

## **2004 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 7 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN SWEDEN JUNE 13 2004**

**Nicholas Aylott and Magnus Blomgren  
Department of Political Science  
Umeå University, Sweden**

**Email: [nicholas.aylott@pol.umu.se](mailto:nicholas.aylott@pol.umu.se) and [magnus.blomgren@pol.umu.se](mailto:magnus.blomgren@pol.umu.se)**

### **Key points:**

- The Swedish election to the European Parliament turned out to be much more interesting than expected. The June List, a Eurosceptical association formed just four months previously, took 14.5% of the vote and three of Sweden's 19 mandates. In one of Europe's most stable polities, this was a remarkable result.
- The leadership of the governing Social Democrats, meanwhile, received a double humiliation. The party's score was its worst in a nation-wide election since 1908, before universal male suffrage. Moreover, the lone Eurosceptic on its list, who had been placed a long way down it, won enough preference votes to take one of their five seats.
- Turnout, at just 37.9%, was even lower than in 1999.
- These results reflect the scepticism that, nearly a decade after their country joined the EU, many Swedes still feel about it. Yet, paradoxically, it is arguable that the election signalled a normalisation of the EU issue in Swedish party politics.

### **Background**

Sweden joined the EU in 1995. Membership was preceded by a referendum in which the electorate approved the terms by only a fairly narrow margin and, on many issues, Sweden has subsequently been a reluctant integrator. Quite often, its political elite, which has become broadly and increasingly favourable to the EU, has been held back by public opinion. The best example of this disconnection between people and politicians is the saga of Sweden's position vis-à-vis monetary union. After standing aside from EMU's launch, in 2002 the government decided to try to persuade Swedish voters of EMU's merits in another referendum. But, when the vote was held in September 2003, the verdict was No. The size of the vote against EMU, 55.9% to 42.0%, has removed the issue from the Swedish agenda for the foreseeable future.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See: See: Nicholas Aylott, "The Swedish Referendum on EMU of September 14 2003", *European Parties Elections and Referendums Network Briefing No 9*, Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex, 2003 at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epernbrefsweden.pdf>.

Europe is an awkward issue in Swedish party politics. The seven-party system is divided into two loose, informal but (for the moment) fairly coherent alliances. On the left there is the socialist bloc, comprising the system's dominant party, the Social Democrats; the former communist Left Party; and, aspiring to a pivotal role in the system, the Greens. The Social Democrats have governed for all but nine years since 1936 and, since 1998, their minority cabinet has been formally supported by the Left and the Greens – despite the fact that those two parties are so deeply Eurosceptical that their programmes still call for Sweden's departure from the EU. The other bloc, meanwhile, comprises "non-socialist" or "bourgeois" parties on the centre-right: the Centre Party, with its agrarian origins; the Liberals; the Christian Democrats; and the conservative Moderates. This bourgeois bloc has also been split over Europe. While all four parties were in favour of EU membership in the 1994 referendum, in 2003 the Centre recommended a No to EMU. Furthermore, in addition to these intra-bloc divisions, three parties – the Social Democrats, the Centre and the Christian Democrats – have contained organised Eurosceptical factions.

Pervasive Euroscepticism, which has been concentrated on but not confined to the left of the spectrum, was expressed in Sweden's two previous elections to the European Parliament. In 1995 it was striking that the Social Democrats' scored much lower than in any national parliamentary election since 1911; that the Left and especially the Greens won much higher proportions than they had ever taken nationally; and, above all, that turnout sunk towards half its usual national level. In 1999 similar patterns were visible, and turnout fell below 40%. But, despite a few attempts, no new parties had managed to break through on the back of popular misgivings about the Union. In short, earlier European elections seemed to indicate that the seven established parties reflected the range of domestic opinion on integration, from enthusiasm (the Liberals and the Moderates) to more cautious support (the Social Democrats, the Centre and the Christian Democrats) and outright opposition (the Left and the Greens).

Nevertheless, some political entrepreneurs felt in 2004 that there were gaps in the political market that they could fill. Two attempts to do so attracted media interest; and both of those found inspiration from across the Sound, in Denmark. One of these efforts, a list of "EU Opponents", declared that their "single-issue movement" was a response to the main parties' reluctance to include Eurosceptics on their election lists (as some had done in previous European elections). EU Opponents presented their list as cross-party, and modelled themselves on the Danish People's Movement Against the EU. They briefly gained some attention when, a month before the election, six Centre Party members were expelled by that party's national executive for standing on the EU Opponents' list.

