

# Framing to persuade. Sweden's decision to join the European Union

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## Introduction

In September 2003, in a referendum, Sweden said 'no' to the euro. This might have shocked the European political establishments, but for Swedish observers the result came as no surprise. Swedish ordinary citizens were already sceptical of the whole EU project when Sweden applied for membership in 1991; thereafter, Sweden was the only member country with a EU-negative majority in its delegation to the European Parliament. For once the dominant Social Democratic Party in Sweden, otherwise so superbly skilful in forming opinion, had not anchored its EU-policy among the voters. Instead, the politics leading to Swedish membership were a rather Machiavellian process that – in the light of the assumption of politics as rational action<sup>1</sup> – reveals a fascinating internal political game between central figures in the Social Democratic Party.

## Was there a choice?

The first question for anyone who would try to make a rationalist reconstruction of the way actors calculated their moves is whether they had a choice to join or not to join. For a long time, this was not the case: membership was out of the question with respect to the ideology of neutrality. Then, when the decision to apply was made, again there was no choice. The political establishment described membership as the predetermined fate for Europe. In the historic teachings from Jean Monnet to Jacques Delors, the Union symbolized, to use Francis Fukuyama's famous expression, 'the End of History', the ultimate goal for the victorious, peaceful, liberal democracies. The argument that membership was 'necessary' played an important role in the Nordic referenda and, for the non-socialist government that came to power in Sweden in 1991, EU membership was part of

‘the politics of the only way’.<sup>2</sup> However, 1990 was the formative year when actors met with a real choice.

For decades, the motto of Swedish foreign policy was: ‘non-alignment in peace, neutrality in war’.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the adoption of the Treaty of Rome, Sweden had successfully avoided war for 150 years – much longer most other European countries. At this time, moreover, Sweden’s national income was higher than that of other countries, and it considered itself to be a more progressive welfare state. It was against this background that Sweden’s Social Democratic leaders looked on sceptically – and not without a certain smugness – at the Conservative and Christian Democratic governments that were working for integration.

The Conservatives and Liberals in Sweden, on the other hand, took a more favourable view of European cooperation from the start.

Any notion that the process of West European integration would lead to a change in the direction of Swedish foreign policy was definitively dispelled in a speech given by Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, in August 1961. In categorical terms, the Social Democratic Party leader confirmed that the traditional Swedish policy of neutrality held firm. The economic situation was not such as to justify any change in policy. ‘It involves no exaggeration to say that economic conditions in our country have been markedly favourable.’ Unemployment was low; industrial production was rapidly increasing; the highly successful export sector was well-diversified across the whole scale of products, from raw materials to advanced technology; social-welfare provisions were being constantly improved. Briefly put, Sweden had an interest in continued free trade with both Western Europe and the rest of the world; it ought not, therefore, bind itself to certain countries through treaties containing ‘protectionist elements’. Above all else, the policy of neutrality stood in the way of membership in the new Union. ‘Most centrally, of course, there are the foreign-policy considerations.’ If Sweden’s foreign-policy interests were to be satisfied, it needed to retain its freedom of manoeuvre – ‘both factually and as stated in the treaty’:

Non-alignment is a very important component of this freedom of manoeuvre, but it must be complemented with consistent efforts to avoid – also outside the military area – commitments which would make it difficult or impossible for Sweden to choose a neutral course in the event of conflict, and which may impel other countries to doubt that Sweden truly wishes to undertake such a course.

Membership of the Union was, therefore, no choice for Sweden.

The Government has ... come to the conclusion that membership in the six-state market established by the Treaty of Rome is not, as things now stand, compatible with the Swedish policy of neutrality.<sup>4</sup>

The policy declaration set forth in this speech then governed Swedish foreign policy for almost 30 years. As long as it was the Social Democrats who ruled,

membership seemed excluded. The Conservatives and the Liberals, to be sure, took up the question at regular intervals, in campaigns calling for a 'Yes to Europe'. It was enough, however, that Tage Erlander and his successor Olof Palme made mere mention of the word 'neutrality', and the question was dropped.

