

'The EEA agreement and the Swedish Parliament' from the EFTA Bulletin (1992)

Caption: In autumn 1992, in an article in the monthly publication EFTA Bulletin, Hadar Cars, former Swedish Trade Minister and Chairman of the Committee on the European Economic Area (EEA) in the Swedish Parliament, outlines the way in which Swedish MPs are drafting the bill which will allow the Parliament to approve the Agreement on the EEA signed on 2 May 1992 in Oporto by the Foreign Ministers of the Twelve and by those of the seven Member States of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

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The EEA Agreement and the Swedish Parliament

By Hadar Cars

The EEA Agreement is (he result of negotiations both extensive and intense. Being an international agreement, it is unique since it will affect several areas in society in itself, through the institutions foreseen to administer and develop co-operation.

At the time of the white paper concerning the Single Market and the Single Act of 1985 - which meant a new start for European co-operation - discussions about the future role of the member countries in dynamic development commenced in EFTA's Parliamentary Committee.

In 1987, the Swedish Government presented a bill to Parliament entitled "Sweden and West European Integration" where West European co-operation was described. The government bill also proposed policies for Swedish co-operation. Parliament then became involved with the EEA Agreement negotiations.

A period of intense debate inside as well as outside Parliament concerning European issues began. The number of motions and parliamentary issues grew. Abbreviations like EEA, COMETT and COREPER became known even outside well-informed circles, while expressions like "acquis" and "cabotage" were a part of the jargon. Those of us interested in European co-operation were of course delighted by this new direction.

By the turn of the year 1989/1990, it became clear that discussion between the EFTA countries and the EC would lead to formal negotiations establishing the EEA Agreement. With an agreement as extensive as the EEA Agreement, Parliament did not wish to be in a situation where it had simply to say "yes" or "no" to a completed proposition. Therefore, Parliament demanded information from and consultation with the Government. The Government had an equivalent interest in such contacts, so as to establish potential solutions to problems that might arise in negotiations.

Another reason for holding consultations between Government and Parliament was due to the public debate concerning future EEA co-operation. In democracies today, a dialogue between voters and those in power exists, especially where big and important questions like the EEA are concerned. It is obvious that parliamentarians need a certain basis in order to participate constructively in such a debate.

For a long time, the Swedish Parliament has had an EFTA Delegation, with parliamentarians nominated by the Government who participate in EFTA's Parliamentary Committee. This Committee is now the consultative body on EEA matters together with the Government. The number of deputies in the EFTA Delegation was increased in order to give all six political parties in Parliament at least one seat. The expanded EFTA Delegation should have access to all relevant material and be kept informed of developments regarding Swedish contacts with the EC.

Both before and during negotiations, the EFTA Delegations kept close contact with the former Foreign Trade Minister Ms. Anita Gradin and with Mr. Ulf Dinkelspiel, responsible for Europe in the present Government. We also had the opportunity to observe current matters and to state our point of view on aims and means for Swedish negotiators.

Last spring, when it was clear that a proposition on the EEA Agreement should be finished before the summer holiday, the question of how to deal with the Agreement in Parliament came up - either in some of the permanent committees in which each would have its areas of liability or in a new committee with particular concentration on the EEA question.

Parliament, with the intention of creating a new committee - the EEA Committee "for preparation of in part the pending proposition on approval of the EEA Agreement and its associated bills, and in part other matters of central importance for the Agreement", did not go on holiday. As soon as those preparatory tasks are concluded, the Committee shall, according to a parliamentary decision, be dissolved. It can also be

mentioned that the EEA, Committee is the very first special committee nominated by Parliament since the constitutional amendment in Sweden in 1971.

The Committee has, like all other parliamentary committees, 15 permanent members. The number of deputies has increased and is now 23. This has given political parties the opportunity to broaden their representation in the Committee. Another important reason for the increase is that the former Communist Party has also been given one deputy seat thanks to the extension. This party is the smallest in Parliament and also the only party believing that the EEA Agreement should not be approved.

