

France and Sweden: Two Countries, One in the Same

The years 1957 and 1995 brought starkly different times in Europe. In 1957, the United Kingdom gave independence to colonies such as Singapore and Malaya. The Soviet Union launched their Sputnik 1 and Sputnik 2 satellites to orbit the earth, beginning the space age. Future Chairman of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, Mona Sahlin, was born. In 1995, the British removed all troops from patrolling streets in Northern Ireland for the first time in 26 years. Russian cosmonaut Valeri Polyakov returned to earth after setting a record for most days spent in outer space at 437 days. Mona Sahlin, then Deputy Prime Minister and obvious successor to the Prime Minister, was revealed to have spent government money for personal items. Though much changed in Europe between these two dates, two countries, France (1957) and Sweden (1995), with very similar concerns joined a union of European countries. Each country knew their economy needed a boost but was concerned of the potential consequences of European integration. However, as each country's leaders ultimately recognized, association in a larger group would bring significant political and economic benefits along with their costs.

Throughout their involvement in the various associations of European states, France has played a large role in policy-making. Beginning with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) largely being influenced by Frenchmen Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, France has been a primary influence in how the integration would affect their own sovereignty. This has continued, "for most of [five decades as] French governments have been trying to achieve national objectives within the European arena by trying to ensure that policy and institutional developments are in line with French policies," (Guyomarch et al. 1998: 17). Therefore, France has rarely faced times where they were obligated to conform to a policy that hurt them politically

or economically. However, this is not to say that the European Union (EU)¹ has never hurt France. Inconsistencies in the views of former French leaders, such as those of Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou, were large hindrances in the rapid development of a functioning European integration system. Though some French leaders have made large improvements in the union's plan, "others have been responsible for some of the major problems and set-backs in the integration process," (Guyomarch et al. 1998: 18). For these reasons and others, France's political and economic advancements from the EU have been coupled with associated costs.

As mentioned before, many of the political costs to France occurred as a result of their leaders' conflicting views on European integration. The failure of French political factions to compromise led to setbacks of European integration due to sweeping policy changes with each new prime minister and president. The solution was eventually found in 1986 when President François Mitterand, a Socialist, named Jacques Chirac, a Gaullist, his prime minister. This "cohabitation... was marked by great, but usually non-public, tensions between the president and the prime minister about responsibility for European policy-making..." (Guyomarch et al. 1998: 29). The necessity of the two to compromise finally allowed France to move in a common direction towards European unification. However, by this time, many European integration policies were established in treaties and could not be changed without the consent of other member nations. Also, with the increased size of the European Community (EC), "the ability of the governments of the old member states such as France to determine the nature and outcome of policy choices was increasingly constrained," (Guyomarch et al. 33). Time lost in internal conflict caused France to lose control over their vision of a strong state (*dirigisme*), largely

¹ EU in this case is also meant to include its previous titles, including ECSC, EEC, EURATOM, and EC.

signed away in the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, which was one of the few ideas French leaders agreed upon. Because of this surrender, the French president, prime minister, parliament, and other government institutions' roles have been stretched and narrowed to fit the process of EU decision-making today. Though France benefits from the EU in realms of security and policy consistency, they have lost a lot of regulatory power that they value greatly.

Conversely, a previously one-dimensional, agricultural French economy benefitted greatly from European integration. Apart from agriculture, “the manufacturing and service sectors were both small-scale and undynamic, and much capital and infrastructure had been destroyed...” by World War II (Guyomarch et al. 1998: 5). In this way, France was unique from other original members of the ECSC, lacking in economic stability. French leaders saw that quick changes were needed to ignite sustainable economic growth. Therefore, the creation of the ECSC for freer trade was the obvious solution for France. With the addition of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) soon after, tight agricultural trade policies were abolished and member nations were protected from trade competition outside of the Community. Within the policy, France, “implemented structural and other reforms designed to ensure that French farmers—and voters—maximized the yield to France from the CAP,” (Guyomarch, et al. 1998: 129). This way, France was able to benefit from strong agriculture while they developed their manufacturing and service industries. Though the CAP did not always benefit the poorest farmers as it was intended to do, it helped France to diversify economically. For example, due chiefly to the Shengen Agreement that allows easy travel in the EU, France is “the most popular tourist destination in the world,” providing a stronger tourist industry (Civitas 2010). In contrast to their success, France and rest of the Eurozone are currently suffering from the economic failures of Greece and Portugal. However, in total, the EU has been beneficial for France by

helping them diversify their economy. France also helped the EU politically by proposing the ECSC and developing it into the EU. As current French President Nicolas Sarkozy said, “France is not strong without Europe, just as Europe is not strong without France,” (Sarkozy 2007).