Some quotes from Prime Minister Palme in the early 1970s may serve to illustrate the Swedish doctrine. President De Gaulle of France had resigned, and an opportunity for expanding the Union seemed thereby to have arisen. Should not Sweden apply for membership now – if, for example, Great Britain did the same? Palme flatly rejected this idea:

There is no question of any change in our policy of neutrality. Of course, we ourselves decide the purport of our neutrality; however, since it builds on the confidence of others in our will and capacity to fulfil the course of action we have chosen, it prevents us from participating in a system of binding foreign-policy collaboration within a group of states seeking to formulate common standpoints.<sup>5</sup>

In autumn of the same year, Palme made the following statement:

We are not prepared to fiddle with our neutrality, and we are not prepared to carry out any policy which could call it into question. We are not prepared to enter into a system of political cooperation that conflicts with this policy of neutrality. We refrain, therefore, from membership in the European Union.<sup>6</sup>

In a Riksdag debate some days later, moreover, Palme criticised the idea of a qualified membership – i.e. with reservations for neutrality. Such an arrangement, in his view, was impossible:

Some seem to think the question of neutrality is independent of that of membership, and that cooperation with the Common Market can be discussed without including neutrality as part of the picture. It is such thoughts which are apparently entertained by those who say, we are all agreed on neutrality, and that an objective discussion about the Union is blocked by the neutrality policy. ... This is absurd. Our vital interests in the area of national security cannot be reduced to a symbol. The main thrust of our foreign policy is not a phrase. It has a living content. We cannot avoid seeing the political content of European cooperation – the foreign-policy collaboration being undertaken in connection with the European Union – in relation to our own foreign policy; and we have come to the conclusion that membership is not compatible with our policy of neutrality.<sup>7</sup>

The Swedish policy of neutrality remained firm, and membership was not in question. The intensification of European integration did not change this. With 'force, clarity, and consistency', Sweden would continue to affirm its neutrality, as the recurrent phrase had it, in Government declarations during the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

As we all know, however, great events took place in the international scene at the end of the 1980s. A changed world met the new Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, who had become the leader of the Social Democrats following the

murder of Olof Palme. World Communism had fallen, and the Soviet Union had dissolved. Trade was internationalizing further, and the economy was becoming ever more globalized. A new threat to the welfare state had arisen, lying not in war but in a collapse of domestic policy, owing to the pursuit of wantonly inflationary economic policies supported by public opinion. In order to ensure the long-term survival of the welfare state, therefore, the governments of different countries would have to cooperate more closely.

A further development of great importance, for Ingvar Carlsson, was the fact that Conservative governments were giving way to Social Democratic ones in an increasing number of European capitals. Cooperation with such nations therefore appeared in a less unfavourable light. Carlsson thereupon entered confidential consultations with his Prime-ministerial colleagues on the future of Europe in a time of change. Step by step, he came to the conclusion that a rethinking was necessary. For the Swedish Social Democrats, the situation had changed greatly from that time when, 30 years earlier, Tage Erlander had been able to dismiss the idea of EU membership from a privileged position of economic success. Sweden's economy had now fallen behind that of its European neighbours. For the international labour movement, moreover, it was unacceptable to look on as capital collaborated internationally, while the labour movement itself was left without influence in this process. In Carlsson's words:

Something is happening – internationalisation and a stronger position for capital-owners are new phenomena. The question then is: can Social Democratic policies be pursued even so? Yes indeed, but not in Sweden *alone*. We must now broaden our field of operations to Europe as a whole. Both trade unions and a strong government can become subject to blackmail – if you don't do what we want, we will move to Spain or some place else. The risk is that capital will acquire an advantage they have not enjoyed in Sweden in 60 years. My conclusion is therefore as follows: in order to tackle this over the long term, and in order to advance our positions, we need to create an international Social Democratic strategy and system for cooperation.<sup>9</sup>

Domestically speaking, the question was a sensitive one. Neutrality had become an instinct among true-believing Social Democrats, and Carlsson could vividly imagine the outcry that would arise were he to go against this opinion. At the same time, the risk appeared plain to him that his party would be overtaken by the Conservatives and the Liberals, who had been – he was forced to admit – more in accord with the times when, in May 1990, they had declared their intention to mobilize around the question of EU membership in the lead-up to the elections in September of the following year.

