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Two Years of Ulf Kristersson's Government in Sweden: A Shift in Migration Policy and the Fight Against Crime

The minority coalition government of Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, in power in Sweden since October 2022, has faced significant challenges over the past two years, particularly in tackling organised crime. The policies introduced so far – such as stricter immigration laws and a reduction in refugee intake – have contributed to improving security but have also led to a decline in support for smaller centre-right parties, namely the Christian Democrats and the Liberals.

The Tidö Agreement, signed in October 2022, serves as the foundation for the functioning of Kristersson's minority centre-right coalition (comprising the Moderates, Christian Democrats, and Liberals, holding a total of 103 seats in the 349-member parliament), which is supported by the Sweden Democrats (SD). The agreement outlines cooperation in seven areas, with significant attention given to changes in immigration and integration policies, including tightening immigration regulations and combating organised crime (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 723](#)).

A New Paradigm in Migration Policy. One of the critical areas of the Tidö Agreement was the introduction of significant changes in migration policy, covering new regulations for citizenship, work permits, and permanent residency. As of 1 October 2024, the rules for acquiring Swedish citizenship through the so-called "notification" (anmälan) process have been revised. For young individuals (aged 15 to 21), new requirements regarding "good conduct" have been introduced¹. Meanwhile, citizens of Nordic countries will now submit registration applications to the Swedish Migration Agency (Migrationsverket) instead of the regional administrative board. Migration Minister Johan Forssell has also announced new regulations, including mandatory language and cultural tests for those applying for citizenship. If implemented, applicants must demonstrate Swedish language proficiency at the A2/B1 level and basic knowledge of Swedish societal principles. The government also plans to extend the required residency period in Sweden from 5 to 8 years before applying for citizenship. Other proposed reforms (such as the requirement for applicants to be financially self-sufficient, the possibility of revoking citizenship after serious crimes that threaten the system, and tightening family reunification regulations) are currently under government inquiry or in the consultation phase.

The government has also reduced the number of immigrants being accepted and introduced stricter rules for granting asylum, mirroring Danish solutions (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 411](#)). In the first half of 2024, Sweden recorded a negative migration balance for the first time in 50 years, with 44,100 emigrants, nearly double the previous years' figures. The increase in emigration primarily concerns individuals born in Sweden (11,200, +16% year-on-year), India (2,800, +171% y/y), and Iraq (2,000, +99% y/y) but also Poland (1,400, +96% y/y)². This has coincided with a decrease in asylum applications, with around 7,300 registered by the end of September 2024 (a 25% drop compared to the same period the previous year), and forecasts for 2024 indicate that this will be the lowest figure since 1997³. Furthermore, in the coming years, the government plans to allocate significant funds

¹ For a young person to be eligible to obtain Swedish citizenship, the applicant must not: (1) be reasonably suspected of a crime of a more serious nature; (2) have been convicted of more serious crimes or repeatedly engaged in criminal activities; (3) pose a threat to Sweden's national security or public safety; and (4) be associated with groups or organisations that commit abuse against other people.

² SCB, *Lägsta folkkoningen under 2000-talet*, <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolkning/befolkningens-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/pong/statistiknyhet/befolkningsstatistik-forsta-halvaret-2024/>.

³ Migrationsverket, *Statistik*, <https://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Statistik/Asyl.html>.

to stimulate voluntary repatriation for individuals who have not integrated into Swedish society (known as the repatriation grant). This involves increasing the grant for return migration in 2026 to 350,000 SEK per person (currently only 10,000 SEK). Such a substantial increase is contrary to recommendations from an inquiry concluded in August 2024 and has been strongly criticised by the Liberals.

As part of the broader strategy to tighten migration policy, the government also raised the threshold for the minimum salary required to obtain a work permit to 80% of the median wage (from June 2024, it stands at 28,480 SEK per month). The regulations, which took effect on 1 November 2023, led to a nearly 50% drop in approved work permits in the first half of 2024 compared to the same period in the previous year. Although the changes aimed to reduce the number of lower-skilled workers, they have also affected highly skilled professionals, with a 30% decrease among IT specialists.

