

Is EU policy taken out of competition?

– A newspaper analysis of government-opposition conflict in Swedish EU politics



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the level of conflict in the media between the government and the opposition at different time periods, and specifically regarding EU policies. Opposition towards policy is a crucial ingredient in democratic systems of government that do not only allow the people to send different personalities to represent them in government, but rather different policy agendas that are, in the end, implemented in their name. To what extent can readers of one Swedish quality newspaper take part in a policy debate over EU policy? The thesis aims to answer this question by specifically utilizing the cartel party thesis, in which mainstream parties cooperate to limit policy competition, and it proceeds by operationalizing 'opposition' and researching 1 092 days of *Dagens Nyheter*, spread over six half-year periods. I use political claims-making as method to identify relevant articles. Across the investigated time-period I identified just 45 expressions of opposition regarding EU policy, leading to the conclusion that it is all but dead, which has implications for the state of democracy in the EU.

Keywords: opposition, EU policy, representative democracy, the cartel party thesis, policy alternatives

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1 Introduction

“All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people.

Swedish democracy is founded on the free formation of opinion and on universal suffrage. It is realized through a representative and parliamentary form of government...”¹

This quote is part of the first article of the first paragraph of the Swedish Constitution. Sweden is also member of the European Union since 1995. Some political decisions in policy areas that were previously under the decision competence of the *Riksdag*² have been moved to the European Union (EU) arena,³ where European institutions make decisions about laws that are then implemented in the member states and become part of national law. Furthermore, the principle of primacy of EU law was established in a famous judgment by the European Court of Justice in 1964.⁴ This meant, and still means, that if in conflict, EU law takes precedence over national law. In the same vein, we also know, according to an estimation, that EU legislation has an immense impact on the exercise of authority within the member states, not least at the local and regional level, where, in the Swedish case, around 50 % of agendas in local parliaments’ agendas are in some way impacted by EU laws.⁵ At the same time, according to theoretical descriptions of representative democracy, a main principle of Sweden’s democratic governance, it is less democratic than the original model of democracy, developed in ancient Greece, which rejected the act of representation and demanded that each citizen herself represent her interests.⁶

In order to make representative democracy “good enough”, robust institutions of freedom of expression and associational autonomy are demanded in order to allow for dissent within the polity and facilitate the emergence of oppositional structures, most notably political parties.⁷ They introduce choice and thus render elections meaningful.⁸ In his seminal volume on political opposition across eleven western democracies, Dahl goes on to insert “the right of an organized opposition to appeal for votes against the government”⁹ as the last of three milestones in the development of democratic institutions. According to Peter Mair, this has not been the case within the political system of the European Union, and its member states, where the citizens’ EU representatives, in the form of ministers in the Council of Ministers, are indirectly elected in national elections.¹⁰ The Union has through the years been described as being democratically

¹ Sveriges Riksdag. *Instrument of government*.

² The name of the Swedish parliament.

³ SOU 2001:1, 115.

⁴ Arena 2019.

⁵ SKR 2018.

⁶ Dahl 1999, 28.

⁷ Dahl 2015.

⁸ Wessels 2011, 98.

⁹ Dahl 1966, xi.

¹⁰ Mair 2007, 7.

deficient, as not being responsive enough to the sovereigns, the people, with its accusers among other things pointing to the absence of an “electoral contest for political leadership at the European level or the basic direction of the EU policy agenda”¹¹ as one culprit. This is, moreover, said to be the case in Sweden. The political parties are not engaging in public debate about EU policies on the table at any given point in time,¹² thus giving the voters no meaningful choice between competing policy agendas, which in the end deprives them of their voice.¹³ Moreover, the lack of public debate on EU policies engenders unequal possibilities for different groups to exert influence.¹⁴ Mair writes that if it is perceived by the people that it is virtually impossible to oppose the policies of the EU, that there is only one way, it risks alienating them to the degree that they start opposing the political system itself.¹⁵ Given that both the EU, and its member states, have seen a veritable explosion of Eurosceptic parties which question the Union’s legitimacy in the last decades, Mair might have been right in his prediction.

1.2 Aim, research questions and disposition

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to this debate, and clarify to what extent there exists party political opposition towards the EU policies promoted by the Swedish government in the media, at different times intervals. There have, of course, been those before me that have been interested in similar questions, leading studies that have mostly been conducted by studying opposition behavior either in parliaments¹⁶ or by analyzing election manifestos.¹⁷ But as Peter Mair said, “in addition to the evidence provided by formal policies which [the party] adopts... we need to know Europe *actually* plays in national political discourse...”¹⁸ The purpose of this thesis is both normative and empirical. Normative since there is an inherent value in knowing more about democratic input into the European Union. As others have noted, the absence of media coverage “would be a blurring of political accountability and a strengthening of executive power at the expense of national parliaments and publics.”¹⁹ Empirical, because to my knowledge, research that sets out to assess levels of opposition towards EU policies in the public sphere have not been conducted before, and in general the reporting on the EU in the media is scant.²⁰ The research question this thesis will attempt to answer is the following:

To what extent does there exist party political opposition directed at the government’s EU policies in Swedish media?

¹¹ Follesdal & Hix 2006, 552.

¹² SOU 2016:10, 33.

¹³ Mair 2007, 17.

¹⁴ SOU 2016:10, 34.

¹⁵ Mair 2007, 6.

¹⁶ See for example Karlsson *et al.* 2018.

¹⁷ Jae-Jae Spoon & Klüver 2014; Wagner & Meyer 2014.

¹⁸ Mair 2006, 13-4. My emphasis.

¹⁹ Meyer 2005, 125.

²⁰ SOU 2016:10, 151.

I set out to answer the question first by operationalizing the concept of *opposition*, leaning on the work of Robert Dahl. In order to help me shed light on the results and levels of opposition found, I delineate “the cartel party thesis”, which stipulates that mainstream parties in a globalized world have cartelized the “political market”, fundamentally changing the nature of the political debate and stifling policy competition between parties. I then research a Swedish quality newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, and use the method of political claims making in order to locate the claims of opposition. The results of the study show that articles containing EU opposition are very rare, with on average one article showing up every 24 days, or 4,1 % of newspapers.

The thesis proceeds as follows. First I review the literature in a couple of research areas that are directly linked to my interests. I then describe the theoretical points of departure, such as definition of concepts and delineation of the framework of the cartel party thesis which will guide the analysis. Following that, choices of methodology and material are argued for. Then follows the analysis and a concluding discussion.

2 Previous literature

2.1 The EU in newspapers

Studies of how the EU plays out in the media are plenty and have diverse aims. Meyer conducts a study of quality newspapers in the UK, Germany and France, with the specific interest in knowing if more space is dedicated to EU news as integration deepened after the Amsterdam Treaty.²¹ His study departs, similar to mine, from the perspective that a “Europeanized” public debate in the member states is a necessary condition for Europe’s legitimacy.²² The results show no general increase of the EU in the media, that media coverage was event-driven and that economic policy was more covered than social policy.²³ That EU coverage in the media is event driven is also found by Peter and de Vreese.²⁴ The share of EU news in televised news programmes in five member states increased from an average of 5 % between European Council meetings to an average of 11 % during and a few days before and after it.²⁵ The main conclusion is that this is too little, and that if “Europe depends on a vivid media coverage, then the findings presented in this study should make scholars, politicians, and citizens think.”²⁶

Van der Pas and Vliegenthart study what kind of conflict over European integration reaches the media.²⁷ They hypothesize that parties can engage in two forms of conflict; positional and discursive. The former relates to conflict over policy, while the latter relates to conflict over how to frame a certain news event. Their hypothesis is that an increase in both types of conflict should result in a parallel increase in media attention, as conflict has major news value. To gauge conflict levels between the parties, the authors research their electoral manifestos, and to find out if the media responded, they research quality newspapers. They find that conflict over the framing of an EU issue is more likely to “make the news” compared to conflicting policy agendas.²⁸ Meyer *et al.* also study what makes the news but in a broader sense, by studying which party press releases end up in the news during the Austrian 2013 elections.²⁹ The main finding is that coverage is most likely when parties discuss issues that are high on the media agenda, and that other parties are discussing. This highlights the media’s gate-keeping function, and suggests the ability of mainstream parties to exclude issues they find undesirable by ignoring them.

²¹ Meyer 2005.

²² Ibid, 123.

²³ Ibid, 129-30.

²⁴ 2004.

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶ Ibid, 17.

²⁷ 2015.

²⁸ Ibid, 274.

²⁹ 2017.

2.2 The (de)politicization of the EU

Hutter and Grande ask if European integration has become more politicized in the national electoral arena.³⁰ Politicization is “the expansion of the scope of conflict *within* the political system”³¹ and is conceptualized along three dimensions: salience (an issue that is frequently raised), expansion of actors (actors outside the government express opinions on the issue) and polarization (the issue causes conflict). The study investigates quality newspapers between 1970 and 2010 during national election campaigns in five countries. They find that EU politicization in general has increased since the Maastricht Treaty, which confirms their hypothesis that as authority is transferred to Brussels, domestic EU politicization increases. But peaks of politicization were again event-driven and most pronounced during the investigated countries’ own membership negotiations and referendums, Turkish membership and around Treaty negotiation.³² They did not find that politicization increased as the vote share of radical right-wing parties increased. Rather, politicization can be driven by disagreements regarding the EU between major mainstream parties.³³

Green-Pedersen also sees the pivotal role for mainstream parties if European integration is politicized or not as he conducts a case-study of Denmark.³⁴ He takes a party-strategic approach and argues that there needs to be incentives for politicization to happen. Politicizing Europe has unclear implications for government formation with other parties, as the EU as an issue cuts across the left-right dimension. Second, since the perception of the EU is particularly amenable to framing by policy entrepreneurs, and since no party can control how an issue is framed, this further makes politicization uncertain for vote-maximizing parties, and thus unattractive³⁵ The paper argues that, in general, there has not been incentives for the mainstream parties to break the pro-EU consensus, which explains the lack of politicization of European integration. The author backs the claim up by arguing that the only time a mainstream party broke the pro-EU consensus, when the Social Democrats said ‘No’ to the Single European Act in 1986, both these incentives were present.

Hutter and Kreise are interested in the effect the Euro crisis and the so-called migration crisis had on the politicization of European integration within the member states and proceed by researching newspapers during election campaigns in 15 countries.³⁶ They divide Europe into three parts, a Northwestern, a Southern and a Central Eastern part. Among other things, they find an increased politicization of the EU after the refugee crisis in the Northwestern countries and that radical parties on both ends of the political spectrum were more likely to politicize Europe in Eurosceptic terms.³⁷

³⁰ 2014.

³¹ Ibid, 1003. Emphasis in original.

³² Ibid, 1013.

³³ Ibid, 1015.

³⁴ 2012

³⁵ Ibid, 119.

³⁶ 2019. Sweden was not included in the sample.

³⁷ Ibid, 1007-8.

2.3 Party political opposition to EU policy in Sweden

Loxbo conducts a similar study, but focuses on the Swedish European Affairs Committee in the *Riksdag* and the years 1995-2012, with a special focus on 2006-2012, when Sweden had a right-wing government.³⁸ He explicitly wants to test the expectation of the cartel party thesis, that policy debates are scant and decreasing, in the context of the EAC. Between a scale of 0 (complete depoliticization) to 100 (complete politicization), there is only one policy area, labor market regulation, where all opposition parties are over the halfway mark, where an issue is more politicized than depoliticized.³⁹ On a majority of policies, most parties are comfortably under the halfway mark. The most opposing parties were almost always the Sweden Democrats and/or the Left Party, both Eurosceptic parties. Another finding is that the Social Democrats often were very close to complete depoliticization, meaning there was often almost complete consensus between them and the right-wing government on Sweden's EU policies. Though the author concludes that "it is clear that concrete policy alternatives mostly are lacking"⁴⁰, the take-away is that conflict increases over time, contrary to the cartel party thesis and that Swedish EU politics are rather politicized than *depoliticized*.

Karlsson *et al.*,⁴¹ depart from Robert Dahl when defining opposition, and stipulate that it can either consist of criticism of the government and/or an expression of a different policy position. They argue that the latter, which is also the focus of this thesis, is necessary for the functioning of democratic elections.⁴² They find that opposition patterns in the Swedish EAC are more conflictual than consensus-driven, as almost 50 % of statements contain some form of opposition, while 11 % are supportive. Moreover, opposition levels increased steadily from 2010, likewise for the share of statements that express policy alternatives. The conclusion is that there is a 'vital' opposition in Swedish EU politics and that this is most often directed towards the political content, meaning policy.⁴³

Johansson *et al.* compare the level of government-opposition conflict during the Swedish presidencies in the Council of Ministers 2001 and 2009.⁴⁴ In both years the opposition agreed to a temporary truce during the presidency, to rally behind the government. The finding is that conflict levels were higher in 2009, even if opposition in the EAC dropped markedly compared to previous years. In the media, though, the left-wing opposition launched several attacks, both on EU and domestic policy. Why was conflict higher in 2009? The authors suggest first that the Swedish political system became more conflict oriented as it took on the characteristics of a two-party system around 2006, and second that as the Swedish voters have become more EU friendly, it has

³⁸ 2014.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 140.

⁴¹ 2018, 5.

⁴² *Ibid*, 3.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 15.

⁴⁴ 2012.

been easier for political parties to contest EU policy – “the European arena has... become more integrated into domestic politics.”⁴⁵

In sum, this literature review helps to situate the study I am conducting and gives some insight, even if the results of the studies sometimes are contradictual. Media coverage of the EU is event driven, as is politicization. Some find radical parties as key for the politicization of the EU, while others do not, arguing that the role of mainstream parties is more important. Parties’ chances of making the news depend on factors outside their control. In Sweden, the opposition towards EU policy has increased with time in the parliament, and the government-opposition relationship is more contentious than expected.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 227.

