective identity for the nation" (Dahlgren 2016, 393).

## Political Speeches

The analyzed material covers claims from political leaders across the party-political spectrum and contributes to providing an account of the Swedish political elite's discourse on immigration and visions of Europe over the studied period. It includes both "traditional" speeches and debates between different political leaders (e.g. in parliament or in TV-broadcasted debates).

The speeches were analysed following a number of analytical categories, pertaining to (1) what political entity the speaker was making a claim about (the EU, member states or other countries); (2) in what way the speaker was referring to actors talked about (e.g. how refugees and migrants or political antagonists were portrayed and referred to); (3) whom the speaker directed his/her speech to (e.g. a specific political actor; the public in general, members of parliament); (4) what diagnosis the speaker made (hence, what problem is identified) and (5) what policy solution he/she proposed (prognosis). As shown in the table, categories 1, 4 and 5 tend to overlap (hence, making a claim e.g. about EU (1), also often involves identifying what is the problem with EU's current policy (4) and proposing a solution to solve that problem (5).

The most salient position, expressed by speakers across all parties except SD, is that the EU has a responsibility towards refugees; that the EU and other member states must continue supporting International Human Rights organisations (e.g. SWE-2013-Billstrom), that "the whole of Europe has to react in order to prevent deaths of migrants" (SWE-2015-Lofven) or that the EU will have to cooperate with other international actors, for instance Libya and the migrants living there (SWE-2016-Wallstrom). Similarly, the most common claim regarding other *EU member states* is that they must cooperate, take their responsibility and show solidarity. The need to make common efforts at burden-sharing and to agree on quotas and reallocation of asylum seekers are often referred to. In many of the speeches, other member states are criticized for not having taken their share of the moral obligations towards asylum seekers. It is emphasized that Sweden and Germany were the only countries showing solidarity and that the EU needs to do better. Speakers emphasize that Sweden has a role to play as a forerunner and role model for other EU member states, and that Sweden must strive for a better and more coordinated EU policy approach.

The claims made by speakers from the SD diverge from the rest. SD sees EU as a threat towards the Swedish nation state and the autonomy of "the Swedish people". According to SD, nation states should maintain power over their borders, and decisions must not be taken on supranational levels. For instance, this view is expressed in a 2018 debate (with the Liberal party leader): "Take Sweden, for example, should we who sit in parliament decide how many immigrants can come to Sweden, or should bureaucrats and politicians in other countries who sit in Brussels take those decisions?" (SWE-2018-Akesson). Similarly, SD is critical to what they see as a development towards EU federalism: "We do not need – and we will not have – a United States of Europe" (SWE-2016-Akesson). SD is also critical of the Swedish asylum policies, calling for the introduction of sharp restrictions to bring the Swedish approach more in line with other states: "Sweden is isolated in the EU, since it's only this country that is positive towards migration (SWE-2013-Ekeroth). Up to 2015, the demands voiced by SD were rejected by the other parliamentary parties, as exemplified with the support, expressed by Moderate party minister of migration, Tobias Billström, of "Sweden's long tradition of granting permanent residence to people in need of protection" (SWE-2013-Billstrom).

In October/November 2015, the idea of adapting Swedish asylum policies to other European countries gradually gains ground. Sweden's relatively more generous asylum

policies are criticized as being irresponsible and naïve. Hence, the idea of Sweden as a forerunner for humanitarian principles is confronted by the idea that Sweden's relatively more generous asylum policies resulted in challenges regarding capacity to receive and integrate new arrivals. The need to limit asylum migration was thus the main argument when the Red-Green government in November 2015 announced the introduction of border controls at the Swedish-Danish border and a temporary law that adjusted Swedish migration policies "to the EU minimum level". Parliament approved the bill on a temporary law in June 2016 (Borevi and Shakra 2019). The government maintained the claim that all EU member states should take their responsibility but held that Sweden could not diverge from other EU member states. In 2017, the Moderate party spokesperson for immigration, Tobias Billström, declared that restrictions introduced in the temporary migration law must be made permanent: "Sweden cannot wait for a common European asylum system, it needs an effective and sustainable migration policy" [*effektiv och hållbar migrationspolitik*] (SWE-2017-Billstrom). This message was later combined with another striking slogan - "Sweden must put its house in order regarding reception of refugees" [*Sverige måste se om sitt hus då det gäller flyktingmottagande*] (e.g. SWE-2017-Lofven; SWE-2018-Lofven).

