



**European Parties Elections  
and Referendums Network**

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING No.37  
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN SWEDEN,  
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**Key points:**

- The result of the Swedish election to the European Parliament suggested that Swedes have become more positive towards the EU, or at least less Eurosceptical. The strongly pro-EU Liberals and the now less Eurosceptical Greens did well, almost doubling their most recent scores in national elections. The Left Party, which still advocates withdrawal from the Union, received less than half the percentage it won in 2004. The Eurosceptical June List, a surprise success in 2004, lost its three seats.
- The two main parties, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, scored rather poorly. Both had to some extent flirted with Euroscepticism in their campaigns; the Social Democrats had chosen a well-known opponent of both EU and EMU as their top candidate.
- A new party, the Pirate Party, its agenda dominated by the related issues of digital file sharing and online privacy, received 7.1 per cent and one mandate.
- Another indicator of increased interest in the EU, and probably also of the Pirates' mobilisation of potential abstainers, was the improved (albeit still low) turnout, 43.8 per cent.
- Although it was low-key, the campaign had a genuinely European flavour. Traditionally national issues such as employment and health care were debated from an EU perspective.

## Background

Sweden became a member of the EU relatively late, in 1995, after a fairly close-run referendum – an illustration of the Eurosceptical disposition of much of the country's electorate. As in neighbouring Denmark, but unlike in Finland, this scepticism has long found ample representation in the party system. Seven parties have since 1994 been consistently represented in the national parliament, and, for most of that time, two had advocated Swedish withdrawal from the EU. A third had accepted membership but urged a No in 2003 in another EU-related referendum, on whether Sweden should adopt the euro – a vote that, to the embarrassment of the political establishment, was won comfortably by the opponents of the single currency.

Still, the intensity of Eurosceptical sentiment in Sweden has waned.<sup>1</sup> By 2008 nearly half the respondents to an annual survey indicated that they were "on the whole in favour" of EU membership, the highest level since the surveys started in 1994.<sup>2</sup> The striking success that the two anti-EU parties had secured in Sweden's first elections to the European Parliament in 1995 and 1999, in which they won a collective average of 27.7 per cent (double their average score in the 1994 and 1998 national elections), had fallen to 18.6 per cent in 2004. Even the spectacular performance in 2004 of a new party, the June List, formed in the wake of the popular rejection of EMU the previous autumn, could be interpreted as a sign of Eurosceptical opinion coming to terms with EU membership. The June List wanted Sweden to stay in the Union, but was against further transfers of power to Brussels.

In response to this softening of opinion, one of the anti-EU parties, the Greens, decided in autumn 2008, after a ballot of its members, to drop from its statutes the call for Swedish withdrawal from the EU. That left the former communist Left Party as the only hard Eurosceptics remaining in the national parliament.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Centre Party, the third party that opposed EMU in 2003, had developed the more positive view of the Union that had been visible before the 2004 European election.

Table 1. Swedish parties on two dimensions

	left				right	
pro-EU				Liberals	Chr Dems	Mods
		Soc Dems	Centre			

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Aylott (2008), "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).

<sup>2</sup> Sören Holmberg, "Åsikter om EU-medlemskapets konsekvenser 1997-2008", SOM-rapport nr 2009:3 (Gothenburg: SOM Institute, University of Gothenburg) ([www.som.gu.se](http://www.som.gu.se)). A summary in English is available.

<sup>3</sup> The terms "hard" and "soft" Euroscepticism are taken from Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (2002), 'The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States', *Opposing Europe Research Network Working Paper No.* (Sussex: University of Sussex).

Greens

**Eurosceptical** Left

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*red-green alliance*

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*Alliance for Sweden*

Notes. Only parties represented in the national parliament are included. Positions are derived from the authors' judgement.

As for the domestic political situation, the main parties are associated with two increasingly formalised blocs (see table 1). Before the 2006 national election, the four right-of-centre or "bourgeois" parties – the Liberals, the Centre, the Christian Democrats and the prime minister's party, the Moderates – had formed an unprecedentedly co-ordinated "Alliance for Sweden", which succeeded in ending 12 years of Social Democratic rule. After a difficult start to their government, opinion polls quickly showed a collapse in the Alliance's support, with the left-of-centre opposition almost out of sight. However, since autumn 2008 the opposition's lead had almost disappeared.