For thirty years, Sweden struggled with a question opposite Sarkozy’s statement: Can we be strong without Europe and its impending union? The consideration of membership in the EU was not a question of whether the EU would be made stronger by Sweden but rather would Sweden be made stronger by the EU. Opposition of membership cited concerns of losing their historic neutrality and removing the *krona* as their currency among other things. Discussions by the Swedes on this topic were relatively tame until September 18th, 1994. On this date, the Social Democrat and former Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson ran against the incumbent Conservative Carl Bildt for a second term as Prime Minister in a race Carlsson would ultimately win. Months later, in a highly controversial 52% - 48% vote, Swedish Parliament (called *Riksdag*) approved Swedish membership in the EU. Accepting a country with a stable economy and little internal conflict, the EU was thrilled with Sweden’s addition. However, controversy is still prevalent in Sweden whether the membership in the EU is the best economic and political choice for Sweden.

Not unlike France, Sweden’s reluctance in accepting all the EU offered and required was due to indecision among the political elite. Political conservatives and business leaders advocated for Swedish membership in the EU fearing losing access to key European markets (Burke 2001). The Social Democrats, on the other hand, opposed abandonment of Sweden’s neutrality and economic stability as a welfare state. However, upon his election to a second term as Prime Minister, the Social Democrat Carlsson was able to convince or dupe enough of his party members to favor EU membership. The group that voted “yes” was not a majority for long as skepticism arose. Per Gahrton, a member of the *Riksdag*, voiced these concerns that

membership would “transform Sweden from an independent nation to a sort of province within an expanding superpower, in the process converting itself from a legislative body to little more than an advisory panel,” (Burke 2001). Sweden had already developed a stable parliamentary democracy with accepted laws. Joining the EU, however, forced citizens to accept a set of laws that Sweden had no voice in establishing. Therefore, it was obvious that “Sweden sought to join the Union not because...of the merits of European political integration, but rather on the basis of economic reasoning...” (Miles 2005: 2). The 52% “majority,” then, elected to surrender political well being in favor of economic interests. As a benefit, Sweden opted out of any attempts for a common European defense force prior to joining the EU, exempting them from the Common Security and Defense Policy and thus maintaining neutrality. Still, with political costs outweighing benefits from joining the EU, Sweden looked to the economic portion of the EU for advantages.

The Swedes, like the French, gain their benefits from the EU primarily in the economic realm. In 1960, Sweden joined six other European countries in signing the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) as an alternative to the EEC. Sweden, along with the other countries including the UK and Austria, established the EFTA out of frustration of the EEC’s lack of flexibility in trade regulations. However, as the EEC moved toward the EU of today, EFTA members began to resign from the Treaty to join the more successful EU². This gave Sweden fewer options for free trade as only less economically diverse countries remained in the EFTA and dooming Sweden to a dark economic future. Therefore, Sweden’s membership in the EU allowed them the trading benefits with other European powers that they used to receive from the

² EU here refers to the name the European integration body today known as the EU held at the various times countries left the EFTA.

EFTA. Traditionally a welfare state, Sweden has remained apart from the Eurozone in order to protect their autonomous monetary policy with the *krona*. Swedish political leaders are reluctant to change to the Euro because “[citizens] needed to be convinced of the economic benefits of Swedish participation in the EMU above and beyond that of full membership itself,” (Miles 2005: 227). The Swedish citizens were duped into thinking membership in the EU would bring immediate economic benefits through the use of propaganda and therefore needed significant evidence that the Euro would actually benefit them (Burke 2001). Nevertheless, the EU and Sweden are mutually benefitting from the membership economically due to new financing for the EU and easier trade for Sweden.

As two countries that joined the EU nearly four decades apart, France and Sweden’s factors influencing and discouraging membership in a union were nearly identical. Each country had a deeply developed, stable political system but significant economic concerns based on their future outlooks. Though they gave up large amounts of sovereignty and political traditions, France and Sweden deemed their future economic prosperity reason enough to join. Now two of the more economically and politically mature states in the Union, France and Sweden interact frequently in arenas such as trade. Further, “the succession of the French and Swedish presidencies of the European Union in 2001 also encouraged the two countries to work together, emphasizing common approaches to many,” (French Diplomatie 2008). Cooperation such as this shows that, even though the EU cannot be deemed entirely successful yet, countries are forging relationships to engage in mutual well being and advancement. The mere fact that these two countries are largely free of internal and external conflict as well as succeeding economically illustrates the bright future of the European Union and other unions to come.

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