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ARTICLE



How to have your cake and eat it too: Sweden, regional awkwardness, and the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

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ABSTRACT

Our study draws on an investigation of Sweden's participation in the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) to ask what it can reveal regarding how 'awkward' states in regional integration – those regularly considered by their partners to be beyond the regional mainstream – can secure their preferences nonetheless. We test the independent variables of 'awkwardness', by focusing on the ongoing work of officials charged with making the EUSBSR work in practice. We thereby seek to add to existing macro-level analyses of Sweden's place and position in the European Union that tend to focus on 'big picture' matters. Our findings suggest that Swedish actors working within the various agencies and institutions associated with the EUSBSR have been able to offset their country's perceived awkwardness by developing a reputation for everyday effectiveness and reliability. This leads us to the tentative conclusion that under certain conditions awkward states can offset this status, and, in the words of the everyday metaphor, have their cake and eat it too.

KEYWORDS Sweden; awkward states; European integration; EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

Introduction

When Sweden joined the European Union (EU) in 1995, it immediately entered the club of states that opted out of the single currency, albeit on a political basis rather than as an explicit opt out from the EU Treaties. In the two decades since then, Sweden has continued to demonstrate a determination to follow its own path in EU politics, frequently revealing policy preferences that differ from the majority of EU members on issues of the environment, social policy, and defense (see, e.g., Bengtsson 2016; Jacobsson and Sundström 2016; Rosén Sundström 2016; and, for changes in Swedish popular opinion in relation to European Parliamentary (EP) elections, Stegmann McCallion 2014). There is a default popular view that 'Europe' is somewhere else, rather than a continent of which Sweden is a full part; cross-border collaboration with fellow Nordic states is still seen as more culturally intuitive than that with other European countries, although public

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opinion seems to be more reconciled with the fact of Swedish EU membership now than in the past. When Sweden applied to join the EU, membership was presented as part of the necessary reforms to resolve the economic crisis Sweden experienced in the early 1990s, and the discourse on the subject is still of Sweden's EU membership is still more economic than political.

Consequently, it is no surprise that Sweden has been considered as an 'awkward' partner in EU politics and policy-making (Johanssen 2003). This term, originally developed by Stephen George (1998) to describe the United Kingdom and its relationship with the EU, has recently been revived, extended, and applied to a range of states and regional integration projects (Murray, Warleigh-Lack, and He 2014). In this article, we seek to evaluate the continued applicability of the term to the Swedish case. If a state is considered to be an 'awkward partner,' does such a judgment prevent the state from securing its objectives? Once those objectives are in place, and a policy or strategy has been agreed upon, can an 'awkward state' manage its day-to-day interactions with its partners in such a way that the actual achievements of the policy or strategy fit with its intentions – even if these change as the policy or strategy evolves?

Our study draws on an investigation of Sweden's participation in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR). This may seem counterintuitive at first, since Sweden was instrumental in the creation of this strategy (Miles and Sundelius 2000), and thus is on the face of things less likely to seek to obstruct it than other areas of European integration, which Sweden considers more problematic. In addition, and by definition, the EUSBSR is not a pan-EU initiative, and involves the EU states with which Sweden has the greatest cultural connections as well as states such as Russia and Norway, which are not in the EU. Furthermore, as the EUSBSR is focusing more on functional cooperation in matters of environmental protection and infrastructure, it has relatively few links to issues that lie at the heart of national sovereignty and that are clearly raised by EU integration in areas of core state power, such as economic, monetary, and foreign and security policy. This means that the EUSBSR has clear differences from many areas of EU policy, but it is by the same token much more similar to the general process of European integration in its complex and multiple forms which include, but are not constrained to, the EU in its maximal 'ordinary legislative procedure' mode.¹ Moreover, we hypothesize that for precisely these reasons, evidence of Swedish 'awkwardness' in the EUSBSR would be particularly telling, since the political stakes involved are lower, reducing the likely level of controversy and facilitating an acceptance of Swedish requests by partner states. The EUSBSR also provides an opportunity to add an investigation of an important but 'everyday' aspect of the European integration process to existing literature on Sweden in the EU, which predominantly focuses on the 'big picture' matters of, for example, how Sweden ran its Presidency of the European Council or how it manages its relationship with the single currency area (see the following section).

