THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SWEDISH POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM IN THE LATE 20th/ EARLY 21st CENTURY

A. Ryabichenko
M. Shenderyuk*

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This article studies the transformation of Swedish political party system in the 1980s, and aims to develop its typology before and after the transformation. The article identifies several key prerequisites for such transformation: among them, the crisis of social democracy and an increase in the nationalist feelings in society. The latter is caused by the negative effects of attempts at social integration of the migrants and introduction of the principles of multiculturalism. Ethnic tension manifested itself in the wide-spread support for the Swedish Democrats party in the 2010 parliamentary election. From a political party system dominated by social democrats, Sweden has gone to a system with two leading parties — the left-wing Swedish Social Democratic Labour Party and the right-wing Moderate Party. The Swedish Democrats position themselves as an alternative to the two party blocs headed by the ruling parties (the Alliance and the Red-Greens). The study employs an interdisciplinary approach and uses the methods of scientific synthesis. Its findings can be of practical significance for politicians, social activists, and academics alike.

Key words: politics, Sweden, nationalism, political party system, social democracy, identity

* Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University
14, A. Nevski Str., Kaliningrad, 236041, Russia

Over the recent years, Swedish political party system has undergone serious changes. According to researchers from the University of Gothenburg, the distribution of contemporary political parties along the Left-Right scale is as follows: Left Party, Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP), Green Party, Swedish Democrats, Centre Party, Liberal People's Party, Christian Democrats, and Moderate Party [1, s. 241]. Each party, except for the Swedish Democrats, is a member of either left-wing, or right-wing coalition. The vir-

tual division of the parties in parliament into two coalitions was, in fact, institutionalised with the establishment of the right-wing Alliance[1] and the left-wing union of the Red-Greens in 2004 and 2008.

There are several reasons behind the transformation of Swedish political party system. Modern Sweden has a separate class of professional politicians. The right shift in public opinion, which commenced in the early 1980s, has been replaced recently with the parity of the 'right' and 'left' views. Citizens' trust in the leading political institution is declining [2, s. 9—35]. The key reason behind the changes in Swedish political party system is the crisis of Swedish social democracy, caused to a degree by the loss of trust between labour market players. In the 1970s, Swedish businesspeople opted for the neo-liberal development trajectory and directed criticism against SAP; the main reason behind it being the 1975 employee funds project, which at first looked as an attempt to gradually socialize the largest Swedish enterprises [3, s. 304—306].

This debate over social funds resulted brought forward an information campaign against SAP launched by the Swedish Employers' Alliance together with Timbro, a neo-liberalist think tank. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO-S), which had been supporting the party for many years, found itself in a confrontation with the Social Democrats in 1980. Ten years later, when party membership of local LO-S organisations was terminated, SAP received another blow [4, c. 57; 5, s. 262].

Another reason behind the declining authority of SAP is the change initiated by the social democrats themselves. According to Tommy Möller, since the 1980s SAP has abandoned many of the earlier beliefs. The result of the intraparty struggle between the 'traditionalists' and the 'reformists" (also known as "the War of the Roses"[2]), was a right shift in the social democrats' ideology. The main 'stumbling stone' for SAP fraction was the issue of whether the Swedish collectivist model posed an obstacle to personal initiative [6, p.1; 7, s. 2].

The party congress of 1987 concluded that there was a need to revise SAP programme, a new variant of which was prepared in the run up to the 1990 election. In fact, all decisions reached by the party in 1988—1991[3] demonstrate the success of the reformists.

As the positions of the party's liberal wing grew stronger, the support for its chief opponent — the right-wing Moderate Coalition Party (MCP)[4] — was increasing. The concept of freedom traditionally employed by the left Swedish politicians took on a new, market-oriented, individualist social interpretation. This period also saw the first instance of cooperation between the struggling coalitions — a move motivated by the need to reform the Swedish model of socioeconomic development.