Carlsson decided to float an idea. In an article in *Dagens Nyheter*, a leading newspaper, he hinted cautiously at an imminent change in the policy of neutrality. The gambit was hardly successful. The article was *so* cautiously written that, if

anything, it gave the opposite impression. Already the headline – ‘EU membership made impossible’ – set the tone of the article, and the major part of the piece was devoted to traditional arguments for the maintenance of neutrality. Neutrality was a question of credibility. It was to be understood, first, as a declaration for the future that Sweden would take all thinkable measures to stay outside a possible war and, second, as a determination in the meantime not to enter into any alliances in the area of foreign policy and national security. The new world situation notwithstanding, a cautious approach was in order:

A deterioration in relations between the superpowers cannot as yet be excluded either; we know that positive developments can sometimes shift into their opposite, and we know from experience what importance a firm policy of neutrality can have in such situations.

We knew altogether too little about what might happen in the future:

My answer to those now asking about the future of our neutrality policy is thus very clear: we have no cause to change course. Everyone must know, and everyone must be able to trust, that Sweden will stay neutral if a war should, despite everything, break out.

Carlsson could not then resist criticizing the Conservatives (and as mentioned he had, from an electoral-tactical standpoint, good reason to do so). The Conservatives had published a report on the new national-security situation in Europe, and argued for membership in the EU. Carlsson showed his talents as a fully fledged party-political advocate when he pointed out that the Conservatives contradicted themselves when they argued, on the one hand, that the national-security situation was so unstable and so unclear that defence spending could not be cut, and that it yet was, while on the other, it was so stable and so clear that Sweden could very well join the EU. Less impressive however, in light of the actual outcome, was the Prime Minister’s apparent indignation over how the Conservatives had made ‘a far-reaching and completely unqualified claim that Sweden at the turn of the century must be a full member of the EU’. For it is precisely this that would take place – on the Social Democratic initiative, and five years before the turn of the century.

‘The judgement we make *today*’ – it bears noting that Carlsson italicized the temporal adverb – was that an application for membership would undermine confidence in Sweden’s neutrality. The 12 member states had signalled their intention to undertake ever closer political collaboration. It was thus ‘impossible for Sweden to pursue the question of membership.’

The Prime Minister then came at last to his message. To begin with, he repeated his main point: ‘Concern for the credibility of our neutrality policy is thus the reason for not applying for membership in the EU.’ He thereupon presented a feeler, in the form of a hypothesis:

If the motive for this neutrality policy were then to disappear – something for which we wish and actively work for, i.e. a peaceful pan-European order, wherein the vision of common security has become a reality – well, in that case, we would obviously be faced with a new situation.

Yet the Prime Minister also rounded off this cautious proposal with the rider that ‘we do not, however, find ourselves there today’. He concluded with an enthusiastic description of the EEA – i.e. the attempt to create, through an agreement between the EU and other European countries, a common market for 18 countries and 350 million people.<sup>10</sup>

The article provoked a storm of criticism. The Prime Minister, in the view of a political-science professor, had lodged his arguments in ‘a fog of phrases’, thus making a sensible discussion more difficult. The leader of the Conservatives, Carl Bildt (who was soon to replace Carlsson as Prime Minister), opined that Carlsson did not seem to understand ‘the magnitude of what is now happening in Europe’. The Prime Minister ‘has not avoided altogether being affected by the power of what is now happening in the EU, but [he] searches high and low for arguments to justify saying stop and no’.<sup>11</sup>

The public squabble over foreign policy led to a convening of the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, with the King presiding and all leaders of the political parties participating. *Dagens Nyheter* commented shrewdly:

Ingvar Carlsson thunders against ‘loose pronouncements on neutrality’. Under cover thereof, he shifts his position a bit in the direction of membership.

The Prime Minister had specified two developments that would allow Sweden, notwithstanding everything, to apply for membership in the EU: if ‘the risk of war in Europe has disappeared’, or if the members of the EU have ‘decided not to coordinate [their] foreign and security policies’. These were hardly unambiguous requirements:

The conditions laid down by the Prime Minister are rather imprecise. It may be supposed that, come the day he wishes to bring Sweden into the EU, he will be easily able to convince himself that one of the two conditions has been met.<sup>12</sup>

But the debate raged on. The Prime Minister tried to explain himself in an interview. He had written the article ‘in order to avoid uncertainty in the outside world’. In a situation ‘where it might seem as if Sweden were shifting, and neutrality being experienced as a burden, it was necessary to clarify our attitude’. However, the journalist objected that the Prime Minister’s article had rather created confusion. ‘Some say that the door to the EU has been closed, others that it has been opened.’ The Prime Minister replied magisterially that he presumed readers would ‘read what I have written, rather than going by the headline’.<sup>13</sup> As readers could see, however, the striking headline in question – ‘EU membership

made impossible' – did in fact correspond with what the Prime Minister had written.