This swing back towards the right probably had two main causes. First, electors may have blamed a dire economic situation primarily on the decline in Sweden's export markets, rather than the sitting government. Second, the same period had been a testing one for Mona Sahlin, who in 2007 had become the first woman to lead the Social Democrats. Convinced that her party, still easily the largest in Sweden, needed to emulate the co-ordination of the right-of-centre bloc, she had initiated negotiations about a forming pre-electoral alliance with the Greens and the Left. But her attempt in October 2008 to exclude the Left and plan for a coalition only with the Greens, made after a row over fiscal policy, had backfired disastrously, as she was forced by her own party to back down and include the Left.

One other set of political circumstances is worth mentioning. The government was given a major headache during 2008 by its attempts to allocate new powers of internet surveillance to the National Defence Radio Establishment (FRA). An effective media campaign was waged and well-attended demonstrations were held against the proposed law, which was alleged to infringe unacceptably the right to privacy online. The Alliance's parliamentary groups suffered modest but highly unusual levels of revolt before the legislation was squeezed through. Then, in April 2009, in a case that caused headlines around the world, the Swedish founders of the Pirate Bay, a website that facilitated digital file sharing, were convicted by a Stockholm district court of breaking copyright law. File-sharing is as popular, and as illegal, in Sweden as in other developed countries, and the verdict sparked considerable debate.

A Pirate Party, formed at the start of 2006 to oppose restrictions on file sharing, had received negligible support in that year's national election. However, as the issues of copyright and digital privacy gathered momentum, the chance for it to improve its performance in 2009 became clear.

## The Campaign and Party Strategies

### *Candidate selection*

Sweden's proportional, list-based electoral system is used at all political levels, although the 29 multi-member electoral districts used in national elections become a single district in European ones. Since 1995 the system has allowed for (but does not require) a measure of personal preference voting. The parties rank-order their candidates, but the ranking can be superseded by any candidate who wins the personal endorsement of a certain percentage of her party's voters – 5 per cent in European elections, 8 per cent in national ones. Any such candidate is moved to the top of the list, and can be deposed only by another with more preference votes. Interestingly, fewer and fewer voters have specified support for a particular candidate, rather than the party list as a whole, in national elections. In the 2004 European election, however, personal preference votes had a considerable impact on the outcome.<sup>4</sup>

Before the 2009 election, each party permitted any member to nominate a candidate for that party's list. Once those nominations had been collected, three parties – the Centre, the Liberals and the Moderates – held primary ballots of their entire memberships to gauge support for their various nominees. These were advisory votes, but the parties' election committees generally followed their results, and their proposals were then approved by the national executives or national councils. For the Centre and the Moderates, this meant that sitting MEPs, both former MPs, were top-ranked. However, amendments to the primary results were sometimes made. Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, the Italian wife of Carl Bildt, the Moderates' former leader and the current foreign minister, who had come second in the party's primary, was relegated to eighth on the list.

The Liberals, meanwhile, who had customarily been relatively open to selecting people without a strong background in the party, had got their fingers burnt with one of their two successful candidates in 2004, a former journalist who, after a conflict with the party leadership over her business affairs, had defected from the party. But the Liberal election committee had no trouble in endorsing its members' enthusiasm for Marit Paulsen, one of its MEPs in 1994-99, when she declared that her improved health would allow her to run again.

The Christian Democrats restricted the franchise in their primary to representatives of its regional units. Its leadership's unstated wariness about consulting the entire membership was largely because of one person, one of its MEPs in 1994-99. His strongly conservative and Eurosceptical views did not fit the progressive and pro-EU image that successive party leaderships had sought to promote; but his ability to mobilise his supporters in the party's grass-roots inevitably made his candidature a strong one. Despite the restricted franchise, he finished fourth in the Christian Democrats' primary, and the election committee's decision to exclude him entirely from its list caused some waves within the party. Its top candidate was a former leader

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<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Aylott and Magnus Blomgren (2004), "The European Parliament Election in Sweden, June 13 2004", 2004 European Parliament Election Briefing Paper 7 (Sussex: European Parties Elections & Referendums Network).

of its youth wing, but she was balanced by the presence of the party's enduringly popular former leader in ninth place.

