



# Sweden

**Assessment: Very Good**

**Trend:** ↔

Capital: Stockholm

Type of Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of Government: Prime Minister Goran

Persson (since 21 March 1996)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Anna Lindh

Population: 8,875,053

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 2

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sweden has a **very good** record of support for democracy abroad, as evidenced by its emphasis on democracy and human rights in its foreign policy and in its generous development aid to developing countries. Sweden consistently condemns coups and criticizes the manipulation of elections abroad, and has increasingly supported regional and international responses to such threats to democracy.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Although Sweden has only a small population (9 million out of 376 million in EU-15), its history of armed neutrality during two world wars and extensive economic and trade interests abroad have allowed it to play a leading role in the international political arena. Its generous levels of development assistance also have given it impressive leverage for promoting certain policies abroad. Since 1968, Sweden has aimed to give one percent of its GNP in general foreign aid, a goal achieved in the 1980s before national economic problems led to a severe cutback to the UN-recommended level of 0.7 percent in the early 1990s. This turning point in Sweden's development program eventually led to a major overhaul and renewal of foreign aid, both in organization and in basic development policies.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the "new" Swedish development policy aims to return gradually to more robust aid levels (in 2004, foreign aid is supposed to reach 0.86 percent of GNP), and to make the promotion of democracy a higher priority of the foreign aid program.

It is an unspoken truth that the Social Democratic government -- formed by the party that has been in power almost without interruption since the 1930s -- was historically too uncritical when giving foreign aid to various socialist and communist regimes in Africa during the Cold War era.<sup>2</sup> Today, however, the promotion of democracy is considered one of the most important goals of Swedish foreign policy, accepted by all political parties. Indeed, when the Swedish government presented its foreign policy to the parliament (*Riksdag*) in 2001, Foreign Minister Anna Lindh stated: "The promotion of democracy is and remains a cornerstone of Swedish foreign policy."<sup>3</sup>

The key external challenge to Sweden during the period 1992-2002 was the emergence of new states in Sweden's neighborhood -- Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania -- following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. A greater proportion of Swedish aid is now given to Eastern Europe and particularly to the Baltic states. The *Riksdag* has set four goals for Sweden's cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe, one of which is "the promotion and deepening of a democratic culture."<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the aid provided to the Baltic states is not financed with funds from the traditional budget aimed for developing countries.



Sweden has a close relationship with its immediate and regional neighbors. By history and tradition, there is a strong relationship among the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, and Iceland). This cooperation has been institutionalized through the Nordic Council (composed of 87 parliamentarians from the five countries) and the Nordic Council of Ministers (meetings between governmental ministers). While the importance of these councils today is sometimes questioned, cooperation with regards to EU questions remains an important part of Swedish foreign policy.<sup>5</sup>

During the Cold War, Sweden's policy of neutrality allowed it to have an independent voice on foreign affairs issues. For example, Sweden criticized U.S. involvement in Vietnam, as well as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In 1995, Sweden's international relations changed dramatically when the country entered the European Union. Since then, Sweden increasingly has exercised its foreign policy through EU institutions, even though it remains a member of the Nordic Council, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. Now, Sweden is more likely to criticize and be able to influence other countries through the EU than on its own.

In spite of this opportunity to exert influence through the EU, the introduction of the euro and the development of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) have raised questions about the EU as a platform for Swedish foreign policy. Sweden is not part of the euro-currency zone, though a referendum on this matter might be held in March 2003. In addition, public opinion is divided about building a common defense capability within the EU framework, as has been proposed under the CFSP. A recent review of Sweden's security policy doctrine left it as one of three non-aligned EU members, the others being Ireland and Austria. Sweden is a member of the Partnership for Peace, but NATO-membership in the short-run is unlikely.

### **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

Sweden's response to the overthrow of democratically-elected governments has generally been good. Since gaining entry to the EU in 1995, it has consistently condemned coups and has attempted to coordinate all such responses with other EU members, rather than take any action on its own. The government supported EU declarations

deploring the 1999 military coups in Pakistan and Cote d'Ivoire and calling for respect for human rights and civil liberties in those countries, as well as the restoration of democratic rule. When members of the right-wing Freedom Party (FPÖ) led by Jörg Haider joined the government of Austria in February 2000,<sup>6</sup> Sweden fully supported the sanctions imposed by the other 14 EU member states, which included a cessation of all official bilateral meetings between EU countries and the Austrian government.<sup>7</sup> Following the coup against Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in April 2002, Sweden joined fellow EU Ministers in calling for new elections and underlining the importance of maintaining democratic principles, notably respect for human rights.