Our contribution to the particular agenda of this special issue of the *Journal of Baltic Studies* is to explore some of the *political* impacts of the EUSBSR. We do not ask here whether the Strategy has had an impact in policy or economic terms, but rather whether it has shaped the broader standing of Swedish political actors in European integration, and even of Sweden as a member state of the EU. We thereby add an extra layer to the understanding of the EU as a form of multilevel governance (see Gänzle, this volume), especially regarding the complex relationship between the

reputation of a particular state in European integration and how this can both shape and be shaped by national representatives from various levels of governance.²

The methods used in this work are standard and widely accepted by the greater academic community. In addition to desk research on the secondary literature and primary documentation, we sent questionnaires to officials working on matters pertaining to the EUSBSR in issue areas led by Swedish actors to assess how they had experienced Swedish counterparts in their daily work. We also used these questionnaires to uncover whether and how preexisting ideas and understandings of Sweden as a (partner) state shaped how actors from the other EUSBSR states were predisposed toward Swedish preferences in advance of real participation in EUSBSR negotiations.³ The results of this fieldwork are tantalizing. The numbers of respondents involved were necessarily small given the potential sample size, and our findings can do no more than suggest future hypotheses.⁴ However, we nonetheless feel justified in inferring from the questionnaires that states can overcome their awkwardness in regional integration and, under certain circumstances, can even secure objectives that require investment of financial resources by other states.

The article is structured as follows: in the next section, we detail the concept of ‘awkward partner’ and establish a set of independent variables linked to this definition that are subsequently investigated empirically. Using existing secondary literature on Sweden’s EU membership, we then use these tools to contextualize our case study by exploring the ways in which Sweden can be, and has been, considered awkward in the context of regional integration. The following section explores the case study, and the article closes by presenting an agenda for subsequent study of Swedish involvement in European integration which may then feed-in to less idiographic comparative research on awkward states in regional integration.

Sweden as an awkward partner: dependent and independent variables

According to Murray, Warleigh-Lack, and He (2014, 280), the ‘awkwardness’ of partner states in regional integration processes involves both material and ideational elements, but is primarily about *perception*:

Awkwardness ... is a mixture of obstructiveness and maladroitness, but is not primarily an objective condition; subjective perception of material factors can give rise to, or deepen, the perception of one state’s awkwardness by others. Material factors such as economic interests, domestic politics and security alliances certainly contribute to the preferences adopted by awkward states, but “awkwardness” is ultimately a social condition that is a function of the perceptions and judgement of state actors and their regional partners.

We invoke in [Table 1](#) the independent variables identified as salient by these three authors, and then further developed in subsequent work by two of them, as a means of organizing a brief literature review on the first two decades of Sweden’s membership of the EU.

Security issues, especially regarding neutrality and NATO

Before the global economic crisis and the euro-crisis, Von Sydow (2004, 123) worried that Sweden could be marginalized in the EU as it did not take part in the single currency, and in an EU that was about to go from 15 member states to 25 (and

Table 1. Independent variables.