The second attempt was taken more seriously by media commentators. The figure behind this initiative, Nils Lundgren, had become well-known the previous year as a leading light in the campaign against EMU. As a long-standing member of the Social Democrats, a former chief economist with one of Sweden's biggest banks and a member of the public inquiry into the consequences of EMU in the late 1990s, he did not fit the profile of a political outsider. Nor did his main collaborator, a former governor of the Swedish central bank. After weeks of rumours, in mid-February the two announced their plan to compete in the European election.<sup>2</sup> The idea for their group's name, the June List, was clearly taken from the Danish June Movement. So were some of its resources, lent by the Danish group. So too was its basic position: acceptance of, even support for, Sweden's EU membership, but opposition to further transfers of power to European institutions. This mild brand of Euroscepticism was aimed both at So-

---

<sup>2</sup> See: Nils Lundgren and Lars Wohlin, "Nu startar vi nytt parti inför EU-valet", *Dagens Nyheter* Feb. 11th 2004.

cial Democratic supporters with doubts about the EU, but who could not face voting for the Left or the Greens, and at bourgeois voters who also felt that their EU-related preferences were insufficiently reflected by the centre-right parties that they usually supported.

The June List reckoned that the referendum on the euro had revealed the potential of a pitch to these groups. Still, few observers gave it much chance. Apart from some turbulence in 1988-91, new parties have found it hard to force their way into the Swedish party system, and the two previous European elections had given no indication – the Danish model notwithstanding – that it would be any easier in 2004.

The electoral system for the European Parliament also warrants a brief mention. The country comprised a single constituency, and the parties offered nation-wide lists with rank-ordered candidates. However, as in 1999, there was the facility to vote for an individual candidate on a party list, instead of for the list as whole. If a candidate won at least 5% of all her party's votes (that is, those for the list as a whole and for individual candidates on it), she was projected to the top of the list, potentially upsetting the party's order.

## **The campaign and party strategies**

### Candidate selection

The process of selecting candidates within Swedish parties has changed in recent years. The use of intra-party primaries is more common and the desire to balance the list according to an equal gender allocation is very manifest in all parties. At the same time, the introduction of preference voting in the late 1990s has made the process of selecting candidates more complex. This tendency was also observable in the 2004 election.

Candidate selection in national elections is relatively decentralised in Sweden; that is, it is usually left to the regional levels of the party organisations. In European elections, by contrast, with the country comprising a single constituency, the parties' national levels were fundamental to the process. In 2004 the party leaderships either closely monitored it or reserved to themselves the final say about the composition of their lists. All the parties except the Left and the Social Democrats held some kind of advisory intra-party primary.

This intimate involvement of the parties' leaderships in candidate selection is of considerable importance. The reason is the wide cleavage within some parties regarding the question of European integration, which creates tension when it comes to selecting candidates. There were debates within several parties on whether lists should contain candidates with a different view on EU issues to the party leadership's. Naturally, this was most sensitive in parties that have strong internal conflicts on such issues, such as the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. The result was that, in 2004, Eurosceptical candidates were more or less left out of the ballots in parties that usually gain support from a Eurosceptical electorate. The Social Democratic list, for example, contained only one Eurosceptical candidate, and she was put very far down on the list. However, the facility of preference votes made it possible for the few rebellious candidates to campaign on being the alternative voice of the party, and this strategy turned out to be successful for some of them.

Among the 22 Swedish MEPs before the 2004 election, only eight were given (apparently) safe places on the parties' lists. One of the incumbents, a Eurosceptical Christian Democrat, was given an unsafe place (which, however, left open to him the chance of election via pref-

erence votes, which he had managed in 1999). Thirteen incumbents were not placed on the lists at all, mostly because they themselves declined to run again (although the Greens' rules on term limits were applied to their two sitting MEPs).<sup>3</sup> This must be regarded as a relatively high turnover rate.