During the war in the Balkans, Sweden supported the NATO-led bombings aimed at toppling Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosovic from power. This led to some domestic criticism, especially when the government refused to disclose whether it had supported a German initiative to lift the sanctions against Serbia. In addition, two ministers of the Swedish Government, Anna Lindh and Ulrica Messing, encouraged Swedish sport associations to exclude participants from the Former Yugoslavia from any international events they organized.<sup>8</sup> Overall, Sweden has been one of the largest donors in the Balkans (especially to Bosnia-Herzegovina) and has channeled more than SEK 2 billion (roughly \$200 million) to the region in the period 1991-1999.<sup>9</sup>

### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Sweden has been very active in monitoring elections abroad and condemning electoral processes that do not comply with basic democratic standards. This has been true both for countries historically targeted for Swedish aid, such as many countries in Africa, as well as for post-Communist countries, such as Belarus, in Sweden's more immediate neighborhood.

Even before the most recent set of flawed elections in Zimbabwe, the Swedish government decided to reduce bilateral development cooperation with Zimbabwe by 45 percent for the 1999-2001 period. While support for programs for combating HIV/Aids continued, all other development programs carried out with Zimbabwe's government were to cease. This decision was motivated by the Zimbabwean government's lack of respect for democracy and basic legal procedures. The Swedish



government also declared that it would continue, together with the EU, the dialogue with the opposition in Zimbabwe, and sent election monitors there in November 2000.

In response to the flawed elections of 2002, Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh chastised Mugabe for running elections that were neither free nor fair and called on his neighbors to assume greater responsibility in resolving the impasse. "Mr. Mugabe has got the result he wanted but his election victory is not credible," she stated. "Zimbabwe has today a new president who cannot be regarded as popularly elected. The international community bears continued responsibility for Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's neighboring countries must now shoulder their responsibility. They must stand up for the fundamental values represented by the democratic world."<sup>10</sup> Earlier this year, the Foreign Minister received a delegation from the largest opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).<sup>11</sup>

Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh similarly condemned as "totally unacceptable" the procedures surrounding the elections in Belarus during the autumn of 2000. Before the elections, Sweden had provided significant aid to Belarus to support activities designed to foster democratic development and an independent media. As of September 2000, more than 100 Belarussian journalists had been educated in Sweden in an effort to help develop a free press.<sup>12</sup>

In Zambia, after the 1996 election process was found not to have met basic democratic standards, Sweden immediately suspended some foreign aid. Following the arrest of the former President Kenneth Kaunda, and the subsequent disturbances in late 1997, the Swedish government decided not to enter new long-term agreements with Zambia.

Sweden has been a regular contributor to election monitoring missions. In the period 1997-2002, it sent observers to 33 countries.<sup>13</sup>

## PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Sweden has been a dependable advocate for strengthening democratic institutions and values, as evidenced by its high level of donations to democracy-building programs abroad and its consistent support for international protocols relating to democracy and human rights.

Sweden has a historic commitment to foreign aid. While development assistance spending

was reduced to 0.7 percent of GNP as part of the reorganization of the foreign aid system in the mid-1990s, the promotion of democracy has grown more important. A white paper presented in March 1998 by the Swedish government states that "the promotion of democracy and human rights will be an essential feature of Sweden's co-operation [with developing countries]."<sup>14</sup> The *Riksdag* lists "democratic development" as one of six goals for the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which in 1999 estimated that 65 percent of its total disposable foreign aid was channeled to activities that involved the promotion of democracy.<sup>15</sup> Sweden is also the host country for International IDEA, founded by 14 countries in February 1995, with the objective "to promote sustainable democracy worldwide."<sup>16</sup>

More recently, a Swedish parliamentary commission charged with investigating how Swedish policy on sustainable development should be further expanded, proposed that a rights-based approach should underlie the broadened global development policy area and stressed that this policy must be combined with support for democratic processes. The commission further proposed that the protection and promotion of human rights should be key criteria for transferring responsibility for the use of aid funds to the recipient country.<sup>17</sup>

Sweden has a strong record of voting for and ratifying international protocols dealing with human rights and democracy. The 1998 white paper committed Sweden to supporting "all relevant international agreements" pertaining to the protection of human rights. In particular it committed Sweden's support to UN conventions governing civil and political rights; economic, social and cultural rights; racial discrimination; torture and other cruel or inhuman punishments; the elimination of discrimination against women; and the rights of children.<sup>18</sup> During its presidency of the EU in 2001, Sweden championed an initiative to establish new rules regulating public accessibility to EU documents.<sup>19</sup>

## POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS

Sweden's record of relations with dictatorships has changed profoundly since the end of the Cold War. According to one estimate, 80 percent of Swedish development assistance to African countries in the period between 1980-1989 went to socialist and Marxist regimes, which often did not live up to basic democratic standards.<sup>20</sup> Since



the end of the Cold War this pattern has changed. Sweden today spends a much higher percentage of its development assistance on promoting democracy, and more readily suspends non-humanitarian aid when basic democratic norms are violated.