Independent variable	Relevance	Pertinence in Swedish case
1. Relationship with extra-regional security guarantor	This relationship may be privileged over regional ties by our states	Minor, given Swedish neutrality
2. Elite view of state identity – as ‘different’ from region?	May color state actor perceptions of what is necessary/feasible in region	Cultural closeness to Nordic states rather than EU as a whole; Europe as ‘elsewhere’
3. Popular skepticism toward/opposition to participation in region	May limit elite room for maneuver or capacity to bargain	Significant in early years; recent evidence suggests popular adjustment to EU membership, but not to €-zone membership
4. Internalization by state actors of regional norms and values	If inadequate, this may produce cognitive dissonance in the region and/or sense of difference from partner state actors	‘Best in class’ mentality
5. Policy preferences	If consistently different in our states, may increase perception of alterity, i.e. perceived ‘otherness’ both internal from the member state toward the regional organization or external by fellow members’ view of the state in question	Outside €-zone; neutrality; social and environmental norms considered important, and tougher than EU average; (counterexample: signatory to Fiscal Stability Treaty)
6. Perception of potential gains from cooperation by state with regional partners	If considered few or minor, may preclude significant compromise	Marginal salience – EU membership considered generally worthwhile by elites
7. Attempts to create deeper material and tangible alliances	May diminish perceptions of awkwardness with regional partners	Continued pursuit of non-EU forms of regionalism, e.g. Nordic Council – refusal to put all the eggs in one basket
8. Regional agenda-setting efforts	Reveals whether and how a state seeks successfully to overcome political marginality in the region	Activism for enlargement to the Baltic States and Turkey; environment policy; development aid; transparency

Source: Authors, based on Warleigh-Lack and Murray (2014).

beyond) this would be aleatory. She argued that it was beyond doubt that the Swedish government prepared to minimize the cost of staying outside the euro-zone both politically and economically. Although the financial crisis and deep EU malaise have recently and significantly reduced the short- to medium-term economic costs of staying outside the single currency, the political costs at EU level could have been considerable in the circumstances anticipated at the time of Swedish accession. In fact, von Sydow (2004, 124) sees Sweden’s decision to participate in and contribute to the developing Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, as well as the EU Battle Groups, as a straightforward quid pro quo for staying outside Economic and Monetary Union . If this is correct, security policy and Swedish neutrality have not contributed to a perception by fellow EU elites of Swedish ‘awkwardness’ because Stockholm was willing to compromise on this matter to avoid being treated as peripheral in a deepening EU.

Elite views of state identity, and EU norm internalization by elites

Existing evidence shows that Swedish elite actors, however, can generate negative reactions from their peers in partner states through a (perhaps) unconscious

demonstration of felt superiority. In his review of Sweden's 2001 European Council Presidency, Ole Elgström reported that Swedish officials could be guilty of 'complacency' in their dealings with interlocutors (Elgström 2002, 188). Moreover, Swedish actors were claimed 'to have referred to the "Swedish model" at every possible opportunity and to have seemed annoyingly confident that they knew and/or possessed the best solution to EU problems' (Elgström 2002, 188). At best, this risks transmission of a certain air of *noblesse oblige*; at worst, it makes Swedes appear arrogant and potentially disengaged. It is commonplace for officials from Sweden's EU partner states to contrast Swedish actors with their Finnish counterparts, with Helsinki rather than Stockholm considered the breeding ground of committed pro-Europeans (Goldmann 2001). Thus, while Swedish actors may well embrace the EU on pragmatic grounds, they do not tend to internalize EU norms: why bother when those one already has are Swedish and therefore almost tautologically superior?⁵

Divergent policy preferences and attempts to set the EU agenda

Such a view would appear reinforced by the fact that Sweden's preferences in EU policy-making are often outside the mainstream. The obvious matter of the political (rather than strictly legal) opt out from the Euro is just one example. Perhaps more telling is the fact Sweden has often sought to 'upload' its own high standards in policy areas such as environmental protection and social welfare across the rest of the Union, and insisting on retaining them if it cannot succeed in that effort (Miles 2001). That said, Sweden has been part of the mainstream in certain high-profile matters, even when the discussions at hand seem to problematize these high standards in social and environmental policy, and when other states were prepared to sit outside the metaphorical tent (e.g. the Fiscal Treaty of 2012). Moreover, Swedish politicians and officials have sought to shape EU policy on both a day-to-day basis and from the heights of the Council Presidency, and even been willing to take part in EU policy that they would rather did not exist, if this helps reinforce Sweden's credentials as a 'good European' (Miles 2001, 309–11). Thus, Sweden's potential to be seen as an awkward partner is something its officials may seek to downplay in EU politics and diplomacy, although by the same token they may also seek to use this same potential in order to gain leverage (Von Sydow 2004, 19).

