

Statement of Government Policy
1 October 2002

(Unofficial translation)
Check against delivery

Statement of Government Policy presented by the Prime Minister, Mr Göran Persson, to the Swedish Riksdag on Tuesday, 1 October 2002

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Mr Speaker,
Honourable Members of the Riksdag,

The task entrusted to us, Members of the Riksdag, by the Swedish electorate was clear.

Sweden's development as a welfare nation shall continue.

For this reason, conditions for children, health and medical services and care of the elderly must have priority over tax cuts.

For this reason, every reform must be financed and policies must be characterised by good order and responsibility.

For this reason, policies shall be drawn up in cooperation – both within the Riksdag and outside it. Only in this way can the goal be reached:

Sweden shall be a land of opportunity – not a society of discord.

The successes of recent years – a strong economy, high rate of growth and low unemployment – constitute a good foundation for dynamic, forward-looking policies.

The targets of our economic policies will remain in place. Public finances shall be in surplus and inflation kept in check. The expenditure ceilings shall continue to apply and will be met.

The objective is that 80 per cent of the population between 20 and 64 shall be employed in 2004. The need for social welfare for the poorest will be halved between 1999 and 2004.

A continued favourable economic development calls for broad support for two major tasks – both crucial for the future of our country.

Firstly, we must make working life more humane and reduce sick leave.

The Government's target is to halve the number of days of sick leave by the year 2008. Concurrently, each year the number taking early retirement will be reduced. The long-term efforts initiated in the autumn of 2001 will continue. Three-way talks between the Government and the social partners are now in progress.

The right of those who are ill to rehabilitation will be promoted and opportunities to return to work improved. Long-term sick leave will require opinions from more than one doctor. Resources will be appropriated for greater coordination between health and medical care, social services, the labour market and social insurance. The social partners' preventive efforts will be strengthened as will public health measures and occupational health services. Particular attention will be paid to women's health and working conditions.

Employers must take greater responsibility for long-term sick leave. Poor working environments must involve a cost – good ones will be rewarded. Employees' influence over their working conditions and hours of work must increase. Full-time employment must be a right and part-time work an option. Young people must not find themselves trapped in insecure jobs. The number of types of fixed-term employment will be reduced and opportunities for permanent employment increase. Security of employment for those on parental leave will be reinforced.

The resources represented by the elderly, those on early retirement and disabled people must be better utilised. The more people working, the greater will be the scope for making working life better for everyone. The public sector shall lead the way and be a model workplace.

The second major task is to increase immigrant Swedes' access to the labour market.

The will to work is the nation's primary asset. This will in every individual must be utilised if we are to keep Sweden together.

Labour market policy will be strengthened. Resources will be devoted to adapting employment offices and job counselling to the individual's preconditions. A new grant will be introduced for those who have not gained a foothold on the labour market despite long inclusion in the activity guarantee scheme. Swedish language teaching will be improved. Systems and methods of evaluating foreign professional qualifications will be developed. Protection against discrimination will be expanded and urban development policy enhanced.

All public authorities, all municipalities and county councils shall set up goals and draw up action plans to increase diversity and combat discrimination in connection with recruitment. We want private employers to do the same.

These two social problems – the high figures for sick leave and the exclusion of the many immigrants – are the overriding tasks of this term of office. They are our joint responsibility. The participation of all actors will be needed.

The Government will convene two symposia. We want to bring together representatives of the parties in the Riksdag, the social partners, organisations, and national and international experts, both theorists and practitioners. New ideas, facts and experience must form the basis for joint action.

The spirit of mutual respect that has developed in recent years between representatives of the business sector and the trade union organisations inspires hope. It is only through greater agreement that the Government, business sector and employee organisations can take the all-embracing responsibility required for prosperity and welfare.

Swedish laws and rules shall encourage enterprise. The "3:12 rules" will be amended. More companies will be treated generously in connection with generational change. Financing opportunities for new and growing companies will be enhanced. Competitiveness and exports will be promoted, cartels vigorously opposed. A new innovation strategy will be formulated.

Sweden is a small country dependent on the world around. This has inspired openness and curiosity about all that is new and unfamiliar which has been a factor for our success. The combination of traditional industries and new creative sectors such as IT, biotechnology and the adventure industry offers excellent opportunities for growth.

A national centre for export of environmental technology will be established. Swedish success in the field of design gives competitive advantages. Increased investment will be made in industrial design. Preparations are under way for a Swedish Design Year in 2005. The Invest in Sweden Agency will be given more resources to attract foreign investment to this country.