The June List's complex nomination procedure was in effect a primary. Its candidates in 2004 had included figures with backgrounds in all the other main parties, with nothing more than their Euroscepticism to unite them. Still more crucial to the List's cross-party appeal had been the background and character of its top candidate and co-founder. However, after the total failure of the List's run in the 2006 national election, its leader had stood down. He was replaced by Sören Wibe, a recent defector from the Social Democrats, in which he had long been a Eurosceptical voice. The party's election committee nominated a little-known Liberal as co-leader, but her subsequent resignation left the June List with Wibe in sole charge. There were figures with right-of-centre backgrounds on its list, yet Wibe's presence at its top gave the June List a more left-wing image than in 2004.

The two parties that did not hold internal primaries were the Left and the Social Democrats; they traditionally prefer indirect intra-party democracy to the direct sort. One of the Left's two sitting MEPs topped its list, and its selection process was uncontroversial. The Social Democrats, though, changed their selection strategy significantly compared to that before 2004. The success then of the party's 31st-ranked candidate, Anna Hedh, can be explained by her being the only self-declared Eurosceptic on the party's entire list, a quality that clearly attracted the preference votes of many party sympathisers. The Social Democratic election committee for the 2009 vote not only ranked Hedh in an electable fifth place. It also persuaded the party's secretary-general, Marita Ulvskog, a former government minister who had been against both EU membership in 1994 and EMU in 2003, to be its top candidate.

The final party in our survey, the Greens, who had only recently dropped the anti-EU position that it had long held, were happy to let their own internal primary be more or less binding for its candidate selection – an intriguing innovation in Swedish party life. Its sitting MEP, who won the ballot, remained openly committed to Sweden's withdrawal from the Union. Its second-ranked candidate, a journalist and author, only joined the party once she had agreed to be nominated.

In general, nine of Sweden's 19 sitting MEPs were rank-ordered on the party lists in such a way that, if each party's tally of mandates were repeated and preference votes did not skew the outcome, they would be re-elected. (The equivalent figure in 2004 had been eight.) A tenth, for the June List, was relegated to one place below that level. Mostly, this high turnover was down to personal decisions by incumbents not to run again. But the leader of the Social Democratic delegation in 2004-9 was unceremoniously dumped by her party.

### *Campaign strategies*

As they had successfully managed in the 2006 national election, the four Alliance parties tried to concentrate on different issues – only some of which could be said to be directly relevant to the election at hand. Much the biggest of them, the Moderates, emphasised the economy, with the prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, prominent in its campaign. Earlier the Moderates had talked of promoting "a very clear nationalist perspective", to "protect Sweden's interest in the EU", especially over issues like

labour law and equality of the sexes, according to the party's secretary-general.<sup>5</sup> But that tone was later dropped. The Centre brandished its environmentalist credentials, although all the parties, to varying degrees, did the same. The Christian Democrats' top candidate presented a novel mix of mild feminism and mild social conservatism on, for instance, alcohol policy. The Liberals' election posters called, *inter alia*, for renewed investment in nuclear power and for Sweden to adopt the euro – two issues that are entirely the responsibility of the national parliament.

In addition to pressing its feminist profile, the Left Party tried to exploit its newfound monopoly in hard Euroscepticism among the main parties. Like the June List, it worried about the threat to the "Swedish model" of industrial relations allegedly posed by European law.<sup>6</sup> This threat was also an issue for the Social Democrats, although they were more cautious. Before the party had lost power in 2006, some in its ranks had urged its government to hold the Lisbon treaty to ransom until Sweden received assurances from the EU about its industrial-relations system – a tactic that had been an anathema to the pro-EU party leadership. The Social Democrats' campaign slogan was "Jobs first" – perhaps an implicit acknowledgement of how, in the national election three years before, they had fumbled the issue of unemployment. Their top candidate, Ulvskog, recanted her earlier doubts about driving a personal campaign for preference votes. Clearly, though, there was a more Eurosceptical tinge to the Social Democrats' platform in 2009.

