Sweden Essay, Research Paper

1. State (also included is additional basic information):

Sweden, a fairly small country, located in Northwestern Europe on the Scandinavian Peninsula, shares its borders with Norway on the right, and Finland on the left. The northern region of Sweden is within the artic circle whereas the south is more temperate with heavily cultivated fertile land. It is known for its cold winters and large forests. It is ranked 83rd in the world population with over 8.9 million people. It is a highly urbanized country with an 84.7 % urban population distribution (84.7 % of the people live in urban areas, cities, towns, etc.). The capitol of Sweden is Stockholm. Sweden is a homogeneous country with a small Sami minority (approximately 15,000 nomadic reindeer herding Lapps located in the north). Twelve percent of their population consists of immigrants form other European nations. The official language spoken is Swedish (with the Sami and Finnish populations retaining their own languages), although English is widely and fluently spoken in the cities. The dominant religion is Evangelical Lutheranism (94 %), but also includes those who practice Roman Catholicism (1.5 %) and Pentecostal (1 %), with the remaining 3.5 % practicing various religions.

The climate in Sweden is generally milder then other countries located at the same parallel. Their average summer temperature is around sixty-four degrees, and their average winter temperature is around twenty-seven degrees. Daylight hours are short in the winter and almost continuous in the summer. Most of their rain occurs in the early spring and fall.

Sweden, with 173,686 square miles, is comprised of 6.2 % cropland, 1.2 % permanent pastures, 62.3 % forests/woodlands and the remaining 30.3 % other (cities and other urban areas). With over 8.9 million people, Sweden has 52 people per square mile and only a .3 % per year population growth. Their Gross National Product is approximately $227,315,000,000 with a $25,710 per capita (1996 est.).

With agriculture (primarily dairy and livestock) only making up 2.5 % of the G.D.P., Sweden’s key manufacturing industries are precision parts, paper, iron, steel, and processed food. The crops that they do produce are mainly potatoes, grains and sugar beats. Their natural resources are iron ore, lead, copper, zinc, silver and uranium. Sweden is close to 80 % sufficient in providing their own agricultural needs. Recently there have been many measures taken to stop factory-farming companies and to increase the upholding of animal rights.

State involvement in the economy is basically focused on supporting infrastructure and providing services. Sweden has developed an extensive social welfare system which the expense of maintaining has undermined the wealth of the country as a whole. Because of the abundance of social services that Sweden provides for their people (from birth until death), Sweden has one of the highest tax systems in the world. There is a traditionally a low unemployment rate, in addition to very low crime rate. There is an active Government Labor Market policy that results in very few labor disputes, being very beneficial to the population since 80 % of the labor force is unionized.

Sweden’s education system is organized in a simplistic fashion. Basic education, between the ages of seven and fifteen years, is compulsory. At sixteen years of age, children can attend upper secondary schools that can provide them with general and specialized vocational courses. After that is completed, they have the choice to continue on with college. Sweden is home to 34 universities.

The current constitution was passed in 1974 and took effect in 1975, replacing the former one of 1809. The constitution is composed of four basic documents; the Instrument of Government (Regeringsformen) is what sets forth the basic rules of the political system:

v The Act of succession, which governs the line of royal succession to the throne.

v The Freedom of the Press Act, which gives members of the public access to public documents and guarantees the right to publish printed material without government control.

v The Freedom of Expression Act, which is designed to protect freedom of expression in the media; and

v The Ricksdag Act is only semi constitutional and serves as statute law. It overseas the ceremonial functions of the monarch, establishes the Cabinet as nation’s governing body, and the Legislature (Ricksdag) as main representative of people.

This document formalized practices in the operation of the system of government. It became accepted through custom. Another purpose was to establish constraints against discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, skin color and gender and to allow for the right to strike for unions and for employers to lock workers out. All elements of the constitution apply to Swedish citizens and all elements apply to non-citizens except where they are specifically excepted.