3 Theory

3.1 Representative democracy

When the idea of representative democracy, or *polyarchy* as Robert Dahl calls it,⁴⁶ emerged, it was by no means uncontroversial. Philosophers at the time, including Rousseau and Montesquieu, rejected the idea as a “contradiction in terms”⁴⁷, and aristocratic,⁴⁸ on grounds that solely the individual could represent his or her own will. Representation was thus viewed by some as inherently *undemocratic*: “democracy, the direct form of decision-making among equals par excellence, is combined with indirect decision-making that supposes a hierarchy of competence, that is, representation.”⁴⁹

In the book *On Democracy* by Robert Dahl, one of the most prominent democratic theorists of the 20th century, delineates one definition of representative democracy by asking what would be required for a country to be governed democratically.⁵⁰ There exist thus six such political institutions:

1. Elected officials
2. Free, fair and frequent elections
3. Freedom of expression
4. Alternative sources of information
5. Associational autonomy
6. Inclusive citizenship

Elected officials are of course the representatives. Elections are useful because they allow the citizens to participate effectively and control the agenda of the government, and they provide a mechanism to dismiss any delinquent representatives.⁵¹ Important for the purposes of this thesis, Dahl writes that “Clearly, the requirements (of democracy, my brackets) could not be met if the top officials of the government could set the agenda and adopt policies independently of the wishes of the citizens.”⁵² *Free, fair and frequent elections* ensure political equality and the possibility of voters to control governmental affairs. *Freedom of expression* allows for an opposition, and hence facilitates active participation. It enables public debate, where government action in the past and future can be discussed and criticized. It is here we can find the importance of opposition in a democratic

⁴⁶ He also calls it “modern democracy”, and “large-scale democracy”. I also use these different terms, in order to make the text more manageable.

⁴⁷ Dahl 2015, 94.

⁴⁸ Manin 2002, 148.

⁴⁹ Alonso *et al.* 2011, 3.

⁵⁰ Dahl 2015, 85-6.

⁵¹ Alonso *et al.* 2011, 7.

⁵² Dahl 2015, 93.

society, as a means to ensure an effective challenger to those who at a certain point control the state's resources. It also facilitates an enlightened understanding among the people, as do *alternative sources of information*. These sources need to be diverse in order for different perspectives to come forth, enabling the citizen to comprehend the issues at hand and form an independent opinion. *Associational autonomy* is crucial for the formation of political parties, "one of the most fundamental and distinctive political institutions of modern democracy..."⁵³ They are a tool for effective participation, while at the same time contributing to an enlightened understanding, since they educate the voters and make them aware of rivaling ideas and visions for society.

Opposition parties are paramount for Dahl's idea of representative democracy. Without conflicting policy agendas, citizens cannot participate in the governance of the state – the politicians govern without their policies having been tested, and thus supported, by the voters. In the cartel party thesis, this is the general trajectory of modern political competition – elections are fought on the basis of competence of party leaders and efficiency, rather than policy.⁵⁴ For representation to work then, there must be a link between what the people, the represented, want and what their representatives do in office, and this link is created through a political debate between the parties who participate in elections. This point is so evidently clear, but necessary to firmly establish – a deliberation between the people and their representatives is paramount for the latter to be conscious of and thus being able to defend the former's interests, which is their *raison d'être*.⁵⁵

Opposition to policy is, furthermore, necessary for representative democracy as it facilitates accountability.⁵⁶

"We say that one person, A, is accountable to another, B, if two conditions are met. First, there is an understanding that A is obliged to act in some way on behalf of B. Second, B is empowered by some formal institutional or perhaps informal rules to sanction or reward A for her activities or performance in this capacity."⁵⁷

Representative democracy is an act of delegation, in several steps, but we are here interested in the first one; the one where the voters delegate decision-making power to parliamentarians through elections. Inherent in the act of delegation is the risk that the agent does not act as promised when hired by the principal.⁵⁸ The most obvious sanction tool available to citizens in democracies vis-à-vis the representatives is elections. In them, the principals both judge the performance of incumbent agents and elect new office-holders.⁵⁹ As the definition above makes clear, the agent is obliged to "act in *some way*". This demands that the behavior of the agent to be judged can be compared with some given promise or programmatic proclamation, indicating what the representative would do or fight for if elected. If some policies are removed from competition, the

⁵³ Ibid, 88.

⁵⁴ Blyth & Katz 2005, 34.

⁵⁵ Alonso *et al.* 2011, 7.

⁵⁶ Meyer 2005, 123.

⁵⁷ Fearon 1999, 55.

⁵⁸ Strom 2006, 61.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 63.

principals will find it all but impossible to figure out who is responsible for the effect of those policies, thus making accountability equally impossible. The voters can not use the sanction weapon to punish delinquents, as it was not clear from the beginning what they would do if hired.

But nothing is black or white. It is important to keep in mind that voters can never be informed on every decision on every dossier taken by their representatives. It is probably true that people on some legislative files, voters are indifferent vis-à-vis a particular policy suggestion and its alternatives, and further that “very little specific national policy is ever a product of an expressed preference for a specific alternative by an overwhelming majority of the electorate.”⁶⁰ However, I argue that EU laws are especially sensitive to a stifled political debate. The EU is a another polity, where questions of a different kind are debated and decided. EU laws tell member states what they can and cannot do. Unlike national laws, they cannot be repealed by a Swedish parliament. Constraints coming from the EU become locked in. National sovereignty is circumscribed, not only with the passing of a new Treaty. Especially since 2016, Swedish politicians often say that, for example regarding regulations on the emission of fossil fuels, that they want to bring it down to “EU’s minimum level”. This has also been the case for migration policy.⁶¹ In the coalition agreement between the right-wing parties in 2022, it is written in several cases that Sweden’s ambitions should not be more far-reaching than what EU regulations demand.⁶² The problem is that not many people have any idea where these regulations come from, who voted them through, and when. It risks alienating the citizens and creating resentment towards the polity itself.⁶³ Not only can the Swedish people, through their representatives, not change EU laws; if the EU law and a Swedish law are in conflict, the former takes precedence. For these reasons, a lacking EU policy debate can not be discarded referring to that not all policies can be debated publicly.

3.2 Opposition

The study’s operationalisation of opposition rests on Robert Dahl’s seminal work *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*.⁶⁴ It is a work within the field of comparative politics and consists of studies of patterns of opposition in ten representative democracies, and aims to build a framework of opposition, taking into account circumstances such as political tradition, electoral systems and other factors. Dahl views democratic development as having developed by three major milestones: 1) the right to vote, 2) the right to be represented and 3) the right of an organized opposition to criticize the government and appeal for votes against it.⁶⁵ There are many of the world’s current “democracies” that hold elections, but where opposition is all but forbidden. For Dahl, the third milestone, the existence of opposition parties, is thus:

⁶⁰ Dahl & Lindblom 1953, 310.

⁶¹ Tidöavtalet 2022, 29.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bergman & Blomgren 2016, 3.

⁶⁴ 1966.

⁶⁵ Ibid, xi.

“... nearly the most distinctive characteristic of democracy itself; and we take the absence of an opposition party as evidence, if not always conclusive proof, for the absence of democracy.”⁶⁶

What is it then? One party controls the government (G-Party), the other does not (O-Party). The O-Party is opposed to the way in which the G-Party handles governmental affairs, and actively tries to *change* that handling. For this study, change is a keyword. Inherent in the word is the idea that the G-Party has one policy programme, vision or ideology, that the O-Party does not endorse, on some grounds, and therefore wants to change it, according to its own policy programme, vision or ideology. This “mode” of opposition, what Otto Kirchheimer called “classical opposition”,⁶⁷ thus puts emphasis on the need for an opposition to stand for something different than does the government, an alternative: “In a classical understanding, the main function of an opposition is to provide for an alternative within the system.”⁶⁸ It is important to stress that the thesis takes interest in *political party* opposition. To be sure, opposition towards the government can come from a myriad of actors – NGOs, interest-groups, businesses, unions, etc. – but political parties are what voters vote for, and only they have the formal power to make laws and control governmental resources.

Which parties are considered opposition parties? The study will consider all parties that are not part of the government as opposition parties. The Social Democrats have not led a majority government in a very long time, and hence need to go into legislative coalitions with parties who support the government but are not part of it, usually the Left Party, the Greens and the Center Party. But as studies have shown, even if this has been the case, both parties have been critical of the government's EU stance in the EAC in the *Riksdag*.⁶⁹ Previous studies have found that the Social Democrats often get support from the other side of the isle on EU policy.⁷⁰ Moreover, in the forum where most EU policy is discussed and decided upon is the Council of Ministers in the European Union, and the ministers in the government are Sweden's representatives. For this reason it also makes sense to include the parties outside the government as opposition parties.

These considerations bring us to the following operationalization of opposition:

A representative of a party not in government that expresses a policy alternative to the EU policy promoted by the government, or calls on the government to act in a certain way in the EU arena, with that policy alternative being a position of the party at-large.⁷¹

Some clarifications are in order. First, sometimes parties make statements together, usually in the form of op-eds. These will be counted as opposition if they are written by a group of opposition parties who together aim to form a government or enter a formalized cooperation. The op-ed is

⁶⁶ Ibid, xvi. See also Neunreither 1998, 420.

⁶⁷ Kirchheimer 1957, 127.

⁶⁸ Neunreither, 421.

⁶⁹ Karlsson et al. 2018, Loxbo 2014.

⁷⁰ Johansson *et al.* 2012, 218.

⁷¹ This definition takes into account that a proposal from an opposition party can be unprompted in the sense that it is not always a response to a policy the government holds. This can for example be calls to action by the government.

then written by “the opposition”, or at least part of it. Publishing a common op-ed is a recurrent way to signal unity. But sometimes op-eds are written by representatives of parties from different sides of the aisle. These will not be counted, as it is difficult to know if these opinions are their personal or the party’s. The claim needs to be a position of the party, because, again, we vote for parties and their policy positions. When a mix of parties voice an opinion together, it is rather to raise awareness of an issue rather than to present a policy agenda in opposition to the government.⁷²

Second, what do I mean by “EU policy”? It is all policies that are linked to the European Union and where political parties have an influence, both formal and informal. It is, most obviously, those issues that are handled in the Council of Ministers or the European Council. It does therefore not have to be legislation; the European Council discuss long-term strategic questions and crisis-management where no formal laws are made, but it is “a formidable locus of power”⁷³. It can also be questions that are decided domestically; ratification of treaties being a typical example.

Lastly, there are different modes of opposition, of which “classical opposition” relates to opposition to policy. Kirchheimer claimed that the “waning” of classical opposition in Western democracies had paved the way for the brutalist regimes of the 20th century, which stood for “opposition of principle”⁷⁴, and that modern democracy after the Second World War has experienced the elimination of opposition in which the government has effectively been run by a cartel of parties without major substantive disagreement.⁷⁵ To Peter Mair, these different modes of opposition are in turn related to the policies of the government, the polity as such, and the personnel of the government.⁷⁶ For the European Union, Mair also connects the lack of opposition to policy as directly leading to opposition of polity: “...when classical opposition is limited or constrained, it then becomes more likely that critics will mobilize around an opposition of principle.”⁷⁷ Opposition of principle is when an actor is “questioning the legitimacy of the political system.”⁷⁸ I am, again, interested in opposition towards *policy*.

3.2.1 Opposition and consensus in Sweden

Here I intend to give a brief overview of party political opposition in Sweden and how it has appeared historically. I believe it is important for us to understand this as each country has its own political culture and traditions that inform and shape what is politically possible to do and say.⁷⁹ Sweden is sometimes described as a consensus democracy.⁸⁰ This concept, a “consensus democracy”, can be conceptualized along three different dimensions.⁸¹ First, that the political parties in a state in general agree on the rules “for the resolution of political conflict within that

⁷² See for example Karlsson *et al.* 2009.

⁷³ de Schoutheete 2017, 55.

⁷⁴ Kirchheimer 1957, 134.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁷⁶ Mair 2007, 5.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁸ Karlsson *et al.* 2018, 3.

⁷⁹ Möller 2015, 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16; Bjereld & Demker 1995, 27; Johansson *et al.* 2012, 208-9.

⁸¹ Elder *et al.* 1983.

state.”⁸², thus that there are no significant parties who fundamentally challenge the rules of the game. The second concerns the political cleavages in society and their intensity, i.e. ideological differences. In consensual democracies, the intensity of these cleavages are weaker. Third, to what extent political parties anchor decisions in the wider society before decision-making, including with opposing political parties. In general, Sweden’s political system is more consensual than other countries’.⁸³ It is regarded that this tradition dates back to the 1930s. That is when coalition governments became more frequent, and when the *Saltsjöbaden Agreement*, which was a grand bargain between labor and capital, was signed in 1938, cemented what is called “the Swedish Model” of the labor market, and represents a milestone in Swedish political history.

Stjernquist sees that this agreement has also influenced relations between the political parties and the political culture.⁸⁴ In the Westminster model, generally with a one-party government, His, or Hers, Majesty’s Loyal Opposition⁸⁵ is solely focused on criticizing the government with the goal of replacing it as soon as possible.⁸⁶ Compromise between government and opposition is uncommon and peripheral. In Sweden, however, the opposition even believes they have a right, according to their size in the *Riksdag*, to impact government decisions and have a say.⁸⁷

If there is a general propensity for consensus among the political parties in Sweden, it is even more accentuated in foreign policy.⁸⁸ This is generally seen to have two reasons. First is that domestic agreement on foreign policy is viewed as a national interest that increases the nation’s credibility in its international relations. Second, as strategic actors, parties do not want to politicize foreign policy, which could give the impression that they are trying to score political points at the cost of national unity. Foreign policy is also generally seen as being less important than domestic issues with the electorate.⁸⁹ This is important to have in mind as I conduct this study. Placing the EU on a domestic policy-foreign policy axis is not easy; it is almost certainly a mix.⁹⁰ In terms of Council of Ministers terms, the Foreign Affairs Council is undoubtedly more in the realm of foreign policy as compared to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council. Internationalisation, globalization and European integration bring domestic and foreign policy closer together.⁹¹ For Sweden, domestic processes are heavily dependent on international events. On the whole, it is maybe indicative that newly elected Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in an EAC meeting in the run up to a European Council in October 2022, when answering a question regarding his government’s intention in anchoring EU decisions across the political aisle, said:

⁸² Ibid, 10.

