

FACTS ABOUT THE EU

Sweden in the EU

Sweden has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995. This means that as a member state it participates in decision-making on EU policies together with the other members. As a member, Sweden can influence the development of the EU, but it also has to follow EU decisions it would prefer to reject.

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. This form of cooperation is usually referred to as the Single Market.

The EU's single market also enables citizens of the EU member states to move around freely in the EU. Sweden's EU membership allows Swedish citizens to move to and work in other member states without needing work and residence permits.

EU cooperation has grown over the years and now spans many policy areas, for example agricultural policy, regional policy, crime prevention, environmental issues and refugee policy. Sweden and the other member states decide jointly on new EU laws which are to apply in the member states. Many Swedish laws thus originate from EU laws.

The Government represents Sweden in the EU

Both the Government and the Swedish Parliament – the Riksdag – take part in the EU decision-making process,

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.

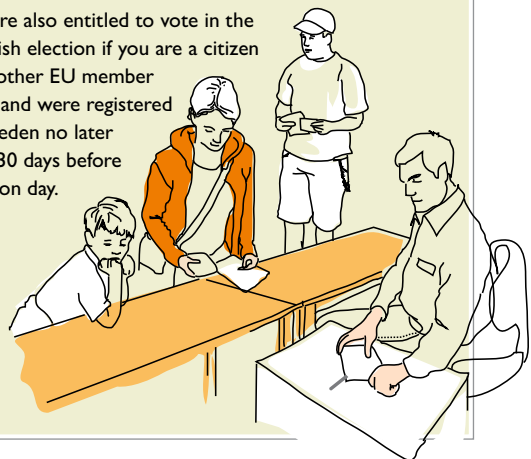
The Riksdag has on several occasions concluded that EU proposals should be decided closer to citizens. It is necessary for at least a third of the parliaments to be of this opinion for the European Commission to review its proposal.

Elections to the European Parliament, 2014

There will be elections to the European Parliament in all EU member states in May 2014. In Sweden, the elections will take place on Sunday, 25 May, and we will be electing 20 MEPs. A total of 751 MEPs will be elected in the whole of the EU.

The members of the European Parliament represent their voters and their party. Parties that are similar to each other work together in the European Parliament and form party groups. In Sweden, you are entitled to vote in the election if you are a Swedish citizen and you have reached the age of 18 by the election day at the latest.

You are also entitled to vote in the Swedish election if you are a citizen of another EU member state and were registered in Sweden no later than 30 days before election day.



and they are both involved on the implementation of EU laws in Sweden.

The Government 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.

The Swedish Prime Minister participates in the EU summits in the European Council. This is where the heads of state and government of the member states meet to draw up the guidelines for the future and discuss long-term EU issues.

Support for EU policies in the Riksdag

The Government has to discuss and gain support for its EU policies in the Riksdag. Members of the Riksdag may ask questions and give their views to the Government concerning the Government's EU policies.

Some of the members – 17 in all – are also members of the Committee on EU Affairs and thus have a special role to play. The Government has to check with the

Committee on EU Affairs before the Government ministers take part in the decision-making on new EU laws in the Council of Ministers. The Government needs these members' support in order to pursue its position.

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. This means that the members of the European Parliament also influence EU decisions.

They are intended to represent the citizens of all the member states. For this reason, they are elected in general elections in the member states. 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.

Elections to the European Parliament are held every five years, and the next election is in May 2014.

Local politicians in the EU Committee of the Regions

Many EU decisions affect municipalities, county councils and regions. For this reason, the elected representa-

tives 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.

According to the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), approximately two thirds of the issues on the agenda of the local authorities are connected in some way to EU policy.

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. Certain EU laws – regulations – apply in the same way in all EU member states. Other laws – directives – are more of a description of targets 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 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 to be made.

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.

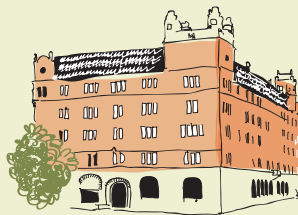
1. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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

of a government agency to work with the procedure of implementing the directive and applying the new rules.

Swedish authorities and government agencies are affected by EU policies in various ways. They are also responsible for monitoring developments in EU policy and providing updated information within their particular areas. In their decisions and regulations they also have to take EU rules into consideration. Officials at the government agencies can also participate as specialists in working groups in the EU.

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 EC Court of Justice. The task of the EU 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 consider that the country is not following EU regulations. It is the Commission that then decides whether to pursue the matter further.

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

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

After some time, 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 complaining about 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 will 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 that Sweden is not following EU rules, you can 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 the EU institutions.

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. The result was 52.3 per cent in favour and 46.8 per cent against membership of the EU. There was an 83.3 per cent turnout.

Projects in Sweden can apply for EU support

Certain groups in Sweden, as in other EU member states, can apply for financial support from the EU for development projects. Such support is available for many different kinds of activities. Some examples of these are regional development, culture, rural development, research and public health projects.

The EU will primarily provide contributions to projects that are based on cooperation between participants from several member states. The projects should further development in the other member states and have a European dimension. Every project must meet certain criteria to be granted funding.

Usually, such projects do not receive all of their funding from the EU, but also need money from other sources.

Much of this EU support is dealt with by government agencies in the member states. This means that Swedish agencies can often provide information about which EU support is available in their own field.

In certain cases, the EU can give financial support to projects that are only being carried out in one single country without cooperation with groups in other member states. This mainly concerns support from the EU's Regional Fund, Social Fund and Agricultural Fund.

The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has overall responsibility for support from the Regional Fund in Sweden, while the ESF Council is responsible for support from the Social Fund. Agricultural support is the responsibility of the Swedish Board of Agriculture.

Read more

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

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 regulations, it can consult the EU Court of Justice and request a preliminary ruling. In its ruling, the EU 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

All member states pay a contribution for EU membership every year. The contribution is made up of revenues from the states' gross national income (GNI), VAT revenues and tariffs and duties from trading with countries outside the EU.

During the last few years, Sweden has paid approx. SEK 30–37 billion per year, and has got back approx. SEK 10–13 billion in the form of various kinds of support. The support is mainly agricultural, but to a certain extent also comes from the EU's Regional and Social Funds.