The most common subject matter in the speeches is *refugees*. Most speeches portray refugees as people who have not chosen to leave their countries but are forced to do so, it is noted that many of them are children, that they try to reach their destination under dangerous circumstances, that they are in need of protection. Speeches held by representatives of SD instead typically emphasize the size of the migration stream ("22 million Syrians might come to Sweden", SWE-2013-Ekeroth, 2013), that the majority of the refugees are men, and explicitly juxtapose the interests of refugees against those of Swedes ("it is the taxpayers the government should think of first, and not the asylum seekers", SW-2013-Ekeroth). The second most common "object talked about" is the Sweden Democrats and political actors representing this party. Representatives of other parties portray SD, for instance as being against both "EU and EU cooperation" and "international conventions" (SWE-2013-Billstrom); as "spreading fake news and false information regarding migration" (SWE-2013-Palm). When SD-representatives talk about their own party, it is instead portrayed as the "only opposition in parliament" (SWE-2013-Ekroth).

All political actors, except those representing the SD, express *liberal* views about Europe - hence, they are pluralists, imagining Europe as a society open to diversity. They are also strongly in favour of an international humanitarian role for the EU; and clearly embrace an idea about Europe and the EU built around a discourse of human rights based on the liberal platform of respect for individual dignity. In early September 2015, Social Democratic Prime Minister Stefan Löfven held a speech where he declared that the refugee influx had put EU values to a test. Mentioning the history of Europe, and the current challenge of people fleeing the war in Syria, with the death of Alan Kurdi, he continued: "Now, once more we have to decide which Europe we want to have. My Europe receives people who flee from war, shows solidarity and cooperation. My Europe does not build walls, we help when there is a big need" (SWE-2015-Löfven). In a 2018 speech by Liberal party leader Jan Björklund similarly made historical references, noting that European values were again challenged, with the rise of xenophobic parties and extremists both on the left and the right: "We liberals will not give way. We will take the fight against both right-wing populists and left-wing populists. The liberal societal model and European cooperation must be developed, not dismantled" (SWE-2018-Bjorklund).

The material gives numerous examples of SDs critical or sceptical view of the European Union. The EU is held to represent a threat to the nation state and to the Swedish people. Other scholars have concluded that in SD rhetoric ethno-nationalist ideas about protection of



the Swedish identity and welfare state are expressed alongside, and sometimes in tension, with defence of a “European identity” (e.g. Rydgren 2010). This tension is a tension that is apparent also in the speeches analysed here.

## Circulation of Narratives in the Mainstream Media

The editorials reflect constructions of Europe in relation to refugee immigration, revolving around concrete events such as elections to the European parliament, proposals for an EU common asylum policy, various summit-meetings on refugee and asylum policies, etc. Just as in the political speeches, the 2015 events represent a watershed regarding what matters are discussed and how. For instance, starting from the autumn of 2015, a criticism of the asylum system surfaced as one primary theme. Several editorials, notably in GP and SvD, held that the “refugee crisis” showed the need to reconsider the applicability of the UN refugee convention, possibly even to consider the abolishment of the principle of the right to asylum: given that it was hard to live up to the theoretical principle of every individual’s right to apply for asylum, it was held to be hypocritical to retain this right.

Several editorials, notably in GP and SvD, highlighted and discussed alternative options, intended to discourage asylum seekers from making dangerous journeys in their efforts to reach Europe. One idea was to replace the current asylum system with refugee quotas (where selected persons would be transferred directly to the EU) and a mechanism for burden sharing across the EU member states; another to make efforts at putting more focus on channelling financial aid to countries in conflict-ridden regions (instead of receiving refugees in Europe) and a third idea, finally, to introduce “the Australian solution”; namely to keep asylum seekers away from the national mainland, instead isolating them on remote islands. In October 2017, an editorial in SvD supported a proposal, that had been launched by the Moderate party, to create “hotspots” outside of Europe where asylum seekers would have their applications assessed, arguing that:

The right of asylum as it looks like today only implies that people, by all means available, are hindered from seeking asylum [...] What remains is to risk your life in the Mediterranean Sea – so far this year 2.784 persons have drowned. Is this what it means to defend the right of asylum? If we really care for people’s lives, then we need to create a system that does not feed the smugglers (SvD 2017-10-24).