⁸³ Bjereld & Demker 1995, 27.

⁸⁴ Stjernquist 1966, 140.

⁸⁵ The party with the second largest number of seats in the House of Commons. The opposition in the United Kingdom is institutionalized and salaried by the state.

⁸⁶ Potter 1966, 8.

⁸⁷ Stjernquist 1966, 138.

⁸⁸ Bjereld & Demker 1995.

⁸⁹ Ibid..

⁹⁰ Johansson et al. 2012, 226; Hegeland 2006.

⁹¹ Bjereld & Demker 1995, 21-2.

“... I see good conditions and great utility in as far as possible having widely anchored positions in all foreign policy issues, even if we more often, on good grounds, perceive the EU *almost* as domestic policy.”⁹²

He goes on to reason that more unity and agreement over the Swedish position will give the government a stronger voice in Brussels. From this statement one can understand that at least the Prime Minister primarily sees the EU as foreign policy. The statement of course also touches upon the core of this thesis: the relationship between the government and opposition on EU policy. The Prime Minister’s statement clearly values consensus, and sees a value in as far as possible finding common ground on EU policy.

3.3 The cartel party thesis

3.3.1 A brief history of party organization development

The proponents of the cartel party thesis place its emergence within a historical context where different “party types” have dominated at different times. Katz and Mair took stock of the evolving relationship between the state, the political parties and civil society.⁹³ At first, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, before universal suffrage, there was *the elite party*. It was mainly marked by a close relationship of the occupants of powerful positions in civil society on the one hand and of the state on the other. No strong formal party organizations existed, as we think of them today. Then came *the mass party*, which is closely related with the working class parties that emerged at the beginning of the last century. These parties have their power base in strong social movements, and are dependent on them for support, policy formulation and legitimacy.⁹⁴ The individual identifies strongly with the social group and thus with the party. Even if the party gets into parliament or government, it is still ruled by the extra-parliamentary party, meaning the activists through the party congress. The party was thus “the (not an) essential linkage between citizens and the state.”⁹⁵

Around the 1950s, as the mass parties had succeeded in providing extensive welfare programs to the people, class identities and division started to break down.⁹⁶ Welfare programs pushed by the mass parties became accepted by large swaths of the population, and by the bourgeois parties, which decreased conflict between the parties.⁹⁷ And with mass media, parties could more readily appeal to the entire electorate, which also weakened the dependence of the party leadership on the activists and grassroots. These changes brought with them *the catch-all party*, which aimed to appeal to many different constituencies of society, rather than acting as the political arm of a social movement. Since parties more and more were wrestling over the same voters, their ideological differences decreased and their policy proposals necessarily became more alike.⁹⁸ The party is no

⁹² Sveriges Riksdag. Webb stream of government-parliament consultation October 19th before European Council. My translation and emphasis.

⁹³ Katz & Mair 1995.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁹⁷ Katz & Mair 2009, 758.

⁹⁸ Katz & Mair 1995, 13.

longer firmly anchored in civil society but rather has become a broker of different interests, aggregating and representing them in government. A professionalization of politics occurs, with the rise of mass media, where media and PR consultants are vital for electoral success.

3.3.2 The Cartel Party

In economics, a cartel is an arrangement between firms operating on the same market to limit output, the quantity produced, and/or set a common price higher than would be the case if the firms were in true competition. The cartel maximizes profits.⁹⁹ In 1995, Katz and Mair borrowed this terminology when they argued that a new organizational form of political parties and party systems had emerged; *the cartel party*. In a political cartel, like an economic cartel, competition is restricted through a more or less conscious agreement between political parties in which the supply of political proposals is restricted. This does not mean that parties do not compete, but that competition between clearly defined and different policy agendas has reduced in importance in favor of competition on the grounds of personalities and managerial skills and “on the provision of spectacle, image, and theater.”¹⁰⁰

Why would parties do this, i.e. why do they collude to restrict the supply of political proposals? There are several reasons. First, let me note that the cartel party thesis consists of two main observations. On the one hand, the cartelization of the party system, in which the inter-party competition in terms of policy is constrained, and on the other “the cartel party”, which rather takes stock of the internal organization of the party, who’s main characteristic is the increased significance of the party leadership at the cost of the activists. As the study at hand deals with party competition on EU policy, I am solely interested in the cartelization of the party-system.

A first reason for why parties’ policy competition decreases pertains to party financing. As party membership numbers plummeted in the mid to late 20th century, parties needed new revenue streams, also to cope with increasing costs of election campaigning and media ads. The response lay in state subventions, financial contributions from the state to the political parties, which the parties themselves proposed and voted through as legislators.¹⁰¹ Herein lies the primary mechanism to constrain competition on the political market; the established parties make the rules for which parties actually get financial support, and they decide thresholds for a party to gain seats in parliament. It could also be the reverse relationship, that party leadership, who again are the legislators, opt for more state subventions in order to decrease dependence on the party activists and members.¹⁰²

“In short, the state... becomes a fount of resources through which these parties not only help to ensure their own survival, but... also enhance their capacity to resist

⁹⁹ Blyth & Katz 2005, 38-9.

¹⁰⁰ Katz & Mair 2009, 755.

¹⁰¹ Katz & Mair 1995.

¹⁰² Blyth & Katz 2005, 53.

challenges from newly mobilized alternatives... No longer simple brokers between civil society and the state, the parties now become absorbed by the state.”¹⁰³

There is thus a clear idea that the cartel parties, compared to previous party types, have moved even further away from civil society, to the state.

These developments make the parties converge in terms of interests and party organization, and encourages them to cooperate.¹⁰⁴ A second reason for cooperation, and related, is that politics has become more of a profession, upon which politicians and their advisors depend for income and prestige.¹⁰⁵ One of the main goals has been to secure the continued survival of the party in a position of power. This has, according to the authors, facilitated cooperation between ideologically different parties to primarily decrease the loss of losing an election, making sure that no matter which party is in and out of power, “the losing side” still will have access to governmental spoils.¹⁰⁶ These arrangements often take the form of “gentlemen’s agreements” and informal rules. In the *Riksdag*, for example, the opposition is awarded presidency posts in the parliament’s different committees.¹⁰⁷ The parties have, according to the thesis, in essence knitted a social safety net for each other, which decreases the difference between losing and winning elections, effectively rendering competition less crucial. One consequence of this is depoliticization.¹⁰⁸

Last but not least, fundamental changes in ideas and practices about economic growth and international cooperation severely undermine governments’, and hence parties’, room for maneuver. The trend in recent decades of outsourcing policy competences to independent bodies largely outside of democratic control, the typical examples being central banks and the EU, is part of the parties’ strategy to neutralize certain policy areas and insulate them from democratic control, so as to credibly commit to cartelization.¹⁰⁹ From another perspective, the constrained policy space that results from EU membership is not part of game theoretical considerations on the part of the parties, but rather a necessary consequence of cooperation in a globalized world.¹¹⁰ No matter, increased international cooperation has effectively curtailed domestic policy competition. Moreover, the increased significance of trade and foreign capital for the state has impeded its ability to independently set tax rates but more and more finds itself forced to stay in line with other countries, so as to not harm domestic competition on the world market and to attract foreign investments.¹¹¹ Add to this the old trend of increased mobility on the part of voters, we have a mix of conditions that constrain which policy tools are available to parties, make parties more and more similar in terms of interests, which leads to cooperation and less policy competition. This

¹⁰³ Katz & Mair 1995, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Katz & Mair 2009, 757.

¹⁰⁵ Katz & Mair 1995, 19; Blyth & Katz 2005, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Katz & Mair 1995, 17.

¹⁰⁷ See also Elder *et al.* 1983, 182.

¹⁰⁸ Katz & Mair 1995, 23.

¹⁰⁹ Blyth & Katz 2005, 43; Hagevi 2014, 8.

¹¹⁰ Katz & Mair 2009, 754.

¹¹¹ Blyth & Katz 2005, 41.

cooperation between parties need not be conscious or overt, but the assumption is that they are aware of their shared interests and “sense of being in the same boat”.¹¹²

But not all parties in parliament are necessarily part of the cartel. Some parties are viewed as “paria”, and find it very difficult to acquire ministerial posts. These are often parties on the “extremes”. In Sweden, of the parties that are currently in the *Riksdag*, it has historically always been true for the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats. Parties in the cartel are simply those that have a “reasonable expectation that they *might* be included in a national governing coalition...”¹¹³ It is thus reasonable to believe, according to the thesis, that parties outside the cartel will be more active opposition parties compared to parties in the cartel.

3.3.3 Sweden – a likely case for cartelization¹¹⁴

Economically, socially and culturally Sweden is marked by some of the traits that make it a good candidate for a cartelized party system, and is also why I choose to use it in this thesis to aid in shedding light on patterns of opposition to EU policy. First, Sweden is often described as a consensus democracy, as described.¹¹⁵ In this sort of democracy, cooperation between parties is common. Thus, analytically, a cartelized party system and a consensus democracy might be difficult to differentiate, as they both result in the waning of opposition. For the time being, though, the argument is that a cartelized party system *within* a consensus democracy further contributes to depoliticization. In addition, state subventions to Swedish political parties have steadily increased, much faster than GDP, to 1.1 billion SEK in 2011.¹¹⁶ At the same time, pay for MEPs has increased many times faster than the average wage in society while being considerably higher.¹¹⁷ This is one aspect of the professionalization of politics. Furthermore, the Swedish economy is highly internationalized, with Sweden being one of the countries with the highest export-to-GDP ratio, equivalent to that of Germany's.¹¹⁸ As mentioned, economies that are more dependent on trade need to adapt their policies to be in line with other countries', which hence restricts the policy space available to the parties.

3.3.4 Expectations

With the above in mind, two expectations are formulated. (1), on account of Sweden's general tradition of consensus, especially in foreign policy¹¹⁹, and the likelihood of the political market being cartelized, I expect to find few expressions of opposition towards the government's EU

¹¹² Katz & Mair 2009, 757.

¹¹³ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁴ Katz & Mair 1995, 17.

¹¹⁵ See also Dahl 1965, 10.

¹¹⁶ Hagevi 2014, 32.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. It is interesting to note that Left Party (outside the cartel) Members of Parliament pay a party tax, which is designed to keep party representative's salary around, or slightly above, the average in society.

¹¹⁸ The World Bank; SOU 2001:1, 115.

¹¹⁹ I am not claiming that the EU is foreign policy, but the previous statement by the Prime Minister indicates that Swedish politicians think of it in those terms, at least primarily.

policies, and (2) that opposition from cartel parties is more often is directed at the government's leadership than policy and (3), I expect to find more expressions of opposition towards the EU policies from parties outside the cartel, as compared with those inside the cartel.

4 Method and material

4.1 Why study opposition in the media?

Previous studies interested in the extent of opposition to the content of EU policies of the government have been conducted, as described previously. In the Swedish case, they have often been conducted in the parliamentary arena. This study is interested in the same phenomena but in the public sphere. Why is this? There are two reasons. The first one has to do with the scientific contribution of the thesis. To my knowledge, this is the first study that systematically researches the amount of EU debate available in the media. If there has not been a systematic review of this, we do not know where we stand. While we, thanks to previous studies, have an idea of how the government-opposition debate looks like in parliament, we cannot say the same for the public sphere. Considering the fundamental importance of a vital opposition in the public sphere for the functioning of representative democracy, this is quite surprising. The debate in the parliament is very important, from a democratic point of view. It is in this arena that government and opposition meet face to face. The opposition can criticize and present alternatives. In the study of parliamentary opposition towards EU policy, the authors conclude by stating:

“The problem from a democratic perspective is rather that the opposition only to a very limited extent reaches the voters... The opposition therefore tends to stay within the walls of parliament. It is open but seldom public.”¹²⁰

The second is more normative. One important aspect is missing in the debates in parliament; the voters. Yes, parliamentary sessions can often be viewed on the *Riksdag's* webpage. But I do not think anyone would seriously argue that any significant number of people do that. The media is the primary communication channel between political parties and the electorate; it is here political issues and the positions of the parties are made available for “the man on the street” and where political messages are transmitted.¹²¹ Political proposals are put into context, they are contrasted with each other. One gets access to commentary, debates, and can understand how a certain proposal would impact society and people’s lives. Most importantly, political proposals are communicated through the media:

“The media are the most important link between politics and citizens... and this may especially apply to an issue as remote and abstract as EU politics”¹²²

¹²⁰ Karlsson et al. 2018, 14.

¹²¹ Statham & Koopmans 2009, 436; SOU 2016:10, 151.

¹²² Peter & de Vreese 2004, 3.

4.2 Research design

4.2.1 A case study

In this thesis, I am conducting a study to find out the amount of statements of opposition expressed by Swedish political parties in the media, or in other words, the detailed examination of one phenomenon. Case studies are well suited for this purpose.¹²³ They allow for case selection based on that case's intrinsic importance,¹²⁴ which is how I argue for the case selection I make in this thesis. The general aim of case studies is not to develop testable theoretical generalizations, or indeed to prove or disprove any theoretical claims. In fact it can not, because of its inherently limited case selection. But case studies can still have scientific value by contributing “to the establishment of general propositions and thus to theory-building in political science.”¹²⁵ The type of case study I am conducting here has different labels. In Levy's typology, it is an “idiographic case study”¹²⁶ because of its aim to describe and understand opposition levels, rather than explaining them. But, still according to Levy, it is a “theory guided case study”¹²⁷ because of my explicit use of a theoretical framework to shed light on the results. Lijphart calls this an “interpretive case study.”¹²⁸ All this is to say that the case study in itself and the form I am utilizing in this thesis are well established in political science research.