Sweden’s history dates back all the way to the Viking Era (800-1050). It was not until the Nineteenth-century that Sweden was marked by the emergence of strong popular movements like the free churches, the temperance and feminist movements and above all, the labor movement (industrialization). During this period, and up until the present, Sweden has carried on in a stable continuance. The constitution was redrafted once with in this period (1975). Within the past ten years, Sweden has not experienced almost any turmoil, with the exception of the economic crisis it experienced when the Moderata Coalition Party took over power from the Social Democratic party in 1991. The Moderata Coalition Party is the only party to have power other then the Social Democratic Party since the early 1930’s.

2. Government:

Sweden is a progressive Democratic nation, despite the fact that it has been a Constitutional Monarchy since 1804. Sweden’s Democracy is run through a Unicameral Parliamentary with 349 seats. These seats are chosen in direct elections under a system of proportional representation. Every three years on the third Sunday in September is when elections are held. Executive power lies within the Cabinet (Prime Minister and 19 ministers), which is responsible to Parliament.

The King is the head-of-state but is purely symbolic. On January 1st, 1980, it was passed through legislation that the crown shall descend to eldest heir, despite sex. The Prime Minister is head-of-government/cabinet and executes executive authority. Speaker of Riksdag (Parliament) nominates a Prime Minister from among leaders of the majority party or coalition in the legislation. The Prime Minister is subject to confirmation by the legislature and also selects Cabinet members (who must be approved by legislature). Centrala Ambetsverk are independent boards of civil servants that handle most of the routine tasks of the government. The Prime Minister and Cabinet formulate major government policies and supervise the administrative apparatus with the aid of the Centrala Ambetsverk. The Speaker may dismiss the Prime Minister at the Prime Ministers request, or if the legislature gives the Prime Minister a no-confidence vote.

The Legislature, a Unicameral Parliament, is named the Riksdag. It is the principle representative of the Swedish people and is charged with exercising legislative authority, supervising the Executive Branch, and deciding to and how much to tax. There are 349 members of the Riksdag elected by a system of proportional representation to three-year terms. Three hundred and ten seats are elected from 28 constituencies with the remainder chosen from a national pool designed to assure representation to any party gaining 4 % or more of the vote. Sweden’s Legislature relies heavily on its Standing Committees (approximately 16) through which it gives detailed legislation attention to all issues before government. Two main aspects that separate Sweden’s Legislature from traditional ones are that many of the body’s duties are executed in a non-partisan government and the Speaker of the Body (rather then the Monarch) is responsible for overseeing the process of a new government.

Sweden is divided into 24 counties (including Stockholm), each having a high degree of devolved power. A centrally appointed Governor who leads an elected council that exercises local executive power heads each county. There are also 284 urban and rural communes with elected councils headed by executive committees (Sami community in the North has a separate local assembly).

The Supreme Court is the ultimate authority in Sweden’s independent judiciary. The 24 members of the Hogsta Domstolen (Supreme Court) head a judicial system comprising of six Hovratt (Appellate Courts) and 100 Tingsratt (District Courts). There is also an extensive Administrative Court system headed by a Supreme Administrative Court, which deals with such specialized matters as child welfare and taxation. Certain specialized types of law are most handled by special courts (ex: real estate courts). Parliament elects a Justitiekanster (Chancellor of Justice) as a check on the courts and administrative apparatus. They insure that judges, legislators, government official and civil servants observe the laws and perform their functions with regards to the rights of the Swedish people. Judges are appointed by the Government and only can be removed by the authority of the court. If a judge is removed, he can request to be subjected to a judicial trial.

Sweden has a small but extensive military. The total active in the Armed Forces is numbered at approximately 53,100 with 570,000 reservists (who also serve with the United Nations and other peace keeping missions). That is around .6% of the population that is active (1998). In Sweden you are obligated to be a member of the Reservists until the age of 47. Conscripts to the Army and Navy must serve for 7-15 months, and the Air Force for 8-12 months. There are also over one million men and women who belong to voluntary organizations offering civil defense training.

Seventy percent of the Military equipment is produced domestically (including advanced fighter aircraft). The Swedish Armed Forces have a number of underground installations to protect them against nuclear attack. Under evacuation procedures, people remaining in cities would be housed in underground shelters that provide space for 5.5 million. Another one of Sweden’s defense strategies is stockpiling food in times of war.