Similarly, in a GP editorial in February 2018, it was argued that Sweden should follow the Danish example and design an immigration policy “...that is already the reality in countries like Australia and Canada, and that generally works well” (GP 2018-02-06). There were also other editorials, notably in DN, that rejected suggestions like the above-mentioned, and instead emphasized it was crucial to defend the right of asylum (e.g. DN 2016-09-22).

Editorials across the three newspapers reflect rather similar opinions regarding European political dynamics in relation to the refugee issue: There is a widespread unwillingness across Europe to receive refugees – driven by an immigration-restrictive public opinion and the political influence of right-wing populist parties – that hinders any common European solutions.

Editorials highlighted that fundamental “European values” were at stake in relation to refugee migration, and the right to free movement within the EU was particularly mentioned. The EU-Turkey deal was another theme discussed in several editorials. It was recognized that this deal involved fundamental risks – a gamble – not only economically, but also in relation to “European values” and “European identity”. The negotiations with Turkey received some support, but were recurrently characterised as problematic, summarised in the title of one DN-editorial; “EU must not sell its soul” (DN 2015-11-30).

Another conclusion worth highlighting is that many editorials criticise political leaders for being hypocritical, saying one thing and doing another. For instance, in one editorial it was argued that Social Democratic Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (together with Angela Merkel) used solemn proclamations about “European solutions” and “solidarity” while simultaneously

taking part in “the race to the bottom” just like other countries, introducing asylum policy restrictions and border controls (DN 2016-12-13).

## How editorials comment on Reinfeldt’s 2014 speech and Löfven’s 2015 speech

Two of the speeches in our sample have become particularly noteworthy and are often referred to in political and public debates. The first was held in August 2014, during the national election campaign by Fredrik Reinfeldt (SWE-2014-Reinfeldt), then Prime Minister and leader of the Moderate party, where he urged the Swedish population to have patience and to “open your hearts” towards the increasing numbers of refugees which were expected due to the ongoing war in Syria. A month later, the Moderate leader resigned his post (on the night after Election Day), since the party had suffered a significant loss in voter support. The party leadership would later distance itself from the “open-your-hearts speech”. The other speech was held on 5 September 2015 by Stefan Löfven, then Prime Minister and Social Democratic party leader, during a public demonstration to show solidarity with asylum seekers from Syria (SWE-2015-Lofven). The Prime Minister’s declaration that “my Europe does not build walls” became a famous slogan, not least because two months later Löfven, together with the Green Party deputy Prime Minister, announced the re-introduction of Schengen border controls and declared the intention to introduce significant restrictions in Swedish asylum policies in order to limit asylum migration to the country. Below, we provide an account of how editorials in the three studies newspapers referred to these two speeches, over the period studied.

### *“Open your hearts”*

Starting with editorials in Göteborgsposten (GP), we can first note a positive attitude towards the speech: “It was a good thing to make a plea to the Swedish people to have patience when more refugees are arriving, maybe as many as during the Balkan wars. ‘Open your hearts. Show openness and tolerance. We have done it before. We can do it again’” (GP 2014-08-17). The Prime Minister was said to have disarmed SD “by being positive and honest” (GP 2014-08-23) and by standing up for core values in a time when the stream of people who “flee for their lives from war and oppression” increases:

That is when solidarity and humanity are tested. That is when we should be proud and happy about a prime minister who in a tough election campaign has the guts to say: this will cost money, but ‘open your hearts for the vulnerable’. You do not find many of that kind of politician in Europe (GP 2014-08-18).

One year after Reinfeldt’s speech, in August 2015, the same newspaper was slightly more critical. It was noted that, even though the former Prime Minister was “right in urging us to open our hearts”, it was not enough “only to think with your heart, you have to use your head too, and openly, respectfully and broad-mindedly be able to discuss the consequences and problems of immigration” (GP 2015-08-23). And in June 2016, the speech received harsh criticism, where it was rejected as “historically naïve and destructive”; “Reinfeldt, through moralising, tried to excuse his own inability to have a public debate about a responsible immigration policy instead of transforming it into a moral achievement” (GP 2016-06-26).