The established Swedish political party system was set into motion in 1988, when, for the first time in 70 years, a new player emerged in the Par-

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[1] In Swedish research works, the right-wing coalition is usually described as "bourgeoisie".
[2] This name comes from the symbol of SAP — the red rose.
[3] First of all, the abandonment of the General supplementary pension (ATP) system and the approval of the Swedish accession to the EU.
[4] In 1979, the 'moderate' became the large bourgeoisie party of Sweden; after the 1982 election, they outnumbered the allied Centre Party and Liberal People's Party.

liament (Riksdag) —the Green Party, which had succeeded in attracting the votes of traditionally left electorate.

In 1991, another new party — the Christian Democratic Social Party (now Christian Democrats) — entered the parliament. The same year saw the arrival of yet another parliamentary player, a populist nationalist party New Democracy. While this one stood out for its anti-immigrant slogans, in the social sector issue, they closely followed the bourgeois parties [8, c. 174—181]. In 1994, however, through a number of organisational weaknesses and internal clashes, the New Democracy could not receive enough votes and left the Riksdag.

The instability of the social democrats' position became apparent in February 1991, when the parliament declined crisis management measures proposed by the government, and the social democratic PM had to resign to later return with a new cabinet. In autumn of the same year, for the first time since the 1920, a member of MCP became the Prime Minister of Sweden. With the economic crisis engulfing the country, the right-wing government had no choice but to start cooperating with SAP. Later, however, their key partner changed to the New Democracy [9, s. 74].

In order to regain power, social democrats had to move further to the right and position themselves as 'a party reformed'. This move produced significant results in the 1994 election, when SAP beat their own popularity record set during the introduction of the universal suffrage in 1911 (45.3 %) [5, s. 270—271; 10, c. 157—158; 11, s. 54]. In effect, the party pursued the neoliberal economic policy of the 'bourgeois' cabinet, having carried out privatisation of both public and municipal property.

2001 was an important benchmark in SAP history, when, after adopting its current programme, the party embraced market economy and abandoned the idea of planned economy altogether. The radical differences between SAP and MCP are a thing of the past; and it is now significantly more difficult for social democrats to criticise their opponents. Yet both the 1998 and 2002 elections were a success for SAP, although the party did receive less electorate support than it did in 1994.

The political party system of Sweden underwent significant changes in 2006, when social democrats were defeated by the right-wing Alliance headed by MCP. Consequently, the members of the Swedish Democrats obtained positions in municipal legislative bodies.

In the run up to the election, the 'moderate' abandoned their image of a party supported by the wealthier part of Swedish population. MCP leadership acknowledged a left shift through adding the word 'new' to 'moderate' and dubbing themselves "the only labour party in Sweden" [12, p. 16—18].

In 2002 MCP won 55 seats; in 2006—97. MCP's victory was ensured by the other members of the Alliance coalition: in the 2006 election, the Centre party won 29 seats, the Liberal People's Party 28, and the Christian Democrats 24. However, even 130 seats in the parliament for the social democrats represented a loss of 14 seats in comparison to 2002. Since the Left Party and the Green party gained 22 and 19 seats respectively, they were 'outweighed' by the right-wing politicians.

Fredrik Reinfeldt's bourgeois government, formed after the election, continued the re-orientation of the Swedish economy according to the monetarist-market scenario chosen by the right-wing politicians in 1991—1994; the reform was implemented quite intensively. The key element of the Alliance's policy was the tax reduction, framed by the government in terms of combating unemployment.

In the course of reforming the social security system, the unemployment benefit was reduced and trade union fees increased alongside with the voluntary unemployment insurance payments. As a result, 500,000 people stopped payments to the unemployment benefit funds, approximately 250,000 people left trade unions.

The proceeded to launch a massive privatisation of medical facilities, during which, as the critics of the reform stress, part of the public property was sold at reduced prices. The introduction of market principles in the field of healthcare resulted in separate lines for 'government-sponsored' and 'fee-paying' patients. Moreover, 24,000 jobs were lost in the social sector [13, s. 16; 14, s. 3]. One of the unpopular measures of the Alliance was the adoption of the FRA law and the Directive on the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights enabling the authorities to exert control over the Internet users.

The government's social policy against the "Swedish disease"[5] yielded the opposite result: the number of persons to have applied for benefits increased, while the society became even more polarized [9, s. 64].

At the same time, during the economic crisis of 2008—2010, the bourgeois Alliance proved to be an efficient crisis manager, under whose leadership Sweden was able to quickly restore its pre-crisis production numbers.