Greater attention will be given to the conditions of basic industries, as also to the forestry industry. Agriculture and forestry are important assets in efforts to develop an ecocycle system.

If Sweden with its vast expanses is to be held together and the social and regional gaps reduced, well developed high quality infrastructure is needed. Multibillion investments will therefore be made in the coming years. Road maintenance will be improved and the railway network extended. The Stockholm Transport Commission will be given support to solve the traffic situation in the Stockholm area.

Mr Speaker,

Secure people dare to try their wings. It is only in security that true freedom is born.

It is when policies support both security for all people and economic growth, that development attains its maximum potential. And this is how we wish to shape policy in the coming years.

· The basis of security is laid at an early stage. Priority will be given to children. The financial situation of families with children has been strengthened through a number of investments in the last few years. During this term of office we want to raise child allowances still further and introduce a supplementary allowance for second and subsequent children. Possibilities for improving conditions for single and student parents will be reviewed. Parental insurance will be improved.

Compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child is essential. A new strategy will be presented to increase the impact of the Convention at the local level. Support to children at risk will be strengthened. The reception of asylum-seeking children will be improved.

During this term of office, the sports movement will be allocated SEK 1 billion – providing that it opens its doors to more people, keeps charges down, invests more in sports for girls, participates in the fight against drugs and extends its cooperation with schools.

· Everyone has the right to a secure old age. A good system for the care of the elderly requires more staff. Conditions of work and training opportunities for staff will be improved. Unsatisfactory conditions can never be accepted. Supervision will be tightened and 100 new safety representatives appointed for the elderly.

Maximum charges for elder care and cost ceilings for dental care have improved the financial situation of many elderly people. At the end of this year, pensions will be raised by SEK 300-600 a month for the majority of pensioners with low pensions. As from the beginning of 2003, a maintenance support for elderly persons will be introduced which will guarantee all those over 65 living in Sweden a reasonable standard of living.

Benefits for surviving family will be improved. Means testing of widow's pensions will be discontinued on 1 January 2003. A more generous adaptation pension will be introduced.

- Better health and medical services, more staff and shorter queues.

This is how our goals for health and medical care policy for the next few years can be summarised. These services should encompass everyone, be financed collectively and distributed according to need. All public health care should follow the same rules. Customers of private insurance companies must not have priority to care that is financed collectively.

Over the next four years, health care will be allocated a further SEK 20 billion. More staff can be appointed and quality enhanced. A national health care guarantee will be introduced. The dialogue between alternative and conventional medical care will be intensified. Public finances so permitting, a first step will be taken towards a cost ceiling for dental care for everyone during this term of office. Obstacles preventing people with disabilities from participating in the life of society must be removed.

In the name of solidarity, equalisation between municipalities and county councils will ensure that the quality of welfare is equally high throughout the country. Municipalities and county councils with negative population trends will continue to be given support. The Government will particularly follow developments in the Stockholm County Council, bearing in mind the former majority's unwillingness to comply with decisions made by the Riksdag.

A parliamentary committee of inquiry will be appointed to review the distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the different organisational levels of society.

- Good housing at reasonable costs is a social right.

At least 120 000 new homes need to be built during this term of office.

We want to cut value-added tax on construction of housing for the elderly, student accommodation, and small rental apartments. Rents for newly produced apartments will be kept in check. Competition in the building sector must be strengthened. The expansion in the numbers of places at institutions of higher education will be linked to demands on local authorities to provide student accommodation. Municipalities building rental housing will be rewarded.

Drugs must be combated.

We must all share responsibility for this. Here in our midst drugs are claiming victims. It is often young people who fall into drug abuse. Our ambition is unequivocal. The number of people falling victim to drug abuse must be reduced and the number breaking free must increase.

More drug-free meeting places and strong networks for young people must be created. Care for drug abusers will be strengthened. The national anti-drug coordinator will be given greater resources. Special investments in care and treatment will be made in the major cities where the majority of drug abusers and large groups of homeless people are to be found. The number of places at special homes for young people will be expanded.

- Where there are drugs, criminality often thrives.

During this term of office, 4 000 new police officers will be trained. Border control will be tightened. Initiatives to combat international organised crime will be further developed.

The judicial system will be modernised and the length of time between perpetration of the crime and legal proceedings will be shortened. Efforts to make the prison and probation service drug-free will be intensified. The protection of women and children at risk will be improved. Young women living under threat or coercion will be given better support. More

stringent legislation relating to restraining orders and sexual crimes will be introduced next year.

The learning society of the future is based on today's pre-school.