The Greens, as ever, prioritised the environment. In accordance with their changed stance on EU membership, they could claim accord with the programme of the European Greens – even if, in reality, the Swedish party remained much more Eurosceptical than are most of its counterparts in the Union.

In general, with Lisbon having been ratified by the Swedish parliament late in 2008, that issue was largely absent from party strategies. Opposition to the treaty was, however, one of the few issues other than its central ones on which the Pirate Party took a position. The Pirates were against Lisbon, on democratic grounds. Of the other minor parties, Feminist Initiative, fronted by a former leader of the Left Party, sought to improve on its poor showing in the 2006 national election. The far-right Sweden Democrats pushed a hard Euroscepticism, not least so as to allow the country to close its doors to immigration. Echoing that of the Danish People's Party, its campaign slogan was, "Give us Sweden back!" After a decade of growth, particularly at local level, the Sweden Democrats were optimistic about their prospects in 2009.

The parties' campaigns were quite well funded, partly thanks to a state subsidy of SKr19.5m (€850,000) to all those that had won seats in 2004. The Social Democrats' campaign budget was easily the biggest, at SKr25m, most of which was spent on flyers and other material sent to people's homes. At the other end of the scale, the Pirate Party had around SKr500,000.<sup>7</sup> There was a marked investment in new

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<sup>5</sup> *Dagens Nyheter* Oct. 25 2008.

<sup>6</sup> The main exhibit in this argument is the European Court's so-called Laval judgment of 2007 on the free movement of labour. It had declared illegal an earlier blockade of a building site in Vaxholm, near Stockholm, by Swedish builders complaining at the low wages of the site's Latvian workers, which were supposedly below the level set by a collective agreement between union and employers.

<sup>7</sup> *Dagens Nyheter* Apr. 17 2009.

technology. Apart from the parties' websites and the blogs that some candidates maintained, Facebook and Twitter were also employed by many candidates.

### *The campaign*

This election saw a record number of first-time voters, approximately 600,000. This may not have been unconnected to the rise of two related "youth issues" – digital file sharing and internet privacy – to be perhaps the biggest of the campaign. Indeed, in early May, when the Telecoms Reform Package was voted down in the European Parliament, the impact that EU politics might have on these issues was underlined. These were, of course, strongly emphasised by the Pirate Party, and although most other parties raised doubts about the consequences of file sharing for content creators, none dared to go fully "anti-Pirate". Ulvskog went so far as to predict that her Social Democrats were likely to change their policy and become more sympathetic to file sharing, so as not to criminalise a generation of youth.

Similarly, all the parties included environmental issues in their campaigns. The Greens, not surprisingly, went furthest. They advocated a leadership role for the EU and an 80 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 – by far the most ambitious goal of any Swedish party in this area. The Greens also campaigned with their European counterparts for a "Green New Deal", according to which the financial and economic crises could help to realign society and promote a sustainable future. All the parties expressed opposition to the common agricultural policy.

By contrast, at least two issues divided the parties more or less on the customary left-right spectrum, which dominates the national party system. As expected, one of those was the economy, including the related questions of employment and industrial relations. Traditionally, such issues have been prioritised by the Left Party and the Social Democrats. However, in keeping with their centrist profile under Reinfeldt's leadership, the "new Moderates" were eager to emphasise that they too were keen to protect the Swedish labour-market model. They argued that renegotiating the Posted Workers Directive, which was among the Social Democrats' pledges, might actually leave Swedish collective agreements in a more vulnerable position. Ulvskog (who has form in making controversial remarks during election campaigns) upset a Latvian recruitment firm when she described its business, placing Latvians in Sweden at wages considerably lower than those paid to Swedish workers, as "human trafficking in new form", a description that her counterpart on the Centre list called "almost macabre".<sup>8</sup> It was a rare flashpoint in a generally low-key campaign.