It seemed best, then, that the Prime Minister should make another attempt to explain himself. Another article in *Dagens Nyheter*, published about a month later, was given a more positive caption: 'EU obstacles can be removed'. The foundation for Sweden's policy of neutrality remained, Carlsson averred. 'We must continue to be able to defend our borders and to resist pressures from without. The risk of war and conflict has not yet disappeared.' Discussions in the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs had served, in the Prime Minister's estimation, to clarify matters: unity prevailed on the need for Sweden to be able to defend its borders – a viewpoint that could scarcely have surprised anyone.

Ingvar Carlsson also said that unity prevailed on the need to increase efforts in the area of European cooperation. On the other hand, taking part in the EU's foreign-policy collaboration would be risky for the credibility of the neutrality policy. The Prime Minister added, however, yet another time-bound reservation in italics:

This then applies *today*. In discussions on *the future* I have – both in the Advisory Council and publicly – indicated the circumstances under which Sweden could subsequently apply for membership in the EU.

The reference here was to the two conditions mentioned above: if the risk of war has vanished, or foreign and security policies are not being coordinated. Then, for safety's sake, Carlsson himself interpreted what he meant:

I have not closed the door, then, on Swedish membership. I have instead pointed out openings there may be for Swedish membership in the future, at the same time as I have, obviously, wished to call attention to remaining obstacles.

Analysing a present and then a future circumstance, as Carlsson did, is obviously in no way wrong. Politically, however, the question first becomes interesting when we ascertain when the person in question imagines how such a future will come about. Carlsson's reluctance to be more precise on this point was converted, in this article as in the previous one, into an indignant attack on the Conservatives. Unity, he explained, had been achieved on the Advisory Council.

But 24 hours had not yet gone before Carl Bildt held a press conference and underscored the divergent Conservative line on the EU question. According to Bildt, we ought now to prepare ourselves to apply – already next year – for Swedish membership in the EU.<sup>14</sup>

In his previous article, Carlsson had attacked Conservative plans for membership 'before the turn of the century'. It may seem he had more cause to criticize the Conservatives now, when they talked of applying for membership 'already next

year'. It would soon become clear, however, that Carlsson himself was prepared to follow the Conservative timetable he now condemned.

The political temperature rose. The Conservatives and the Liberals, sensing their chance as the Riksdag elections approached, demanded membership in the new Europe, symbol of the new spirit of the age against defeated world Communism. Democracy was triumphing for good. In view of these developments, Sweden should not be 'neutral', but should rather join the victorious liberal Europe.

So went the debate, as the Social Democratic Party went to Congress in September 1990. The Party leader was not slow either to greet world political developments gladly, and he mentioned the possibility that cooperation within the EU would take such a form as to embrace a common defence policy:

In a Europe where the division into blocs has disappeared, the traditional obstacles to combining Swedish neutrality with Swedish EU membership fall away as well.<sup>15</sup>

As we see, however, this was still a matter of hypothetical reasoning. Carlsson's formulations were general in nature, and there was nothing to indicate that an application for membership might be close at hand.

It was the Minister of commerce who bore responsibility in this area, and she too made an important declaration on the EU question at the congress. She was not pleased with the turn the debate had taken:

It is unfortunate, I think, that today's debate has focused so strongly on the question of whether or not we should become members of the EU. Conducting that debate here is not especially meaningful ... It would be a mistake to exclude for all time the possibility of joining the EU. What we can exclude (and we have done so) is the possibility that the negotiations now being undertaken will lead to Swedish membership.<sup>16</sup>

Ingvar Carlsson expressed himself in much the same way in the Government's declaration to the Riksdag a few weeks later. There too, he neglected to drop any hint about an imminent application for membership.<sup>17</sup>

However, notwithstanding the many evasive and peculiar comments Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson made in 1990 (or perhaps precisely because of them) many had a feeling that he was in the process of saying goodbye to neutrality – all the while paying homage, of course, to the tenets of traditional Swedish foreign policy. There was a choice for Sweden.

### **The strategy of framing**

There was one man who, more than any other, could be expected to oppose Carlsson's reorientation – a man who embodied the Swedish policy of neutrality.