4.2.2 Why a quality newspaper?

I have argued that the public arena is crucial when it comes to the competing policy agendas between political parties. The more clearly defined alternatives voters can choose from when they elect their representatives, the more control they can exercise over the governmental affairs, which – in the end – belong to them. But “the media” is a wide category of information sources; television, radio, newspapers, social media and others. Why is this study concerned with quality newspapers and not any of the other media? According to The Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority, in 2021 28 % of Swedes consumed news using print editions of quality newspapers, while concerning quality newspapers online, that number is 39 %.¹²⁹ Since it is probable that one person consumes quality newspapers both in print and digital form, the total share of Swedes who read quality newspapers is not the sum of those two numbers, 67 %, but let's say it is around 50 %. That would make it the third most popular way to consume news, after national (1st place) and local (2nd place) TV/radio.¹³⁰ As was clear in the literature review, most studies of politics in the news, and specifically the EU, use quality newspapers.

¹²³ Levy 2008, 2; Lijphart 1971, 691.

¹²⁴ Lijphart 1971, 691.

¹²⁵ Lijphart 1971, 691.

¹²⁶ Levy 2008, 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Lijphart 1971, 692.

¹²⁹ The Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority 2022, 11.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Moreover, this study, while being valuable in itself, for what it can say about political contestation in the public sphere and its implications for democracy, does have generalizing ambitions. Not to other member states, but to the rest of the media landscape. I follow the most likely sampling strategy, the “inverse Sinatra inference – if I cannot make it here, I cannot make it anywhere.”¹³¹ If I, as a function of my sampling strategy, cannot find a strong, salient, habitual opposition towards EU policy, I will likely not find it in any other media or time frame. Previous studies of the EU in the media also have used quality newspapers, as described in previous chapters. Quality newspapers act as agenda-setters for other types of media,¹³² and are more Europeanised, meaning that they, much more than tabloids, feature stories about the EU.¹³³ There are two main daily national quality newspapers in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*. As there is no particular reason to choose either one of them, here I resorted to drawing lots, and drew *Dagens Nyheter*.

4.2.3 Reported articles and op-eds

In this thesis, I will differentiate if an expression of opposition is made in a reported article or an op-ed. A reported article is a news article written by a journalist about a certain event, or something someone said. An op-ed is shorthand for “opposite the editorial” and is written directly by the person, persons, organization, etc., in which they express their own opinion on a certain subject. Op-eds, or *debattartiklar* in Swedish, act as agenda-setters in the public discourse, not only for the public but for elites as well.¹³⁴ I make this distinction between reported articles and op-eds because if a party expresses opposition in the form of a 800 word article,¹³⁵ or in the form of a one sentence quote in a reported article, that should be and presented in the results. An op-ed tells us something about the salience with which a party holds policy position A or B. Reported news articles also make up the majority of a newspaper, while op-eds make up a minority. There should, thus, statistically, be relatively more reported articles that contain opposition, compared to op-eds. If, however, it is found that opposition is relatively more common in op-eds than in regular news articles, that points to the fact that the newspaper also is responsible for a possible deficit in opposition. Finally, I will also quantify the total number of op-eds by opposition parties that contain policy alternatives in all policy areas written in a given time frame as it can aid in interpreting the results.

4.2.4 Time frame

Which years should be part of the case selection? As a starting point, I cannot research all 28 years Sweden has been a member in the EU. I made the decision to investigate six time frames of half-years, three half-year periods with a right-wing government and three half-year periods with a left-wing government. The reason for this strategy is that six months will be ample to grasp the dynamics between the parties in that particular year, while at the same time it will enable me to

¹³¹ Levy 2008, 12.

¹³² Ibid, 275.

¹³³ Hurrelmann & Wagner 2020, 712.

¹³⁴ Coppock et al. 2018.

¹³⁵ The maximum length of DN op-eds is 5 500 characters.

study the debate over EU issues spread out over six years, instead of three if I had chosen whole years. To keep it equal, I investigate January 1st until June 30th, except for in one instance.

I decided to analyze the equal number of years Sweden has had a right-wing government as when it has had a left-wing government. If one side is markedly more prone to politicizing EU policies in the media than the other, this approach would allow us to know that. Second, I will not analyze election years. This may seem counterintuitive. The political temperature increases in election years; political issues claim more time and space in the media. But if not even European elections are fought on EU issues and policy, but rather on domestic issues¹³⁶, that tells us something about national elections and the chance that they to some extent will be contested over differing policy platforms regarding EU policy. A few studies have been conducted regarding the party political debate over EU policy in Swedish national elections.¹³⁷ The results show that the debate is all but non-existing. In sum, avoiding election years, where domestic issues take up almost all oxygen, will increase the chances of finding a party political debate regarding EU policy. Furthermore, as stated, there has already been some preliminary studies into opposition levels during elections. By instead investigating the state of play between elections, this thesis aims to add a new piece to the puzzle. Furthermore, the EU agenda is not at stake in Swedish elections; Sweden is “just” a legislator in the EU. The domestic agenda is however very much up in the air during national elections. But election day in Stockholm is just another day in Brussels.

I have thus argued that I will study three time frames with right-of-center governments, and three right-of-left governments. I have also discarded election years. To proceed, I use a mix of previous studies and personal knowledge to select time frames. At the end of the 90s, the EU and the Euro were relatively salient with Swedish voters,¹³⁸ which is why 1997 was selected. Loxbo found that during the reign of Fredrik Reinfeldt’s government, the level of politicization in the European Affairs Committee in parliament increased.¹³⁹ I simply selected those where he found the most opposition, and those were 2008 and 2009. The Sweden Democrats, a Eurosceptic party, won seats in the *Riksdag* in the 2010 elections. Investigating what impact they had on the Swedish EU debate seems important. Therefore I selected 2012, as the EU featured much in the media because of the budget crisis in some member states. Lastly, I need to select two half-year periods from the Social Democratic governments 2014-2022. Here I will rely on my own knowledge of the EU and the debates that have been important in Sweden. I also selected 2016. In that year, the migration crisis and the ‘Brexit’ vote put, again, the EU high on the agenda. I finally selected 2021 as the EU taxonomy and other environmental legislative packages from the EU were rather prominent in the Swedish media.

¹³⁶ Reif & Schmitt 1980.

¹³⁷ See for example Europakommentaren 2022.

¹³⁸ Svenska valforskningsprogrammet 2020.

¹³⁹ 2014, 138.

With left-wing government	With right-wing government
1997	2008
2016	2009
2021	2012

Table 1. Time periods to be studied.¹⁴⁰

4.2.5 Finding articles

Per half-year there are around 183 newspapers to go through. Some Swedish libraries offer a service where some newspapers, including *Dagens Nyheter*, have been digitized and searchable. This service, available at <https://tidningar.kb.se>, allows the researcher to type in search words in order to find relevant articles, instead of having to read through the entire newspaper. This of course saved a lot of time.

One key question is which search words one should use. I opted for these:

*EU, [the name of all political parties in the Riksdag and in the opposition according to my definition], criticism, criticize, opposition, the government, the EAC, the Council of Ministers, Brussels*¹⁴¹

As an example, when studying, 1997 I entered all the search words plus the names of the parties in opposition that time period. The search was made in such a way as to show all the articles that featured the search word “EU”, which became marked in yellow. If any of the other search words existed in that same article, it would be marked with pink. I read all the articles that contained the word “EU” and at least one of the other search words. Some articles could quickly be discarded as not being relevant, while others needed much more thorough reading. The articles that were relevant were forwarded to my personal email and read through one more time, before being coded as either containing opposition according to the operationalization or not.

I also collected articles where the opposition rather criticized the government’s leadership or negotiation skills, to compare with criticisms of policy. I will gather the totality of the articles found and counted as opposition in Appendix 1. To support me in the analysis, I will also present some of the quotes there.

¹⁴⁰ All are concerned with January 1st – June 30th except 2021 which is concerned with July 1st – December 31st since the covid pandemic was still very high on the media agenda.

¹⁴¹ Of course the Swedish translation of these words were used.

4.3 Political claims analysis

Political claims analysis is a method specifically used to study politics' public dimension in newspapers,¹⁴² more precisely political claims made by political actors. The unit of analysis are claims, statements in newspapers, "defined as the public expression of an opinion related to institutions, processes, or results of collective decision-making."¹⁴³, and can contain "calls to action, proposals, and criticisms..."¹⁴⁴ It is called *political* claims analysis since it shows interest in statements by political actors, and not journalist's or pundit's.¹⁴⁵ The reason I utilize this methodological framework is because it can help focus the investigation. As we will see, the framework stipulates a couple of variables of interest which all need to be present in the article in order for it to be coded as a claim of political party opposition to the government's EU policies. It systematizes the investigation and can aid in the presentation of results in the end.

Which variables are we interested in? They are directly drawn from the operationalization of "opposition". Again, it is: a representative of a party not in government that expresses a policy alternative to the EU policy promoted by the government, or calls on the government to act in a certain way in the EU arena, with that policy alternative being a position of the party at-large.

- *Claimant.* Who makes the claim? The person making the claim needs to be a representative of a Swedish political party not in government. The goal is to find the opinions of the parties, as expressed by its representatives. Swedish voters primarily vote for parties and their programmes, not people.
- *Evaluation.* The claim needs to be in the form of an evaluation and this evaluation needs to be critical of either a lack of action or a bad policy.
- *Addressee.* Who is being addressed? The claim needs to be directed at the government at-large or one of its ministers, either directly or indirectly. For example, a claim is not relevant for the study if the addressee is an EU institution or another EU member state. Though, the claim can indirectly target the government and does not have to explicitly address the government and its ministers.
- *Content.* What does the claim contain? It should be in the form of a policy proposal, either in an area where the government's position is unclear or undecided, or a policy proposal that goes contrary to the government's policy.
- *Object.* Which policies are criticized? Here we are concerned with EU policies, decisions decided in the EU or decisions decided domestically that regard EU policy. That could be a legislative file decided in one of the Council configurations, the Euro, or wider, visionary issues discussed at a European Council meeting.

¹⁴² Koopmans & Statham 1999; 2009; Temple et al. 2016.

¹⁴³ Hurrelmann & Wagner 2020, 714.

¹⁴⁴ Statham & Koopmans 2009, 442.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 441.

Accordingly, all articles that contain these variables and answers the questions as prescribed, will be included in the final analysis. It is not that an individual sentence needs to contain all these elements, but taken together in the article, all of them need to be present. I will then simply choose those sentences that best describe the opposition being expressed inside the article. These quotes are then presented either in the analysis or Appendix 1.

Political claims analysis					
	Claimant	Evaluation	Addressee	Content	Object
Question	Who makes the claim?	Is the claim an expression of criticism/call for action, support or neither?	Who is the claim targeted at?	What does the claim contain?	Which policies are criticized by the claim?
Answer	A representative of a Swedish party not in government	Criticism/call for action	The Swedish government and/or its ministers	Policy alternatives	EU policies

Table 2. A review of the methodological framework.

One serious limitation of this thesis, which is hard to come around, is the question of “how much opposition is desirable?”¹⁴⁶ I will probably find at least some articles that express opposition, but there is no objective way to say if it is “enough” or not. I have introduced some ways to allow us to interpret the results. In any case, several previous studies interested in the same field have been able to draw conclusions on the basis of the same kinds of results I will acquire.¹⁴⁷

4.4 Reliability

Reliability concerns the extent to which a result of a study can be repeated by another researcher, at another time.¹⁴⁸ In this study: that someone else can sit down with the same material, same question, using the same definitions, and end up with the same results. The operationalization of ‘opposition’ is crucial for this purpose, which is why I have tried to make it as clear as possible. There have been instances where I have found it difficult to differentiate between different modes of opposition, if a claim has been directed at policy, polity or personality. When this has been the case, I mention it in the analysis. This has been relatively rare, though. Given that I used a special service designed to quickly research newspapers with search words, making the research systematic, I think this also increases the probability of the results being reliable.

¹⁴⁶ Dahl 1965, 7.

¹⁴⁷ Peter & de Vreese 2004; Karlsson et al. 2018.

¹⁴⁸ Drost 2011.

5 Results and analysis

Let us now look at the results and try to make sense of them using the theoretical framework presented above. Can it aid us in understanding the level of opposition towards EU policies? The analysis is divided into six sections, one for each time period. Each section is structured according to the expectations drawn from the theoretical framework. Quotes to back up the reasoning will be included. The totality of the quotes identified are to be found in Appendix 1.

5.1 1997

	The Moderates	The Center Party	The Liberals	The Left Party	The Greens	The Christian Democrats	The right wing parties	Total
Political claims on EU policy	4	4	2	2	3	2	0	17
Op-eds on EU policy	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
Total amount of op-eds	2	0	6	0	3	1	1	13

Table 3. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

There were 6 opposition parties in this period, out of which I consider 4 to be inside the cartel and 2 to be outside of it, in keeping with the definition provided by the cartel party thesis:¹⁴⁹ the Greens and the Left Party. The Left Party, founded in 1917, had until that point¹⁵⁰ never possessed ministerial posts, with the same situation applying to the Greens, even if they were a comparative novelty in Swedish politics. The two parties were, moreover, strongly Eurosceptic.¹⁵¹ Even in 2002, then prime minister Göran Persson denied the parties ministerial posts, in view of the fact that they were against EU membership.¹⁵² The right-wing parties, on the other hand, led the government together 1991-1994, and were generally expected to do so again, should they have won the 1998 elections. They were thus part of the cartel. The Social Democrats made up a minority government, with budgetary support from the Center Party.

