

and legal practices. Russia suggested this interpretation should be replaced by the concept of "asset swaps". Gazprom would purchase energy distribution networks in Europe, while European companies would gain access to Russian hydrocarbon deposits. But Russia and the EU speak different languages and "integration" means different things; the two sides were unable to agree on any mutual interest and the experiment proved short-lived.

The next time that Russia and the EU try to get a dialogue going, the principle of "reciprocity" is going to become crucial. This will be a departure from the old style of relations when, in simple terms, both parties launched sweeping yet ill-thought-out attacks on the other in an effort to make their point. For example, for many years Brussels attempted to "tie" Russia into EU legislation, reflecting its usual tactic of expansion into eastern Europe. This met growing resistance from Moscow, which retaliated by closing the doors to investment

from abroad, including the EU. As Russia grew richer and stronger, Moscow decided that it could simply buy whatever it needed in the Old World and instead tie the EU to Russia. In response, the EU rushed to protect its strategic industries from Russia's grasp.

Adopting the principle of "reciprocity" would, therefore, offer the chance for both sides to start building relations afresh on the basis of a more constructive and even-handed approach. There may even be a chance to open a new period of "reciprocal" relations soon – once the Union has consolidated its institutional re-organization under the new Reform Treaty and Russia has resolved the issue of a new power structure. However, both Russia and the European Union will first have to accept that neither of them will be able to influence the world by themselves in future. A mutual recognition of this fact could transform their troubled relations. □

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STOCKHOLM

Fickle Swedes are turning on their government – again

By **Anders Mellbourn** of Halmstad University

Swedes are a pretty hard bunch to please. Just 16 months ago, they dumped the social democrats – the country's dominant political force for 75 years – regardless of international acclaim for the "Swedish model" of high-tech economic expansion plus extensive social security. Now public support for the centre-right government has dropped to record lows, despite accelerating growth and falling unemployment. Opinion polls have found that Swedes are more concerned about cuts in welfare programmes, particularly unemployment benefits, than they are encouraged by good news on jobs. So what does all this say about Swedish politics?

Like most Europeans these days, Swedes tend to vote against rather than for a political party.

Traditional left-wing voters abandoned the social democrats when they were perceived to have lost their idealism, especially since they also appeared to take so little pride in their own achievements. From the late 1990s, Sweden's blend of technological innovation, openness and competitiveness – together with a web of reformed social benefits – was hailed as a viable alternative to stagnating European welfare systems or cut-throat Anglo-American neo-liberalism. Germans in particular were impressed by the benefits of the Swedish model, more so than "Blairite" New Labour in Britain or the home-grown Neue Mitte of Gerhard Schröder. Swedish social democrat leaders, however, practically apologised for their policies and promised to revert to the true path of welfare support when times got better. The people, meanwhile, focused on the pain of reform, rather than their country's success, and felt that more jobs ought to have been created. In September 2006, the social democrats lost power to a four-party alliance led by the conservative Moderate

Party. The new coalition promised more jobs and less social exclusion, not least among immigrant communities. Conservative mantras about welfare cuts and tax reductions were played down.

But the new government's honeymoon period didn't last long. Voters quickly became sceptical about the centrist rhetoric of the ruling alliance, deciding the coalition comprised "true blue" conservatives and pro-market liberals rather than a new breed of moderates. Personality politics also played a part. Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt may be soft-spoken enough for Swedish tastes, but he seems generally considered rather too laid back for the job. The government's reputation for managerial competence has also taken several knocks. Two ministers had to resign in their first two weeks in office because of media revelations about misdemeanours, like refusing to pay public broadcasting fees and hiring nannies and cleaners on the black market. Other examples of the government's amateurism

over the past year have further denting their credibility as competent managers of the country.

Of course, the previous government's competence had also been questioned. It suffered a particularly serious blow in 2004/5 when a large number of Swedish holidaymakers fell victim to the Indian Ocean tsunami and then felt deserted by the authorities. Swedes also lost patience with the former prime minister, Göran Persson. He was branded as too self-centred and even blatantly non-egalitarian, notably over his taste for splendid mansions. Perhaps significantly for the future, when Persson announced his resignation on election night, support for the social democrats immediately rose. It has continued to increase ever since, even though voters have little indication which way the party is now heading.

Swedish attitudes towards Europe give one final insight into the skewed relationship between policy success and public appreciation in this country. Swedes used to be very reluctant members of the

European Union. But 10 years on, opinion polls are at last showing that a majority of Swedes now take membership for granted. There is still little real enthusiasm for Europe, though, and very little discussion of EU issues. In

Brussels, for example, Sweden wins praise for its commitment to the Common Foreign and Security Policy and common defence policies, even though this remarkable shift from traditional Swedish non-

alignment is barely discussed at home. Swedes appear to have learned to tolerate the EU, without caring to know very much about it. □

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ISTANBUL Despite EU reverses, Turkey's AK Party walks tall

By **Beril Dedeoğlu** of
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Turkey's primary political force is now the Party of Justice and Development (AKP). It returned to power with a landslide victory in last year's general elections and was able to defy all opposition to its choice of its deputy leader Abdullah Gul as Turkey's new president. Given that the AKP grew out of the movement of political Islam – and that its predecessor parties were banned on several occasions – the party's ascent marks a radical departure for a country built upon Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's strongly secular foundations. AKP politicians have had to

adapt to the democratic values, and political and administrative framework, of the republic. After the turmoil of elections last year, the new government's priorities include a new constitution and on-going efforts to address the Kurdish problem. Progress on EU accession talks will – as before – stay high on their agenda.

The AKP's early days in power after they won their first general election in 2002 were marked by the transformation of traditional state structures in preparation for EU accession talks. These major reforms didn't create any great backlash; intellectuals, democrats and liberals, plus the party faithful and people in rural and urban business circles, all lent their support to the AKP's efforts. The government was encouraged by the EU

and received support from the US. It also met with no Russian obstructiveness. During this time, Turkey made overtures in the Caucasus, central Asia and the Middle East. Ankara also won praise for supporting UN peace efforts in Cyprus – in stark contrast to the country's longstanding policy of non-cooperation over the divided island.

AKP-led reforms produced dramatic social changes – but also started to upset Turkey's powerful military-bureaucratic organisations. Alarmed, the AKP turned back to its core constituency and some conservative elements in the party began to plot what critics construed to be putative pro-Muslim policies. Meanwhile, tensions within the EU over its continued enlargement robbed the Ankara government of valuable