Popular opinion as a constraint on elite action

Just over 6.5 million Swedes were eligible to cast their vote in the EU membership referendum, and 83.3% turned out to vote. The 'yes' vote won; however, it was a relatively close vote. Among them, 52.3% voted in favor of joining the EU, 46.8% against, and 0.9% spoiled their vote. The turnout should be compared to elections to the national parliament with a turnout of 86.4% in the 1994 general election just 8 weeks earlier.

Since Sweden joined the EU, there have been discussions about whether it should leave, and these have continued until the present day. Many Swedes believe that they were misled about the extent to which the EU could help solve Sweden's economic problems of the early 1990s, and that they were effectively taken advantage of in a period of national vulnerability (Miles 2001). Although most Swedes can be considered internationalists, this does not make them pro-European (Goldmann 2001). Indeed, that spirit of internationalism can often be focused on a specific and limited number

of culturally similar states, that is those of *Norden* (the Nordic states: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland) (Andersson 2000). That said, EU membership discussions have become less polarized over time, and, as seen in Figure 1, there have consistently been more Swedes in favor of EU membership than wishing to leave since 2001, albeit with a large and growing section of the population that expresses no opinion on the issue. In 2003, Sweden held a referendum on introducing the single currency. In this referendum, 55.9% voted 'no,' 42% voted 'yes', and 2.1% spoiled their vote. Again, voter turnout (82.6%) in the referendum was high, which could be compared to the national elections held the year before (2002) in which the voter turnout was 80.1%. Since 2009 public opinion in Sweden against introducing the single currency has increased (as illustrated in Figure 2). Thus, it seems fair to conclude that popular opinion still limits elite room for maneuver on EU issues (Miles 2000); EU membership has itself become more popular, but Swedish participation in deeper

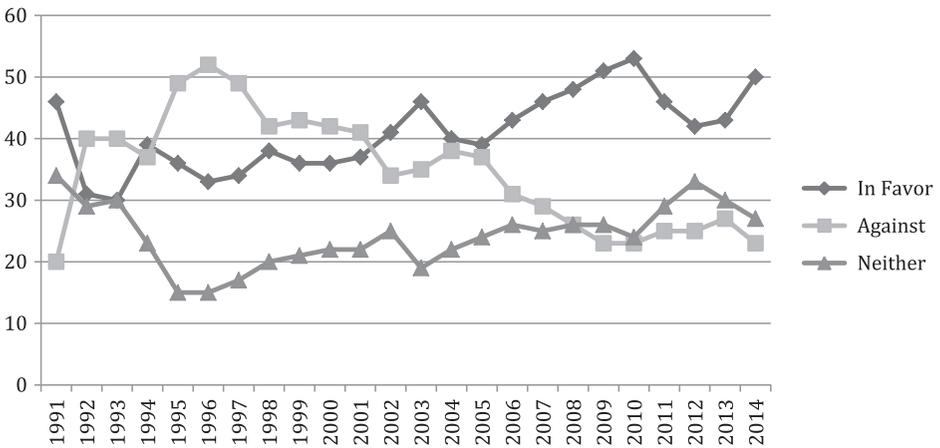


Figure 1. In favor, against, or no opinion toward Swedish EU membership. Source: Holmberg (2014, 396) and Berg and Vernersdotter (2015 200).

