

INVOLUNTARY XENOPHOBIC REFLEX SHOWS ENTRENCHED XENOPHOBIA IN WESTERN EUROPEAN ACADEMIA: THE SWEDISH CASE

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Introduction

A Swedish professor has been accused of committing xenophobic acts towards a Turkish university student. Initially, the specific details of the accusations were not made public, but it has been reported that the student felt targeted and marginalized because of her Turkish heritage. This incident highlights the ongoing problem of xenophobia and racism in some Western European academic institutions ,even if it is assumed to be limited ,and the need for increased awareness and action to address it.

Incident

A third-year Turkish psychology undergraduate was accepted by an Erasmus fund for a research internship at a Swedish university of her choosing during the summer of 2023 as exchange student.[1]In her search for sections of the University, a professor who directs a clinical psychology study group at university, piqued her attention. The student expressed her interest in being considered for a research project in an e-mail written on November 23, 2022.[2] A few hours later, the professor responded as follows:

> Dear [applicant], I would love to host you. However, since Turkey does not allow Sweden to join NATO, I have to decline. Sorry! All the Best...[3]

The student filed a discrimination complaint with the university on 5th of December after getting this response, describing the professor's reaction as "based on political reasons" and "discriminatory if not completely racist." On December 6, she did receive an apology from the psychology department's deputy head.[4]

Measures Taken So Far by the Swedish University

In the initial e-mail sent to the student on the 6th of December, the deputy head indicated that Professor acknowledged that his behavior was inappropriate and that "a number of proactive steps are planned within the department," including "training on equal terms and the Swedish Discrimination Act."[5] The chair of the Department of Psychology at University, acknowledges to the media outlets that the incident occurred and that "internal procedures" had been followed. He made the following remarks:

> We receive many inquiries from students who are interested in visiting us as research interns. We are unable to receive them all, but expect that any request is responded to in a professional manner. In this case, as soon as we learnt about this issue we acted and have handled it according to our routines.[6]

The student believed her encounter was only "the tip of the iceberg" and took the matter seriously enough to file a formal complaint. She commented: If he did this to me, he would do this to other students with different racial backgrounds who apply to the university.[7]

This occurrence, at first glance, seems ostensibly an isolated example of a lack of tolerance and acceptance in academia. However, in my judgment, the answer to the following question needs to be investigated: Is this just an isolated incident and unprofessional reply in academia of the mentioned country, or is it the involuntary expression of a deep-seated impulse of society in question? To answer this question, it is helpful to briefly recall the last elections in Sweden and the attitudes of various parties on issues that may be related to xenophobia and racism.

Latest Swedish Election

After the right-wing bloc secured a majority in the 2022 September election, the head of Sweden's Moderates party, Ulf Kristersson, reached an agreement on October 14 with the Christian Democrats and the Liberals to establish a minority coalition administration. There are three parties in this coalition administration. It consists of the Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and Liberals. In addition, the administration will have parliamentary backing from its far-right partner, nationalist Sweden Democrats, outside the cabinet.[8]

As a result of the September 11 election, the right-wing bloc now has 176 seats in the legislature, while the left-wing group has 173. The Sweden Democrats were the most successful party in the election. They became the second-largest party with a record 20,5 percent of the vote. [9]

Common understanding assumes that the Swedish Democrats were created by Nazi sympathizers and have been marginalized for decades. Some commentators argue that the Swedish Democrat's election campaign emphasis on immigration and violent crime has never before been placed at the center of mainstream Swedish politics. This is not necessarily true. It is worth remembering that some articles warned of the dangers of the rise of the Swedish Democrats in the last election. In these articles, the party's relations with the promotion of the NAZI ideology were foregrounded.[10]

Tidö Agreement: Agreement with the Far Right

The Tidö Agreement is the political agreement of the Swedish Riksdag (Parliament) parties from the right-wing bloc to nominate Ulf Kristersson of the Moderate Party as the Swedish prime minister and the Kristersson Cabinet as the Swedish government after the last election. The name was derived from the castle where the negotiations took place.

The pact includes six key sectors: crime; healthcare; education; growth and household economy; immigration and integration, environment, and energy. Eleven times, the text indicates that the Swedish Democrats will have "full and equal influence" alongside the other parties in drafting legislation, the appointment of committee chairs, and "European concerns affecting areas covered" by the agreement.[11]

Tidö's stance on immigration is one of its most heavily criticized characteristics. Due to the Tidö agreement, the new government is poised to make significant changes to the nation's refugee and immigration policy, including curbing immigration laws and tightening eligibility requirements for foreigners receiving state assistance. In addition, the new regulations will result in stricter imprisonment, making it more difficult for refugees and asylum-seekers to enter Sweden.[12]

Paradigm shift

In addition to the Tidö agreement, the government policy statement must be read to comprehend the reforms the new Swedish government aims to make.[13] It is a straightforward acknowledgment of profound socioeconomic difficulties that have been neglected or denied in Sweden for too long due to "political correctness."[14]

Ulf Kristersson made the following statement:

> "Several of the cornerstones of the Swedish welfare state internal security, external security, energy supply, and social cohesion must now be repaired and reinforced. If they fail entirely, the damage will be monumental. And if that happens, Sweden will no longer be Sweden ☀ All of this will take time. And we should all understand how serious this is there will be a great deal of conflict when the power of the criminal gangs is threatened. I want to stress the risk that things may get worse before they get better. The serious criminals who control districts and illegal markets will not surrender them willingly. The gangs that have infiltrated legal activities and that corrupt public authorities and businesses will not cede ground voluntarily. But there is no other way forward. Government must both take up this fight and win it. Security has become the great issue of freedom of our time ☀ The result has been dangerous social exclusion among many people born in other countries, but also among children and young people born here in Sweden ☀ This Government's message is that this cannot continue. A paradigm shift is now taking place in Swedish migration policy."[15]

Is There A Paradigm Shift?