The 2010 elections brought forth a new development strategy for the country. Once again, the choice was between neoliberal methods of managing Swedish economy and yet another attempt to create a social democratic version of the Swedish socioeconomic model. A distinctive feature of this election was the unprecedented number of young first-time voters (almost 500,000 people). During the campaign, both parties resorted to smear PR strategies and spying.

In order to regain power, SAP changed its leader; Göran Persson who headed the party since 1995 was replaced by Mona Sahlin. Sahlin's candidacy was not a compromise; in fact, she was opposed by both trade union members and 'traditionalists' [15, s. 148]. For the first time in its history, the party was led by a woman. Furthermore, Sahlin's affiliation with the party elite by birth and personal connections with 1986—1991 Prime Minister, Ingvar Karlsson, fastened the deal for her. Another important advantage of Mona Sahlin was her experience in social democratic governments (in 1990—2006, with a small break, she served as the Minister for Employment, Minister for Gender Equality, Minister for Integration, and Deputy Prime Minister). Her political career at Riksdag started as early as 1982 [16; 17, s. 38].

However, the biography of a new leader of social democrats was not spotless. First of all, there was the Sahlin case, better known as the Toblerone affair[6], which became the central argument against her run for SAP

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[5] The Swedish disease is a phenomenon of a two-to-three-fold increase in sick days per an insured person in the country [4].
[6] In 1995, then serving as the Minister for Employment, Sahlin used her working card for private expenses. Toblerone chocolates, among other items, appeared on the credit card statement.

leadership in 1995. After the controversy, Sahlin briefly left politics to run her private business, and only returned to public affairs in 1997.

The echo of the 'War of Roses' turned out to be a negative factor for social democrats. It mainly manifested in the stern criticism of Sahlin, Persson and two party veterans — Kjell-Olof Feldt and Björn Folke Rosengren — in the run up to the election.

As further developments showed, the Sahlin case was not forgotten by the electorate and became one of the reasons behind the defeat of SAP-led Red-Green coalition, which also included the Left Party and the Green Party [18; 19, s. 157—178].

The right-wing Alliance, too, treated the election campaign with all seriousness. In his book, *Forward Together,* published just before the election, Reinfeldt analysed his time in the office stressing tax reductions and the introduction of in-work tax credit: "… we cut taxes for the working population; it is better to work now than it was before" [20, s. 48].

The election campaign reached a new stage in the end of August, when the Alliance and the Red-Greens published essentially similar election programmes (a distinctive feature of the oppositions' programme was the proposal to allocate extra 0.5 mln kronor to the development of sports, and grant pensioners an opportunity to continue working after 69) [21; 22, s. 2].

As an analysis of publications in Swedish mass media showed, among the key contested issues were the decreasing standards of living of Swedish pensioners, taxation and employment policies, social security, energy, and environmental protection. The focus on the socioeconomic axis can be viewed a clear sign of the Swedish development model crisis.

The principal campaign tool of Swedish Democrats was a video clip that proposed tax reductions for pensioners through cutting expenditure on immigrant integration. The video was banned; most experts agreed that the ban itself was the party's real target, so that they could play the 'victim of the regime' card [23].

The election results were rather surprising: the Alliance defeated the Red-Greens but did not secure absolute Riksdag majority. SAP members took 122 seats in the parliament, MCP — 107 seats, the Greens — 25 seats, the People's Liberal Party — 24, and the Centre Party — 23. The Swedish Democrats, who entered parliament for the first time, won 20 seats: as many as the Left Party and one seat more than the Christian Democrats.

Social democrats were virtually defeated: given the party's history, it was their worst performance since 1914. Mona Sahlin resigned from the position of the party leader in March 2011, having stressed that social democrats had come to a standstill in their development. The new SAP leader was a 'centrist' Håkan Juholt; under his leadership, the party showed significant improvement [24]. After Juholt became the head of SAP, he announced the shift of priority from high taxes to a high GDP rate; however, the party was not yet ready to address tax reduction as interpreted by the Alliance. In January 2012, Juholt was succeeded by Stefan Löfven, a former trade unionist. As Östberg stresses, when Löfven became the leader of SAP, the party's ideology moved even further to the right [25, p. 234].

