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Contesting identities

Sweden's foreign policy and the creation of the Self

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Abstract

This paper engages in the study of identity formation in Swedish foreign policy debate. The study is situated within a broad constructivist field of research, drawing upon theoretical debates on subjectivity and the performative making of the state. The study draws upon the notion of ontological security and claims that sub-state actors, just as individuals, search for stable identities and a sense of continuity between self-esteem and action. Through the analysis of policy declarations and parliamentary debates, this study outlines two contrasting narratives of the state of Sweden represented by the two leading political coalitions. The analysis shows how Sweden's state identity continues to move through a process of europeanization while simultaneously experiencing a reawakening of an internationalist foreign policy brand. Sweden's candidature to the United Nations Security Council is used as an example to illustrate this development and to demonstrate the link between biographical narratives and political decision making.

Key words: foreign policy, identity, Sweden, internationalism, europeanization

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1. Introduction

1.1 New times in Swedish foreign policy

Upon taking office in October 2014, Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström, described how she wished the world to perceive Sweden if it were a physical person.

I want it to be a brave person. A brave "hir"¹. A brave hir who is clear, and has the heart on the right place and who can cooperate with others. Who is diplomatic but at the same time has a clear inner compass that guides our way. It is not a softy! Bravery will be needed! And leadership.²

The message is resolute. The new government lead by the Social Democratic Party will take a central role in international politics, leading the way by the promotion of firm moral principles. The tone is intriguing, considering Sweden's comparatively limited power resources as a small state.³ This rhetoric is however not new in Swedish foreign policy but in fact highly present during the 1960s and 1970s. By the end of the Cold War, when political tensions were discharged and a new global political environment unfolded, Swedish foreign policy needed no longer fear potential threats coming from the Soviet Union. In post Cold War Europe, Sweden's membership in the European Union did however provide another element to Sweden's integrity, as it came to entail closer foreign policy coordination with other EU member states through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This shift, which is elaborated more thoroughly in the following section, is suggested to have caused a europeanization of Swedish foreign policy identity.

¹Wallström uses the Swedish word "hen", here translated to "hir". This is a commonly used gender neutral pronoun.

²*UD-Kuriren*, 2014:3-4, p 8. Authors translation.

³As Annika Björkdahl (2013) notes, it is hard to define exactly the meaning of a small state, and the definition of a small state is not fixed. The author shares Björkdalhs understanding of "smallness" as referring to limitations in a state's relative or absolute power.

This paper investigates the making of Swedish foreign policy identity against the backdrop of the parliamentary election in 2014. It aims to illustrate the instability in Swedish state identity by pointing to conflicting narratives within the context of Swedish foreign policy debate. This study joins the theoretical debate on identity and foreign policy by offering an example of how to make sense of this connection. The following section offers a brief overview of previous research on Swedish foreign policy and clarifies the empirical questions this paper sets out to investigate. The subsequent section then outlines the theoretical point of departure by clarifying the concepts of identity, subjectivity, and ontological security. The theoretical section is followed by a study of the Swedish case in an effort to both illustrate theory and give perspective on contemporary developments in Swedish foreign policy.

1.2 From neutrality to European integration

From the early stages of the cold war until the fall of the Soviet Union, Sweden has been described as a strong voice in the international political debate. During this period Sweden had an active foreign policy, which has been explained by both improved relations between the global superpowers and increasingly radicalized social climate within Sweden's domestic context. The so called "active foreign policy" contrasted to the earlier Minister for Foreign Affairs Östen Undén's foreign policy doctrine which was comparatively careful and reluctant to causing too much noise on the international stage.⁴ During the decades when Sweden had turned to an active foreign policy, Sweden was recognized as a strong proponent for the United Nations, and even though the UN was strongly recognized as a key institution already in the 1940s and 1950s, its significance for Sweden changed over time. In the 1950s it was perceived as a collective security organization established to control the rising tensions between the two power blocs. In the 1960s and 1970s, as a result of the decolonization processes, it became more of a global forum, where Sweden could play an active role, often supporting the position of third-world countries. In both the General Assembly and the Security Council, Sweden started expressing support for non-aligned, ex-colonies, which was little appreciated by the Western bloc which saw Sweden as an ideological partner.⁵ Bjereld *et al* claim that

⁴Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 273.

⁵Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 255-257.

