

From multi-culturalism to assimilation? Swedish integration policy from a European perspective

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During recent decades, citizenship and integration policies in the European countries have been undergoing considerable changes. These policy processes have frequently been diagnosed as representing a retreat from multiculturalism towards assimilation (Joppke 2004; Entzinger 2003; Koopmans et al. 2005). Especially national policies aimed at non-European immigrants are said to have largely abandoned the idea of integration as a mutual process, instead emphasizing immigrants' obligation to adapt to their new country (Wright 2007). In concrete terms, this trend is expressed in the spread of mandatory introduction programmes and tests for new arrivals, and in the introduction of formal citizenship tests as a condition for naturalisation (Entzinger 2004; Joppke 2007; Goodman 2010).

In this project the ongoing trends in European integration policies will be studied by focussing particularly on the case of Sweden. The Swedish position is in principal interesting, not least because Sweden seems, so far at least, to be an exception to the trend mentioned above. The project has the ambition to fill a central vacuum in international research,

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where more grounded or nuanced analyses of Swedish integration policies are conspicuous by their absence.

The project has three aims. Firstly, to *characterize* the Swedish position from a comparative European perspective. Is there a form of "Swedish exceptionalism" or is Sweden also gradually adapting to this comprehensive European integration policy trend? How does Sweden relate to the subtle forms of control that exist in this area in EU?

Secondly, I aim to *explain* the Swedish position historically and comparatively. Explanations will be sought through the so-called process-tracing of previous critical decisions that Sweden has made regarding, for example, welfare policy in general and multi-cultural immigration policy in particular. Further, the Swedish development will be contrasted with that of the Netherlands and Great Britain, which together with Sweden, have previously comprised the main examples of European countries with a pronounced multi-cultural policy. What is it that makes development in these three countries now seem so different from each other? Comparative process-tracing is also meant to identify contextual factors in these countries which can explain similarities and differences such as the existence of right-wing populist political parties, coalitions between parties, and the organisation and strength of trade unions.

Thirdly, I shall *scrutinize normatively* the ongoing developments in integration policy. Does the increasing stress on demands and requirements and assimilation into "national values" indicate a step forward or a threat as regards liberal democracies' fundamental principles of tolerance and human rights?

Four analytical dimensions

Below I shall summarise four central analytical dimensions which may be distinguished in relation to the current developments in European integration policies and which provide the basis for my investigation.

First, I shall address the question of how reforms towards increased assimilation are to be judged: do they constitute a return to a classic idea of the national state, where a common *ethnos* is a prerequisite for the formation of political community, or do these reforms indicate progress in pursuing the idea of the national community as a political and “de-ethnicized” *demos* (cf. Borevi 2002)? Those who welcome the current trend claim that courses and tests are benign or “harmless” forms of assimilation requirements as they contribute to securing fundamental liberal principles by ensuring that new arrivals and other non-citizens know about and accept principles such as tolerance, human rights, equality, etc. (Joppke 2004; Koopmans 2010).

Others see this trend as more troubling, claiming that it de facto leads to ethnic exclusions. Even to the extent that the reforms may be viewed as promoting assimilation to “general” liberal principles, they nevertheless function as excluding since they are only directed towards non-European immigrants, who are consequently referred to and stigmatised as representatives for non-liberal values (Phillips 2007). In other countries, as for example demonstrated by Denmark, the very purpose seems to be to exclude certain categories of immigrants by making extremely stringent demands for culturally-specific knowledge or advanced knowledge of the country’s language (Ersbøll 2006).

Secondly, current integration policy development may be described in terms of a

shift in perspective from rights to obligations (Hagelund & Brochmann 2010; Borevi 2010). This brings to light two fundamentally different notions of what best fosters integration. From one point of view, rights are seen as an *integral part* of the integration process – as a necessary precondition, a tool enabling the individual to achieve integration. According to the second, rights are instead an *end in themselves*, the final goal – they are an enticement, a reward, the “crowning glory”, for the person who succeeds in achieving certain integration policy goals.

In their ideal typical or refined form, both points of view imply diametrically different ideas. In the first, efforts are directed towards offering new arrivals practical, expedient resources, whereas the second is more concerned with formulating different incentives (the carrot or the stick) so the individual will really get down to it, make a true effort. In the first, the main responsibility for integration is society; in the second, it is the individual. The current inclination towards individual obligation, the second line, should be seen in light of a general welfare policy trend towards the so-called “activation” policy (workfare), in which individual responsibility and obligations are also underlined (Ferrera & Rhodes 2001; Junestav 2004; Hvinden & Johansson 2007).