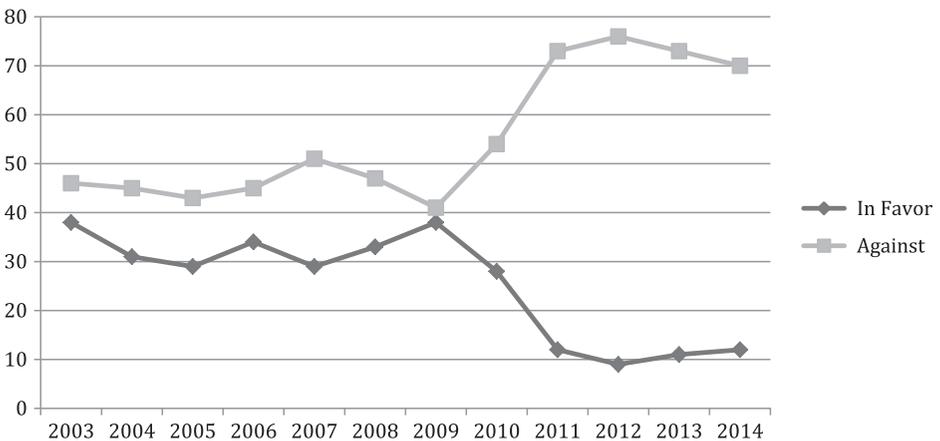


Figure 2. In favor, against, or no opinion toward introducing the single currency. Source: Holmberg (2014, 396) and Berg and Vernersdotter (2015, 201).

integration such as adopting the single currency would be politically costly. For that reason, perhaps, Swedish political parties – particularly the social democrats – have chosen to ‘compartmentalize’ EU issues, in order to minimize the potential for loss of public support, or increase in intra-party conflict (Aylott 2002). In sum, popular opinion remains a significant restraint on room for elites to maneuver.⁶

Elite cost–benefit calculations regarding EU membership

This section of the article investigates the political elite and their attitude toward European integration. In the last EP elections (held in May, 2014), only three out of the eight political parties were clearly in favor of or clearly against the European integration process. Indeed, Michalski (2013, 162) has described Sweden’s experience as a member state of the EU the following way: ‘[a]fter fifteen years of membership, reticence has given way to a more positive stance, best characterized as “pragmatic support.”’ This pragmatism has led to a situation in which ‘the elite and the public are no longer polarized according to a “for-or-against” logic but [EU policy is instead] considered on a case-by-case basis’ (Michalski 2013, 163). There thus seems to have been an elite recognition that, as Sweden is a small country in terms of population, it is very dependent on the outside world, and that in an age of mass communication and globalization, the way Swedes and Sweden are perceived abroad is gaining in importance (Swedish Institute n.d.). If so, this would bestow a balancing act upon Swedish elites, who would need to ensure that whatever soft power the country has is reinforced, not undermined, by Sweden’s reputation in European and international politics.

In sum, Sweden can be seen as a pragmatic member state, whose elites are well aware of their country’s ‘awkwardness’ in the EU and European integration contexts, and seek to minimize or play on this perception as they deem appropriate.

The ‘Swedish’ strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: evidence and analysis

Why did Sweden want a Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region? One answer is the examination of Swedish preferences as expressed in elite discourse. Bengtsson (2009, 2) summarized the introduction of the new EU macro-regional strategy as follows:

the point has often been made that the Baltic Sea would be a suitable test case [for a macro-region], both because of the needs/problems faced in the region and because there is a favourable presence of high degree of interdependence, common institutions already in existence, and a common regional identity, or at least cultural affinity – all elements that are often singled out in research on regionalism as favourable conditions for the successful development of regional endeavours.

This may be so, but the EUSBSR was a long time coming. For several years, Sweden pushed a specific view of how the Baltic Sea region could best be governed, focusing on the joint problem solving approach through the building of institutional cooperation. To this end, it has hosted the Council of the Baltic Sea States’ secretariat since 1998 (Bengtsson 2016). The Swedish government’s non-paper (2008) presenting its opinion in relation to a new macro-regional policy around the Baltic Sea region provided in itself no new focus, implying that previous stances and agreements were being consolidated in the then-nascent Strategy. The non-paper explores the policy areas of environment, enhanced (economic)

growth and competitiveness for the region, fighting against organized crime, and making more efficient use of EU and Baltic Sea region resources. The non-paper did, however, provide more in-depth reasons for the introduction of the EUSBSR as a new macro-regional policy for the EU. The subpolicies outlined earlier can all be found in previous documents provided by the national Swedish government from as early as 1990. However, Sweden did innovate in its resolution to link the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region to the EU itself (Langdal and Von Sydow 2009, 10).