Furthermore, in most parties, the list did not contain many high-profile candidates. The Social Democrats tried to persuade the Swedish European Commissioner, Margot Wallström, to head their list, but she declined. (Indeed, she also turned down an offer to return to a ministerial position. Wallström's reluctance to leave the Commission clearly irked the Social Democrats' leader, and the row overshadowed the launch of the party's election manifesto.) The Social Democrats turned instead to an MP and former chair of their women's association to fill their first place. However, since she had no experience as a minister, and was not associated with the top leadership of the party, she was not recognised as an especially strong candidate. In the Moderates, the former general secretary of the party was placed first. He was a well-known party figure, but he was also seen as coming from the former, outdated leadership.

The Centre Party put its economic spokeswoman, a reasonably senior figure, at the top of its list. The Liberals, meanwhile, lacked the draw of their best-known candidate from 1999, who retired in 2004. But this was offset by their nomination of a journalist known for campaigning on women's issues. Perhaps slightly surprisingly, she was the only significant candidate on all the main parties' lists to be recruited from outside the parties' structures. Externally recruited celebrity candidates are not (yet) as common in Sweden as in some other EU countries.

Two parties presented top candidates who were high-profile incumbent MEPs – indeed, they are the only Swedish politicians who have built significant political identities from a base in the European Parliament. Neither Jonas Sjöstedt of the Left Party nor the Liberals' Cecilia Malmström has had any prominent national political career. It is also significant that these two parties are probably the most consistent in terms of their view on the EU, although on opposite sides of the integration dimension.

The June List lacked a national organisation or membership, so its eight candidates in effect chose themselves. To the other parties' consternation, they were allowed to describe themselves on the ballot paper according to their usual political affiliations. They comprised three Social Democrats, a Christian Democrat, a Moderate, a Liberal, a "general bourgeois" and an "independent left".

### The parties' campaign strategies

The campaign revolved round three broad themes. First, early in the campaign, the Social Democrats argued that this election concerned left and right issues, as in any national election. The strategic purpose was to mobilise the support of their traditional voters. They made the Moderates their main opponent in the election, which meant that they engaged in one-to-one debates only with that party's representatives. They also produced a report that gave examples of how Moderate MEPs had voted during the last period, and thus tried to show that it was a

---

<sup>3</sup> These figures refer to candidates who were elected in 1999. If a successful candidate cannot take her seat during her mandate, for whatever reason, the best-placed unsuccessful candidate on the party list serves as a substitute parliamentarian. Several Swedish substitutes served in the European Parliament in 1999-2004. Of the 22 people who were or could have been substitutes, 11 stood in the 2004 election. One was given a fairly safe place (as the Greens' top candidate), another was given a riskier position (as the Christian Democrats' second-placed candidate) and nine were given unsafe places.

case of "the same Moderates there as here". However, the Social Democrats also needed a more concrete EU-related policy issue, in order to show how support for the Moderates would mean a deterioration of the Swedish model and welfare system. The Commission's draft directive on liberalising services became that issue. The Social Democrats argued that it would undermine the Swedish labour-market system and threaten the public sector. Since awareness among the public and journalists about issues like the services directive is very limited, the Social Democrats were able to define the content of the directive and criticise its alleged consequences.

Second, several parties tried to respond to Swedish voters' general Euroscepticism by framing their messages as calls for a more limited, but stronger, Union. Although such arguments usually implied an increased policy competence for the EU, it was always coupled with the less concrete suggestion that the current Union was doing the wrong things. There were various examples of this double message. The Centre Party advocated a No in the EMU referendum and much of its electorate is strongly Eurosceptical. Yet in the 2004 campaign, the party surprised everyone by arguing for a common EU defence policy and qualified-majority voting in foreign policy. The Moderates and Liberals, meanwhile, argued that the EU should have a stronger crime-fighting capacity (the Liberals demanded a European FBI). At the same time, all these parties argued that the EU should not deal with issues that are better handled at national level (such as, according to the Liberals, agricultural policy). In addition, the Christian Democrats argued that Sweden's traditionally restrictive alcohol policy was being undermined by the free market in alcohol within the Union. They even urged the unilateral re-introduction of alcohol import quotas. In these ways, the parties tried to strike a balance between being positive toward a more developed Union, without standing out as having too EU-enthusiastic a position. In other words, while arguing for a stronger union, the parties also tried to deliver criticism of the consequences of integration.