Dagens Nyheter (DN) is somewhat more sympathetic towards Reinfeldt’s speech throughout the period. In December 2015, the editorial commented on a statement by the Moderate Party secretary, Tomas Tobé, where he indirectly criticized Reinfeldt’s approach, claiming that “it was a mistake to talk too little about migration out of fear of SD” and that “we

should have handled the issue better when in government” (DN 2015-12-11). Another editorial argued it was wrong to “move Sweden on a unique path in relation to Europe” and that one had to “complement ‘open hearts’ with ‘open eyes’”, concluding that integration had not been handled seriously by the previous Alliance government, which was one of its biggest mistakes (DN 2015-12-15). In August 2016, DN again referred to the speech, commenting on the harsher debate and U-turn in Swedish migration policy: “how open are our hearts? (---) today responsibility seems to be synonymous with implementing restrictions so that fewer can enter”. (DN 2016-08-16). Four months later, a DN editorial rhetorically asked “Is Reinfeldt to blame for the refugee crisis happening?”, answering that “no, we would not have been in a better position if the Prime Minister had not been as sharp in his distancing from SD’s xenophobia” (DN 2016-12-10). In August 2017, a DN editorial similarly noted that, in retrospect, the tone in the debate had changed dramatically. In September 2015, political parties had come with various suggestions to promote asylum seekers’ right to seek asylum in Sweden, but two months later the debate had turned “from open hearts to that the government wanted to ‘create a breathing space for Swedish refugee reception’”. The editorial noted that up to September 2015, the focus had been on the crisis refugees experienced when fleeing from war and persecution, whereas thereafter the crisis was mainly understood in terms of how the asylum seekers affected Swedish society, economy and politics. The tone and choice of words had changed accordingly: “Unaccompanied minors became ‘bearded-children’<sup>2</sup> or children in inverted commas. People in need were described as potential terrorists, and also the law-abiding were seen as a threat to Swedish values and the Western culture” (DN 2017-08-04).

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) referred to Reinfeldt’s speech in an editorial in February 2016, where it was noted that “the angry interpretation” of this speech, namely that it was “intended to invite the whole world to come to Sweden” was not correct. Yet, such an interpretation was “possible to understand” (SvD 2016-02-25). In March 2016, Reinfeldt’s speech was again mentioned in an editorial, that reflected on the changing public debate in Sweden: “The debate about Swedish refugee policy has undergone many stages of collective denial. The idea about Sweden as a humanitarian superpower is treacherous since it only considers volumes. The fact that we receive so many in relation to our size, but to a lesser degree talk about how those who come here get along, and why so many still are unemployed” (SvD 2016-03-20).

### *“My Europe does not build walls”*

If Reinfeldt’s speech received praise, at least directly after it was held, Löfven’s “My Europe does not build walls”-speech, held in September 2015, was commented on in more critical terms already from the start. GP published an editorial two days after the speech was held with the following comment:

It is as if Stefan Lovfen personifies the intellectual mess in the current migration debate. In less than 24 hours the prime minister managed first to criticize Hungary for their barbed wire fence along the border and to say that ‘my Europe does not build walls’ and thereafter he demands that the EU’s external borders should be better enforced. But Lovfen is not alone in trying to punctuate the harsh reality with empty buzzwords (GP 2015-09-08).

Yet a couple of days later, an editorial from the same newspaper criticized that the speech manifested a kind of “bombastic manifestations of sentiments where either you are for or against, good or bad”, and continued, “However, what is good and what is bad is not that easy to define. Is it good or bad that we do not open the borders for the 60 million refugees in the

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<sup>2</sup> The Swedish word “Skäggbarn” (“bearded children”) is a gross expression that was spread in right-wing populist circles and xenophobic fora, insinuating that adult asylum seekers were deliberately pretending to be children (hence “fake children”).

world?” (GP 2015-09-12). In June 2016, another GP editorial referred to Löfven’s speech (but indirectly also Reinfeldt’s open-your-heart speech), when commenting on the parliament’s recent agreement to introduce temporary restrictions in asylum policies to limit the inflow of asylum seekers to Sweden. The editorial noted that “There is reason to feel anger against the politicians - from right to left - who less than a year ago pretended that Swedish refugee reception had no limits, that resources were infinite for those with their heart in the right place”. The Social Democrats, the Green Party, the Moderate Party and the Sweden Democrats supported the parliament decision, which was said to show “how the politically ‘impossible’ becomes politically necessary over one night” (GP 2016-06-23). In January 2017, an editorial again noted the shifting messages in the Social Democratic Prime Minister’s different speeches: “Now, two years later, in a parliamentary debate Löfven emphasizes with great proudness that ‘we have changed the refugee policy that became unsustainable during the years with the Alliance government” (GP 2017-10-21).

