

FACTS ABOUT THE EU

Sweden in the EU



PHOTO: CAMILLA SVENSK

Sweden has been a member of the European Union (the EU) since 1995. Sweden cooperates with the other member states in many areas, for example trade, the environment, consumer protection and refugee policy.

One of the EU's most important tasks is to facilitate trade between member states, making it easy to buy and sell goods and services. The EU also enables citizens of the EU member states to move around freely in the EU. For example, Sweden's EU membership allows Swedish citizens to move to and work in other member states. EU cooperation has grown over the years and now spans a wide range of areas. Most money today is spent on agricultural policy and regional policy. The money is used, for example, to reduce wealth inequality between different EU member states and to support agriculture. EU cooperation also includes crime prevention, environmental issues and refugee policy. Sweden and the other member states decide jointly on new EU laws which are to apply in all member states. Many Swedish laws thus originate from EU laws.

The Government represents Sweden

When EU laws are made, both the Swedish Government and the Riksdag are part of the process. The Govern-

ment represents Sweden in the EU and negotiates with the other 27 member states on the formulation of EU policies. This work is carried out in the Council of Ministers, which takes decisions on new EU laws.

Support for EU policies in the Riksdag

The Government has to discuss and gain support for its opinions in the Riksdag before the Council of Ministers

Referendum in Sweden on EU membership

Sweden became a member of the European Union on 1 January 1995. In November the previous year there was a referendum, when the Swedish people were given the opportunity to take a position on EU membership. Sweden and the EU had been negotiating on a membership agreement for several years.

The question in the referendum was: "Do you believe that Sweden should be a member of the EU in accordance with the agreement between Sweden and the member states of the EU?"

The result was that 52.3 per cent voted "yes" and 46.8 per cent voted "no" to EU membership. Almost 1 per cent voted blank. There was an 83.3 per cent turnout.

takes a decision. This is done in several stages, first in the committee in charge of the specific subject area concerned, and then in the Riksdag Committee on EU Affairs.

If the proposal is about an environmental matter, for example, the Minister for the Environment will discuss

it first with the members of the Committee on Environment and Agriculture. The Minister will then check with the Committee on EU Affairs. The Riksdag Committee on EU Affairs consists of 17 members. The Government needs the support of the Committee on EU Affairs to pursue its position in negotiations with the other member states in the Council of Ministers.

Examination of the EU's legislative proposals

In certain areas, both the EU and the member states have the right to decide. When the European Commission presents a legislative proposal in such an area, it must justify why the decision should be taken by the EU.

The Riksdag and the parliaments of the other EU member states examine these legislative proposals. This is known as carrying out a subsidiarity check. The purpose of a subsidiarity check is to determine what is the more effective option – that each individual state or the EU should decide.

The Riksdag has on several occasions concluded that EU proposals should be decided closer to citizens. It is necessary for at least a third of the parliaments to be of this opinion for the European Commission to review its proposal.

The European Parliament – the voice of the people in the EU

The governments represented in the Council of Ministers are not alone in deciding on new EU laws. Usually, the decisions are taken jointly by the Council and the European Parliament.

The members of the European Parliament are intended to represent the citizens of all the member states. For this reason, they are elected in general elections in the member states. Elections to the European Parliament are held every five years and the next election will be in May 2019. There are 751 MEPs in all, 20 of them from Sweden.

When the Swedish MEPs debate and vote on new EU laws, they do this as representatives of their voters and their party, not as representatives of their country.

How an EU law is made

Laws can be made in different ways in the EU. Here is a description of how this is usually done and how the Government and the Riksdag are involved in the decision-making process.

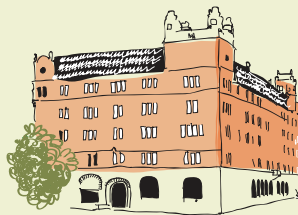
1. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The European Commission presents a proposed directive, an EU law.



2. THE GOVERNMENT

The Government takes a position on whether it wishes to amend or approve the proposal.



3. THE COMMITTEES IN THE RIKSDAG

The Riksdag committee responsible for the matter asks the Government to provide information on the proposal. The committee gives its views to the Government.



Sweden and the euro

In a referendum in 2003, a majority of voters in Sweden voted against introducing the euro in Sweden. The parties in the Riksdag said that they would respect the result of the referendum and Sweden has therefore not attempted to participate in the currency union and introduce the euro.

A country must meet certain requirements to introduce the euro as its currency. Sweden does not meet all the requirements, for example the requirement of having a stable rate of exchange. This is a result of the fact that Sweden has chosen not to participate in the European exchange rate mechanism (ERM), which means that a particular currency is linked to the euro.

It is up to Swedish politicians to decide whether they want to raise the question of a new referendum on the euro.

of state and government of the member states meet to draw up the guidelines for the long-term development and policy of the EU. The Prime Minister informs the Riksdag of the issues that are to be raised before he participates in European Council summits and also reports back after the meetings have taken place.