Maximum charges have been introduced. On 1 January 2003, pre-school will be made available to all four-year olds. An additional 6 000 pre-school teachers and nurses will be appointed so as to reduce the size of children's groups and raise quality.

All schools must be good schools. The Government's school initiative will give compulsory schools 15 000 new teachers and other specialists. Quality control will be improved. Education for pupils living in segregated areas will be strengthened. The Education Act will be reformed and the rights of the pupil reinforced. We shall introduce legislation prohibiting discrimination and sexual harassment in schools. A review will be made of working environment legislation from a pupil's perspective.

Priority will be given to reading skills. School libraries will be given greater support for book purchases. The number of school librarians and teachers of reading skills will increase. Sport and physical activity for all children will be a natural part of everyday school life. Mathematics will be strengthened at all levels – from pre-school up to higher education.

During this term of office, the upper secondary school will be reformed. More pupils must achieve knowledge targets and complete their education. Adult education will become more accessible and flexible. The cyber university will create opportunities for more people to pursue higher education.

The international competitiveness of higher education will be strengthened. The freedom of research will be guaranteed and basic research supported. More undergraduates will go on to post-graduate education. Cutting-edge courses will be established in industrial design. Investments in the biological sciences and biotechnology will continue to be made. More colleges will be assessed against tough criteria in order to qualify for university status.

Knowledge is power, this is a common tenet.
But culture is also power.

We all need access to means of expression – a rich language in which to express our feelings and opinions, perhaps the ability to sing, play, paint, dance.

But we also need someone to listen to us. We need one another, to share experience and to discuss opinions. This is how we help each other to attain deeper insight.

In the words of Leo Tolstoy:

“To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced, and having invoked it in oneself, then, by means of movements, lines, colours, sounds, or forms expressed in words, so to transmit that feeling that others may experience the same feeling – this is the activity of art”.

There must be a thousand ways of saying this.
There is one sure way of enriching a society – by investing in culture.

Culture will be one important area of reform during this term of office.

Continued investments will be made in Swedish film, dance and music. We want to draw attention to architecture, form and design as something that concerns us all. International cultural exchange will be expanded. Efforts to promote immigrant culture will be enhanced.

Sweden's many museums of working life will be supported in a special campaign to preserve our industrial heritage.

Children's culture will be given greater support. An international children's book prize will be established in memory of Astrid Lindgren. Free entry to national museums will be introduced.

Before me, in this Chamber, sits the most gender-equal parliament in the world.

We should be proud of this, but not satisfied.

We are still far from equality between women and men in Sweden.

During this term of office, the Government will intensify efforts to mainstream gender equality in all policy areas. A national action plan for increased gender equality will be presented in the course of the year.

The new Act concerning Equality between Men and Women introduces a requirement to identify unjustified pay differentials and take steps to correct the situation within three years. The results of this amendment to tighten up the Act will be analysed closely. If necessary, we are prepared to make the Act still more stringent.

Mr Speaker,

I want us to build a "green" welfare state.

Environmental policy deals with deep issues of responsibility and morality.

It is the future that is at stake, the conditions that our children and the generations beyond will face in their lives.

Sweden shall continue to be in the forefront in the transition to sustainable development. The Government's overall goal for environmental policy is to be able to pass on to the next generation a Sweden in which the major environmental problems have been solved.

The decisions taken at the global summit in Johannesburg define our duties. Climate policy will receive priority, nationally and internationally. Swedish emissions of greenhouse gases will diminish by at least four per cent by 2010. The green tax shift will continue. Changes will be made in the tax regulations to favour the development of alternative motor fuels. Competitive terms for biofuels will be introduced in 2003.

An agreement is being prepared with the industrial sectors on a long-term strategy for the continued transformation of the energy system. Conditions for closing the second reactor at Barsebäck are being examined.

The marine ecosystems are under threat from discharges of toxic substances and oil, eutrophication and overfishing. Marine environment issues will be brought to centre stage in environmental policy. The EU common fisheries and agricultural policy must be reformed.

Swedish agriculture is competitive and is in a position to exploit the potential presented by growth in the demand for organic foods. The new animal protection authority will be given increased powers. The fight against chemicals will continue. More forests that deserve protection will be purchased by the state for preservation. A special commitment will be made to nature conservation by local authorities.

The world market for environmental technology is growing rapidly. There are abundant opportunities for profitable operations. Increased investments in technological development

and technology exchange have the potential to solve global environmental problems, benefit Swedish industry and promote growth which can enhance welfare and social justice.

At present we still have unsustainable development. This trend can be reversed. A pioneering "green" welfare state can be built. But this will require everyone to play their part and share the responsibility.