Environment

The issue of the environment was brought up by the then Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson in the opening speech to Parliament: 'the agreement to save the Baltic Sea needs to be followed up by concrete measures' (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1990, Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1994). In 2004, environmental issues were focused upon again (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 2004, Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 2005), including the need for further collaboration in the near neighborhood around the Baltic Sea. In the 2006 Government Declaration, the environment is coupled with economic growth, since it was argued environmental issues are crucial for (economic) development in Sweden. It is argued that cross-border problems require joint solutions (Work program for the Swedish Presidency of the EU 1 July–31 December 2009, 9), and that environmental policy is an EU prerogative. The environmental policy aspect was also stressed in the 2009 Government Declaration.

Enhanced (economic) growth and competitiveness and the internal market

In its Government Declaration (1998), the Swedish government states that the region around the Baltic Sea can become one of the most economically dynamic, and that Sweden should be in the vanguard (forefront) of activity undertaken in order to realize this. The post-2004 new larger internal EU market with a possible 450 million consumers was explicitly mentioned in the 2002 and 2003 Government Declarations, and the consumer perspective was linked to increased economic prosperity (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 2003).

Fighting organized crime

Not specifically referred to as crime, but to general *security* in the Baltic Sea region (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1995), the argument regarding fighting organized crime is that strengthening the (then) newly formed democracies will enhance their capabilities to act against a wide range of problems, for example, organized crime, which will in turn strengthen Sweden (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1996). Economic growth and becoming a 'region of the future' (whatever that means) was coupled to the fight against organized crime in the 1998 Government Declaration.

More efficient use of resources

It was fairly clear from the start that the EUSBSR was not going to be provided with new funding in order to reach its policy aims, nor would any new institutions be formed to carry out the implementation process. The then Swedish EU Minister Cecilia Malmström (2009, 9), stressed that '[t]he strategy should not replace or double, but rather be complementary to existing cooperation.' The question then became how the collaborations can add value to what is already being done.⁷

Various Government Declarations also indicated that Sweden should aid the then newly formed democracies of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in their transformation to become working liberal democracies. This intention to aid is often coupled with economic growth and competitiveness, as well as to deepened political collaboration between the Baltic States and the already-existing Nordic collaborations (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1994, Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1995). In 1997, the Swedish Government declared that it would work for a more intensive collaboration in its close neighborhood around the Baltic Sea (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1997) while playing an active role in EU. This was in fact one of four cornerstones outlined by the Swedish government for how Sweden should become stronger in the future.⁸ In the 2008 Government Declaration, the Swedish Presidency of the EU is mentioned, with one of the areas of interest being a reinforced Baltic Sea Region collaboration. This firmly states a Swedish ambition to make concrete progress in the issue and the introduction of an EUSBSR as the first macro-regional policy of the EU.

Thus, even though the British member of the European Parliament Christopher Beazley initiated the first official measures toward a macro-regional policy in 2005, it was mostly upon the Swedish initiative that the European Council, after its summit in December 2007, tasked the Commission with producing such a strategy (Bengtsson 2009). Sweden has long propagated and argued for closer collaboration around the environmental issues affecting the Baltic Sea, and has argued that this collaboration should be with all affected countries rather than only EU states. Over time, Sweden has coupled the environmental problems facing the Baltic Sea with other policy areas such as enhanced economic growth and competitiveness in relation to the internal market, to democracy and the building of new democratic states, in relation to fighting organized crime, and by strengthening democratic institutions, as well as tying the collaboration between the Baltic Sea states to the support of the enlargement process (albeit not exclusively, as there are also historical ties which need to be taken into account going back to, for example, the Hanseatic League). In the next section of the article, we seek to find out whether the realization of such a long-standing objective has enabled Sweden – or at least, Swedish officials – to overcome its, or their, perceived awkwardness in the EU context.