Local politicians in the EU Committee of the Regions

Many EU decisions affect municipalities, county councils and regions. For this reason, elected representatives at the local level have their own way of influencing the EU in matters that affect them. They do this through the EU Committee of the Regions, twelve of the members of which are Swedish municipal and county council politicians.

Member states have to follow EU laws

Once the EU has decided on a new law, Sweden and all the other member states have to follow it. There are different types of EU laws. One of these – a directive – describes targets that need to be reached.

The member states may determine themselves how the directives are to be introduced into their own legislations to enable the targets to be reached. It is the

The Prime Minister represents Sweden in the European Council

The Swedish Prime Minister participates in the EU summits in the European Council. This is where the heads

4. COMMITTEE ON EU AFFAIRS OF THE RIKSDAG

Prior to the meeting of the Council of Ministers, the minister responsible comes to the Committee on EU Affairs to obtain support for the Government's position in the Council.



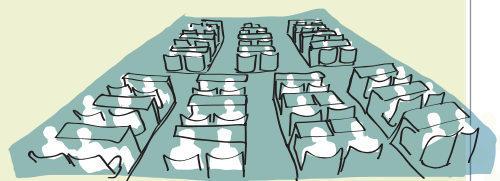
5. THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Following discussions and negotiations, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers have reached agreement on the Commission's proposal and take a decision to approve the directive.



6. SWEDEN – THE GOVERNMENT AND THE RIKSDAG

Sweden is to implement the directive in its legislation. The Government submits a bill to the Riksdag on a new law or amendment to a law. The law can start to apply once the Riksdag approves the bill.



Ways to influence the EU

There are various ways of influencing proposed legislation or commenting on decisions taken by the EU.

If you want to influence a proposed new EU law, you can contact the European Commission, because it is the Commission that draws up proposed laws.

It is then the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament that take a decision on the new EU law. If you would like to influence this phase, you can either contact the Government minister who is going to participate in the Council of Ministers or one of the Swedish MEPs, who can also vote on the proposal. You can also contact the Riksdag members who are about to give the Government their points of view prior to the decision in the Council of Ministers.

If you think Sweden is not following EU rules, you are entitled to report this to the European Commission, which is responsible for ensuring that the member states comply with what the EU has decided. If you want to complain about EU institutions, you can contact the European Ombudsman, whose responsibility it is to look into unsatisfactory practices in EU institutions.

Government's task to look into how an EU directive is to be implemented in Sweden. Sometimes Swedish laws need to be amended or a new Swedish law may need to be created. In this case, a bill is presented to the Riksdag, in exactly the same way as when a Swedish law is made.

The law begins to apply when the Riksdag approves the bill, and when the law comes into effect, the directive is said to be implemented. It is usually the task of a government agency to work with the procedure of implementing the directive and applying the new rules.

Another type of EU law is known as a regulation. This applies in the same way in all EU member states. Once the EU has decided on the law, the Swedish government agency responsible for the particular issue in Sweden will apply the regulation. In this case, the Riksdag does not take a decision. Such regulations may for example concern rules applying to food, the responsibility of the National Food Agency, or rules applying to cultivation, which are the responsibility of the Swedish Board of Agriculture.

If Sweden does not follow EU rules

The European Commission monitors Sweden and the other member states to check that they are following the rules that the EU has decided on.

If Sweden has not implemented a directive on time or in the right way, the European Commission can sue Sweden in the Court of Justice of the European Union. The task of the Court is then to decide on whether Sweden has violated EU rules. If Sweden is found guilty, it can result in fines.

Individual citizens can contact the European Commission and report Sweden or any other EU member state if they feel the country is not following EU regulations. The Commission then decides whether to pursue the matter further.

EU laws take precedence

If a Swedish law and an EU law conflict with each other, it is the EU law that should apply. This is known as the principle of the precedence of EU legislation over national legislation. If a Swedish court of law is uncertain as to how it should interpret EU rules, it can consult the Court of Justice for guidance. This is referred to as requesting a preliminary ruling. In its ruling, the Court of Justice determines how EU law is to be interpreted in the particular case in question. Then, the Swedish court can proceed and rule in the actual case.

Sweden pays an annual contribution to the EU

In order to implement what the member states have decided on, money is needed. All member states therefore pay a contribution for EU membership every year. Most of the money goes back to the member states in the form of support and subsidies.

In recent years, Sweden has paid approx. SEK 30–40 billion a year in EU contributions. During the same period, Sweden has got back around SEK 10–12 billion a year in the form of various kinds of support. This means that Sweden pays more into the EU budget than it gets back. This is because the EU should level out the differences between countries. Countries with weak economies receive more EU money than countries with strong economies.

Money Sweden receives from the EU goes mainly to agricultural support, but also to regional development and labour market support.

Read more

- www.eu.riksdagen.se
- www.riksdagen.se