The other left-right question, healthcare, is also well rehearsed in Swedish politics, but in this campaign it became a European issue, too. The right-of-centre parties argued that Swedes should be able to seek medical care in other EU countries, with their own state paying. The Liberals were the most enthusiastic, suggesting that patients should have the right to seek treatment anywhere within the European Economic Area, and without prior permission from their Swedish regional health authorities. The three red-green opposition parties, plus the June List, argued that medical issues should primarily be regarded as national. The Social Democrats wanted shorter waiting lists in Sweden to be the priority, so that patients in need of

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<sup>8</sup> Swedish Television, *Agenda* May 24 2009, *Rapport* Jun. 2; *Dagens Nyheter* Jun. 2 2009.

operations could be treated domestically. The Left Party stated that treatment should be equal to all, and not dependent on the personal economic resources that travel abroad was said to require.

One small part of the labour market, that for MEPs themselves, came under special scrutiny. The salary of a Swedish MEP was due to rise from SKr54,500 (nearly €5,000) a month, equivalent to that of a national MP, to about SKr83,000, due to harmonisation across the EU. The Left's top candidate, Eva-Britt Svensson, was strongly critical of the reform. She declared that she had kept only the equivalent of her pay in her previous employment, as an administrator, over the previous term, and intended to do the same for the next. Most, but not all, of the top candidates stated that they would give away part of their wage to various organisations and charities.

In the final days of the campaign, the Swedish electoral system became an issue – not so much the basic features of the system, but rather its practical rules, procedures and conventions. One often controversial feature is the televised election-eve debate. Swedish Television nearly always includes only the leaders of parties already represented in parliament. The June List had thus been excluded, controversially, in 2004; but it probably benefited from the publicity it attracted as a consequence. This time it was the other fringe parties, particularly the Pirates, who presented themselves as similarly hard done by.

Still more discussed was the mechanism that governs the act of voting. The Swedish system has no single ballot paper, but rather a separate ballot for each competing party list. The voter takes the ballot for her preferred party and then, in the voting booth, places it in an envelope, optionally after crossing a box next to her preferred candidate. The availability of a party's ballots outside the booth is thus vital for a party, and the state supplies them only for those parties that won more than 1 per cent in the previous election. The leader of Feminist Initiative complained bitterly about the discrimination that "our undemocratic electoral system" inflicted on her party.<sup>9</sup> The disadvantage was offset a few days before the election, when the Feminists received a SKr1m donation towards distributing their own ballots and for newspaper adverts that reminded voters how to vote for the party if its own ballots were absent (by writing its name on a blank ballot). That the donor turned out to be Benny Andersson, of Abba fame, drew further media attention to the Feminists' grievance.

The residual "No to the EU" movement urged voters to boycott the election, as a way of demonstrating the EU's illegitimacy. One of the major Swedish tabloids, *Aftonbladet*, did the opposite. As newspapers generally encouraged voters to take an interest in the campaign, it tried the tactic of buying votes – or, rather, of offering people money (two reporters had SKr500, or €44, at their disposal every day, starting on May 27) in return for their promises to vote. Choice of party was to be the voter's own. Therefore, the newspaper argued, its initiative could not be seen as illegal. Still, *Aftonbladet* was widely criticised.

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<sup>9</sup> Gudrun Schyman, "Sverige behöver ett nytt valsistem", *Svenska Dagbladet* May 29. Indeed, Swedish Radio subsequently reported serious procedural errors at some polling stations in Stockholm (*Ekot* Jun. 23 2009).

## Results and Implications

### *The parties' fortunes...*

Opinion polls during the last week of the campaign indicated that the Pirate Party would do well, so its success – 7.1 per cent and one mandate – was not a complete surprise. Still, as a new party, and a rather different kind of party, this rookie was at the centre of attention the day after the election.