Sweden's active foreign policy, including strong condemnations of the West and support for the Global South, allowed Sweden to maintain the credibility as a neutral state despite its economic and ideological proximity to the Western bloc. Sweden's antagonizing approach was partly overlooked as Sweden mostly directed its attention to the issues in the Global South, as this rhetoric had less effect on the power balance between the superpowers. In the same fashion, Sweden could simultaneously exhibit its commitment to Western ideology by engaging in global issues on justice, in spite of its military non-alignment.⁶ Toward the last stages of the Cold War, the active foreign policy had become a core feature of Sweden's international profile. Bjereld *et al* contend that Sweden was able to preserve its independent position by equally condemning the actions of the US and the Soviet Union, for example by criticizing their invasions of Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively.⁷

Hans Lödén emphasizes the factor of identity and ideology in his attempt to explain the expansion of the active foreign policy, trying to mitigate the theoretical dichotomy between realism and a more liberal view on international relations.⁸ Lödén claims that between 1950 and 1970, the Social Democratic Party started developing an internationalist ideological vision, which viewed security as achievable through positive change of international institutions. This vision included the promotion of disarmament and non-proliferation, international law and solidarity, rights of small states, and a steadfast support of international organizations such as the UN.⁹

Despite somewhat different emphasis, Lödén and Bjereld *et al* clearly agree that Sweden had to mitigate between its Western and its neutral identity due to the political tensions during the Cold War. Bjereld *et al* conclude that this conflictual dimension however lost its relevance by the end of the Cold War, as Sweden lost its primary threat to national security.¹⁰ In this connection, one may ask what happened to Swedish foreign policy identity, given this important structural shift. How would the post Cold War political landscape affect Sweden's international profile?

Indeed, as has been observed, Sweden did change its course in foreign policy significantly after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹¹ In the late 1980s Sweden had already taken important steps toward closer economic integration with the European Union by the signing of the

⁶Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 273-275.

⁷Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 300.

⁸Lödén (2005).

⁹Lödén, (2005), p 373.

¹⁰Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 332.

¹¹af Malmborg (2001), Agius (2006); Bjereld *et al* (2008).

European Economic Area Treaty and the way toward a more comprehensive European integration was wide open. The EU-membership had a crucial impact on Sweden's foreign policy as the CFSP compelled Sweden to coordinate its position with other EU member states. In the mid 1990s, the active foreign policy had been deeply undermined. From this point, it was no longer possible to clearly distinguish Sweden's position from other EU member states', and Sweden's support for the global south was dropped in favor of a more europeanized foreign policy.¹² Mikael af Malmberg argues that:

[i]f Sweden faces a threat after the Cold War it is not one of invasion but of marginalisation. Small states are under strong pressure to approach the sole remaining power-bloc, or the two interrelated blocs of NATO and the EU. Given the kindred nature of the partners in the EU and NATO such a rapprochement comes more naturally today than during the Cold War, although it amounts to an identity crisis for some individuals to abandon the role of 'world conscience' for a more anonymous place in the crowd of states in the Western security community.¹³

During the social democratic leadership of Prime Minister Göran Persson and Minister for Foreign Affairs Anna Lindh, the enthusiasm for regional security, EU and NATO become more central, and Sweden turned further away from past internationalism, closer to the rhetoric of the Moderate Party, at the time lead by Carl Bildt.¹⁴ With a new global political landscape, the Social Democratic Party appeared to have left behind, or at least modified, its ambition to make Sweden an individual and active voice in global politics. In a wider perspective, Swedish social democracy was not alone in this ideological recession. As Bryan Evans notes, the social democratic turn to global capitalism also took place in others countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Australia and the United States.¹⁵

In *The Social Construction of Swedish neutrality* (2006), Christine Agius adopts a constructivist approach in her research on Swedish foreign policy from the Cold War until the turn of the millennium. Agius explains the shift from social democratic internationalism to europeanization under Bildt as a process of identity formation and a redefinition of Sweden's international role. Despite the ostensible consensus between the two largest parties on Sweden's foreign policy, the opinions on the rationales for Swedish internationalism were significantly different. For social democrats, Swedish internationalism was essential for the definition of Sweden itself and Swedish social democratic identity, while conservatives viewed such inter-

¹²Bjereld *et al* (2008), p 322.-329.

¹³af Malmberg (2001), p 181.

¹⁴af Malmberg (2001), p 181-182.