Many individuals fear that there will be a new wave of right-wing parties either directly coming to power in Europe or affecting the government. For example, Rebecka Fallenkvist, a 27-year-old media star and politician for the Sweden Democrats, allegedly spoke scary words, "Helg seger." The terminology resembles the Nazi salute by one letter, "Sieg Heil." This and other examples and messages of the government officials are shown as examples of the "paradigm shift" of the new cabinet.[16]

However, some argue that "paradigm shift" should not be exaggerated. It had already started at different levels in Sweden.[17] The leader of the Social Democratic Party, Magdalena Andersson, claimed the "Paradigm shift" happened in 2015. She stated that:

> "The paradigm shift happened in 2015, and it was us who carried it out ☀ The big rearrangement of migration policy was carried out by us Social Democrats after the refugee crisis of 2015, with a thoroughgoing tightening up of the policy."[18]

After the election, the Swedish digital news publisher, The Local, did a non-scientific survey. It asked the following question:

> " ☀□□ they felt welcome in Sweden, how they felt towards Sweden's new right-wing Sweden Democrat-backed government, whether they thought the statement "Sweden is a racist and xenophobic country" was true or false, and if the new government had affected their plans to stay in Sweden..."[19]

The survey revealed that many immigrants believe there has always been a structural racism problem in Sweden.

For example, an individual from western Sweden gave the following example:

> "I know a black person from Ghana who got a masters degree in financial engineering in Sweden and has not been able to find a job for two year ☀ All of his classmates found a job. Now he works at Burger King"[20]

Furthermore, some immigrants believe that, even before the current government, Swedes were racist. For example, a humanitarian worker stated:

> " ☀□□□ always been [racist] under the surface, but I still think it's not all Swedes ☀ It is a hard society to integrate into. They believe the image that Sweden is a tolerant society protecting human rights but the reality is not so squeaky clean..."[21]

Another Immigrant, Kashyap Haresamudram, an Indian Ph.D. student, argues that the Swedes live in a "bubble" and state the following:

> "As a PhD student, I generally tend to meet academics, other highly educated individuals, and internationally oriented Swedes, and within this bubble I feel welcome and comfortable ☀ But outside this bubble, there are times when I feel like

I do not fit in, when I'm very aware that I'm seen as an outsider. And that can be uncomfortable when all you want to do is blend in ..."[22]

Conclusion

To make a sound assessment on the issue of xenophobia and racism in Sweden, it is necessary to look at Sweden's historical record on structured entrenched discrimination. As we explained in our AVİM analysis entitled Century Old White Supremacism and the Far-Rights Rise in Sweden: A Credible Challenge to Progressive Values and Policies[23], the Scandinavian eugenics[i] movement [24] peaked before the First World War and turned into practice in the 1930s and 1940s. In that period, Sweden was the only country with a national eugenics society and used sterilization policies between 1934 and 1976. The first Swedish law on sterilization came into force in 1935 and was expanded in 1941. Sterilization without the consent of the patient was permitted. For example, the mentally impaired were sterilized on a large scale up to the early 1950s. This process aimed to purify the Swedish stock, freeing it from the transmission of genetic material which would produce, in future generations, such individuals who are undesirable among sound and healthy people. In 1997, a Swedish government commission was established to investigate sterilization practices between 1935 and 1975. The commission determined in a report that up to 63,000 people were sterilized with state approval to improve Swedish "racial purity" as part of a policy of ethnic hygiene. This led to a parliamentary decision in 1999 to give restitution to persons who had been subjected to compulsory sterilization. The reflections of a similar understanding were experienced in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic. While Sweden was trying to apply "herd immunity", it suffered great losses in its elderly population with the understanding that the herd would survive. Still, for that to happen, weaker members of society must be sacrificed. [25]

These discriminatory practices that Sweden applied to her citizens indicate that the majority of Swedish society can have an understanding that normalizes sacrificing the weak and "others" for the survival of the strong. Unfortunately, the current reflections of this understanding may appear in the form of xenophobia extending up to racism, adopting discriminatory hostile approaches against certain groups like Turks, and normalizing anti-Muslim sentiments. The truth is Swedish example is, unfortunately, sorrowful and hurtful.

**Photograph: The Local*

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[20] Waterton.

[21] Waterton.

[22] Waterton.

[23] Tulun, Century Old White Supremacism And The Far-Rights Rise In Sweden: A Credible Challenge To Progressive Values And Policies?

[24] The aim of eugenics is to improve the genetic quality of a human population. For this improvement to occur, people and groups judged to be inferior can be excluded or sacrificed for those who are judged superior and strong enough to survive. Sir Francis Galton, a pioneer of eugenics who coined the term, explained the aim of eugenics in July 1904 as to bring as many influences as can be reasonably employed, to cause the useful classes in the community to contribute more than their proportion to the next generation

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