Strengthening Sweden's Internal Security. In response to growing public concerns, Kristersson's government has taken numerous measures to improve security (see more: "[IEŚ Commentaries](#)", No. 969). As part of the national strategy against organised crime, adopted in February 2024⁴, harsher penalties have been introduced for gang members as well as the possibility of deporting individuals involved in criminal activities who do not hold Swedish citizenship. One of the following steps was the proposal to introduce the institution of an anonymous witness, reintroduced in late September 2024. According to Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer, allowing anonymous testimony during preliminary investigations and criminal trials would enhance the fight against organised crime and help break the so-called code of silence.

Despite these reforms, organised crime remains a significant challenge for the Swedish government. This is the case even though the number of shootings in Sweden has decreased – there were 164 shootings between January and July 2024, the lowest number since 2017 (compared to 227 shootings in the same period in 2023). A similar trend is observed in the number of explosives. In the analysed period of 2024, there were 66 explosions compared to 101 in 2023. However, the distribution of areas most affected by gun violence has changed slightly – while the number of incidents has decreased in Stockholm, no such trend has been observed in other large cities like Malmö, Gothenburg, and Uppsala. A worrying trend is the increasing involvement of younger individuals in shootings (since 2019, the proportion of suspects under the age of 18 has more than doubled). Moreover, the reduction in shootings has been accompanied by a 17% rise in drug-related crimes compared to 2023⁵. In response to the growing crime rates, the government plans to increase justice system spending by 3.46 billion SEK (around 305 million EUR) in 2025. The total justice system budget will rise by 10% year-on-year, reaching 86.7 billion SEK. The new funds will enable improvements in police operational capacity and an increase in the number of detention and prison facilities. Further increases in spending are planned for 2027, with the budget projected to reach 100 billion SEK.

The growing activity of such groups is also raising concerns in neighbouring states (e.g., in early October, three Swedes aged 15 to 20 were arrested in connection with explosions at the Israeli embassy in Copenhagen). Therefore, in addition to domestic measures, Sweden is also engaging in regional cooperation – in Copenhagen on 21 August 2024, the justice ministers of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden announced intensified joint efforts to combat gang violence, particularly involving minors. Plans include joint Swedish-Norwegian police patrols and enhanced information exchange.

Conclusions

- Faced with high levels of crime, especially involving minors, Prime Minister Kristersson's government, in cooperation with the Sweden Democrats, is tightening penalties, increasing justice system spending, and expanding cooperation with neighbouring countries. These efforts, aimed at improving internal

⁴ Government Offices of Sweden, <https://www.regeringen.se/regeringens-politik/nationell-strategi-mot-organiserad-brottslighet/>.

⁵ Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, *Anmälda brott första halvåret 2024*, <https://bra.se/om-bra/nytt-fran-bra/arkiv/nyheter/2024-07-18-anmalda-brott-forsta-halvaret-2024.html>.

security, are supported by the Social Democrats in most cases. Public opinion polls from September 2024 indicate that the public is not as concerned about crime as in previous years – 40% of respondents view Sweden as safe (compared to just 30% in 2023). More people also report feeling safer in their municipalities – only a quarter of respondents said they fear injury, compared to one-third in June 2023.

- However, the legislative process and the implementation of reforms in this area are accompanied by a decline in support for the smaller centre-right parties. According to recent public opinion polls (Indikator Opinion, Verian, and Demoskop), the opposition bloc holds a 6-7 percentage point lead over the ruling centre-right coalition. While the Moderates and Sweden Democrats maintain support levels of around 20%, the smaller parties, namely the Christian Democrats and Liberals, are hovering around the electoral threshold (4%). This precarious position reflects the complicated status of these centre-right parties within the political landscape. This trend was evident before the elections (see more: [“IEŚ Commentaries”, No. 688](#)), and currently, voters from these parties continue to shift towards stronger parties. On the opposition side, the Social Democrats dominate, maintaining high support levels of around 33%, while the Left Party and the Greens garner over 7%.
- Looking ahead to the parliamentary elections in September 2026, the smaller coalition parties' struggles may threaten Kristersson's government's stability and contribute to delays or weakening of the reform process. Further declines in confidence in the ruling coalition may also lead to abandoning unpopular decisions.