Table 2. Swedish election to the European Parliament, June 7 2009

EP group		2009		2009 cf. 2004		2009	cf.
		%	seats	%	seats	2006*	
GUE/NGL	Left Party	<b>5.6</b>	<b>1</b>	-7.1	-1	-0.3	
PES	Social Democrats	<b>24.6</b>	<b>5</b>	0.0	0	-10.4	
Greens-EFA	Greens	<b>10.9</b>	<b>2</b>	+5.0	+1	5.7	
IND/DEM	June List	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0</b>	-10.9	-3	3.1	
-	Feminist Initiative	<b>2.2</b>	<b>0</b>	+2.2	0	1.5	
Greens-EFA**	Pirate Party	<b>7.1</b>	<b>1</b>	+7.1	+1	6.5	
ALDE	Centre Party	<b>5.5</b>	<b>1</b>	-0.8	0	-2.4	
ALDE	Liberals	<b>13.6</b>	<b>3</b>	+3.7	+1	6.1	
EPP-ED	Christian Democrats	<b>4.7</b>	<b>1</b>	-1.0	0	-1.9	
EPP-ED	Moderates	<b>18.8</b>	<b>4</b>	+0.5	0	-7.4	
-	Sweden Democrats	<b>3.3</b>	<b>0</b>	+2.2	0	0.4	
-	Others	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0</b>	-0.9	0	-5.5	
						0.0	
	turnout/totals	<b>43.8</b>	<b>18</b>	+6.7	-1	-38.2	

\* = National parliamentary election. \*\* In late June the Pirate Party declared its decision to join the Green group in the European Parliament. Source: Election Authority (val.se).

Its success was largely down to its appeal to a particular group: the young. According to an exit poll, fully 24 per cent of all voters between 18 and 21 voted for the Pirates, a bigger share than for any other party; and 17 per cent of 22-30-year-old voters did

so, the third-highest share.<sup>10</sup> The Pirates managed to mobilise many younger electors who would otherwise have abstained, which in turn contributed to a significant rise in turnout, to 43.8 per cent – even if that figure is still only a little over half that in recent national elections.<sup>11</sup> Yet it would be an exaggeration to see the Pirates only as a youth party. The proportion of their supporters under 30 was only slightly higher than those over 30.<sup>12</sup> Their vote was also spread remarkably evenly over Sweden.

Two other parties were also claimed by media and political experts as winners in this election: the strongly EU-positive Liberal Party; and the Greens, whose Euroscepticism, as mentioned above, had softened, and who also had a youth profile (they were backed by nearly as many 18-30-year-old voters as the Pirates were). The Liberals and the Greens received, respectively, 13.6 per cent and 11.0 per cent, around double what they got in the scores in the 2006 national election. Like the Pirates, the Liberals will receive an additional mandate if the Lisbon treaty comes into force, as it will raise Sweden's quota of seats from 18 to 20.

The main losers, on the other hand, were the more Eurosceptical parties. The newcomer in 2004, the June List failed to retain any of its seats (as, interestingly, did its nearest Danish equivalent, the June Movement). The campaign of 2009 may prove to have been its last. The other loser was the Left Party, which received less than half its score in 2004, and lost one of its two mandates. Its result was roughly what it got in the 2006 national election, but hitherto the Left had done better in European elections.

The performances of the two biggest parties in Swedish politics, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, might be described as lacklustre. Both parties received considerably smaller proportions than they had in the 2006 national election, but almost the same as in the 2004 European election. This was probably nothing more than a minor setback for the prime minister's party. Sahlin, meanwhile, claimed success in that her Social Democrats had maintained their previous score; increased their votes in the higher turnout in 2009; and retained their position as biggest party, a status that some optimistic Moderates had earlier regarded covetously. These were hardly major triumphs, but they lifted just a little of the pressure that Sahlin was under in domestic politics. The two other mainstream parties, the Centre and the Christian Democrats, were rather more disappointed with their scores, which featured a loss of around 1 per cent compared to 2004, and a little more compared to 2006. But each retained its sole mandate.

What of the other smaller parties, that is, those not represented in the national parliament? They actually scored slightly worse (16.3 per cent) than in 2004 (16.6 per cent), and their votes were spread around more widely than in 2004, when they were concentrated in one party.

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<sup>10</sup> The source for this and later references to individual-level data (with one exception, in the next footnote) is a survey by Swedish Television, *SVT:s vallokallundersökning. EUP-valet 2009*, downloaded from the organisation's website (svt.se), Jun. 23 2009.

<sup>11</sup> According to a post-election survey by Synovate, a polling firm, the proportion of the male electorate that voted jumped from 37 per cent in 2004 to 49 per cent in 2009, against 42 per cent for women (*Dagens Nyheter* Jun. 10 2009).