The activation philosophy’s ideas about individual responsibility and the individual’s obligation to do something in return, is thus repeated in integration policy development. In the Netherlands, individual responsibility has been stressed so clearly that it may be described in terms of a “privatisation” of integration. Immigrants themselves in the Netherlands have the responsibility for contacting one of the private organisations that offer introduction courses and for paying for the course,

while the state concerns itself only with checking that the individual has achieved the required goals through a final integration exam (Joppke 2007).

Thirdly, there is an analytical dimension concerning the relationship of integration policy with external immigration controls. Integration policy demands may be seen as a kind of gatekeeper for the welfare state as well as for national citizenship. However, for recipient countries in Europe, these controls also provide a possibility to regulate who will be able to emigrate to and legally reside in the country. There has always been a connection between regulation of immigration and welfare policy (Brochmann 1999), but during recent years it has become much more pronounced (Carrera 2006; Joppke 2007; Jacobs & Rea 2007).

Recent developments in the Netherlands can once again serve as a drastic example of this. The person seeking a residence permit in order to be reunited with a family member living in the Netherlands is required first to pass an integration test at a Dutch embassy. Since there is no form of Dutch education abroad, this integration test becomes a way for the authorities to block undesirable family immigration (Joppke 2009, 250). Corresponding tendencies, if less pronounced, can be discerned also elsewhere in Europe. Developments in integration policies are therefore intimately intertwined with the issue of “Fortress Europe” and attempts to keep out undesired immigrants in order to encourage the immigration of a well-educated workforce. In certain cases, integration has become a code word for selecting and excluding undesirable immigrants (Groenendijk 2006).

Fourthly, integration policy trends can be analysed as expressions of an ongoing Europeanisation. The trend towards placing

greater demands for assimilation on new arrivals can, of course, be considered to come “from below”, on the initiative of and by means of spreading policy between EU member countries. However, member countries’ increasingly unified view of integration policy questions also give rise to inter-state measures. For example, in spring 2006, the G-6 countries (France, Italy, Poland, Spain, Great Britain and Germany) took a common initiative to investigate the possibilities to introduce a single “integration contract” in EU member countries, which would make newly arrived immigrants bind themselves to abide by certain European cultural values and laws (EurActiv 2006).

Furthermore, EU has the goal of expanding the co-ordination of integration policy between member countries, even if they have no supra-national mandate in that area (Niessen & Schibel 2007; European Commission 2005). The policy instruments that are available instead fall inside the parameters for so-called “soft regulation”, which ever since the Lisbon Treaty in 2000, has expanded under the aegis of “Open Method of Coordination”, with more subtle forms of control such as dissemination of knowledge, launching of common language, evaluating and ranking of member countries policies (Jacobsson 2004).

Sweden – an exception to the European trend?

The purpose of my project is, as has been mentioned, to focus on Sweden’s integration policy position in light of the current developments in Europe. Sweden is remarkably little represented in international research in this subject, given its in principle, interesting position. In what follows, I shall examine why Sweden is inter-

esting to study by making references to the analytical dimensions presented above.

First, regarding the relationship between *ethnos* and *demos*, Sweden made itself known in the 1970s as an advocate of a multi-cultural policy. Aiming to avoid previous forms of ethnic “Swedifying” policies (which were directed towards the Sami minority, among others), the policy was oriented towards affirming and supporting immigrants’ ethnic affiliations. Integration required that immigrants could preserve their minority cultures within Swedish society. In the mid-1980s, however, Sweden backed away from this policy: it was no longer to be the task of the state to further immigrants’ long-term preservation of their cultures. In the 1980s Sweden underwent an integration policy process which in several ways resembled what a decade later happened in other European countries having had a multi-cultural policy, for example the Netherlands (Soininen 1999; Borevi 2008; 2010). In this sense, Sweden may be considered *to pioneer* a “multi-cultural retreat” that was later to characterise European integration policy development.

Secondly, if we concentrate on the current shift from rights to obligations, Sweden appears in a European comparison as *an exception* or odd case. An activation policy trend has had a clear impact since the 1990s, also in Swedish integration policy, with the introduction of economic incentives to encourage new arrivals to, for instance, participate in introduction programmes (Qvist 2008). However, in contrast to several other European countries, Sweden has neither introduced formal language demands nor other tests of knowledge as conditions for naturalisation. Neither are there in Sweden any obligatory requirements for new arrivals to

participate in particular introduction programmes (Djuve & Kavli 2007; Jacobs & Rea 2007). Advocates of the introduction of such reforms have during recent years been given increasing attention in Swedish public debates, but reactions to them have been strong (for example, against formal language demands for citizenship). Is this a question of typical Swedish resistance to formal demands for cultural adaptation, and in that case, how should it be understood and explained?