His position was not an insignificant one. He was the Minister for foreign affairs, Sten Andersson, who had long served as the Party secretary of the Social Democrats. As late as 10 October 1990, he had explained in the Riksdag that 'it is mistaken and imprudent to take up the question of membership today'. The fall of the Wall, to be sure, meant that much had changed in the outside world. But 'the policy of neutrality is the foundation of our national-security policy. It is as important today – when we are seeking to create new forms for security and cooperation in a Europe that still hold so much uncertainty – as it was in the bipolar Europe'. More particularly, Andersson said, there were 'five reasons' why Sweden still should not become a member. The first was the need for unity in important foreign-policy questions – scarcely a conclusive argument, since unity could as well be established around membership as around remaining outside. Second, it was 'unnecessary and in fact too early to take up this question' – which was not so much an argument as simply a restatement of a standpoint opposite to that of the Conservatives and Liberals. The three subsequent reasons were all variations on the theme of uncertainty in the new Europe. Andersson spoke of the risk for a new boundary between a nuclear-armed Soviet Union and the rest of Europe, of possible dangerous domestic developments in the Soviet Union, and of the risk for increased unemployment in the new Central Europe. 'These are five good reasons not to undermine' – by joining the EU – 'the unity which has done so much for Sweden'.<sup>18</sup>

In order to overcome the expected resistance of Sten Andersson and other supporters of the traditional neutrality policy, Ingvar Carlsson decided to make use of a well-known political strategy. He undertook to reinterpret the question: from having been about foreign policy, it became – in Carlsson's presentation – a question of economic policy. Swedish membership was necessary for the country's continued existence as a prosperous welfare state.<sup>19</sup> Through a strategy of framing, Carlsson placed the question in a larger context, so that it appeared in a new and more positive light.<sup>20</sup>

To enhance his prospects for success in this attempt at reinterpretation, the Prime Minister kept his potential opponent – Sten Andersson – out of the decisive meetings and deliberations. It was instead the new Minister of finance, Allan Larsson – a super-bureaucrat with a reputation for uncommon keenness and efficiency – who became Carlsson's new confidant. During the summer, in fact, Carlsson and Larsson had travelled to Austria, and met with the Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitsky and his Minister of finance. In the course of long hikes together in the Alps, the four Social Democratic ministers had discussed the prospects for both countries becoming – in the new world political situation that had arisen – members of the EU. Carlsson and Larsson had returned to Sweden with the decided feeling that it was now necessary for the Social Democrats to step onto the European scene in earnest.

In October, it became clear that the condition of the Swedish economy was worsening, and that the foreign-exchange reserves were coming under great strain. This was a situation that suited Carlsson and Larsson to a tee. Applying for membership could now be portrayed as an economic necessity. It was not the first time world economic conditions had played an important role in an ideological reorientation within Swedish Social Democracy. How had it been with the Social Democrats' legendary policy in the 1930s? Had the new unemployment policy really been as important as was afterwards claimed? Was it not in fact the case, critics of the Social Democrats often argued, that it was rather the crisis that had saved the Social Democrats than the Social Democrats who had saved the country? Was such a thing now happening again?

On 18 October, a press conference was held at which the Prime Minister and his Minister of finance declared that a serious economic crisis was brewing. Carlsson and Larsson were on their move to frame an application as an economic necessity.

The reconstruction of Carlsson's strategy can be described in the following way. Carlsson and Larsson desired membership, but they knew that support for such a line was weak in the Party, and that resistance could be expected. Andersson was opposed to membership, but he also wanted to be loyal to his Party and to avoid challenging Carlsson's leadership. Carlsson and Larsson's rational choice, is to emphasize the 'Economic question' over the 'Political question' since a policy of economics without confrontation or of economics with confrontation is better than a policy of politics without or with confrontation. Such a choice is the very meaning of the strategy. Under these circumstances, Andersson, if he acts rationally, would choose confrontation.