The newly-elected EEA Committee was constituted on 26 May. Three days later the government bill came to Parliament. The Committee took charge of the motions revived on account of the proposition as well as two other motions which had been revived earlier and already delivered to the EEA Committee.

In the EEA Committee, we decided to give all 16 permanent parliamentary committees the opportunity to express their opinions on the government bill - especially on those parts mentioning their respective working fields. We wanted their opinion on 3 September latest, which meant that we intruded upon our colleagues' summer holidays.

We could do so because we had taken upon ourselves to work more during the summer. We had several conferences where we met experts from the Government and from a great number of organizations. The Committee even had time for a trip to Brussels where they met the Vice-Presidents of the Commission. Mr. Frans Andriessen and Mr. Henning Christophersen, in order to discuss the coming EEA co-operation.

Two public hearings were also arranged during the summer: one by the Standing Committee on the Constitution in consultation with the EEA Committee about certain constitutional aspects, including the Agreement's compatibility with constitutional law: the other by the EEA Committee itself. Five main subjects were discussed: dynamic effects of the EEA Agreement; the effects of a rejection of the Agreement: citizens' EEA-mobility, social conditions and equality: EEA and environmental issues: regional policy and local questions. Those titles together give an idea of what kind of questions have been discussed in the Swedish EEA debate.

After the summer, which was largely occupied with information-gathering and discussions and deliberations, the Committee had to formulate its conclusions. This work was done in September and October.

The result is a profound examination of the consequences of the EEA Agreement on all affected areas. To sum up, the EEA Committee considers the Agreement as very positive for Sweden, even if there are some parts we wish to modify. The Committee also believes that our present mode of co-operation is not a realistic alternative to the EEA Agreement. Rejection of the Agreement would have noticeable negative consequences for our country.

The Committee is in agreement, and recommends that the Agreement be approved. This does not alter the fact that there exist different ways of regarding what is more or less important and how Sweden should react once EEA co-operation has started.

Among the important advantages conferred on Sweden by the Agreement. I would personally like to accentuate the free movement of persons which will offer Swedish citizens new experience and contacts across borders. It is also important that the Agreement will be positive for employment as well as the national economy and consequently for Swedish well-being.

The abolition of trade obstacles leads to increased efficiency and competition which will give rise to more gains for consumers. Where research and education is concerned, the EEA Agreement offers new possibilities.

The Agreement will also create new and better conditions for environmental policy in Western Europe and

in the rest of the world. This is of special importance as many environmental dangers are regional or global.

It also means a lot to me - in the light of this sometimes exciting debate - to be able to say that in the EEA, Sweden will retain the possibility of pursuing active labour, regional, social and equality policies with the same means as before.

Disadvantages of the EEA Agreement are divided into two categories. The first concerns the contents of the Agreement - we do not accept every detail of the EC Directives. We are able, within the framework of EEA co-operation, to discuss future improvements - environmental and consumer protection become more and more developed in both the EFTA and the EC countries. The second and more important category concerns what we do not get with the EEA Agreement.

Important realms of EC co-operation are not included in the EEA. Co-operation concerning foreign and security policies is mentioned. Personally, I see such co-operation as an opportunity to act, together with countries and people close to us, in favour of democratic stability and economic development in Central and Eastern Europe, peace and security, and to increase respect for human rights.

Even if we participate in the Single Market from next year on, in principle, the same conditions as the EC countries, there are still some flaws in the Agreement. We are guaranteed a certain influence but it is quite restrictive.

My point of view is therefore that the largest gaps in the Agreement could be redressed only by joining the EC. Anyhow, this discussion lies outside the authority of the EEA Committee - the mandate of the Committee is limited to questions concerning EEA co-operation.

Our conclusion was discussed at the plenary sitting on 18 November. The Parliament then decided in accordance with the proposition made by the EEA Committee, and the EEA Agreement was approved.

It is natural that, after so many months of intense work with the EEA Agreement, we are now focusing on the future. How will co-operation progress? What is to come beyond the Agreement - membership, or something else? Discussions concerning these questions have begun and will increase in extent. Several members of the EEA Committee will be deeply engaged in further discussion in Parliament of questions concerning Europe.