One example of the change described above is Swedish development cooperation with Cuba. The previous center-right government (1991-1994) terminated foreign aid to Cuba, but it was restarted again in 1995 by the Social Democratic government. However, according to the government's decision of 12 October 1995, this aid shall now aim at "systemic openings in Cuba's economic and political life" (i.e. market economy and democratic elections), a stipulation that the Social Democratic government would not have formulated in the 1970s.<sup>21</sup>

With more strategically important countries, such as North Korea and China, Sweden has sought a policy of "constructive dialogue." It has engaged these governments at the highest levels, and encouraged them to undertake market reforms and protect human rights. For example, Prime Minister Göran Persson led an EU delegation to North Korea during Sweden's Presidency of the EU. During discussions with Kim Jong-Il, Mr. Persson invited a North Korean delegation to the EU in order to study how market economies function. A delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Trade, Ri Gwang Gun, visited Belgium, Italy, Sweden, and Britain in March 2002. With regard to China, Sweden has focused on the issues of human rights and capital punishment. At the latest meeting of the EU-China dialogue, in March 2002, Foreign Minister Anna Lindh condemned the increased use of capital punishment in China. The Swedish Government has stated that human rights and capital punishment must be discussed at the summit between China and the EU in Copenhagen planned for September 2002.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to Belarus, the Swedish government has taken steps to support political opposition groups. For example, the Ministry of

Foreign Affairs in Stockholm called in the Ambassador of Belarus, Aleg Jermalovitj, to deliver a message condemning the verdicts against two leading opposition politicians in Belarus, which had taken place earlier the same week.<sup>23</sup> In addition, a delegation of opposition politicians was invited to Stockholm in March 2000 to meet with the Foreign Minister, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the *Riksdag*, and Swedish NGOs working with Belarus.<sup>24</sup>

While Sweden has actively supported pro-democracy actors in undemocratic countries such as Belarus and Zimbabwe, it has developed a more cautious policy regarding sanctions. In an address to the *Riksdag*, Foreign Minister Lindh outlined the conditions under which the Swedish government would support the use of sanctions. First, there had to be a consensus in support of the sanctions within the international community, especially within the UN Security Council. The sanctions also had to be understood by the general public. Second, the sanctions had to be effective, targeted, and could not hurt innocent people or a third party. Third, sanctions could be used only when other diplomatic means had proven insufficient. A clear set of criteria had to be fulfilled before the sanctions could be lifted.<sup>25</sup> To advance these proposals, Sweden has sponsored with Switzerland and Germany a joint initiative to improve the international application of targeted sanctions. This effort is ultimately supposed to result in a handbook primarily intended for practical use in UN work. The Swedish initiative recommends using sanctions cautiously, in a targeted fashion, and only with wide support in the UN. Sweden itself has hesitated in applying sanctions and Foreign Minister Lindh has expressed frustration over the "blunt sanctions" in effect against Iraq. The government also expressed ambivalence about using EU-proposed economic sanctions in the case of Burma in 1997.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>OECD: "Development co-operation review of Sweden. Summary and Conclusions." For example, five autonomous entities (Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), BITS, SAREC, Swedecorp, and Swedish Centre for Education in International Development) were merged into a "new SISA"; the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) was also reorganized.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see: Schraeder, Hook, and Taylor, "Clarifying the Foreign Aid Puzzle: a comparison of American, Japanese, French, and Swedish Aid Flows."

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the '1 percent goal' and the six goals of Swedish foreign aid, see [www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se); Mrs. Lindh's speech can be found at [www.ud.se](http://www.ud.se). In 2002, Swedish foreign aid amounted to SEK 16 billion (0.74 percent of GNP).

<sup>4</sup> [www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se); "Country Profile 2002: Sweden", *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, p. 12.



<sup>5</sup> For information about the Nordic Council, see [www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org); “Country Profile 2002: Sweden”, The Economist Intelligence Unit, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> While the Austria example was not an overthrow of a democratically elected government, it raised serious challenges to democratic values in the EU.