This is how Carlsson's deliberations could be summarized. The situation was not a happy one. Neither Carlsson nor Andersson wanted an internal fight in the Party. Carlsson and Larsson therefore decided to complement the strategy with another tactical manoeuvre. Large savings were proclaimed as an important part of the crisis programme. At the press conference of October 18, public savings had been announced. They were said to be presented at the end of the following week. On 26 October, the Government published a 20-page document detailing measures to stabilize the economy and limit the growth in public spending. Ministers now faced urgent problems. Particularly large savings were made in Andersson's bailiwick, the Ministry of foreign affairs. Policy towards Europe was given a brief treatment – a bit more than half a page. After some words on the positive developments in Europe, the following startling sentence could be read:

The Government seeks a new Riksdag decision on policy towards Europe – a decision that makes plain, in clearer and more positive terms, Sweden's ambition to become a member of the European Union.<sup>21</sup>

What was one to think? The members of the Riksdag were bewildered. Could Sweden thus alter its foreign policy ‘in a footnote’? That was the question put by a spokesman for the Centre Party (one of the three non-socialist parties):

The Government proposed, in a footnote to an economic crisis package, that the Riksdag take a positive position on behalf of Swedish membership in the EU. To turn the question of EU membership into a way of trying to halt a flow of currency and stop speculation on a Swedish devaluation – this is not a particularly dignified way of taking up one of the most momentous questions with which we are faced in this year and the coming years.<sup>22</sup>

The Liberal leader took a similar view:

I would like to concur with those who have found it rather odd that this crucial step was taken as a direct consequence of the fact that interest-rate difficulties had hit Sweden. It would have been nicer had this step been taken in a more aggressive manner and with a greater commitment than was the case.<sup>23</sup>

Many Riksdag members criticized – with the leader of the Conservatives leading the charge – the oceanic difference between the Government’s declaration and the assurances given in the Riksdag just a couple of weeks earlier by the Minister for foreign affairs, Sten Andersson, to the effect that Swedish membership in the EU was not currently in question:

As recently as in the special Riksdag debate on Europe on 10 October, the Minister for foreign affairs himself stood up and enumerated not less than five weighty reasons the Government had for why the question of membership ought not to be discussed now. Then came the currency and interest-rate crisis – a misery in itself, but a misery that would bring something good with it. In the political crisis that then followed, the Social Democrats stumbled forward yet another step, presumably without fully realising the significance of what they were doing. They stumbled into taking the decisive step.<sup>24</sup>

Where the accusation of conflicting messages from the Government is concerned, it is easy to concur. However, it is another question whether the Prime Minister was ‘stumbling’ – or was in fact showing himself to be highly agile.

However critical, namely, the non-socialist opposition (and a large part of the Social Democratic parliamentary group as well) was of the manner in which the EU question was handled, there was a safe majority for the proposal. The Social Democrats had, after all, gone over to the position long defended by the Conservatives and Liberals.

What did Sten Andersson have to say? He explained that foreign policy cannot

be static or incapable of adaptation in a changeable reality ... It would in fact be strange if Swedish policy remained unaffected while walls fell, bloc antagonisms ceased, and the political map of Europe was redrawn ... Our participation in the continuing political developments, and our prospects for affecting them – politically, socially, and economically – are obviously improved

if we take part fully in the work of the Community. This is the background to the Government's judgement that membership in the EU, with continued neutrality, lies in Sweden's national interest.<sup>25</sup>

Party loyalty prompted the former Party secretary to make the best of a bad situation. That Sweden ought to change its policy on account of developments in Europe was something Andersson had rejected just a few weeks earlier. It was of course true that Sweden's prospects for influence would improve if it became a member, but this is a trivial truth; what was in question was how such prospects were to be weighed against the advantages of non-alignment. After all, the idea that membership could be combined with continued neutrality had been depicted, ever since Palme's days, as bourgeois naïveté.

There was another Minister, moreover, with as much reason to feel herself run over as Andersson. This was the Minister of commerce Anita Gradin, who later became Sweden's first EU commissioner. During the week the crisis programme was being worked out, she was spending two days in Geneva, and her Under-secretary of state was in Japan. When she came home she was faced with a *fait accompli*. Her irritation was considerable over the fact that the assurances she had given at the Party congress – that Sweden did not intend to apply for EU membership – had been so openly repudiated.<sup>26</sup>

With the support of an overwhelming majority in the Riksdag, Ingvar Carlsson was then able, on 1 July 1991, to submit an application for Swedish membership in the EU. The fact that this took place *before* the Riksdag elections in September of the same year well serves to illustrate the closed style of decision-making that led to Swedish membership. A referendum was held in November 1994, in which 52% voted 'yes' and 47% 'no'. On 1 January 1995, Sweden became a member of the EU.