¹⁵Evans & Schmidt (2012) (ed.), p 2.

nationalism as a way to continuously avoid pressing domestic issues.¹⁶ In order to change the course of Swedish foreign policy, Bildt had to redefine the narrative of Sweden's role in the world, an endeavor deemed hard due to the hegemonic role of the Social Democratic Party. Agius relates to Finnemore and Sikknik's concept of "cognitive frames" to make sense of Bildt's struggle to promote a more positive attitude toward European integration. According to this view, norms are first created and then entrenched, and when new norms enter into such an established framework, contention will arise between old and new norms. Bildt's political ambitions therefore had to fit within the social democratic understanding of Self and other.¹⁷ In spite of Bildt's journey uphill, Sweden still experienced the initial phase on an identity makeover during the Moderate Party's three years in power. The party had to redefine Sweden's national identity as defined under decades of social democratic rule, resulting in an identity crisis as Sweden pulled closer to neo-liberal norms of the EU, partially abandoning a traditional view of social democratic welfare exceptionalism. By the Social Democratic Party's return to power in 1994, Sweden was already approaching full scale membership in the EU, but as Agius notes, the definition of Sweden's national identity remained heavily contested.¹⁸ The social democrats did however begin to bridge the previous ideological gap between social democrats and the EU, and Persson's government expressed optimism for Sweden's possibilities to have an actual progressive effect on the EU. The EU was previously viewed as a purely capitalist project, but as the process of integration moved on, the union started to be seen as an undertaking for peace and security.¹⁹ Agius however voices a concern that Sweden's increased integration with the EU may lead to a loss in constructivity within the international political dialogue, due to the loss in an independent voice.

Indeed, this seemed to be the assessment about Swedish neutrality for those (this author included) who had hoped that Sweden's unique stance in international affairs would continue, despite the pressures to abandon neutrality. However, in the 'war on terror' and deeper connection to the EU through globalisation, Sweden may have an opportunity to *convert the values and norms of neutrality* toward a more normative appreciation of global politics and action [...] The crucial question is whether Sweden can bring its more critical edge and unique world vision to the European table, so to speak, and work to transform the EU into a normative or cosmopolitan world power.²⁰

¹⁶Agius (2006), p 157.

¹⁷Agius (2006), p 159-160; see Finnemore and Sikknik (1998).

¹⁸Agius (2006), p 161-184.

¹⁹Agius (2006), p 171.

²⁰Agius (2006), p 201. Italics in original.

This study departs from a shared concern for the future of Sweden's “critical edge and unique world vision”. The question Agius poses appears even more relevant considering the historical shift in Swedish politics with two recently concluded terms with a government coalition with Bildt serving as Minister for Foreign Affairs. What could be expected from Sweden's foreign policy with the return of the Social Democratic Party?

Perhaps one could expect some level of continuance of the active foreign policy, despite some depressing accounts of a “silence”²¹ in Swedish foreign policy. Annika Björkdahl claims that small states, Sweden included, indeed proceed to actively have an impact on global issues, despite their shortage of power resources in both relative and absolute terms.²² Björkdahl argues that Sweden still “punches above its weight” in international politics by continuing to provide steadfast support for international institutions and norms. Despite the gradual shift in Swedish foreign policy identity, Sweden has been able to sustain its influence in international affairs by acting as a “norm entrepreneur” within both the UN and the EU, although the norm entrepreneurship has been more successful within the latter due to the sharing of core values. On the other hand, the lack of a coherent normative framework outside of Europe explains the failure of Sweden's normative entrepreneurship in the UN.²³ Christopher Browning employs the similar notion of “branding” to describe how Sweden along with other Nordic countries have been marketing a “Nordic brand”. Browning holds that Nordic countries not only have perceived their statecraft as exceptional but also externally marketable across the world. Elements such as peacefulness, bridge-building, international solidarity, and the economic system were central to this brand. However, by the end of the Cold War, the Nordic brand was gradually abandoned through the europeanization process.²⁴ Douglas Brommesson, who has studied the normative europeanization of Swedish foreign policy, also identifies such an exceptionalism and links it to what he describes as an internationalist foreign policy. The following table, adopted from Brommesson, illustrates a classification of two ideal types of foreign policy, and will be used as reference for the following study.

²¹Östberg (2012), “Swedish social democracy after the Cold War”. In: Evans & Schmidt (ed.) *Social democracy after the Cold War*, p 228.

²²Björkdahl (2013).

²³Björkdahl (2013), p 334.

²⁴Browning (2007).