During the time period, and turning to the first expectation drawn from the cartel party thesis that there are few expressions of policy opposition in Swedish EU politics, I identified 19 expressions of opposition containing policy alternatives vis-à-vis EU policy, 17 in reported articles and 2 in op-eds. Across the 6 months investigated, that makes roughly 1 every 9,5 days. This is, as we will see, by far

¹⁴⁹ Katz & Mair 2009, 757.

¹⁵⁰ And still to this day.

¹⁵¹ *Europeiseringen av Sverige*, 89.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 95.

the most for any of the time periods. In line with previous studies, it is clear that the reporting focused on consequential events that touched upon issues of sovereignty, especially regarding the Euro. 18 of the 19 claims of opposition identified discussed either the Euro or the Treaty negotiations, 10 on the former and 8 on the latter (see Appendix 1). Though I do consider these claims to regard EU policy, Euro and Treaty reform obviously being just that, both are clearly of a domestic character, owing to the fact that both are decided domestically.¹⁵³ The debate was thus highly concentrated on these issues. For some of the investigated years I have not been able to find data for how many legislative acts were passed in the Council, but let us depart from the average number of 120, keeping in mind that in reality it can be both higher and lower.¹⁵⁴ Almost none of these received any opposition by the parties outside the government. Taken together, and on average, though, the time period saw more policy debate than expected, and especially compared with other time periods. The coverage was, as seen in other studies, event-driven and domestically focused. Opposition parties produced 13 op-eds in total this time period, out of which, again, 2 debated EU policy.

The second expectation, drawn from the theoretical framework, that opposition is rather directed at the government's leadership and comportment than at its policy positions, does not find support in this time frame. Of the identified claims, 19 were directed at policy and 6 at leadership, negotiation skills, or the process and did not offer any policy alternative. It is sometimes hard to draw the line between the different kinds of opposition. The guiding principle is that if a claim tells the readers what the party would have pushed for or voted for regarding some policy issues, that claim is targeted at policy, not personality.

As an example of opposition towards policy, in an article from April 10th, all opposition parties are asked to rate the government's performance in the intergovernmental negotiations that led up to the Amsterdam Treaty. The quote tells readers that the Liberals are for more environmental legislation at the EU level:

“Furthermore, there does not seem to be any changes regarding a common minimum level for carbon dioxide taxes... We and all other Swedish parties except the Social Democrats and the Moderates are keen on having that in the Treaty.”¹⁵⁵

There were several instances of opposition towards the government's leadership and behavior in EU affairs. This news article, from January 24th, is in the form of a resumé of the yearly EU debate in the *Riksdag*:

“She criticized the government for not coordinating enough of its work in the intergovernmental conference with the other Nordic ministers...”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Motion 1999/2000:Fi205. Treaties are ratified in each member state.

¹⁵⁴ Council of the European Union 2015.

¹⁵⁵ *Dagens Nyheter*, 10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 13. Statement by a representative of the Center Party.

Regarding the third expectation, that the two parties outside the cartel should be more opposing than the four parties in the cartel, it does not get support. Of 19 claims, 7 were made by “the outsiders” and 12 by the “insiders”. Hence, they did deliver an unproportionate amount of opposition. Though, the numbers are so small, as is the sample size, that this should be interpreted carefully. This goes for the rest of the analysis, as it consists of the same sample size.

What is equally interesting is that when the parties outside the cartel deliver their opposition, they do it in a much clearer way. Often it is the main story of that article.

Regarding the Euro, on April 8th, the vice president of the Left Party, Johan Lönnroth, wrote an op-ed in which he criticized the Euro. The government had by that time not yet made up its mind on the Euro, but this quote clearly tells the readers what the Left Party wants:

“If worst comes to worst and the Euro is implemented in 1999, Sweden must stay out.”¹⁵⁷

The Greens focused more on the ongoing treaty negotiations. In this opinion piece from April 25th, four representatives of the greens write that the new Treaty will turn the EU into a federation. This clearly informs the readers that the Greens are first, against the treaty and sending more competence to the EU, and second, proponents of a ‘Swexit’.

“If the government is not ready to use its veto it needs to in the name of democracy ask the people of Sweden if they want to remain members of a European Union that is developing towards a federation...”¹⁵⁸

On June 9th, this demand is repeated after the Greens’ congress decided that they will demand that the government uses its veto to block the new Treaty:

“The Greens demand that Göran Persson¹⁵⁹ uses the veto at the EU summit 16th-17th June in Amsterdam and says no to the entirety of the EU’s new Treaty.”¹⁶⁰

5.2 2008

¹⁵⁷ Lönnroth 1997, 4.

¹⁵⁸ Samuelsson *et al.* 1997, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Sweden’s prime minister at the time.

¹⁶⁰ *Dagens Nyheter*, 10.

	Social Democrats	The Left Party	The Greens	The opposition	Total
Political claims on EU policy	2	1	1	0	4
Op-eds on EU policy	1	1	0	0	2
Total amount of op-eds	11	1	1	1	15

Table 4. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

The right-wing parties won the 2006 elections, and thus three parties found themselves in opposition; the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens. By this time, Swedish politics was changing. In December of 2008, the three opposition parties announced, for the first time in history, that they entered a formal cooperation with the aim of forming a coalition government in 2010 if they won the election.¹⁶¹ This was preceded by developments within the Greens and the Left Party regarding their EU stance. First, the Left Party said that a coalition government with the three parties would not have to push for a ‘Swexit’ vote.¹⁶² Importantly though, the party retained their position that Sweden should leave the Union. Regarding the Greens, the transformation was more far reaching. In February, party leadership announced that they wanted to drop the party’s prolific ‘Swexit’ stance,¹⁶³ and in October the final decision was taken by the party membership.¹⁶⁴ As mentioned, shortly thereafter the historic coalition agreement was presented. I will treat the Greens and the Left Party as standing outside the cartel, given that the coalition was announced after my investigation period.

During the first half year in 2008, I identified 6 expressions of opposition, 4 were found in reported articles and 2 as op-eds. This is clearly less than in 1997. On average, that makes 1 every 30 days. At the same time, the Council adopted 249 legislative acts in 2008, making almost 21 per month.¹⁶⁵ Hence, overall, and in relation to what Swedish ministers partook in deciding upon, the first expectation is met: this time period saw a muted and poor EU policy debate on the hundreds of legislative files discussed and adopted in the EU arena by Swedish ministers. Salient EU debates at this time was the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, which famously failed in the Irish referendum, and the *Laval case* where the European Court of Justice ruled that Swedish unions did not have a right to take action and institute a blockade of a construction site against Latvian workers whose employer had not signed a collective agreement with the Swedish construction workers union. The ruling went to one of the hearts of Swedish political life and the issue was highly politicized.¹⁶⁶ The Swedish labor movement reacted very strongly against this and regarded it as the EU reaching too far into Sweden’s internal business.¹⁶⁷ Again the policy opposition was

¹⁶¹ Ibid, December 8th, 6-7.

¹⁶² Ibid, 16th of January, 9.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 28th of February, 14-5.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 7th of October, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Hayes-Renshaw 2017, 90.

¹⁶⁶ Johansson *et al.* 2012, 213.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, December 19th.

scarce, event-driven and framed by domestic debates and concerns. 5 out of 6 claims were either about the Treaty or the Laval case, which essentially became a domestic issue for the working class-parties. Opposition parties produced 13 op-eds in total during this time period.

Now turning to the second expectation, which stipulates opposition to be directed at leadership rather than policy, this is not found to be the case. No claims were found criticizing personality or leadership skills. The Laval case was high on the agenda for the opposition, and they wanted the government to secure the Swedish labor market model from meddling by the EU. In this article, Mona Sahlin, then president of the Social Democrats, answered to criticism from a high-profile Social Democrat leaving the party, since he felt that the party was not acting strongly enough for Swedish labor rights and, basically, that the party had become too EU friendly.

“We shall demand from the government that they do what they can to ensure the right to collective agreement.”¹⁶⁸

The Social Democrats mobilized on this issue. In this op-ed, union representatives together with representatives of the Social Democrats, were pushing the government to work for a strengthening of the Swedish labor market model by promoting different legislative solutions at the EU level. These quotes tell us what the Social Democrats would have pushed for, were they in government.

“These judgements demand a revision of EU legislation, which must be pushed by the Swedish government.”¹⁶⁹

The limited policy debate that was delivered by the only party within the cartel in the opposition was, hence, only directed at policy, pushing and calling on the government to fight for the Swedish labor market.

Moving to the third expectation, that parties outside the cartel should be more active in opposing the government’s policy, neither this finds support in the identified political claims during the time period. Only 3 expressions of opposition were identified, 2 made by the Left Party and 1 by the Greens. In this article, it is reported that the president of the Left Party, Lars Ohly, has launched a campaign called “Ask the people”, to demand a referendum on the new Treaty. The Left Party were against its ratification:

... Lars Ohly explained why they say no to the new Treaty. Among other things, they point to the fact that political power in a number of policy areas is moved from the member states to Brussels...¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, April 17th, 15. Statement by Mona Sahlin, then president of the Social Democrats. A proposal from some on the left was that the Social Democrats should demand that the government veto the new Treaty if the right to collective agreement was not more clearly enshrined in the EU Treaties. Mona Sahlin dismissed this strategy.

¹⁶⁹ Lundby-Wedin *et al.* 2008, 7.

¹⁷⁰ *Dagens Nyheter*, January 19th, 15.

The Greens called on the prime minister to coordinate with other EU member states regarding state visits to China, as a protest against, what the Greens thought of as, that government’s human rights violations.¹⁷¹

5.3 2009

	Social Democrats	The Left Party	The Greens	The opposition	Total
Political claims on EU policy	3	0	0	0	3
Op-eds on EU policy	3	0	0	0	3
Total amount of op-eds	10	1	2	2	15

Table 5. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

In 2009, the same parties were in opposition and in government as in 2008. As mentioned earlier, both previous parties outside the cartel had, according to the definition, entered it, as they both explicitly were being proposed as future parties in government in the case of an election win for the left side in 2010. This time period gives us a rather interesting chance to see how opposition levels, in this case towards EU policy, change when a party suddenly, at least temporarily, becomes part of the cartel.

During the first half year of 2009, I identified 6 expressions of opposition coming from the opposition parties; 3 political claims and 3 op-eds, making one every 30 days. In 2009, around 240 legislative acts were adopted in the council, making 20 per month.¹⁷² This again shows that a domestic debate on EU policies was largely missing in *Dagens Nyheter*, again confirming the first expectation. They were all expressed by representatives of the Social Democrats. As a comparison, 15 op-eds on other topics were submitted by the opposition, sometimes together, but oftentimes separately. The public discourse was heavily occupied with the financial crisis, which reached its peak in 2009. *Dagens Nyheter* had a special section in the newspaper called “EUROPA 2009”, where they primarily informed the readers about the different member states.¹⁷³ This had to do with the fact that Sweden would take over the rotating presidency of the Council of Ministers on July 1st, and that elections to the EP were going to be held in June. These two events, evidently, increased the visibility of the EU in the newspaper.

Regarding the second expectation, I do not find support for that opposition is directed towards personalities and leadership rather than policy. All claims identified were directed at policy. Though, again, the likelihood of finding a policy debate between government and opposition remained very low. The Social Democrats were clear in that they directed their opposition towards

¹⁷¹ March 18th, 9.

¹⁷² Hayes-Renshaw 2017, 90.

¹⁷³ See for example January 5th for the Czech Republic.

policy, informing the readers of the newspaper what policies it would have fought for, were they Sweden's representatives in EU affairs. Moreover, they dedicated 3 op-eds to this purpose. The fact that they all came in May and June, close to both the start of the Swedish presidency and the EP elections, shows that they took advantage of the sudden increased publicity of the EU. Especially the op-eds clearly stated what it thinks the government should focus on during the presidency.

In this op-ed, representatives of the Social Democrats put pressure on the government to make migration a central tenet of the presidency. The article contains other proposals but they are not direct at the government, but are rather part of the election campaign for the European Parliament (EP) elections. One of the signatures of the article belongs to a candidate for the EP. Though, even if the op-ed is directed at the Swedish government, it contains several policy proposals for a European migration policy and invokes political leaders in the EU and can also be seen as a part of the election campaign:

“The Prime Minister must keep his promise and make migration policy a cornerstone of his presidency in the EU.”¹⁷⁴

In another op-ed, the Social Democrats are again explaining to the readers what the government should do with the upcoming presidency. It is also part of the EP election campaign, as it is co-signed by their top candidate to the EP elections. Moreover, the article discusses in length the Swedish domestic situation, and should also be seen as part of the Social Democrats bid to win the 2010 elections:

“It is important that Sweden, as president of the EU, from day one takes the lead in the fight against youth unemployment.”¹⁷⁵

Another very interesting finding for this thesis is an article on May 6th, which tells the readers that the government and opposition will temper the domestic debate during the presidency, and that the opposition will back up the government during this time:¹⁷⁶

“We shall not seek conflict just for it, but facilitate the best we can.”¹⁷⁷

“We have a common responsibility that Sweden handles this well... we should not seek unnecessary conflict...”¹⁷⁸

“Is the opposition for or against Sweden?”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ Cetin *et al.* 2009, 6.

¹⁷⁵ Sahlin & Ulveskog 2009, 6.

¹⁷⁶ *Dagens Nyheter*, 11.

¹⁷⁷ Statement by president of the Social Democrats Mona Sahlin.

¹⁷⁸ Statement by the prime minister.

¹⁷⁹ Statement by the prime minister.

