

# Turkey and Europe : the Swedish point of view

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**Last month in Sweden's general elections a right-wing coalition under the leadership of the Conservative Party won with a small margin. The Social Democrat Workers Party, which has been in power for the last 12 years and has governed the country for the 65 of the past 75 years, became the opposition.**

The exit of **Goran Persson**, 57, prime minister for the last 10 years, and the arrival of **Fredrik Reinfeldt**, 41, doesn't necessarily mean Sweden will face major changes in its internal or foreign policies. In Sweden's stable democracy, there is a social market economy agreed upon by central right-wing and left-wing parties. This model combines the advantages of a competitive market economy and the virtues of a social prosperity government. Since the 1990s Social Democrats have successfully liberalized their economic policies and central right-wing parties have socialized theirs.

Well then, how is it that the Social Democrats in Sweden lost when the economy, enviously followed by all of Europe, has a growth rate this year of 5.6 and an employment rate that remains around 5 percent ? The answer to this is the erosion of government trust by Swedish voters that have grown tired of the corruption and neglect (on a scale that wouldn't even make it into our newspapers) of Persson and Social Democrat administrators. In fact, since the right-wing coalition has come to power, two female ministers were obliged to resign within one week due to irregularities (again of the type that wouldn't even be a news headline in our newspapers) : a quirk of fate.

## About the Turkish policy

Well, will the right-wing coalition's coming to power in Sweden affect its Turkish policy ? No, it won't, because the new administration supports Turkey's EU membership at least as much as the former administration did. In fact, the appointment on Oct. 6 of former Prime Minister **Carl Bildt** as minister of foreign affairs is an indication that Sweden's future support of Turkey will be even greater because Bildt is at least as close to Turkey as was former Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh, the unfortunate victim of a murder three years ago. He is a very powerful politician with intellectual attributes and he is aware of the importance of Turkey for the European Union.

Last month on his web site **Bildt** commented on possible future French president **Nicolas Sarkozy**: *"I am absolutely opposed to his recommendation for curtailment of membership negotiations with Turkey. The developments of the last several months should have shown Turkey's geo-strategic importance for the EU. Sarkozy's approach is taking us toward conflict both in the EU and, more importantly, in the most critical borders."*

As for the current atmosphere in Istanbul, **Bildt** interprets it as follows: *"An obvious pessimism dominates. There is a danger of derailment if a solution isn't found for Cyprus. However, history never advances on an even keel; there are always ups and downs. We are going to give a final decision on Turkey's membership at least 10 years from now. At that time a different EU and a different Turkey will be on the stage. But if we have a clear interest in Turkey's membership today, I'm sure this will become much clearer 10 years from now. It's certain that Turkey's geo-strategic importance is not going to diminish."* ♦

The Swedish parliament has not yet taken a decision to recognize an Armenian genocide. But whether it will take such a decision or, as some claim, make it a crime to deny an Armenian genocide like France remains a matter of great curiosity. Last Tuesday in a meeting of EU foreign ministers, Carl Bildt said: “*Freedom of expression is important for both Sweden and France. Just as such an idea as this will never be put on the agenda in Sweden, I don’t believe that it will become a law in France.*”

I asked the above question to **Ingmar Karlsson**, ambassador to Sweden’s Istanbul Consulate. He said: “*Sweden’s policy on this subject is very clear: History is written by historians, not politicians. The Swedish parliament hasn’t passed a law on this issue to date; it won’t do so after this either.*”

As for the comic and ridiculous claims that Orhan Pamuk won the Nobel Prize for literature because of the Armenian lobby in Sweden, there is no Armenian lobby in Sweden.