Sweden’s Army is organized in field and local defense units. Its largest and most versatile is their infantry, Northern Sweden and their armored brigades. The Navy places emphasis on light, fast ships and submarines capable of maneuvering among small islands along Sweden’s coast. The Air Force is supplied with domestically produced Saab combat aircraft.

3. Political Parties:

Sweden’s political structure allows for a multiparty system to exist. Although minority parties have the right to exist, one party in particular has held power for the better part of the last half of the century with almost no interruption at all. This party is the left-wing Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet, SdAP). The SdAP has dominated the Swedish Political system from 1932 until 1976 and then from 1982 until 1991 and then again holding power from 1994 until the present. Sweden Prime Minister, Goran Persson, currently leads the SdAP. It was formed in 1889 and advocates socialist economic reform (although during its tenure the bulk of Swedish businesses has remained in private hands). Most of the Party’s socialist orientations manifest in government economic planning (increasing government control of the economy) and regulation of the private sector (avoiding industrial nationalism).

In 1985 and 1988, the SdAP was forced to form coalitions with the Left Party in order to retain power. They now have over 1.1 million members organized in “Labor Communes” and Social Democratic Clubs. They hold a national congress every three years. The Central Party Organization controls the procedure for nomination legislative candidates. The bulk of their support is from the working class and members of labor unions. Compared to the past though, there has been an influx of support from the white-collar workers.

The Moderate Coalition Party (Moderata Samlingspartiet, MSP) is the second most favored political party in Sweden. They have been the only party capable of infiltrating the SdAP reign since they (SdAP) first came to power. In September of 1991, the MSP won the election, but due to economic difficulties that undermined their popularity, the SdAP returned to power the following election. The MSP was formed in 1904 as a conservative party but switched to a slightly more moderate platform in1968. Carl Bildt, former Sweden Prime Minister, currently leads the MSP. The MSP has a conservative orientation and supports a reduction of government involvement in the economy. They support Liberal-Conservative policies such as market economy, reduced taxes and limited government involvement in the economy. However, the MSP does support the maintenance of a welfare state, provided it is managed carefully and frugally. Support of increased participation in the European Union, a strong Defense Policy and a national nuclear energy program is also advocated by the MSP.

In the early 1980’s, the MSP became the largest non-socialist party in the country. It drew support (and still does) from the urban and affluent sectors of society (including the business community) and the agricultural south. It boasts 140,000 members and receives most funding from state subsidies, rejecting all donations from the private industry.

The Christian Democratic Community Party (Kristdemokratiska Samhallspartiet, KdS) was formed in 1964 but was unable to gain a significant legislative presence until 1991, remaining largely unrepresented even up until 1984. This party of 30,000 members is led by Alf Svensson and promotes an emphasis on Christian values in political life. According to the Swedish Political Convention, the KdS is primarily a bourgeois party as opposed to a socialist party.

The People’s Party (Folkpartiet, FP) is often referred to as the Liberal Party. It was founded in 1902 and draws support from professionals, intellectuals and the Rural Free Church Movement.

Formerly the Agarian Party, the Center Party (Centerpartiet, CP) now promotes decentralization and progressive social and environmental development.

The Left Party (Vansterpartiet, VP) was formed in 1917 as the Communist Left Social Democratic Party but adopted a “eurocommunist” orientation well before the fall of communist regimes in the eastern bloc during the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. The VP adopted its current name in 1990.

Like most growing countries, Sweden also has a growing environmental movement. The foremost member is the Green Ecology Party (Miljipartiet de Grono, MG). The MG was founded in 1981 and has not had a stable part in holding support.

4. Elections:

Sweden’s elections take place every three years (always on the third Sunday in September). Their Unicameral Parliament (349 seats) is chosen in direct elections under a system of proportional representation. Everyone over the age of eighteen can vote, in fact, their requirements for voting are almost parallel to the United States requirements. All elections, local and national, take place at the same time due to close central/local interaction.