Third, the established Eurosceptical parties, the Left and the Greens, plus the newly created June List, campaigned on giving less power to Brussels. In particular, these three parties demanded a referendum on the putative European constitution. The Left and the Greens both said in their election manifestos that they wanted Sweden to leave the union. Elements in the leaderships of both parties, especially the Greens, had earlier floated cautiously the idea of softening this hard Eurosceptical position. But party congresses in the months preceding the 2004 election had, in both cases, squashed the suggestion. Thus, the two parties' support for Sweden's exit from the EU, which was widely criticised as unrealistic, created an opportunity for the June List to gain support, with its position that Sweden should remain a member but limit the transfer of power to the Union.

### The campaign

The campaign itself started relatively late, not least because the parties concentrated their efforts in the three or four weeks before the election, and also because they devoted limited resources to it.<sup>4</sup> These two aspects inevitably signalled to the media, the sub-national party organisations and party members that the 2004 election was not an especially important one. It was also obvious that several parties had difficulties deciding who in the party structures should be the main public figures in the campaign. In some parties, the top candidates played that role; in others, it was the party leader – or even, in the Social Democrats' case, cabinet

---

<sup>4</sup> According to *Dagens Nyheter* (May 26th 2004), the Social Democrats devoted SKr25m to their campaign, the Moderates SKr4.3m, the Christian Democrats SKr3.5m, the Liberals and Centre SKr3m each, and the Left and the Greens SKr2.5m each.

ministers. Indeed, there was particular confusion among Social Democrats about the role of their party leader and the prime minister, Göran Persson. He was hospitalised for a hip operation during the last ten days of the campaign. The timing of the operation was, according to some, another indication of the low priority his party had given the European election.

More generally, the media had a hard time defining the issues involved in this election. One result of this confusion was that the presumed low turnout was the main topic of discussion several weeks before the election, rather than a debate about the policy issues involved. It was also obvious that the media had difficulties knowing what questions to ask the candidates, because some journalists (and perhaps even some of the candidates, too) did not themselves have enough knowledge about the most sensitive and controversial issues.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the June List created a problem for the media. First, it was not until quite late in the campaign that the media – and, indeed, the main parties – seemed to realise that the List was a genuine contestant in the election. Studies later showed that the media's interest was belatedly attracted in the fortnight before the vote.<sup>6</sup> Second, the question of whether the June List should take part in the final debate on national television, on the Friday before the election, created a dilemma. Swedish Television chose not to invite it, on the grounds that its significance had not yet been demonstrated either electorally or consistently in opinion polls. Ironically, this may have made it possible for the List to emphasise its profile as an anti-establishment party, and thus to gain some support at the end of the campaign.

## **Analysis and Conclusions**

Turnout was again very poor by Swedish standards. Indeed, it was the worst of the 15 pre-2004 member states, and only five of the ten new member states saw a lower level. Unsurprisingly, that prompted a certain outpouring of angst. Even some pro-EU politicians questioned whether it was really worth having an election in which so few take part. Of course, this is far from being just a Swedish issue. Here, we limit our analysis to three aspects of Sweden's 2004 election: the parties' performances, implications for their control of candidate selection, and the role of Euroscepticism in Swedish party politics generally.

### The parties' fortunes

The first organisations to field criticism after the election were the pollsters, who blamed a late surge of support for their failure to anticipate the June List's success. This may indeed have had something to do with the List's exclusion from the television debate; certainly, that brought publicity that it had struggled to attract previously. After the election, the June List's success was pinned on the media for a slightly different reason. It had scored so well, it was claimed, because the media had failed to subject it to sufficient critical analysis, which left its potential supporters insufficiently informed about its real character.<sup>7</sup> But this seems unlikely.

A more persuasive explanation is that, quite simply, the June List's score represented successful political entrepreneurship. A first, crucial element in this operation was the identification of a market: middle-of-the-road voters who – in contrast to the parties they usually vote for – had been against EMU, were suspicious of the EU's planned constitution and generally doubt-

---

<sup>5</sup> See Torbjörn Bergman and Magnus Blomgren, "Okunnigt i medierna om Europavalet", *Dagens Nyheter* June 20th 2004.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Dagens Nyheter* Jun. 24th 2004.