However, the fact that nationalists are widely supported in some parts of the country (notably, in the municipality of Bjuv, they won 19.2 % of votes) indicates that the ruling Alliance underestimated the party's potential.

Both the right and the left coalitions refused to cooperate with the Swedish Democrats and accused them of xenophobia and populism. A massive campaign against the party had been launched long before the election. Since the main goal of 'traditional parties' was to prevent nationalists from dealing with migration problems, both coalitions announced the possibility of cooperation in this one issue. Later, the Green Party became the key partner of the Alliance in regulating migration. Increasing popularity of the green after the elections made them an attractive partner for both political coalitions. At the same time, MCP's Alliance partners were losing their support, and the cooperation of opposition within the Red-Green coalition finally came to a halt in autumn 2010.

There were two major reasons behind the relative success of the Swedish Democrats in the recent elections:

1) success of nationalist parties in other Nordic countries;
2) negative results of multiculturalism policy after 1974.

The victorious march of nationalist parties across the Nordic countries began in Denmark, when the Danish People's Party, established in 1995, won 22 parliament seats in 2001 and gained the right to participate in the government. Since 2005, the conservative liberal Progress Party has been the second largest party of the Norwegian parliament. The True Finns entered the Finnish parliament after the 2011 elections.

Mass migration became a tool used whenever there was a need to maintain the numbers of population in times of demographic crises. In Sweden alone, the positive statistics of population growth is accompanied by the crisis connected with the ageing of said population. Increased life expectancy is now a constant partner of declining birth rate[7].

In the recent years, cumulative birth rate has not been able to reach the value necessary for the natural replenishment of population without immigration[8]. The declining birth statistics is typical of the crisis of traditional family brought on by female emancipation. Alcohol abuse is on the increase in Sweden, with women being one of the most vulnerable groups. The country was the first one to legalise same-sex marriages; such unions have been registered on the same basis as traditional ones since 1995.

Now immigrants account for 15 % of the Swedish population (compared to 1 % in 1951). In 2011, one of every four babies born in Sweden was of foreign origin (one of the parents was a migrant). 'Soft' migration rules suggesting equal social rights for all residents were introduced by the Swedish authorities in the 1970s [26, p. 336—355; 27].

Swedish migrants are either legal refugees or foreign workers. Traditionally, the former constitute quite a significant portion of the total population

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[7] It is estimated that by 2062, life expectancy in Sweden will increase by five years for women and seven years for men. Further increase of the number of the elderly is forecasted (in 2060, there will be one million more people over 65 than in 2009), whereas the number of working population will decrease.

[8] It requires that, on average, each woman has 2.1 children during her lifetime; after the 1970s, this level has only been exceeded twice (in 1990 and 1991). In 2011, a Swedish woman averaged 1.9 children.

of migrants. Liberal acceptance policies regarding refuges from the conflict-ridden 'third world' countries were launched in 1984. In the late 1980s, tens of thousands of refugees from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Ethiopia obtained their Swedish residence permits. In the 1990s, the country welcomed refugees from Somalia and Bosnia [28]. In the mid-00s, there was an increase in immigration from Iraq. The recent events in Libya, Egypt, and Syria resulted in a new wave of refugees from these countries.

Migrant workers are accepted in Sweden in accordance with the 2008 legislation, which simplifies mobility between Sweden and non-EU countries. Since one of three newcomers competes for a job with Swedish citizens, in 2013, LO-S suggested limiting the inflow of migrant workers from non-EU countries [29].

The integration of migrants into the Swedish society is carried out according to the principles of multiculturalism as described by the Swedish constitution, which states that integration of cultures should take place without assimilation. Thus, immigrants arriving in Sweden are not obliged to accept Swedish cultural norms and traditions, while both their culture and language are protected by the law.

Among negative consequences of such an active 'open door' policy are the ever-growing ethnic tensions in society, increased risk of terrorist attacks[9], and instability in immigrant quarters[10]. Public support for extremist nationalist organisations has skyrocketed. The Swedish Democrats, a parliamentary party, joined marginal ultranationalist parties in their criticism of the multiculturalism-based immigrant integration. The party did start as an unstable activist organization influenced by right extremists; however, the Swedish Democrats celebrated their 25th anniversary in Riksdag, and this is something that the seven traditional parties of Sweden should not take lightly.