Thirdly, Sweden occupies an interesting position also regarding the connections between integration policy and immigration controls. The interplay between control of immigration and rights plays a central role for the understanding of the growth of Swedish immigrant policy that was established during the period of workforce immigration during the 1960s. The prerequisites for a generous integration policy involved regulation of immigration according to access to jobs. The immigrant policy institutions and goals remained even after migration in the 1970s changed character, when refugees and families/relatives became more numerous, and when regulations were no longer possible to make in light of domestic policy (Borevi 2002; 2010).

Sweden has become known as a refugee-friendly nation and a humanitarian model, aspects that are also central for Sweden’s national self-image (Johansson 2008). Nevertheless, Sweden is highly dependent upon other countries’ migration and integration policies. This can be described as a negative regime contest where it is a matter of appearing to be the least generous in order to avoid attracting what seem to be undesirable immigrants (Brekke 2004). In this regard, it may be said that Sweden, with a comparatively generous and comprehensive welfare pol-

icity, should experience especially heavy pressure. Sweden's recent increasingly active attempts within EU to persuade more countries to share "the refugee burden" may be viewed as a way to handle this pressure (Sperl 2007). However, considering the dimension of political control, there should also be a significant pressure on the convergence of integration policy.

Fourthly, regarding the driving forces behind a Europeanisation of integration policy, Sweden should experience a corresponding pressure to harmonise. As has already been mentioned, Sweden is an important actor in international cooperation, not least within EU. However, what integration policy line does Sweden pursue in the EU context? What is Sweden's reaction to attempts at harmonizing, through soft governance, integration policy within Europe? What traces might these attempts leave in Swedish policy and debate?

Research design

Below I present the method, material and how I will proceed to answer each of the aims of the study.

Descriptive survey and characterisation

My *first* purpose is to characterise the position of Swedish integration policy from a comparative European perspective. I shall concentrate on the two policy areas that most clearly represent the European trend towards activation policy and obligations: citizenship policy and introductory policy for newly arrive immigrants. Citizenship policy encompasses above all the regulations for naturalising new citizens, whereas introduction policy concerns rules and measures aiming to facilitate the

integration of new arrivals into the labour market and social and political life.

Aiming to characterise the Swedish position, I shall first survey all proposals since the 1990s in Swedish political debate that vis à vis integration policy or citizenship include elements of *obligation or coercion*. This can refer to the introduction of a demand for participation in a particular activity (e.g. a language course) or that through a special test, show that one has certain knowledge, skills, talents or that one embraces certain values. I intend to make this survey regarding two different arenas.

The *first arena* comprises the political debate as it is represented in the official parliamentary publication: in reports of official investigations, motions, government proposals and parliamentary treatment. My aim here is to survey and describe (1) when a proposal of the kind mentioned above is made; (2) who makes the proposal; (3) what the proposal contains – its message; (4) what arguments are put forward, and (5) what reactions and possible counter-arguments are provoked by the proposal. The material is not difficult to find and compare – it is possible to access through the search motor Rixlex. This material makes it possible to narrow down points of view both on the part of parliamentary parties and the interest organisations included when the proposal was circulated for comment.

Since, in contrast to most European countries, Sweden has not had a right-wing populist/anti-immigration party represented in its parliament since Ny Demokrati (New Democracy) in 1991-1994, I intend to study a *second arena* in which proposals from these movements and parties may be represented. I shall therefore undertake a specific media study in order to examine particularly proposals

from right-wing populist parties and organisations regarding integration and citizenship policy. Methodologically, this part of the study is inspired by the “political claims analysis” developed by Ruud Koopmans and his research colleagues (Koopmans et al 2005). Since my enquiry is more limited than Koopmans (their study was intended to survey integration policy “claims” from a number of different actors), I shall make more focussed searches in media archives in order to describe (1) when a proposal is made; (2) what it contains – its message; (3) what arguments are put forward, and (4) what reactions and counter-arguments are provoked by the proposal.

The aim of characterising the Swedish position finally involves comparing the Swedish proposals – put forward on either of the above mentioned arenas – with relevant EU documents. These EU documents could for example consist of reports on bench-marking or best practice, which comprise an important part of attempts at soft governance in the integration policy area. The aim here is to survey what traces these attempts at control leave in the Swedish integration policy debate.

Explanatory analysis through historical and national comparisons

The second stage of the study involves analysing the results of the first part from an explanatory perspective. To this end, the Swedish case is analysed from a comparative historical and national vantage point. Firstly, the study will be oriented towards investigating whether Swedish integration policy can be explained as a form of “path dependence” (Pierson 2003). More concretely, the hypothesis is that the Swedish position can be traced back to an historical decision, partly as re-

gards welfare policy in general, partly as regards Sweden’s previous multi-cultural immigration policy.