<sup>7</sup> See: Stig Hadenius, "Självgoda medier föraktade junilistan", *Dagens Nyheter* Jun. 15th 2004.

ful about further European integration; and who, moreover, would not vote for the Left or the Greens, either because of those parties' characters or because of their demand that Sweden leave the EU. Exit-poll evidence supports this observation.<sup>8</sup> A narrow plurality of the June List's voters did not want Sweden to leave the Union, whereas a bigger plurality of Green voters, and a comfortable majority of Left voters, did support that scenario. The same poll confirmed the June List's cross-party, cross-bloc appeal, indicating that it took over a quarter of its voters from the Social Democrats, a fifth from the Moderates and smaller proportions from all the other parties.

**Table 1. Sweden's election to the European Parliament, June 13th 2004**

<i>EP group</i>		<b>per cent 2004</b>	<b>mandates 2004</b>	per cent 1999	mandates 1999	per cent 2002*
<i>EUL/NGL</i>	Left Party	<b>12.8</b>	<b>2</b>	15.8	3	8.3
<i>PES</i>	Social Democrats	<b>24.6</b>	<b>5</b>	26.0	6	39.8
<i>Greens-EFA</i>	Greens	<b>6.0</b>	<b>1</b>	9.5	2	4.6
<i>ELDR</i>	Centre Party	<b>6.3</b>	<b>1</b>	6.0	1	6.1
	Liberals	<b>9.9</b>	<b>2</b>	13.9	3	13.3
<i>EPP-ED</i>	Christian Democrats	<b>5.7</b>	<b>1</b>	7.6	2	9.1
	Moderates	<b>18.3</b>	<b>4</b>	20.7	5	15.2
	June List	<b>14.5</b>	<b>3</b>	-	-	-
	Sweden Democrats	<b>1.1</b>	<b>0</b>	0.3	0	1.1
	others	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0</b>	0.5	0	1.7
	turnout/total	<b>37.9</b>	<b>19</b>	38.3	22	80.1

\* National election.

European Parliamentary group initials: EUL/NGL = Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left; PES = Group of the Party of European Socialists; Greens-EFA = Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance; ELDR = Group of the European Liberal and Reform Party; EPP-ED = Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats.

Note: All percentages are of eligible votes, and figures are rounded to one decimal place.

Source: Election Authority ([www.val.se](http://www.val.se)).

The very breadth of that appeal could have been the List's biggest weakness. Sweden's bloc-minded voters have rarely shown much interest in parties who claim to transcend the left-right divide (the Greens may have been an exception in their early days). That the List over-

<sup>8</sup> Data from this exit poll, Valu 2004, have been taken from two sources: the *Dagens Nyheter* website ([dn.se](http://dn.se)), downloaded Jun. 15th 2004; and the Swedish Television website ([svt.se](http://svt.se)), posted Jun. 13th 2004, downloaded Jun. 29th 2004.

came this difficulty can best be explained by two factors. First, it could only have been possible in a European election, when executive power is not at stake. Second, there was the List's main figure. Lundgren's characterisation of himself as a "market-liberal Social Democrat" was shrewd: it offered something to both left and right. More generally, he could be described as the "charismatic leader" that new parties often need to break through. But he also had another, vital quality: credibility. With his background and measured style, he could not be depicted by the other parties as an extremist or an eccentric.

Due to its intrusion into all its rivals' electoral territories, the June List's success made for mild disappointment or mild satisfaction, rather than disaster, for each of them<sup>9</sup> – with perhaps one exception. On the centre-right, the Moderates' more critically pro-EU campaign may have limited their supporters' defections to the List, which was surely the objective. Still, their five MEPs were cut to four. The Christian Democrats' appeal to the fears of their core constituencies about alcohol may have staved off the electoral collapse that had for some time seemed likely, even if only the top name on their list was elected. The Liberals' performance, considering the retirement of their star candidate from 1999, plus the competition from the June List, was acceptable.