The distribution of seats in Parliament following the most recent elections (September 21st, 1998) are as follows; The Social Democratic Party / SdAP had 131 seats (compared to 162 seats in the previous election), The Moderate Coalition Party / MSP had 82 (compared to 80 in the previous election), The People’s Party / FP had 17 (compared to 26 in the previous election), The Center Party / CP had 18 (compared to 27 in the previous election), The Christian Democratic Party / KDS had 42 seats (compared to 14 in the previous election), The Left Party had 43 seats (compared to 22 in the previous election), and The Green Ecology Party had 16 seats (compared to 18 in the previous election).The Chief Government Officials that are currently in power now are listed below:

? Monarch: King Carl Gustaf -since September 1973

? Prime Minister: Goran Persson -since March 1996

? Deputy Prime Minister: Lena Hjelk-Wallen -since October 1998

? Foreign Affairs Minister: Anna Lindh -since October 1998

? Defense Minister: Bjorn von Sydow -since January 1997

? Justice Minister: Laila Freivalds -since (not available)

? Finance Minister: Bosse Ringholm -since April 1999

? Industry and Commerce Minister: Bjorn Rosengren -since October 1998

? Agriculture, Food, and Fisheries Minister: Margareta Winberg -since October

? Environmental Minister: Kjell Larsson -since October 1998

? Culture Minister: Marita Ulvskog -since October 1998

5. International Relations:

Sweden is known for one of the largest immigration populations in Europe. It has a generous policy towards political refugees from selected countries. Sweden shares a common Labor Market with other Nordic countries. Their wealth is derived in part from the existence of some major international corporations. Its top trading partners include the United Kingdom, Norway, Germany, and the United States of America.

Sweden’s is among the World’s lowest Tariff enforcers. The Bulk of their imported goods are clothing and textiles, iron and steel, machinery, motor vehicles, chemicals, petroleum products, and foodstuffs. Their exports consist of machinery, cork, pulp and wood paper (paper products), iron, steel, metals, chemicals, foodstuffs, and petroleum products.

Traditionally, Sweden has remained a neutral nation, pursuing a policy of non-alignment in peacetime, and aiming at neutrality in the event of war. In 1993, Sweden extended $1,768,500,000 in economic aid. Sweden has begun to abandon this position of neutrality since the dismantling of the Soviet Union and has begun joining forces with organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Western European Union. When Sweden joined the European Union, there was a 52 % approval rate, a 46.9 % disapproval rate, and 9 % were undecided. Listed below is a listing of International Organizations that Sweden has membership in:

? African Development Bank

? Asian Development Bank

? European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

? European Free Trade Association (EFTA)

? Inter-American Development Bank

? Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

? United Nations (UN) and its agencies including:

? Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

? Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

? General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)

? International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA)

? International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)

? International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

? International Court of Justice

? International Development Association (IDA)

? International Finance Corporation (IFC)

? International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)

? International Labor Organization (ILO)

? International Maritime Organization (IMO)

? International Monetary Fund (IMF)

? International Telecommunications Union (ITU)

? UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

? UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

? Universal Postal Union (UPU)

? World Health Organization (WHO)

? World Intellectual Property organization (WIPO)

? World Food Programme

? European Union

6. Issues:

Currently Sweden’s issues range from politics, to international relations, to domestic problems and so on. Next year is an election year so naturally politics are on the minds of all of those involved, although the question of who will control Sweden is not a hard one. Many political parties are hoping to gain more seats, slowly working their way into the majorities’ slice of the pie.

Sweden today I often noted for its high standard of living and their extensive system of social security/welfare. Sweden is often these days characterized by its decline in certain sections of industry and trade (which has lead to a substantial measure of economic restriction. The formulation of Swedish foreign and security policy is changing as Europe changes. Their concept of “neutrality” will no longer be adequate or sufficient. Sweden is still not a member of any military alliance, bearing responsibility for personally and independently defending and protecting its country and people. Sweden is now taking steps to attach itself to a European Identity in foreign policy. Sweden has applied for membership to the EU, and has made efforts to develop contacts with the emerging new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Along with strong support for the United Nations (a cornerstone of their foreign policy), Sweden is actively participating in international co-operation. Other concerns that Sweden is facing at the moment are the promotion of better human rights (which constantly is given attention if the circumstance calls for it), international disbarment (which Sweden supports), and a better concern for the environment.