Overcoming awkwardness? Sweden and the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Our evidence, although limited, suggests that Swedish officials can overcome perceptions of their home state's 'awkwardness' by living up to partners' high expectations of efficiency and good preparation.⁹ In other words, the day-to-day experience of working with Swedes can counterbalance preconceived ideas about Sweden as a member

state that is likely to set itself apart from others, or even consider itself as superior to them. Interestingly, this seems to be the case even for officials who considered the EUSBSR itself to be a quixotic Swedish priority, which took up scarce EU funds that might have been better allocated elsewhere.

Respondents stated that in their experience it is individual colleagues from any state, rather than predominantly those from a particular state, who are routinely difficult to work with. Indeed, insofar as the Swedish colleagues with whom they had collaborated on the EUSBSR could be considered to share characteristics, these were almost all positive (e.g. being well-organized and prepared, consistent in their positions, and pragmatic about finding solutions to any problems that arise). Sweden *was* considered to have certain priorities that were not universally shared (respondents cited the issue of Swedish actors promoting what they called ‘multilevel governance’ in particular), but these were not understood by respondents to have caused challenging or unmanageable problems. Indeed, where actors from particular states were mentioned as being routinely awkward to collaborate with, respondents did not identify Sweden in this way, but instead pointed to Denmark and Russia.¹⁰

One intriguing response to our questionnaire implies that as an EU member state, Sweden benefits from a certain sense of ‘we-ness,’ shared worldviews and understandings of how policy should be made that officials from other EU countries identify or assume to be common within the EU club, but infrequent outside it. If this is so, then the inclusion of non-EU states in European integration regimes and projects may benefit EU member states which might otherwise be considered problematic or difficult: it redraws the mental map between ‘us’ and ‘them’ with the potentially awkward state positioned clearly within the former camp.

Instead of a conclusion: suggestions for future research

Our findings, limited to one case study though they are, have implications for comparative research on awkward states in regional integration, as well as for further work on Sweden as a member state of the EU. We have used the EUSBSR as a means to explore a wider issue, rather than training our primary focus on the EUSBSR itself. In this final section of the article, instead of presenting a firm conclusion based on our case study, we seek to tease out its implications for future work and suggest a helpful research agenda.

Our results corroborate existing comparative work on awkward states in regional integration (Murray, Warleigh-Lack, and He 2014) insofar as they add to the evidence that states are considered to be awkward by their peers for ideational and subjective reasons, rather than as a result of objectively identifiable and generally applicable criteria that hold good across time and space. However, our work also takes this more generalized, model-building research forward by adding to its empirical evidence base, thereby adding idiographic depth to a project that hopes to culminate more nomothetically. In our case study and document analysis, we have focused on the everyday level of politics, and also on an area of this phenomenon which acts as a good microcosm of the European integration process as a whole because it presents the EU as a part, and maybe the core, of a matrix of regional institutions and processes – an often-neglected issue in EU studies.

Our findings suggest that *Sweden can offset awkwardness at the macro-level, such as its non-participation in the single currency or its policy of neutrality, against everyday efficiency and participation in the EU and wider European integration.* To an extent, these findings are to be expected, since the relative absence of drama, media attention, and a sense of high stakes in

everyday politics reduces the need to emphasize differences and rewards efficiency. However, by showing that such expectations are well-founded, our research suggests that a state that wishes to insist on enduring policy choices that do not fit the regional mainstream can mitigate the political costs of this by developing a reputation as a reliable partner in other ways and through effective diplomacy.