SVD in an editorial in December 2015 held that time could have been better used, if politicians would have been more prepared for a crisis, more prepared for the large inflow of asylum seekers; “However, that they did not do. As late as 6 September Stefan Lovfen declared ‘Now we need to decide what Europe we should be. My Europe receives refugees. My Europe does not build walls’. But, on his demand the train tracks in Kastrup have been separated by fences. A wall made of metal. And on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January, the ID-checks at the Swedish-Danish border will be in force. The U-turn is scandalous, but Löfven is in good company” (SvD 2015-12-31). Another SvD-editorial, in August 2016, reflected on the changing discourse and the political slogans that quickly had become obsolete:

‘Open your hearts’, said Reinfeldt. ‘My Europe does not build walls’ said Löfven. ‘A world without borders’ says the Green Party. Of all my liberal opinions, the idea of free movement used to be the one that attracted most support, the most popular one, the least controversial. It would show itself to be a shallow agreement, which was embarrassingly clear when the climate of the debate changed overnight, and closed borders became the new black (SvD 2016-08-28).

In January 2017, a SvD-editorial noted that Löfven’s “my Europe does not build walls” and Merkel’s “Wir schaffen das” were “mirroring speeches”, which in both countries had soon been replaced by closed borders and a growing opinion against receiving more refugees (SvD 2017-01-31). In another SvD-editorial from April 2018, it was argued that “if the government had acted on time, 163.000 people would not have arrived in Sweden from safe countries they were passing through on their way. Why on earth did the government wait so long?” The editorial went on arguing that, at the time when the Prime Minister had made his “My Europe does not build walls”-speech, in September 2014, the government had known very well that migration to Sweden was unsustainable: “But outwardly, they didn’t pretend they knew. Löfven was more eager to sing with the angels” (SvD 2018-04-25).

DN in a similar manner noted that Löfven’s rhetoric was shallow: “He says something one day, and next day he enforces the opposite” (DN 2016-02-01); but also noted that “all right of centre parties in the alliance opposition, except the Centre Party, made a similar turn in a more restrictive direction” (DN 2016-02-09). In April 2016, a DN-editorial reflected on the U-turn that the government had made after the ‘My Europe does not build walls’-speech. The editorial listed the challenges caused by the large increase of asylum seekers, in relation to jobs, housing, schooling and “values regarding for example equality between men and women, secularity and freedom of speech”, and ended with the rhetorical question: “What does it cost to be a humanitarian superpower?” (DN 2016-04-25). In August 2016, another DN-editorial reflected on how incredibly swift the shift had occurred. From September 2015, when the photo

of Alan Kurdi was spread over the world and Löfven held his “my Europe does not build walls”-speech to November when a “breathing space for Swedish refugee reception” had been announced, and Sweden closed its borders and adjusted its asylum policies to the EU minimum level (DN 2016-08-16). In 2018, a couple of DN editorials reminded of Löfven’s 2014 “My-Europe-does-not-build-walls speech”. One editorial argued that the shift had never been discussed in ideological terms, noting that “nowadays, however, the minister of Justice Morgan Johansson brags on twitter about that the number of expulsions of Moroccan children and youths have doubled since last year” (DN 2018-01-11). Another editorial suggested that “the reason he [Löfven] is not constantly reminded about this proclamation is that so many others who said similar things have now changed their minds” (DN 2018-02-06). Finally, one editorial held that Löfven had to take into account the two opposing traditions within the Social Democrats: one conservative “welfare and Swedish works first” and another “radical dream about internationalism and solidarity with the world’s most vulnerable” (DN 2018-03-15).

To summarize, the comments about the two speeches revolved around the embarrassingly swift shift of the Swedish discourse about asylum policies, the hypocrisy of political leaders, and the naïve and moralistic view that these speeches were held to represent of Sweden as a moral super-power in the EU. Only small variations are to be noted across the three newspapers, but on the margins DN’s editorials express most regrets about the turn, while GP and SvD are most critical towards the approach taken before the turn.