What of the parties that were against EMU in 2003? The Left gained from its top candidate, Sjöstedt. His party won more than two-fifths of the vote in his home county, almost double the Social Democrats' score. The Left lost votes overall, though, and one mandate. The same can be said of the Greens. Interestingly, the Greens' only pro-EU candidate, who was given 24th place on their list, received their third-highest tally of preference votes. This may presage a renewed internal debate about the wisdom of the party's hard Eurosceptical position. Even more interestingly, just such a review may already have happened in the Centre. Its curious transformation into Sweden's most pro-EU-sounding party during the 2004 campaign (a strategy that was rather sprung on the party's grass-roots and which might yet cause a reaction there) may have been part of a wider attempt to recast itself as Sweden's premier social-liberal party, appealing to voters frustrated by the Liberals' recent shift to the right in domestic politics. In this European election, the strategy achieved some electoral success. The Centre was the only one of the main parties to improve on its score in 1999.

The Social Democrats' result, however, was unquestionably bad. True, their losses were small. But, after such a poor score in 1999, improvement was the party's minimum expectation in 2004. The Social Democrats' presentation of the election as a fight between left and right, as in national and sub-national elections, clearly failed to persuade many voters. Nor did the lack of well-known, impressive candidates help the party. The contrast with Denmark, where the successful Social Democratic list was headed by a former prime minister, was obvious. Indeed, the disappearance into hospital of the party leader and prime minister could not help but convey the impression, fairly or unfairly, that Sweden's dominant party was only semi-interested in the election to the European Parliament.

#### The parties and their candidates

Perhaps just as damaging for the Social Democrats as their weak vote, however, was the identity of their candidates who did make it to Strasbourg. The biggest upset was the success of its only Eurosceptical candidate, Anna Hedh. She had been placed so far down the party's list that voters were forced to look on its reverse side to find her name. Nevertheless (and maybe

---

<sup>9</sup> Moreover, some losses could be blamed on there being three fewer Swedish mandates available than in 1999.



partly because of the publicity this symbolic snub attracted), her personal votes were enough to win the third of five Social Democratic mandates. This was a major embarrassment for the party leadership, which – in the absence of an intra-party primary – had done much to shape the party's list. It also signalled that the leadership's strategic decision (taken in the EMU referendum campaign and continued in the run-up to the 2004 election) to ignore or suppress its Eurosceptics, rather than to accommodate them, is quite capable of backfiring.

But this was not the only way in which preference voting created problems for the Social Democrats (for a cross-party comparison, see Table 2). Internal controversy was sparked by the personal campaign driven by the party's seventh-placed candidate, an EU-enthusiast from the party's youth wing. She was publicly backed by, among others, a former prime minister, and she subsequently won enough preference votes to secure the Social Democrats' second mandate. This intervention was interpreted by some as flouting the list that the party had ordered in its time-honoured style, based on a complex balance between intra-party constituencies – men and women, regions, trade-union affiliations, even ethnic groups. The party leadership, it was argued, ought to have campaigned for the top candidate much more strongly. The consequence of its not doing so, once preference votes had been counted, was that one of the party's most experienced MEPs, placed fourth on its list, was edged out of his seat; that all but one of its mandates went to women; and that West Sweden, a big and relatively densely populated region, was left without Social Democratic representation in Strasbourg. In other words, as a writer for the Social Democrats' newsletter complained, "For the first time, the party completely lost control over who got into parliament."<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2. Elected candidates' positions on their party lists**

MEPs elected →	1	2	3	4	5
Left Party	<u>1</u> *	2	-	-	-
Social Democrats	1*	7*	31*	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
Greens	1*	-	-	-	-
June List	1*	2*	3	-	-
Centre Party	1*	-	-	-	-
Liberals	<u>1</u> *	3*	-	-	-
Christian Democrats	<u>1</u> *	-	-	-	-
Moderates	<u>2</u> *	1*	3*	4	-

The numbers in each party's row show the places on the party list that their successful candidates held. An asterisk (\*) indicates that a candidate received a personal vote in at least 5% of her party's total vote, which took her to the top of the list, superseding its order. If more than one candidate received at least 5%, the one with more votes took the higher position. A figure underlined indicates an incumbent MEP (not including substitutes). Source: Election Authority ([www.val.se](http://www.val.se)).

<sup>10</sup> See: *Aktuellt i Politiken* Jun. 21st 2004.