Does this amount to a state having its cake and eating it too? In the case of Sweden and European integration, our judgment is cautious but affirmative, since Stockholm's ability to achieve its objectives, either positively (securing new policies or programs that reflect Swedish preferences) or negatively (the ability to opt out of particular policy agreements), does not seem to affect its reputation in everyday European integration politics. Indeed, quite the reverse seems to be the case: it is the day-to-day politics and policy-making that permit Sweden to continue as an outsider in key policy areas without paying significant reputational costs. This finding may not be generalizable even within the case of European integration, since, for example, the UK's reputation as an awkward partner has not diminished despite the UK's relatively strong record on policy implementation and reputation for reliability in day-to-day EU politics (Wall 2008). However, our findings may help explain why, for example, France is not generally held to be an 'awkward' state in the EU despite the Empty Chair Crisis of 1965, its blocking of the first EU enlargement, its continued opposition to significant reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the 2005 rejection by referendum of the Constitutional Treaty. Comparative research into this problematic would therefore be welcome, both within the European context and beyond it.¹¹

Notes

1. European integration is not limited to the construction of the EU. Rather, it consists of a matrix of institutions and processes, some of which are limited by geography or policy area, in which the EU is but the most comprehensive organization, and is itself variegated rather than uniform (Leruth and Lord 2015).
2. We are grateful to the reviewer for the suggestion that our work could link to the literature on soft power, and agree that this could be fruitful – perhaps especially regarding the relationship between paradiplomacy/substate diplomacy and the international reputation of a nation-state. However, space precludes such a discussion here.
3. Thirty-one persons were identified to be working with Swedish representatives, 7 out of the 31 agreed to answer the questionnaire. The interviewees came from a range of member states (Finland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Denmark) and 11 declined to participate as they had not, they felt, been working within the area or with Swedish representatives long enough to be able to answer our questions.
4. We sent questionnaires to 31 officials from 'other' states working in the Swedish priority areas of the EUSBSR. Despite polite chasing of responses and assurances of confidentiality, as well as offers of telephone or face-to-face interviews, we received only seven responses. Even given the small target group, this rate of response means we are necessarily circumspect about our findings. Our respondents may be a self-selecting subgroup of people who felt secure in responding because they had nothing negative to report. The information they supplied does, however, tally with existing firsthand accounts of what it is like to represent an 'awkward' state in EU politics and policy-making (Wall 2008), and with a recent extensively-researched monograph on the related issue of how EU countries manage the political costs of opting out from certain policies (Adler-Nissen 2014).
5. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014) intriguingly shows how officials from 'awkward' member states of the EU can manage this status successfully, but also how they can suffer a certain stigma as a result of their country's stance. Her book focuses on Danish and British actors, but frequently makes explicit reference to Swedish equivalents.

6. Political elites, at all levels of Swedish politics, can successfully use the EU as a means to reshape long-standing political debates and overcome established logjams in the national political system, as has been shown regarding the regionalization of the country (Warleigh-Lack and Stegmann McCallion 2012). However, the political costs of an overt pro-EU stance in an issue area that is sensitive in public opinion remain high; this may be part of the reason why the office of the Prime Minister has consolidated and increased its hold over Swedish EU politics and policy (Larsson and Bäck 2008, 249–51).
7. The answer to this question is outside the remit of this article; however, it is intriguing that one of our respondents specifically mentions as a Swedish priority the insistence on *multilevel governance* and on the role of subnational authorities in the implementation processes.
8. The following cornerstones are relevant to the Baltic Sea Strategy: first, Sweden should participate actively internationally in the global environment she finds herself in; second, a Swedish foreign policy goal is to intensify the Baltic Sea collaborations; and third, Sweden's military aim was to be alliance-neutral especially in the event of war in our close neighborhood. Indeed, the Swedish overall objective was declared to be an all-European security community (Regeringsförklaringen (Declaration of Government) 1997).
9. Because we obtained few responses to our questionnaire, we present our findings later by drawing on an overall analysis of the results.
10. Intriguingly, here too the reasoning was informed by day-to-day experience. Danish officials were considered to lack clarity and consistency in the objectives they were seeking, or being expected to seek; Russian officials were considered to suffer from information and buy-in deficits, since Moscow was not involved in the negotiation of the EUSBSR but takes part in its actual implementation.
11. For instance, can Mexico use policy convergence and implementation to 'do a Sweden' in the context of NAFTA? What about Brazil in Mercosur or Burma/Myanmar in ASEAN?

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