## Conclusion

Focusing on the Swedish case, this report has sought to explore how political actors are constructing views about Europe in relation to ideas and claims revolving around refugee immigration and how these themes are interpreted and discussed in the mass media. The analysis is based on two empirical data-sets covering the period 2011-2018 consisting of a selection of political speeches and editorials from three national newspapers.

One main result is that the 2015 events, often referred to as “the refugee crisis”, stand out as a watershed in the Swedish context and resulted in significant discursive changes. This meant a change in the discursive constructions of Sweden’s role in the EU and Sweden’s relation to other European countries, but also of EU’s ability to come up with reasonable responses to asylum immigration at all. Prior to 2015, Sweden was typically constructed, both by political actors and in the editorials, as a role model for other EU member states. Post-2015, the crucial issue was instead to make efforts to avoid that Sweden stood out as more generous than other European countries. Correspondingly, the national self-image as a “humanitarian forerunner” now became a recurrent target of criticism and even mockery, particularly in the editorials but also in some of the political speeches.

Another main conclusion is that *liberal* ideas and rhetoric about Europe dominate the Swedish political discourse. Political speeches analysed in this report reflect images of Europe as an “open society”; the aim to incorporate diversity in the European project and the fundamental approval of human rights based on the liberal platform of respect of individual dignity. Correspondingly, there are very few clear examples of *conservative* ideas of Europe to be found in the material. The material further contains concerns that immigration is threatening, not only the Swedish welfare state but also its culture or “way of life. Similar fears are formulated in relation to what is understood as European values; European culture or the European way of life. There are indications that such concerns and framings increased during the second part of the period studied (2015-2018).

Finally, this report contributes with showing how processes of audience-making may be empirically explored and analysed, e.g. by investigating how editorials refer to, interpret and discuss political speeches. It is shown that over time the editorials have varying interpretations of two famous speeches: the “Open-your-hearts” speech, held by then Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt in August 2014, and the “My-Europe-does-not-build-walls” speech held by then Prime Minister Stefan Löfven in September 2015.

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Göteborgsposten (GP), 2015-09-08, *Förvirrande fagert tal*.

Göteborgsposten (GP), 2015-09-12, *Vad är ont och gott i migrationsfrågan?*

Göteborgsposten (GP), 2016-06-23, *Hur mycket politiskt hyckleri tål Sverige?*

Göteborgsposten (GP), 2016-06-26, *Moralistens diktatur*.

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Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2016-03-20, *Ledarskapsmässigt haveri*.

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2016-08-28, *Varför gick gränslösheten åt skogen?*

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2017-01-31, *Willkommen frau Merkel*.

Svenska Dagbladet (SvD), 2017-10-24, *Med Moderaternas förslag kan EU hållas ihop*.

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## Appendix 1

### OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL SPEECHES

ID	Date	Speaker
SWE-2013-Billstrom	2013-10-22	Tobias Billström (Moderate Party)
SWE-2013-Ekeroth	2013-10-22	Kent Ekeroth (Sweden Democrats)
SWE-2013-Haddad	2013-10-22	Roger Haddad (Liberal Party)
SWE-2013-Palm	2013-10-22	Veronika Palm (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2014-Akesson	2014-04-26	Jimmie Åkesson (Sweden Democrats)
SWE-2014-Reinfeldt	2014-08-16	Fredrik Reinfeldt (Moderate Party)
SWE-2015-Lofven	2015-09-06	Stefan Löfven (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2016-Wallstrom	2016-09-08	Margot Wallström (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2016-Hoj Larsen	2016-09-08	Christina Höj Larsen (Left Party)
SWE-2016-Bjorklund	2016-07-03	Jan Björklund (Liberal Party)
SWE-2016-Lofven	2016-09-13	Stefan Löfven (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2017-Fritzon	2017-11-14	Heléne Fritzon (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2017-Billstrom	2017-11-14	Tobias Billström (Moderate Party)
SWE-2017-Lofven	2017-10-26	Stefan Löfven (Social Democratic Party)
SWE-2018-Akesson	2018-06-20	Jimmie Åkesson (Sweden Democrats)
SWE-2018-Bjorklund	2018-06-20	Jan Björklund (Liberal Party)