Here I would relate to the rather new scholarly interest in the meaning of path dependence with reference to multi-cultural policy (see, for example, Faist 2006; Siim & Skjeie 2008). How do countries with a multi-cultural institutional heritage deal with the current trend towards the convergence of integration policies? To answer this question, I shall widen the Swedish process-tracing to include comparisons with other countries. My purpose with this is to compare developments in Sweden with corresponding developments in the Netherlands and Great Britain, countries that together with Sweden, previously constituted the main representatives of multi-cultural policies in Europe. Why do these countries look so different now? One possible reason could be that the previous similarities regarding their multi-cultural policies have been exaggerated. The Swedish variant of multiculturalism has diverged from that of Great Britain by, for example, being more oriented towards positive than negative rights, and from that of the Netherlands through clear efforts to create standard institutional solutions (Borevi 2008).

Comparative process-tracing is meant to identify important stages in the development of Swedish integration policy and compare them with how integration policy has developed in the Netherlands and Great Britain. How did multi-cultural policy arise and proceed in these countries? What similarities and differences in character exist? What significance had central contextual factors such as coalitions between parties, the advent of right-wing populist parties and the strength of trade unions?

In the Swedish case, political documents and interviews with politicians and civil servants will be used to carry out the step-wise process-tracing. For Great Britain and the Netherlands, I shall primarily rely on secondary material – books, articles and research reports. For these two countries, the method in other words involves a kind of “re-analysis” of earlier studies in order to identify the decisive stages in the development in these countries from multi-culturalism to a relatively tough assimilation policy. The British and the Dutch integration policy has attracted great interest from research and the situation with material both in terms of historical analyses of these countries’ integration policies and more contemporary developments should be considered to be good (see e.g. Entzinger 2003; Geddes 2000; Favell 2001; Kiwan 2009; van Oers 2009). As regards comparisons between countries, exchanges with researchers in the countries in question will be of central importance.

As has already been mentioned, my analysis of the Swedish case will be made from a comparative European perspective, with clear connections to the leading research in the area. In addition to the research already referred to, the academic discourse on integration policy typologies can be mentioned (for example, Koopmans et al 2005). A consequence of the European trend towards greater integration policy convergence is that what appeared to be distinct national integration policy models in the 1980s and 90s, are now either irrelevant (Joppke 2007) or at least in need of comprehensive reformulation and nuancing (Jacobs & Rea 2007; Wright 2008). My planned analysis provides good possibilities for contributing to research on this question as well.

Normative analysis

As has already been indicated above, central normative questions are brought to a head in current integration policy development. The *third* purpose of the project is to make a normative evaluation of the new emphasis on obligations and demands that crop up in political reforms and debates in Sweden and in Europe. The arguments and political facts that are elucidated in conjunction with the first and second purposes of the study will here be exposed to normative evaluation and analysis. The practice of introducing different types of tests as a condition for obtaining a residence permit or achieving citizenship status signal a new engagement in promoting national identity. This raises the normative question of whether tests and requirements should be regarded as legitimate based on a liberal democratic notion of the nation as *demos*, or whether they represent an improper move towards the conception of the nation as *ethnos*. This issue has recently provoked heated academic debate (see, e.g. Bauböck and Joppke 2010) and relates to central issues in the comprehensive literature on citizenship, multi-culturalism and liberalism in political theory (e.g. Kymlicka 1995; Barry 2001; Carens 2000; Parekh 2000).

The aim of this third purpose is to discuss whether it is possible, on the basis of the liberal democratic ideal of a political *demos*, to evaluate the different versions of obligatory language and integration tests which have been launched or proposed in policy debates. One potentially important distinction in such a normative analysis is that between content and procedure. Some scholars would argue that it should mainly be a matter of *content* when deciding if e.g. current obligatory teaching programmes are legitimate according to

an understanding of the national community as demos. This brings to a head questions e.g. of what types of knowledge, skills, talents or attitudes are appropriate to demand of a person (cf. Wright 2009, 2). Will it make a difference, for instance, if what is required is knowledge of the country's political form of government or acquaintance with its art, literature, music or geography? What importance has the question of what *level* of knowledge or skills is required from the immigrant/applicant? Can the test be ranked normatively in relation to how high or low the cut off point is set? Other scholars would rather hold that it is the very *procedure* of obligatory testing and mandatory introduction programmes, that are solely directed towards non-European immigrants, that are to be considered problematic, regardless of their substantial content (Phillips 2007). Arguments and standpoints relating to issues like these would be found in the policy debates studied in the first and second parts of the project. The aim in this third part is to evaluate and criticize them, thereby formulating a normative conclusion.

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