Mr Speaker,

Sweden has a strong and respected voice in the world. We are active in the United Nations, the European Union and other international forums. Disarmament, conflict prevention and human rights, international law and sustainable development, free and fair trade – these are and shall remain corner-stones of Sweden's foreign policy.

More than a year has passed since the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States, when the threats of a new era became reality. A global insight emerged: All democratic forces must work together to preserve open societies. The international fight against terrorism must be conducted maintaining full respect for international law, human rights and individual legal rights. Export controls will be strengthened to prevent acts of terrorism.

Sweden does not participate in military alliances. The agreement reached on Sweden's security policy stance remains firmly in place. The reform of our Total Defence will continue.

Sweden will play an active role in ensuring that the EU assumes its full share of responsibility for sustainable global development. The advantages of globalisation must be more widely spread and manifest welfare disparities combated. The fight for global justice is our common responsibility. The UN goal of halving world poverty by 2015 must be achieved.

In this term of office, the enlargement of the European Union will be accomplished. Sweden will actively strive for a decision before the end of the year on the accession to the Union of those states that are ready for membership. This will be a historic step towards uniting Europe.

After enlargement, the internal market will consist of over 450 million consumers. The potential of the Baltic Sea region as Europe's most rapidly growing area must be realised. Funds will be allocated to consolidate the position of the Swedish business sector in the area. Attention will be paid to the celebration marking the 300th anniversary of the founding of St Petersburg. Support will be given to Russia as it prepares to join the WTO. Proposals will be presented for how citizens of new EU countries can be given free access to our labour market from the day of their accession onwards. Integration issues will be top priority when Sweden presides over cooperation between the Nordic governments in 2003.

During this term of office, decisions will be taken to enable the "one per cent" target for development assistance to be reached. Continued debt relief will receive priority, as will the fight against HIV/AIDS. A new development policy will be presented to the Riksdag in the spring. An EU-wide refugee policy shall be forged, based on the principles of solidarity, the right to asylum and humanity. The right to asylum for people in need of protection in Sweden will be defended vigorously.

The work of the Convention on the Future of Europe will be taken over by an Intergovernmental Conference on a new Treaty during this term of office. Sweden is taking an active part in the discussion on the future shape of the Union. While there may be a need to strengthen the role of the Commission and common decision-making in areas such as the

environment and asylum and migration, the Council should have a strong position in EU cooperation. The role of the national parliaments should be developed and strengthened.

Talks will be initiated between the parties represented in the Riksdag concerning a date for a referendum on full Swedish participation in the EMU, the aim being to achieve as broad a consensus as possible.

We ourselves – and nothing else – make up democracy. The day people turn their backs on democracy, the open humane society will begin to decay. The strength of democracy lies in the collective will of the many to govern their own lives and conditions.

Once again we are confronted with a declining electoral turn-out. This is a warning signal that we must take extremely seriously. This also applies to the advances made by parties holding anti-democratic values.

Having said that, preliminary analyses indicate that the trend has been broken in the electoral districts where special initiatives have been taken to raise voter turn-out. Similarly, there is evidence of growing support for popularly elected institutions. These are hopeful signs to bear in mind. No responsibility rests more heavily on the members of the Riksdag than to protect democracy.

In the spring, the Riksdag decided on a long-term action plan for a stronger democracy. Efforts in this area must be stepped up.

The fight for democracy and human dignity, the fight against racism and other forms of intolerance, must be fought constantly – in our everyday lives, discussions and thoughts. Next year a new government authority, the Forum for Living History, will be inaugurated. Its task will be to advance these efforts, taking the Holocaust as its point of departure.

Support will be given to the establishment of an independent centre for the fight against racism and other forms of intolerance. Sweden's national minorities shall have more influence. A council will be set up for Roma issues. In the spring the government conference Stockholm International Forum will be arranged for the fourth year in succession.

To conclude,

Four years of hard work await us.

This Chamber will serve as a showcase for the two sides of democracy.

On the one hand, the exchange of opinions: the mutual confrontation of ideas and values.

On the other hand, the decisions: the compromises and balances.

That's the way it is, the way it has to be in a living democracy.

We face great challenges, but great opportunities as well.

We have a commitment to a policy for welfare and employment, propelled by technological development, adaptation to the modern day, involvement and narrowing gaps in society.

We have a responsibility for Sweden, but also for the world around us, on which we are so dependent.

Let us meet in a new spirit of agreement, breaking down boundaries and barriers, and together building a more secure and stronger Sweden.