<sup>12</sup> See a blog post by election researcher Henrik Oscarsson, "Är PP ett ungdomsparti?" (henrikoscarsson.com), Jun. 10 2009, based on the exit-poll data.

The Sweden Democrats took 3.3 per cent, a score that, while not disastrous, induced gloom at their election-night party. Some observers were quick to attribute their weak performance to the Pirates' success. Both do have anti-establishment profiles, and it may be that the Pirates took some media attention from the Sweden Democrats. Yet the latter's usual supporters are not, in fact, as overwhelmingly young and male as many commentators seemed to assume. Moreover, it seems unlikely that the technophile, libertarian Pirates would have attracted many voters otherwise tempted by ultra-nationalist, anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats. In contrast to the Pirates, the Sweden Democrats' support is concentrated in a few regions, particularly southern Sweden; in some municipalities there, it won over 10 per cent.

Feminist Initiative, meanwhile, probably thanks to its last-minute visibility (its voters had the highest proportion of those opting for it late in the campaign), won a vaguely respectable 2.2 per cent. Yet even in gender-aware Sweden, its narrow platform may have limited electoral potential.

*...and their candidates' fortunes*

The parties' lists were disrupted somewhat less by preference voting than in 2004. The Social Democrats's election committee, in particular, anticipated the preferences of their supporters much more accurately (see table 3). Even the reordering of the Christian Democrats' list was probably expected by the party. Its former leader was inserted fairly late in the selection process, when polls put the party in danger of losing its mandate. His winning the endorsement of well over a third of his party's voters was hardly a surprise. (Unlike in some EU countries, it would be unthinkable in Sweden for a candidate to stand in an election and then decline to take up a seat. The Christian Democrats' first-ranked candidate might, however, get her chance in the European Parliament as a substitute after a couple of years.)

On the other hand, it is not clear why the Moderates' election committee relegated Corazza Bildt from her second place in the party primary. Nor is the reaction of the party leadership to her winning the personal support of 14.3 per cent of her party's voters, not far short of its first-ranked candidate's tally, which gave her the second of the party's four seats.

The Liberals must have been delighted to welcome back the Norwegian-born Paulsen, their plain-speaking, self-styled "old lady", onto their list. More than half the party's voters expressed a personal preference for her, the second-highest proportion in the election (the highest was for Feminist Initiative's top name). The Left, by contrast, may have rued the withdrawal from politics of its top candidate in 2004, who won a big score of preference votes.

In all, 59.2 per cent of voters chose to use a preference vote, against just 22.2 per cent in the 2006 national election. Over three-quarters of Christian Democratic voters did so, against fewer than half for the Left, the Sweden Democrats and the June List. Otherwise, there was little ideological pattern in the propensity to endorse a particular candidate. Preference voting favoured women candidates in 2004, bringing their number to 11 of Sweden's 19 MEPs. In 2009 the effect was more neutral. Ten of 18 successful candidates were women.

Table 3. Elected candidates' positions on their party lists

MEPs elected >	1	2	3	4	5
Left Party	<u>1</u> *	-	-	-	-
Social Democrats	1*	2*	<u>3</u> *	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Greens	<u>1</u> *	2*	-	-	-
Pirate Party	1*				
Centre Party	<u>1</u> *	-	-	-	-
Liberals	1*	2	3	-	-
Christian Democrats	9*	-	-	-	-
Moderates	<u>1</u> *	8*	<u>3</u> *	<u>2</u>	-

Notes. 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 (val.se).

## Analysis and Conclusions

We draw five conclusions from the Swedish election to the European Parliament. The first is that the effect on national party politics will be small. Of the parties with national parliamentary representation, the Liberals' and the Greens' morale will have been boosted; the recent buoyancy of the Left's leadership will have taken a knock. But none of them did so disastrously or brilliantly as to threaten a reaction that would have implications for its general strategy, orientation or the dominant (internal) coalition. For the governing parties, a successful Swedish presidency of the EU Council, which was to begin soon after the election, was more important; and the national election in 2010 remained infinitely more important for all of them.