This erosion of party organisations' capacity to screen democratic representatives in Sweden is not unique to European elections; but its progression was illuminated in 2004. Other parties also had their list orders upset – and, surprisingly enough, the beneficiaries were often women.<sup>11</sup> The Liberals' newly recruited journalist won enough preference votes to win the party's second mandate at the expense of one of its sitting MEPs. The Moderates' top name was elected, but he was overtaken on preference votes by the second-placed candidate, an incumbent MEP. Thus, of the eight outgoing MEPs who had "safe" places on their parties' lists, only six were re-elected. Four of the new MEPs are former national parliamentarians; the rest have not had any prominent career within the national party organisations. One inference is that several parties, particularly the Social Democrats, are still struggling to find heavyweight candidates for European elections.

### Euroscepticism and Swedish party politics

The longer-term consequences of this election are hard to predict. The durability of its big winner, the June List, will be fascinating to monitor. Whether it becomes a feature of European elections in Sweden, as its equivalent has managed in Denmark, or collapses as quickly as it emerged, like New Democracy did in national politics after 1991, may well depend on its own decisions concerning leadership, organisation and strategy.<sup>12</sup> This, in turn, will determine whether Sweden develops a "Euro-party system", distinct from the national one, as in Denmark (and maybe now other member states, including Britain). It is highly unlikely that the List will be tempted into national politics; indeed, its leader more or less ruled it out. Its success might just, though, further weaken Swedish voters' ties to their parties, and so make it easier for other new parties to make an impact at national or sub-national level.

Two broad observations can be drawn about the 2004 election. One is that Euroscepticism is alive and well in Swedish politics. Between them, the Left, the Greens and the June List won over a third of the vote. But the great success of the last of those three, plus the modest setbacks for the first two (not to mention the failure of EU Opponents, who polled just 0.6%), suggest that this Euroscepticism is becoming softer in character.<sup>13</sup> As opinion polls have also suggested, fewer and fewer Swedes see departure from the EU as realistic and/or desirable. So the issue of European integration may be becoming normalised in Swedish political life. The June List is not an "anti-system party", in the sense of opposing the very existence of the political structure in which it operates. The Left and the Greens, according to their party programmes, are still anti-system parties in EU politics; yet neither pushed its official support for Sweden's departure with any urgency in 2004. Despite the laments of some politicians and media commentators, this was not actually a campaign about yes or no to the EU.

This leads, in turn, to a second observation. The results in other countries seem to have involved strong elements of anti-government protest, and the very high abstention rate could indicate a similar phenomenon in Sweden. But survey evidence does not support this hypothesis. According to a Temo poll, nearly 60% of abstainers stayed away because they felt either insufficiently informed about or uninterested in the election, and another 14% because

---

<sup>11</sup> Without preference votes, ten men and nine women would have filled Sweden's mandates. The successful candidates in fact comprised eight men and eleven women.

<sup>12</sup> The first of these was which party group in the European Parliament the List would affiliate to. The EDD, the Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities, seemed the likeliest destination.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Nicholas Aylott (2004, forthcoming), "Softer But Strong: Euroscepticism and Party Politics in Sweden", in Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (eds), *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism, Volume 1: Case Studies and Country Surveys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

they did not like the EU, while just 3% referred to a protest or contempt for politicians.<sup>14</sup> In other words, much of the electorate was unengaged rather than protesting. This, plus the June List's success, mean that it is hard to see this European election as a second-order national poll. Instead – and probably to the dismay of the Social Democrats, who remain deeply divided over the issue – 2004 may mark a step towards a long political contest in Sweden over the appropriate division of power between different tiers of government in the multi-level European polity.

*This is the latest in a series of election and referendum briefings produced by the European Parties Elections and Referendums Network (EPERN). Based in the Sussex European Institute, EPERN is an international network of scholars that was originally established as the Opposing Europe Research Network (OERN) in June 2000 to chart the divisions over Europe that exist within party systems. In August 2003 it was re-launched as EPERN to reflect a widening of its objectives to consider the broader impact of the European issue on the domestic politics of EU member and candidate states. The Network retains an independent stance on the issues under consideration. For more information and copies of all our publications visit our website at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/1-4-2.html>*

---

<sup>14</sup> See: Nicklas Källenberg and Arne Modig, "Europaparlamentsvalet 13 juni 2004. Vad hände egentligen?", presented July 7th 2004, Visby, downloaded from the Temo website ([www.temo.se](http://www.temo.se)) July 8th 2004.