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Right wing extremism - history and current state Sweden – questions about Flanders.

The right wing movement in Sweden has been more or less fragmented & unable to form a mass movement since its beginning in the early 1920s. Several hundred parties, groups, and associations existed from the movement's founding through the present. This was the case until 1988 when the Swedish Democrats were formed, who are today estimated to be the second largest party in Sweden and will most likely keep on growing till the election in 2016. It did take a while for the party to establish itself among the public opinion; anti-immigration parties have been much less successful in Sweden than in other Scandinavian countries. SD started out as white supremacy movement in Sweden; back then it was a party led by people publically known to be holocaust-deniers and general supporters of fascism. Their methods of expressing their opinions were often very loud and violent, despite never gathering much support. Then the tides changed from the late 90's to 2006 when the party went through somewhat of a cleanse and was suddenly brought forward as something other than the fascist movement it had once had been.

A lot happened on the journey from the SD's inception in 1988 up to its reformation in 2006. It is a common perception that it isn't the same party it was originally. Ideologically, the differences between the original party and its present-day version are very small; with some small exceptions, the positions it takes on the major issues are pretty much the same today as they were a quarter century ago. There indeed have been some changes, but most of them involve organisation, not ideology. Those changes have come about partly because the SD has restricted intra-party democracy and dealt firmly with its internal opponents. The SD adopted a new Communication Plan and a policy of 'Zero Racism' in October 2012. Often members who expressed their opinions in a way that could cause offense were expelled. Indeed, no other Swedish parties have excluded so many adherents in such a short amount of time. The new rules also mean that a few individuals who had previously enjoyed strong support within the SD were not nominated as candidates on the party list for the national parliament in 2014.

Of course, ambitious members who want to make a career in the SD understand the new guidelines and practice self-censorship. Nevertheless, there have been some occasions when the party's representatives have let their guard down, perhaps because they were in situations that put them too much at ease. It is obvious that when members and representatives of the party communicate with each other in private, they have a far higher tolerance for extreme expressions of xenophobia, Islamophobia, and even anti-Semitism than the new rules permit. Statements made by SD figures in closed web forums have been exposed by left-wing activists. Just after the elections to the EU-parliament in 2014, the leader of the SD, Jimmie Åkesson, made it clear that the party would cooperate with the *UKIP* and *Dansk Folkeparti* and not with the coalition that Marine Le Pen was attempting to organise. This was somewhat surprising news, since prior to the election few experts would have guessed that the SD would cast its lot with the EU-sceptics and more mainstream parties that were gathered in the group known as *Europe for Freedom and Democracy* (EFD).

The decision concerning party blocs and affiliations marks the end of a long process in which the SD has attempted to alter its public image. It is interesting to speculate about why SD is so reluctant to admit that it is affiliating with similar parties throughout the EU. The answer seems

to lie in Sweden's history. For many years, Sweden was the Nordic exception to European trends, in that it lacked an openly xenophobic or right-wing populist party in its national parliament.

Questions

- As previously stated Sweden was before the Swedish Democrats, one of the very few countries in Europe lacking a right wing extremist party in its national parliament. Reading about Belgium's history, with right wing parties having been well established, it is obvious that this hasn't been the same in Belgium. What kind of effect do you think historical differences have had on RW-parties in Belgium and in Sweden?
- Another thing that is interesting with RW-parties is how much one single person can mean for the entire organisation, SD like most RW-parties has one strong spokesperson, Jimmie Åkesson, Front-national has Marine La Pen and UKIP has Nigel Farage. How about Vlaams Belang? Why is this a common trait among most RW-parties?
- Thirdly, most RW-parties have something else in common: Their biggest aspiration is to end 'mass immigration' - for multiple reasons. It is therefore that in different countries they have been labelled 'one-issue parties', parties unable to talk about other things than ending 'mass immigration' and the dangers of a multicultural society. Is it the same case with RW-parties in Belgium and why does this seem to be such an unavoidable trait for RW-parties across Europe?