Moreover, the second conclusion is that the 2009 results may suggest that the Swedish party system has every chance of retaining its stability. The nightmare scenario for all the mainstream parties (whether for ideological or strategic reasons) has increasingly been that the Sweden Democrats would breach the 4 per cent threshold for winning seats in the national parliament in 2010, and thus quite possibly hold the balance of power. The Sweden Democrats' mediocre performance in this second-order, European election might suggest that this scenario is less likely. Alternatively, sympathisers who abstained in 2009 might be more mobilised in 2010.<sup>13</sup> Another possibility is that

<sup>13</sup> The Sweden Democrats do seem to have quite a stable base. In 2009 more than half their voters, a bigger proportion than for any other party, had decided "a long time ago" to vote for them.

the Pirate Party could disrupt bloc politics in the same way (which would create similar strategic headaches for the main parties, even if they would suffer less ideological anguish). The Pirates' success indicates that internet governance has become an issue that many younger Swedes, from across the left-right spectrum, care strongly about. But it will be fascinating to see whether the Pirates can maintain their appeal when national government is at stake and two clearly defined blocs are competing for it.

The third conclusion is that candidates make a difference in a European election. The Social Democrats and the Moderates both seemed content to use the top place on their lists to park figures who were fairly popular with members but not entirely *au fait* with their current leaders' ideological preferences. Otherwise, their lists catered largely for regional and sectional intra-party interests. The Greens and the Liberals, by contrast, were prepared to relax the usual Swedish requirement for candidates to be steeped in the party's internal life, and instead included individuals with looser party association and broader electoral appeal. Party mobilisation – defined by the exit-pollsters as the percentage of voters who voted for the party in the European election minus the percentage who said they would have voted for it had the election been to the national parliament – can be seen as supporting this interpretation of the parties' priorities. The figure for the Social Democrats was -4.4 per cent, for the Moderates -9.8 per cent. For the Greens it was +2.6 per cent, for the Liberals +4.7 per cent. The Pirates, whose top candidate, Christian Engström, also showed himself to be a handy campaigner, had +4.5 per cent.

There is another way of interpreting the parties' varying fortunes. It relates to our fourth conclusion, and that which was most commonly drawn by Swedish observers: namely, that Swedish voters are becoming more positive about the EU.<sup>14</sup> The keenest EU enthusiasts, the Liberals, did well; so did the Greens, who had discarded their hard Euroscepticism; the Social Democrats and the Moderates, who had turned slightly more Eurosceptical, did poorly; the Left, the last mainstream hard Eurosceptics, did even worse; and the June List lost its seats.<sup>15</sup> The increased turnout compared to 2004 might suggest the same thing. So do the data on public opinion mentioned in the introduction, which were echoed in the 2009 exit poll. Even if we see other factors, such as candidate selection, that contributed to the election outcome, there is clearly a lot in this interpretation. After 15 years of Swedish EU membership, departure is unrealistic. Indeed, the Left Party's downcast leader publicly doubted whether his party's support for withdrawal was still tenable.

Our final conclusion is related to this point, but distinct. The campaign may have been sedate and rather inchoate, and the manifestos formulated by the Europarties to which the Swedish parties affiliate were almost never mentioned. Nevertheless, and in contrast to that in other member states, Sweden's was genuinely *a European election campaign*. National party blocs did not orientate the debates; for the most part, issues that clearly fall within the EU's competence took centre stage. Indeed, it could be argued that the 2004 campaign had the same features, except that then the debate was

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<sup>14</sup> For instance, Per T. Ohlsson, "Som eld under grytan", *Sydsvenskan* Jun. 14 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Libertas, the pan-EU Eurosceptical party, attracted some media interest when it announced its list. But then it disappeared from view, and, complaining at the cost of printing and distributing its own ballot papers, it withdrew from the election in mid-May, according to its website ([www.libertas.eu/sverige](http://www.libertas.eu/sverige)). Up to 145 people may still have voted for variants of its name.

mainly about the vertical distribution of power between the EU and the member states, whereas in 2009 it was more about specific policy issues. In 2004 the June List made clear that it wanted Sweden to remain a member state. Conversely, in 2009 the two biggest parties felt able to sound critical of certain EU policies without having their support for EU membership remotely questioned. Both campaigns suggest that the EU has been quite smoothly internalised into Swedish political discourse, albeit in a fairly marginal position.

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