The following initiatives were instrumental in bringing the Swedish nationalists to success:

1) refusal to cooperate with extremist groups;
2) party 'cleansing' and liberalisation of party ideology;
3) active participation in municipal elections.

The key elements of the Swedish Democrats' ideology, according to Lindberg, are nationalism, value-based conservatism, and the "welfare state" solidarity model [30]. It seems necessary to add Euroscepticism to the list above. The party's ideological profile developed as early as 1999, when nationalists abandoned the demands of mass deportation of immigrants, introduction of capital punishment, and nationalisation of financial institutions.

The party's ideology rests on the idea of the need to protect national identity from adverse influence of a foreign culture. Since the Muslim culture is considered to be the most conspicuous among all migrants' cultures, the criti-

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[9] In December 2010, a suicide bomber made an unsuccessful attempt at a terrorist attack in the centre of Stockholm.

[10] At the end of May, 2013, ethnic riots broke out in Stockholm suburbs; as a result, hundreds of cars, several schools, shops, and other buildings were burnt. Fire brigades and police officers were attacked. Riots spread to other Swedish cities.

cism of Islamic expansion remains one of the key items on the party's agenda. At the same time, as the 2011 programme shows, the viewpoint of the Swedish Democrats on the issue of migration as a whole has significantly softened. The document introduces the principle of 'open Swedishness', according to which a person of any culture and race who has adopted Swedish cultural norms can become a bearer of the Swedish identity [31, s. 11].

Another sign of liberalisation of the party's ideology is a more relaxed attitude to the same-sex marriages [32, s. 28—29; 33].

The views of the party leaders on national identity have been criticised in mass media on more than one occasion: an analysis of numerous Swedish publications about the party helped identify the presence of propaganda communication, in the framework of which the Swedish Democrats were subjected to defamation by the ruling and opposition parties and affiliated structures.

Contacts between the Swedish Democrats and ideologically similar parties have been minimal; however, it is worth mentioning the support from the French national front in the 1990s [32, s. 24; 34, s. 76—77]. The Danish People's Party served as the key example for the Swedish nationalists.

The party's growing popularity offers an optimistic view of the future for its leaders. If the Swedish Democrats win more than 10 % of the votes in the 2014 election (in November 2012, the party supporters accounted for 8 %), nationalists can gain access to the government and start pursuing a restrictive migration policy.
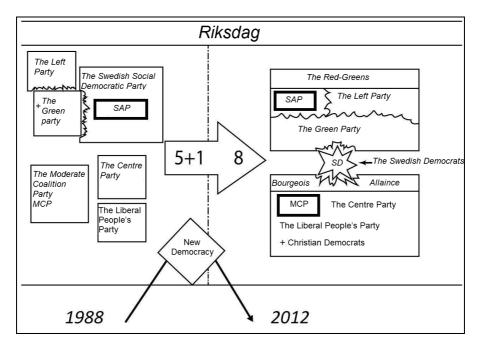

Fig. The transformation of the political party system in Sweden in 1988—2012

To conclude: the transformation of the Swedish political party system in 1988—2012 manifested itself in the crisis of Swedish social democracy, the

rise of the right-wing Alliance to power, and the success of the Swedish Democrats in the 2010 parliamentary election. By 2010, Swedish political party system dominated by the Swedish Social Democratic Party was replaced by a multi-party system led by the left-wing SAP and the right-wing Moderate Coalition Party. The approximation of the dominating parties' ideologies is an on-going process. The positions of the new political subjects — the Swedish Democrats — are expected to strengthen against this background. At the same time, the Swedish Democrats, who now act as the 'third force', remain the major source of instability in the country.

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About the authors

Arkady Ryabichenko, Junior Research Fellow, Social and Economic Studies Centre, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Russia.

E-mail: ARyabichenko@kantiana.ru

Dr Marina Shenderyuk, Associate Professor, Department of History, Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, Russia.

E-mail: m. shenderyuk@gmail.com