<sup>7</sup> The sanctions came into effect on 4 February 2000, and the support of the Swedish government was confirmed in a press release the same day: “Minskade kontakter med Österrike”, Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 4 February 2000.

<sup>8</sup> ”Regeringen uppmanar till idrottssanktioner mot Förbundsrepubliken Jugoslavien”, Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 29 April 1999. This action was part of a wider package of sanctions agreed on by the EU Foreign Ministers.

<sup>9</sup> The government’s support of the bombings were for example criticized in far-left magazine *Riktpunkt* (see Issue 4:2000) but also by former members of the Social Democratic government. For information about foreign aid to the Balkans, see: [www.sida.se/Sida/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=392](http://www.sida.se/Sida/jsp/Crosslink.jsp?d=392).

<sup>10</sup> “Uttalande av Anna Lindh med anledning av valresultatet i Zimbabwe”, Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 13 March 2002.

<sup>11</sup> The delegation from MDC also met with SIDA “Obs! Ny version: Oppositionen från Zimbabwe besöker Stockholm.” Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 20 Mar. 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Fråga nr 2000/01:1677, “Skriftligt svar på fråga 2000/01:1677 om demokratisering av Vitryssland”, 18 Sep. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Serbia (1997), Bosnia (1997), Algeria (1997), Chechnya (1997), Guatemala (1997), Kosovo (1998), Latvia and Macedonia (1998), Russia (1999), Namibia (1999), Mozambique and Kazakhstan (1999), Sierra Leone (1999), Guinea-Bissau (1999), Georgia and Macedonia (1999), Indonesia (1999), Nigeria (1999), Azerbaijan (2000), Zimbabwe (2000), Tanzania (2000), Bosnia-Herzegovina (2000), the Ivory Coast (2000), Montenegro (2000), Peru and Guyana (2001), Moldova (2001), Sri Lanka (2001), Zambia (2001), Bangladesh (2001), Nicaragua (2001), East Timor (2001), Uganda (2001), and Cambodia (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Information from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, No. 4 March 1998: “Democracy and human rights in Swedish development cooperation.”

<sup>15</sup> Svar på interpellation 1999/2000:397 om bistånd till Guinea Bissau, Anf. 21 Statsrådet Maj-Inger Klingvall.

<sup>16</sup> IDEA = The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. See: OECD: “Development co-operation review of Sweden. Summary and Conclusions.”

<sup>17</sup> Globkom (Kommittén om Sveriges politik för global utveckling): “Executive summary”, pp. 3-4 (available at [www.globkom.net](http://www.globkom.net)).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Sweden has been exceptionally fast in becoming a party of all the major international human rights treaties. It should, however, be noted that Sweden has not ratified some treaties, including one ending discrimination against women.. Moreover, Sweden has not –like all the other major industrial countries – signed the MWC. See: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: “Status of ratification of the principal international human rights treaties as of 13 May 2002.”

<sup>19</sup> Svar på interpellation 1999/2000:397 om bistånd till Guinea Bissau, Anf. 21 Statsrådet Maj-Inger Klingvall.

<sup>20</sup> Schraeder, Hook, and Taylor, “Clarifying the Foreign Aid Puzzle: a comparison of American, Japanese, French, and Swedish Aid Flows.”

<sup>21</sup> Fråga nr 1996:97:518: “Skriftligt svar av biståndsminister Pierre Schori på fråga av Elisa Abascal Reyes (mp) om medicinskt bistånd till Cuba”, 23 May 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Fråga nr 2001/02:1406, “Skriftligt svar av Anna Lindh på fråga av Sten Tolgfors om dödsstraff i Kina”, 18 July 2002.

<sup>23</sup> ”Sverige fördömer domar mot vitryska politiker”, Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 22 June 2000.

<sup>24</sup> The delegation included politicians but also a trade union leader and the President of the Belarussian Association of Journalists. “Vitryska oppositionspolitiker besöker Sverige”, ”, Pressmeddelande från Utrikesdepartementet, 2 Mar. 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Fråga nr 1999/2000:1213, “Skriftligt svar av utrikesminister Anna Lindh på fråga av Sten Andersson om sanktioner mot Jugoslavien respektive Kina”, 31 July 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Fråga nr 1996/97:257, “Skriftligt svar av utrikesminister Lena Hjelm-Wallén på fråga av Eva Goës (mp) om bojkott av Burma”, 7 February 1997.