By introducing spending reductions, Carlsson had avoided a confrontation in the Social Democratic Party. As a result, Andersson's efforts were taken up wholly within his Ministry, and he was left with no time to consider the situation or to begin mobilizing the support necessary for a struggle within the party; he had no time to confront but stuck to his loyalty.

My point is that by reinterpreting EU membership as an economic question, Carlsson and Larsson gained the advantage and increased their chances of victory, at the same time as they reduced the risk that Andersson would decide to confront them. With sufficient time for preparation and all Ministers available for resistance, Andersson would probably have been able to win even if joining the EU were understood as an economic question. By surprising their potential opponent and reinterpreting the question, Carlsson and Larsson paved the way for a Riksdag decision to apply for EU membership.

## Conclusions

Through close and critical reading of what politicians said and wrote about Sweden and the EU, we have been able to distinguish the ‘choice’ as well as the ‘preferences’ of various ‘actors’ and their ‘strategies’, with which they tried to mobilize support for their lines of action. The point is, with an expression from Max Weber, to create a methodological ‘heightening’ – ‘*Steigerung*’<sup>27</sup> – by making concepts more abstract and universal and patterns and structures more easy to identify. This is one way to bridge the gap between observation and explanation. The measures taken by Carlsson & Larsson were not unique. Their action was a well-known technique to persuade reluctant co-players. *The strategy of framing* put the issue of Swedish membership of the European Union into a larger context: it was transformed into a policy closer to the Swedish heart – Sweden’s prospect for consolidating and developing its standard as an economically prosperous welfare state. Through the additional tactics of spending reductions, the Prime minister succeeded in pacifying the opposition to this policy change in his party and avoided an open confrontation with representatives of the more traditional foreign policy.

This internal game in the Social Democratic Party hardly convinced the voters and, in the Swedish opinion polls during the years that followed, the ‘eurosceptics’ remained as numerous as before, or even grew in number.

## References and notes

1. I have earlier analysed (in Swedish) the Swedish decision to apply for membership as chapter 10 in the fifth edition of my book (2001) *Ideology och strategi. Svensk politik under 130 år* (Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik), where a theoretical framework is also elaborated. The most important contribution in previous research on the matter, with another theoretical approach however, is J. Gustavsson (1998) *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change: Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership* (Lund: University of Lund). Many of the empirical findings in the present study rest upon Gustavsson’s pioneering study. Gustavsson’s conclusion is basically supported by N. Aylott (1999) *Swedish Social Democracy and European Integration. The People’s Home on the Market* (Aldershot: Ashgate) pp. 127–130. Against rationalistic reconstructions, Aylott spreads some doubts, however, whether it is at all possible to ascertain the ‘real’ motives of political actors. In his memoirs, former Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson rejects my thesis that he together with Finance minister Allan Larsson more or less forced the Foreign minister Sten Andersson to accept an application. ‘I had a political vision about a Europe in cooperation and co-ordination’ – I. Carlsson (2003) *Så tänkte jag.* (Stockholm: Hjalmarson & Hökberg) p. 374. This refutation is hardly to the point. It

- is not Carlsson's vision that I have criticized; how would that, by the way, be possible in the name of research? It is his strategy to realize this programme that I have analysed.
2. T. Jensen, P. Pesonen and M. Giljam (1998) *To Join or Not to Join. Three Nordic Referendums on Membership in the European Union* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press).
  3. *Declaration of the Swedish Government 4 February 1948*, later repeated annually in the foreign-policy declarations.
  4. *Proceedings 26<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Swedish Metal Workers' Union*, 20–25 August 1961, pp. 194–204.
  5. *Proceedings of the Swedish Parliament*, 19 January 1971, p. 43.
  6. *Proceedings of the Swedish Parliament*, 3 November 1971, p. 70.
  7. *Proceedings of the Swedish Parliament*, 2 December 1971, p. 59.
  8. *Proceedings of the Swedish Parliament*, 8 October 1982; 4 October 1983; 2 October 1984; and 1 October 1985.
  9. G. Färm (1991) *En samtalsbok med Ingvar Carlsson* (Stockholm: Tiden), p. 103.
  10. I. Carlsson (1990) EG-medlemskap omöjliggörs, *Dagens Nyheter* 27 May.
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