These are statements by parties within the cartel. They seem to want to delegitimize a policy debate that they themselves have not greenlighted, calling in “unnecessary”. They are responsible when they depoliticize, rendering those who politicize irresponsible. It is also evident that at least the prime minister sees the EU presidency clearly as foreign policy, where Sweden has one single interest. If one were to be against the government, one would, consequently, be against Sweden. It is also interesting to note that both previous parties outside the cartel, the Greens and the Left Party, did not criticize this *détente* but accepted it.

Regarding the third expectation, there is not much to say on this in this time period, as there, according to the definition, were no cartel parties. All parties could reasonably be part of the next government. Though it is interesting to find that after both the Left Party and the Greens had moved into the cartel, they both were completely silent on EU policy, expressing 0 policy alternatives.

5.4 2012

	The Social Democrats	The Left Party	The Greens	The Sweden Democrats	The opposition ¹⁸⁰	Total
Political claims on EU policy	0	0	0	0	2	2
Debate articles on EU policy	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total amount of op-eds	5	4	8	1	1	19

Table 6. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

In 2012, the same parties were still in government. The left side lost the 2010 elections and stayed in opposition, but were joined by the extreme-right party the Sweden Democrats. I argue that the Left Party now again was considered to be outside the cartel. This is because, after the 2014 elections, they were not allowed in the center-of-left coalition government. After the bismall elections in 2010, the Left Party were considered a liability, both electorally, but also strategically, should the Social Democrats need to cooperate with one of the right-wing parties.¹⁸¹ However, the Greens, I argue, remained in the cartel, given that they indeed *were* included in the government in 2014. The Sweden Democrats, being an extreme-right party, were the pariah party *par excellence*, and were hence outside the cartel. There were thus two opposition parties inside the cartel and two outside of it.

In total, I identified 4 expressions of opposition by opposition parties during the investigated time period, making 1 every 45 days, or 1,5 months. This is the lowest of any of the investigated time periods. In 2012, the Council of Ministers adopted around 90 legislative acts, making 7,5 per

¹⁸⁰ Not including the Sweden Democrats.

¹⁸¹ Om Makt och Politik 2014.

month on average. Again, and in line with the first expectation, many of the legislative files the Swedish government voted upon, discussed, negotiated in the EU arena were, evidently, left undebated in Sweden. Not only that but 2 of the claims found either featured in a small article, or were not part of the main story and mentioned as a by-the-way. This in spite of the EU being featured often in the news, primarily because of the budget crisis that had hit some of the member states with the Euro in the wake of the financial crisis. The single currency was seriously questioned; there was a sense of crisis and political chaos.¹⁸² Sweden did, and does, not have the single currency, but it is obvious that the Euro crisis had repercussions on the wider EU cooperation, which could have garnered debate between the parties on how Sweden should have acted. 19 op-eds discussing policy alternatives were written by the opposition parties, regarding other policy areas.

Regarding the second expectation, opposition was mainly directed at policy, not leadership skills, which means that it is yet again not met. In this article, it is reported that the prime minister is ready to enter the EU's financial pact without the support of the Social Democrats. The parties do not agree on whether the financial pact is a good idea for Sweden. Here then president of the Social Democrats criticizes the prime minister's negotiation skills, rather than a specific policy:

“As it stands right now, when the government has not been able to negotiate exceptions, this is too unclear, way too bad. It would amount to Sweden joining the Euro from the back door which we Social democrats are not ready to accept.”¹⁸³

In an op-ed, representatives of the Greens write that they could support the government in agreeing to the EU's financial pact if they demand a permanent exception for Sweden from the Euro. Here it is interesting to note the radical shift that had taken place in the Greens regarding their EU stance, after they dropped the 'Swexit' demand from their programme. They had now become a party that could act pragmatically in EU policy. This quote does tell the readers that the Greens are clearly against the Euro:

“Today the finance minister and the European Affairs Council will have a joint consultation in the run up to the continued negotiations regarding the financial pact. We will then take up the issue of a permanent exception for Sweden from participating in the Euro.”¹⁸⁴

As stated, this time period was engulfed in the Euro budget crisis which severely hurt the popularity of the single currency in Sweden, dropping to an all-time low in 2012.¹⁸⁵ This demand from the Greens should be seen in this light, not as an expression of Euroscepticism.

¹⁸² *Dagens Nyheter*, May 16th, 8.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, January 18th, 11. This quote was particularly difficult to decide whether it dealt with policy or personality.

Since the quote mainly takes aim, according to me, at the prime minister's negotiation skills, I code it as opposition to personality.

¹⁸⁴ Bolund *et al.* 2012, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Europaportalen 2022.

The third expectation that the parties “in competition”, to extend the vocabulary of Katz and Mair, should be more active in opposition does not find support in this investigation. Neither the Sweden Democrats nor the Left Party made any statements in *Dagens Nyheter* during this time period which informed the readers about what they would have done in the EU if they were in government.

5.5 2016

	The Moderates	The Center Party	The Liberals	The Left Party	The Christian Democrats	The Sweden Democrats	The bourgeois parties	A group of parties	Total
Political claims on EU policy	1	0	0	3	0	2	0	0	6
Op-eds on EU policy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total amount of op-eds	4	1	6	2	1	1	2	3	20

Table 7. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

In 2014, the Social Democrats and the Greens formed a coalition government. The Left Party, while still being considered an opposition party in this thesis, was part of a legislative cooperation with the government. The right-wing parties were back in opposition for the first time in 8 years, and the Sweden Democrats also remained in the opposition. Again, the two parties on the extremes were outside the cartel, and they were also the only parties who officially wanted a ‘Swexit’. The political discourse centered around the high amount of migrants coming from primarily Syria to the EU, of which Sweden accepted more than any member state, in relation to its population. EU migration reform was very much discussed at the time.¹⁸⁶

In total during the first half year of 2016, I identified 6 expressions of policy alternatives and opposition concerning the left-wing government’s EU policy. All of them were in the form of reported statements and interviews, meaning no op-eds. 6 in 182 days makes 1 claim every 30 days. Since I have not been able to find specific numbers for the legislative acts adopted by the Council this year, I will use the average number, which is 120,¹⁸⁷ making 10 per month. This, again, shows that the debate between political parties in Sweden on EU policies is scant and insufficient to keep the readers informed about policy alternatives, what *could* be done with Swedish influence, formal and informal, in the European arena, and confirms the first expectation. This in spite of the migration crisis, where many refugees fled to Europe to escape the war in Syria, which became a big political issue for the EU, and Sweden. This could have created fertile ground for a policy debate. The Brexit episode, which touched Sweden, was also salient in the news as the UK was one of its closest allies in the EU. The winter of 2016 saw an ongoing debate concerning how much the EU

¹⁸⁶ *Dagens Nyheter*, March 10th, 14.

¹⁸⁷ Council of the European Union 2015.

should adapt to the UK's demands in the renegotiation of their membership, with a deal signed on February 19th.¹⁸⁸ This of course in addition to the other consequential acts adopted in the EU, and European Council summits. As compared to the 6 political claims identified, the time period saw 20 op-eds written by opposition parties regarding other policy areas.

Regarding the second expectation, which says that, according to the cartel party thesis, parties within the cartel should direct their opposition more towards leadership style and management competence, rather than the political content, does not find support. In fact, only 1 claim was expressed by an opposition party within the cartel; the Moderates. In it, one of their representatives thinks the Social Democratic prime minister should put pressure on member states who are not taking proper responsibility, by calling on the EU to use the budget to put pressure on some member states.

“I would like to see the prime minister slam his fist on the table and speak up...’ The Moderates want Sweden to work for that [the countries that are not assuming responsibility regarding migrants] should be punished economically. ‘I think they should try to use the budget to put more pressure.”¹⁸⁹

The third expectation, that parties outside the cartel will be more inclined to express opposition is met. Again, almost all identified claims came from either the Left Party or the Sweden Democrats. Together they made 5 political claims. The statements were primarily expressions of their Euro skeptic positions. They tried to seize the unexpected opportunity that materialized after the British people voted ‘Leave’ on Midsummer’s eve 2016. The Sweden Democrats also demanded a ‘Swexit’ vote. This article was published a few days after the Brexit referendum. In it, we can read that the EU skeptic parties, the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, want the government to demand concessions from the Commission. The article contains two political claims:

“The Left Party, which cooperates with the government on the budget, thinks that Brexit is a ‘golden opportunity’ to renegotiate the Swedish membership.”¹⁹⁰

“... Jimmie Åkesson¹⁹¹ holds, like the Left Party, that it is time for a renegotiation of the Swedish agreement with the EU.”¹⁹²

And a couple of days later:

“The Swedish position should, according to the president of the Sweden Democrats, be, like the British did before, to demand a renegotiation of the membership terms and thereafter a ‘Swexit’ referendum.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ *Dagens Nyheter*, February 20th.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, February 18th, 8.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, June 25th, 18-9.

¹⁹¹ The party leader of the Sweden Democrats at the time.

¹⁹² *Ibid*.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, June 28th, 11.

“The Left Party wants Sweden to seize the opportunity and negotiate a social protocol which makes clear that Swedish collective agreements should not be able to be bypassed.”¹⁹⁴

The reaction by the government to the ‘Brexit’ vote and the demands for a Swedish renegotiated deal with the EU is quite interesting, keeping the cartel party thesis in mind. The previously quoted article from June 25th has a quote by the Swedish prime minister as its headline: *“It is easy to be a populist today”*. In it, he criticizes the demands by the EU skeptic parties and deems them “irresponsible”.¹⁹⁵ And again from the previously quoted article, from June 28th, we learn that the government, i.e. the Social Democrats and the Greens, have made a deal with the right-wing parties; a deal within the cartel:

“... the government and the four bourgeois parties now see eye to eye that [‘Brexit’] must be handled with stability and the long-term in mind.”¹⁹⁶

Like in 2009, when the government and the Social Democrats called for a temporary political cease fire during the Swedish EU presidency and invoked “responsibility” on the part of the political parties, a similar phenomena emerges in relation to the news piece also, even if the two situations are different. The Social Democratic prime minister is deeming the policies argued for by the parties outside the cartel as “irresponsible”, “easy”, “populist” and “short-sighted”, and his own policies, shared with the other parties in the cartel as “responsible”, “difficult”, promoting stability and not out to score short-term political points. This is probably a conscious strategy to disqualify some opposition in the eyes of the voters, to move certain issues from the agenda – which has as its function to limit policy debate.

5.6 2021

	The Moderates	The Center Party	The Liberals	The Left Party	The Greens ¹⁹⁷	The Christian Democrats	The Sweden Democrats	The opposition ¹⁹⁸	Total
Political claims EU policy	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	4
Op-eds EU policy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total amount of op-eds	4	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	16

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 18-9.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 11.

¹⁹⁷ Again, they entered the opposition on November 24th.

¹⁹⁸ The Moderates, Sweden Democrats, and Christian Democrats.

Table 8. Identified claims during the time period in 1997.

The preconditions this time period were exactly the same as the previous: the same parties in opposition and government and the same parties within and outside the cartel. Though the Greens left the government in November, they were still in general viewed as having a chance to return after the 2022 elections. Moreover, the Sweden Democrats had in 2019 dropped their demand that Sweden leaves the EU.¹⁹⁹ By this time, three of the right-wing parties had said that they would seek to form a government supported by the Sweden Democrats after the 2022 elections. The Sweden Democrats would however not be allowed to be part of that government,²⁰⁰ and were thus still outside the cartel, as were the Left Party.

The second half-year of 2021 saw a total of 5 political claims of opposition by opposition parties, 1 op-ed and 4 in reported articles, making 1 every 37 days. If we again assume that 2021 saw the average amount of legislative acts adopted by the Council of Ministers, 120, that then makes 10 acts per month. The results are, again, crystal clear: the political debate between the parties, who are hired to represent the people in political institutions, are not engaging in any meaningful debate that makes visible policy alternatives and introduces choice for the decisions made in the EU arena. This is in line with the first expectation. As a comparison, the opposition wrote a total of 16 op-eds during this time period.

Regarding the second expectation, drawn from the cartel party thesis, there is no evidence that the parties inside the cartel mostly focused on opposition towards leadership skills and the like, rather than criticizing and challenging the government's EU policies; 1 claim was directed at compartment and 4 at policy. In one article, the Greens, which had just left the government, expressed concern over the government's forestry policy in the EU:

“They have wanted to water down the proposals with stricter environmental protection.. Regarding the taxonomy,²⁰¹ Sweden has decided to hit the breaks. That Swedish forestry should be allowed to continue business as usual.”²⁰²

Not only was opposition rare; it was often also inconsequential and hard to find in the article itself, a side note and not the main story. This quote, is, moreover, clearly directed at the compartment of the government, not a specific policy:

“Moreover, the moderate criticizes Baylan for not taking part in the first Council meeting for agriculture since the government took office again.”²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Åkesson 2019.

²⁰⁰ Which is also what materialized after the elections.

²⁰¹ The taxonomy is a classification system that names which economic activities are deemed sustainable by the European Commission.

²⁰² *Dagens Nyheter*, November 28th, 22.

²⁰³ *Dagens Nyheter*, July 23rd, 7. The prime minister had lost a vote of no confidence and the government was forced to step down. It was soon thereafter voted in again.

Turning, finally, to the third expectation, there was 1 expression of opposition coming from the parties outside the cartel. The president of the Left Party wrote the only op-ed dedicated to EU policy this time period. Notwithstanding, most opposition was in the form of claims by parties within the cartel, why the third expectation, once again, is not met. The Sweden Democrats made no statements concerning EU policy.

In the op-ed, the Left Party again say ‘No’ to EU integration, more precisely the single market for electricity, by demanding that Sweden take back control over electricity prices. The op-ed was written at a time when the price of energy skyrocketed across Europe:

“To bring down energy prices, the government must immediately stop the initiation of new transmission cables to Europe and drop the ambition for a common price for electricity in the EU.”²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Dadgostar & Lahti 2021, 5.

6 Concluding discussion

6.1 Is EU policy taken out of competition?

	1997	2008	2009	2012	2016	2021	Total
Political claims	17	4	3	2	6	4	36
Op-eds EU policy	2	2	3	1	0	1	9
Total amount of op-eds	15	15	15	19	20	16	100

Table 9. A summary of the results.

Equipped with an operationalization drawn from the work of Robert Dahl, I researched 1 092 editions of the Swedish quality newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* during six years, three with center-of-left governments and three with center-of-right governments, searching for a government-opposition policy debate regarding EU policy. Opposition directed at the policies promoted by the government is generally thought of as a cornerstone in a representative democracy, as it provides the voters, who send representatives on their behalf to exert political authority, with true choices on how that political authority should be exerted,²⁰⁵ and makes accountability possible. This is especially true regarding the laws decided in the European Union, which hierarchically are above national laws, should they be in conflict, and given that EU laws act as constant constraints on the will of the people; if it finds that one particular EU law is displeasing, they have no formal possibility to change it. This thesis has aimed at answering the following research question:

To what extent does there exist party political opposition directed at the government's EU policies in a Swedish newspaper?

We can now answer it. There is a relatively low extent of policy opposition towards the government's EU policies. In total, I found 45 expressions of opposition during the investigated time period of 1087 days, 36 being reported by journalists and 9 in the form of opinion pieces written by the parties themselves. 45 political claims of opposition spread out on 1 092 newspapers makes one every 24 days. But how can we know if this is a lot or a little? I have previously touched upon a key limitation of this research: knowing what is "enough" opposition. An admittedly blunt way to shed some light on the results has in this thesis been to compare them with the amount of legislative acts the Council of Ministers adopted in a certain year. As I have not been able to find the numbers for each investigated time period, we can use the average number, which again is 120

²⁰⁵ Dahl 1966.

legislative acts adopted by the Council each year,²⁰⁶ which gives, on average, 360 legislative acts during the time period I have been occupied with. This is, moreover, just one piece of the puzzle. The Council adopts other policy documents and recommendations. And this number does not capture policy stances the Swedish government pushed in the most consequential EU meetings; the European Council. Even if the European Council does not adopt laws, it is here the visionary issues of the Union's future are dealt with: "[It] shall provide the Union with the necessary impetus for its development and shall define the general political directions and priorities thereof."²⁰⁷ This thesis has shown that a big majority of the policies the Swedish government supports in the European arena are not taken up for discussion and debate in *Dagens Nyheter*, a quality newspaper. The decision to research a quality newspaper was made because they, according to previous literature, in general feature more news about the EU.²⁰⁸ Moreover, the time periods of investigation were selected because they, according to previous literature and news events, experienced more EU debate and the EU featured more in the news. Since the amount of opposition was low here, it is likely to be as low or probably even lower in other newspapers. I therefore argue that these results can be generalized to other Swedish media.

It is, furthermore, clear that opposition is most pronounced around EU policy when it has a clear connection to domestic concerns. Three issues, the Euro, Treaty and membership negotiations and the Laval Case, all three "events" and of domestic character, but still EU policy, together make up more than half of all claims identified (see Appendix 1). The Euro debate in 1997 alone makes up 20 % of all claims. This finding is in line with previous studies that have found EU reporting in the media to be event-driven.²⁰⁹ The hundreds, if not thousands, of decisions made in different Council negotiations, the business-as-usual decisions, are left almost undiscussed by the political parties in the media. These results run contrary to studies of opposition levels in EU politics, primarily in the European Affairs Council in the *Riksdag*, which have both found a "lively opposition"²¹⁰ and that it increases over time.²¹¹ This study does not find an increase over time, but a peak in 1997 and then a rather stable and low level.

One fifth, 20 %, of opposition came in the form of op-eds, often being quite lengthy and detailed. In this thesis, op-eds are regarded as a stronger expression of opposition compared to a political claim in a reported news article. This is because op-eds are agenda-setting²¹² and, I argue, reflect not only the policy position of the party, but also with what intensity it holds this position. 9 of 100 of the total number of opinion pieces published by opposition parties were coded as being expressions of opposition towards EU policy. While it is still clear that there in general "is a surplus of consensus"²¹³ on EU policy, an important part of that opposition is delivered in salient and agenda-setting op-eds. Reported news take up the majority of space in *Dagens Nyheter*, with op-eds

²⁰⁶ Council of the European Union.

²⁰⁷ Treaty on European Union, Art. 15.

²⁰⁸ Hurrelmann and Wagner 2020, 712.

²⁰⁹ Hutter and Grande 2014; Peter and de Vreese 2004.

²¹⁰ Karlsson *et al.* 2018, 14.

²¹¹ Loxbo 2014.

²¹² Coppock *et al.* 2018.

²¹³ Dahl 1965, 10.

taking up a small part. Parties obviously cannot control what the editors put in the newspapers.²¹⁴ It takes two to tango. The deficit of policy contestation on EU policy in newspapers is not only, maybe even mainly, to blame on the political parties. The media play a key role as the interface between politics and the people.

6.2 Going back the Cartel Party Thesis

Going back to the expectations delineated, drawn from the cartel party thesis, (1), which expected few expressions of opposition and policy proposals, does find support, as explained above. That does not mean that other explanations can be discarded. For example, Sweden's strong consensus tradition, especially in foreign policy, can itself have a strong impact on these results. The cartel party thesis is one possible perspective, that I, once again, have good reasons to apply in the Swedish case; consensus tradition, large party subventions and internationalized economy. The picture can also be nuanced. In 2008 and especially 2009, the Social Democrats were relatively active in supplying the readers of *Dagens Nyheter* with policy proposals for the EU level, primarily regarding the labor market, in the wake of the Laval Case in 2007. In 2009, which saw the publicity of the EU spike because of EP elections and an upcoming presidency, the Social Democrats temporarily "broke out of the cartel" and wrote 3 op-eds with EU opposition during a couple of weeks. In this case, it seems the Social Democrats wanted to exploit the EU's increased publicity. This can point to the fact that the cartelized party system is not static, but rather dynamic.

Expectation (2) drawn from the cartel party thesis that parties in the cartel direct their opposition towards personality and leadership skills rather than policy does not find support. Again, 45 (85 %) of claims were expressions of opposition towards policy and 8 (15 %) were directed at personality and leadership.

Expectation (3) does in general not get support. It is not the case that parties outside the cartel have been more active in opposing the government's EU policy in the media. Of the 45 claims identified in total, 16 came from cartel parties. During the investigated time period, there have always been two cartel parties. Until 2008, they were the Left Party and the Greens, and from 2010 they have been the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats. Even if the Social Democrats were in government half of the investigated time period, they had an equal amount of expression of opposition compared to the Left Party (9 each), which were part of the opposition the entire time period. We find the same pattern on the right side, where the Moderates (inside the cartel) expressed more opposition (3 versus 2 claims) than the Sweden Democrats (outside the cartel), while they spent as much time in opposition during the investigated time period.

What they say is interesting to note. In total, the Sweden Democrats made 2 claims. Both were in 2016, after Brexit, and demanded a renegotiated Swedish EU membership and a 'Swexit' vote. Most of the statements by the Left Party said 'No' to different EU deals and treaties, such as the Euro in 1997, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2008, to a single market for electricity in 2021 and demanded

²¹⁴ Meyer *et al.* 2017, 282.

a renegotiated Swedish EU deal in the wake of the ‘Brexit’ vote. In 1997, when the Greens were outside the cartel, they also said ‘No’ to the Treaty of Amsterdam. One finding of this thesis is that parties outside the cartel, meaning those who are reasonably not going to be part of the next government, are synonymous with skepticism towards the EU. The only party that used to be Eurosceptic, to then make a u-turn and embrace the EU are the Greens, and they are now a party that, as of writing this thesis, generally are considered to be part of eventual future left leaning governments. Parties being negative towards the EU is indeed often used by the party leaders of the largest parties on both the left and the right as reasons not to let them enter the government,²¹⁵ i.e. to keep them outside the cartel.

The expectation for a more vital debate on EU policy coming from opposition parties outside the cartel is not met. Their policy alternatives almost always express their dislike, if not disdain, for the Union. But is not this opposition towards polity, then? I have not regarded it as such, but admit it is a balancing act. Is it opposition towards polity or policy, saying no to a Treaty, or demanding a renegotiated membership? The question is not easily answered. In one view, opposition towards polity means “questioning the legitimacy of the political system.”²¹⁶ As the claims I have identified have not explicitly²¹⁷ done that, I have coded them as opposition towards policy.

Another finding that merits further research is the way in which cartel parties try to use language as a means to disqualify some debates as illegitimate, with the goal of curtailing the parties outside the cartel and their ability to politicize certain issues. We saw it in two examples above, where primarily the Moderates and Social Democrats worked together to limit political debate. Analysis in this vein moves the cartel party thesis from description to more robust understanding of how parties exercise power, governmental and otherwise, to check incoming political debate and challenges, and secure their own jobs and established standing in society, in the end contributing to the institutional stability of the cartel.

The results of this thesis is an important contribution to the research field of opposition in general and policy contestation of EU policy in the national arena in particular. Even though what I have studied is not EU institutions or actors, each member state’s democracy is an integral part of the EU’s political system, visible not least in the discussion regarding some member state’s democratic back-sliding over the last decade. One way to ameliorate the situation would be to have yearly televised debates exclusively on EU policy.

The lack of policy debate also keeps voters in the dark about which party is responsible for which EU decisions, which makes it difficult for them to keep their representatives accountable. This link is essential in a democratic regime. The problem identified is not created by the EU institutions, at least not directly, but it can become a problem for the EU, if its citizens increasingly feel that EU legislation appears out of nowhere. Being, to my knowledge, the first study that explicitly shows interest in *opposition* as a cornerstone of representative democracy, the study makes an important

²¹⁵ Europeiseringen av Sverige, 89.

²¹⁶ Karlsson *et al.* 2018, 3.

²¹⁷ Though one could argue, implicitly.

contribution to the democratic deficit debate, and indeed confirms that contestation of EU policy is muted at best.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The limitations of this study can serve as fruitful avenues for those in the future who are interested in these issues. First, the cartel party thesis is, as mentioned, just one of several other possible explanations for the levels of opposition or politicization regarding a policy. Vote-maximizing behavior by parties could be a part of the puzzle: perhaps political parties pick up issues voters find important and focus on those. In order to dig deeper into the mechanisms that (do not) drive opposition parties to publicly contest EU policy, a method of process tracing could be useful. For example, interviewing representatives of different parties would perhaps enable us to gain new insights.

Another limitation of this thesis, and the cartel party thesis I would argue, is that it does not take into account *which* issues are and are not being contested. Do any patterns emerge? From a critical perspective, one could argue that issues of trade policy have been removed from the agenda. During the time period I have investigated, I found no contestation of trade policy. Because even if opposition overall was scarce and rare, there was *some* opposition. Building on this, one could also imagine a cross-country study of this kind. That way, one could use different variables to see if they impact the amount of opposition in the media. Take a country like France; it is one of the Union's leaders, has been a member since the start, the relationship between government and opposition is much more conflict oriented, and lies geographically in the heart of Europe. What role do these factors play for the issue we are interested in, if any? A final limitation of this thesis has been the definition of opposition, especially in its insistence on only including opposition expressed by political parties. I made this choice because political parties are the only ones who can take over the state's resources and implement political decisions. But a large part of the policy debate in *Dagens Nyheter* was expressed by a myriad of actors, such as civil society, political scientists, economists and newspaper pundits. Their contributions add to the public discourse and inform the readers about EU policy.

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- 2021
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Appendix 1

1997

Opposition towards personality

- 24th of January, page 13.
 - i. “It is not good enough to bend every time Germany or France cough.”²¹⁸
 - ii. “The government was criticized by the Liberals’ Bo Könberg for being either late or holding up the process in the three areas he found most important: foreign and security policy, environment and the fight against criminality.”
 - iii. “Also the Christian Democrat Holger Gustafsson wanted a clearer position from the government regarding deeper cooperation on criminality.”
 - iv. “She criticized the government for not coordinating enough of its work in the intergovernmental conference with the other Nordic ministers...”²¹⁹
- 10th of April, page 10.
 - i. “They (the government, my parentheses) have fallen behind and accepted the dominance of the great powers Germany and France.”²²⁰
- 3rd of June, page 10.
 - In this article, then party president for the Moderates Carl Bildt, the leader of the opposition, discusses the Euro and the government’s handling of the issue:
 - i. “A prime minister needs to say what he thinks, take responsibility for that and have the courage and boldness to lead the country, even if sometimes it is hard.”

Opposition towards policy

- 4th of March, page 13.
 - The news article informs the reader that Member of European Parliament Per Unckel of the Moderates is not pleased that Sweden, thanks to an EU decision, will be able to emit more greenhouse gasses:
 - i. “It is noteworthy and regrettable that the Social Democrats in the EU disregards the Swedish policy on carbon dioxide.”

²¹⁸ Dagens Nyheter. All quotes have been translated by me from Swedish to English. Statement by a representative of the Greens.

²¹⁹ Statement by a representative of the Center Party.

²²⁰ Statement by a representative of the Greens.

- 8th of April, page 4.
 - The vice president of the Left Party, Johan Lönnroth, wrote an op-ed in which he criticized the Euro:
 - i. “If worst comes to worst and the Euro is implemented in 1999, Sweden must stay out.”

- 10th of April, page 10.
 - In this article, all opposition parties are asked to rate the government’s performance in the intergovernmental negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Amsterdam. The article contains 3 claims by three different parties:
 - i. “Furthermore, there does not seem to be any changes regarding a common minimum level for carbon dioxide taxes... We and all other Swedish parties except the Social Democrats and the Moderates are keen on having that in the Treaty.”²²¹
 - ii. “From the beginning it was portrayed as an employment union and a precondition for the Euro. Now employment has become secondary to price stability. A chapter on employment (in the Treaty, my parentheses) will not lead to any change, and hence you can say that the government has failed.”²²²
 - iii. “The environment is a fiasco. The principle that every country should be able to set their own minimum and maximum limits has been dropped.”²²³

- 21st of April, page 12
 - In this article, the president of the Center Party Olof Johansson discusses the Euro:
 - i. “In discussions with journalists, Johansson said that the Center Party will not sign off on any constitutional changes in preparation for the single currency without a referendum.”

- 25th of April, page 4.
 - In this op-ed, four representatives of the Greens write about the new Treaty:
 - i. “If the government is not ready to use its veto it needs to in the name of democracy ask the people of Sweden if they want to remain members of a European Union that is developing towards a federation...”

- 7th of May, page 4.
 - In this op-ed²²⁴, the president of the Liberals discusses the Euro.
 - i. “Sweden needs to be more international. EU membership has to be taken advantage of. The single currency harbors great opportunities, not least for a small country.”

²²¹ Statement by a representative of the Liberals.

²²² Statement by a representative of the Left Party.

²²³ Statement by a representative of the Greens.

²²⁴ This is not at all the subject of the op-ed, which is why I do not count it as an op-ed.

- 14th of May, page 10.
 - This article makes clear that the Center Party will fight for a referendum on the Euro:
 - i. “... The Center Party promises to do everything to make sure that a referendum is held if the issue of the Euro is brought up after the next elections.”
- 3rd of June, page 10.
 - In this article, then party president for the Moderates Carl Bildt, the leader of the opposition, discusses the Euro and the government’s handling of the issue:
 - i. “Carl Bildt reiterated that, if he wins the election, that he will do everything for that Sweden, ‘to not be marginalized in the EU’, as soon as possible negotiate to join the Euro.”
- 4th of June, page 11.
 - In this article, the Center Party discusses the Euro:
 - i. “The Center Party says no to EMU ‘for the foreseeable future.’”
- 5th of June, page 13.
 - This article further discusses the Euro:
 - i. “The main reasons for the Christian Democrats (to say no to the Euro)²²⁵ is the Swedish economy...”
 - ii. “We will continue working for that Sweden enters (the Euro) as soon as possible.”²²⁶
- 6th of June, page 10.
 - This article reports from a debate on the Euro which took place in the parliament:
 - i. “[The party president of the Center Party] called EMU a centralistic high-risk project which Sweden should opt-out of for the foreseeable future.”
 - ii. “The Christian Democrats are open to changing the constitution, even if they said ‘No’ to EMU a year ago because of Sweden’s shaky economy.”
- 9th of June, page 10.
 - This article reports that at the Greens’ congress they decided that they will demand that the government uses its veto to block the new Treaty:
 - i. “The Greens demand that Göran Persson uses the veto at the EU summit 16th-17th June in Amsterdam and says no to the entirety of the EU’s new Treaty.”
- 19th of June, page 12.

²²⁵ My parentheses.

²²⁶ Statement by a representative of the Moderates. My parentheses.

- This article reports from the European Council meeting where the Amsterdam Treaty was discussed:
 - i. “He says that Sweden has a special responsibility to work for the Baltics to become members [in the EU].”²²⁷
 - ii. “[The Left Party] demand a referendum on the new Treaty.”
 - iii. “The Greens are of the same opinion.”²²⁸

2008

Opposition towards policy²²⁹

- 19th of January, page 15.
 - In this article, it is reported that the president of the Left Party, Lars Ohly, has launched a campaign called “Ask the people”, to demand a referendum on the new Treaty:
 - i. ... Lars Ohly explained why they say no to the new Treaty. Among other things, they point to the fact that political power in a number of policy areas is moved from the member states to Brussels...”
- 18th of March, page 9.
 - In this article, a spokesperson for the Greens is calling on the prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt, to not go on an official visit to China because of the Chinese suppression of protests in Tibet:
 - i. “Sweden should also bring this up at the EU level, because if other countries have planned visits to China there should be a common position.”
- 17th of April, page 15.
 - In this article, a known EU skeptic in the Social Democrats, Sören Wibe, leaves the party because he finds that it has become too EU positive and that it did not fight enough for labor rights in the new Treaty. A few months before, in December 2007, the European Court of Justice had shocked the Swedish labor movement with the so-called Laval case where it ruled that Swedish unions did not have a right to take action and institute a blockade of a construction site against Latvian workers whose employer had not signed a collective agreement with the Swedish construction workers union. The ruling exacerbated the negative sentiments towards the EU already felt on the Swedish left:
 - i. “We shall demand from the government that they do what they can to ensure the right to collective agreement.”

²²⁷ Statement by a representative of the Moderates.

²²⁸ This sentence appears immediately after the previous quote. We thus understand that the Greens also demand a referendum.

²²⁹ No opposition towards personality found this time period.

- 6th of May, page 6.
 - In this op-ed, representatives of the Left Party discuss the new Treaty and demand that Sweden secure the right to collective agreements:
 - i. “We demand the right to collective agreement is secured before the Lisbon Treaty is ratified in parliament.”
- 13th of May, page 7.
 - In this op-ed, union representatives together with representatives of the Social Democrats, are pushing the government to work for a strengthening of the Swedish labor market model by promoting different legislative solutions at the EU level. The op-ed is written in the light of the previously mentioned Laval case:
 - i. “These judgements demand a revision of EU legislation, which must be pushed by the Swedish government.”
- 15th of May, page 13.
 - In this article, it is reported that the Social Democrats attempt to integrate the issue of the Swedish labor market model into the EU presidency in the second half of 2009 failed.
 - i. “[Mona Sahlin] also demands initiative against the Posted Workers Directive.”

2009

Opposition towards policy²³⁰

- 10th of January, page 9.
 - Because of the war in the Gaza strip, the Social Democrats want EU’s deal with Israel to be put on hold:
 - i. “The Social Democrats go further than the government in reacting to Israel’s attack on Gaza. The EU deal should be put on ice...”
- 23rd of January, page 10.
 - In this article it is reported that the Swedish government is hesitant towards accepting innocent inmates from Guántanamo Bay prison. This is criticized by the Social Democrats, which thinks the government should take action at the EU level:
 - i. “Sweden should share the load and therefore the foreign minister should join his colleagues in the EU who actively speak out in favor of accepting exonerated prisoners.”
- 19th of April, page 19.

²³⁰ No opposition towards personality found this time period.

- This article also deals with the issue of Dawit Isaac. In it, Urban Ahlin, a high ranking representative of the Social Democrats, expresses that he thinks the Swedish government should act on the EU level. The following quote is preceded by a proposal that Sweden could work for a bargain between the EU and Eritrea: they release Isaac while the EU supports Eritrea in their border dispute with Ethiopia:
 - i. “He says unequivocally yes on [Dagens Nyheter’s] question regarding whether Sweden should take such initiatives during the EU presidency.”
- 28th of May, page 6.
 - In this op-ed, representatives of the Social Democrats write about the upcoming Swedish presidency in the Council of Ministers to put pressure on the government to make migration a central tenet of the presidency. The article contains other proposals but they are not direct at the government, but rather as part of the election campaign for the European Parliament elections. One of the signatures of the article belongs to a candidate for the EP:
 - i. The Prime Minister must keep his promise and make migration policy a cornerstone of his presidency in the EU.”
- 5th of June, page 6.
 - In this op-ed, again the Social Democrats, have proposals partly towards the government behavior in Brussels and partly towards the EU at-large, as part of the election campaign. One of the signatures of the op-ed belongs to a candidate for the EP. This time the topic is youth unemployment. However, most of the article’s proposals regard domestic policy:
 - i. “It is important that Sweden, as president of the EU, from day one takes the lead in the fight against youth unemployment.”
- 19th of June, page 7.
 - This is also an op-ed, by the Social Democratic spokesperson for foreign affairs, Urban Ahlin. In it, he criticizes the right-wing government’s policy surrounding nuclear disarmament. The op-ed was written in the wake of a nuclear test launch by North Korea.
 - i. “Sweden must use the EU presidency to increase pressure on nuclear disarmament.”

2012

Opposition towards personality

- 18th of January, page 11.
 - In this article, it is reported that the prime minister is ready to enter the EU’s financial pact without the support of the Social Democrats. In this statement, then party president Håkan Juholt explain why the Social Democrats say no:

- i. “As it stands right now, where the government has not been able to negotiate exceptions, this is too unclear, way too bad. It would amount to Sweden joining the Euro from the back door which we Social democrats are not ready to accept.”

Opposition towards policy

- 20th of January, page 6.
 - In this debate article, representatives of the Greens write that they could support the government in agreeing to the EU’s financial pact if they demand a permanent exception for Sweden from the Euro.
 - i. “Today the finance minister and the European Affairs Council will have a joint consultation in the run up to the continued negotiations regarding the financial pact. We will then take up the issue of a permanent exception for Sweden from participating in the Euro.”
- 25th of January, page 12.
 - In this short news article, it is reported that the government lost a vote in the parliament regarding an EU policy. The Commission wanted a new mandate to negotiate a new fishery agreement with Morocco. It is not reported which parties opposed but a fair assumption is that all opposition parties opposed.
 - i. “The second defeat regards the government’s proposal that the European Commission should get a new mandate to start negotiating a new fishery agreement with Morocco.”
- 31st of January, page 8.
 - This article reports from an EU summit, where the financial pact has been discussed and decided upon. The opposition parties opposed a statement by the European Council, and the government was forced to make a reservation.
 - i. “Reinfeldt was forced to reserve against the statement since the Social Democrats and the other opposition parties in the EAC said no to proposals that youth unemployment should inter alia be fought by lowering taxes.”

2016

Opposition towards policy²³¹

- 18th of February, page 8.

²³¹ No opposition towards personality found this time period.

- This article is written in the midst of the migration crisis. It reports from a meeting in the European Affairs Council. The Moderates want the government to act stronger and clearer in Brussels, and push for a more fair system in terms of the division of migrants.
 - i. “I would like to see the prime minister slam his fist on the table and speak up...’ The Moderates want Sweden to work for that [the countries that are not assuming responsibility regarding migrants] should be punished economically. ‘I think they should try to use the budget to put more pressure.’”
- 18th of March, page 20.
 - This article concerns the EU’s deal with Turkey regarding migration. The deal was struck to hinder migrants from reaching Europe. In it, the president of the Left Party is interviewed.
 - i. “Jonas Sjöstedt of the Left Party thinks that Sweden should say no to a deal with Turkey.”
- 25th of June, page 18.
 - This article was published just a few days after the Brexit referendum, which saw the UK vote yes to leave the Union. In it, we can read that the EU skeptic parties, the Left Party and the Sweden Democrats, want the government to renegotiate Sweden’s EU membership:
 - i. “The Left Party, which cooperates with the government on the budget, thinks that Brexit is a ‘golden opportunity’ to renegotiate the Swedish membership.”
 - ii. “... Jimmie Åkesson holds, like the Left Party, that it is time for a renegotiation of the Swedish agreement with the EU.”
- 28th of June, page 11-12.
 - This article deals with the same topic as the previous.
 - i. “The Swedish position should, according to the president of the Sweden Democrats, be, like the British did before, to demand a renegotiation of the membership terms and thereafter a referendum about ‘Swexit’.
 - ii. “The Left Party wants Sweden to seize the opportunity and negotiate a social protocol which makes clear that Swedish collective agreements should not be able to be bypassed.”

2021

Opposition towards personality

- 23rd of July, page 7.

- In this article, the minister for business, agriculture and forestry Ibrahim Baylan is criticized by a moderate, John Widgren, for his comportment in Brussels:
 - i. “Moreover, the moderate criticizes Baylan for not taking part in the first Council meeting for agriculture since the government took office again.”

Opposition towards policy

- 17th of July, page 10.
 - In this article, an MEP of the Moderates is criticizing the government’s forestry policy in the EU:
 - i. “It is regrettable that the government has failed in defending Swedish interests.”
- 28th of November, page 22.
 - In this article, a previous minister of the Greens (which left the government a few days earlier) expresses concern over the government’s forestry policy in the EU. Now that she is no longer in government and can speak more freely, she particularly criticizes the government’s inclination to protect the Swedish forest industry and running its errands.
 - i. “They have wanted to water down the proposals with stricter environmental protection.. Regarding the taxonomy, Sweden has decided to hit the breaks. That Swedish forestry should be allowed to continue business as usual.”
- 4th of December, page 28.
 - In this article, it is reported that Sweden has flip-flopped on the EU directive for minimum wages, and the minister for the labor market is now going to vote yes in the Council. Parts of the opposition are not in agreement:
 - i. “A majority in the EAC supported the government’s position, while the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats were against it.”
- 14th of Decembre, page 5.
 - In this debate article, the president of the Left Party, Nooshi Dadgostar, criticizes the government’s energy policy in the EU. At this time, the price for electricity was at times very high.
 - i. “To bring down energy prices, the government must immediately stop the initiation of new transmission cables to Europe and drop the ambition for a common price for electricity in the EU.”
- 22nd of December, page 12.
 - This article reports that the Moderates reported the prime minister Magdalena Andersson to the Committee on the Constitution. They accuse her for going

against the majority's opinion in the EAC and not arguing for an inclusion of nuclear power into the EU taxonomy at the EU summit:

- i. “A majority in the Council requested that the prime minister argue that nuclear power should be classified as sustainable on the EU’s list of sustainable investments, the so-called taxonomy... Andersson stated that she will on the one hand present the position of the EAC, and on the other hand inform her colleagues in Brussels that that position is not endorsed by the *Riksdag* at-large... ‘This is a new situation. We have a prime minister that is tasked with representing Sweden in the European Council and who presents two conflicting positions...’²³².

²³² Though it is not stated clearly in the article, we do understand that there are two competing opinions between the government on the one hand and parts of the opposition on the other.