Table 1: Brommesson's ideal types of foreign policy

	Internationalist foreign policy	Normatively europeanized foreign policy
World-view	A common humanity with a common destiny that may be reached together	Different cultural spheres with a Europe based on certain values and a specific territory
Principled beliefs	International cooperation characterized by progressivism and equality between states and individuals	Loyalty and solidarity to values identified as European heritage, but still values of universal validity
Causal beliefs	A strong international order as safeguard of equal rights for all	A strong Europe has the power to universally enforce the values identified as 'European'

Source: Brommesson (2010), p 232.

Brommesson concludes that Sweden's foreign policy became normatively europeanized during the 1990s, resulting in a stronger emphasis on European unity both spatially and ideationally.²⁵ The ideal types provide a useful point of reference in the analysis of Swedish foreign policy and will be discussed further in relation to the empirical study.

This section has briefly outlined the gradual development of Sweden's foreign policy identity. It has underlined that Sweden's identity has been imbued with a certain exceptionalism over the years. Some scholars have explained this exceptionalism by pointing to power balance policies during the Cold War, while others have emphasized ideology as the underlying factor. There is however reasons to argue, without making too sweeping conclusions, that one answer not necessarily excludes the other. Finding one single explanation is however not very meaningful nor the purpose of this paper. What should be stressed is instead the gradual shift from an internationalist to a normative europeanized foreign policy and a discursive alteration of the active foreign policy.

²⁵ Brommesson (2010), p 237-238.

1.3 Purpose and research question

Against the background of the above conclusions, this study sets off to investigate the identity formation process in Swedish foreign political debate and its connection to political action. The purpose of this study is captured by the following research question: *How do discourses on state identity influence the course of Swedish foreign policy?* The research question embodies both an empirical concern for the developments in Swedish foreign policy and a theoretical discussion regarding the connection between identity and political action. As will be argued throughout this paper, discourses shape identities, and identities influence the rationales for political action. The following part sets out to disentangle the central theoretical topics and outlines the methodological approach for this study.

2. Identities, narratives and action

This part defines the theoretical context in which this paper is situated. By drawing upon a broad constructivist approach to international relations, this part explores three theoretical topics central for the purposes of this paper. The first topic pertains to the constructivist approach to identity and international relations. The second topic concerns subjectivity and the ontological status of the state. The third topic brings in the concept of ontological security and its link to agency. Before embarking on these specific inquiries, a short overview of the constructivist approach to international relations will provide a broad theoretical context.

2.1 A constructivist approach

Within the field of international relations, realism and liberalism have commonly been viewed as the two main theoretical approaches for the understanding of states' interests and behaviors. However, since the fall of the Soviet Union and the shift away from bipolar power relations constructivists have offered a considerably different view in this debate.²⁶ While realists and liberals may disagree on the relevance of global inter-connectivity and its influence on states' behavior, both perspectives share rationalist assumptions about the foundations of the interplay between states. Building on the accommodation of economic theory in the discipline of international relations, rationalist theories like realism and liberalism suggest that states act rationally to achieve its highest prioritized goal in any given situation. Influenced by Hobbesian and Lockean understandings of rationality as an instrument to protect and achieve certain material interests, realists and liberals go on and study international relations.²⁷ Scholars using rational choice theory are, as Jeffrey Checkel explains, mostly concerned with utility maximization based on predefined ideas about the “good” option, often related to power or wealth; norms and social factors are seen as exogenous, and may at most have a curbing effect on the

²⁶Wendt (1988); Keohane (1988); Ruggie (1998).

²⁷Choi (2015), p 110-112; see Ruggie (1998), p 862.

rational state.²⁸ As Ji Young Choi points out, many rationalists do in fact concur with the argument that ideas and norms do have a significant impact on states' behavior, but their rationalist view remains underdeveloped, and at best they view norms and identities as constraints, resulting in a too static view on the state's identity.²⁹ In Alexander Wendt's famous article from 1988, he claims that social theories based on rational choice directs our attention away from certain questions about identity, by presuming that identity is exogenous to actors' decision making. "Questions about identity- and interest-formation are therefore not important to students of international relations. A rationalist problématique, which reduces process to dynamics of behavioral interaction among exogenously constituted actors, defines the scope of systemic theory".³⁰

The central constructivist argument is that actors – that is to say their identities and interests – and structures are mutually constituted. Ted Hopf argues that structure, in world politics understood as “a set of relatively unchangeable constraints on the behavior of states”³¹, is deprived of meaning without any intersubjective understanding of norms and practices. Actors would simply not be able to act without any preconception of norms. Hopf offers a hypothetical example with an accidental fire in a theater, where all the visitors run against the one single door leading out. If the only material circumstance would be the existence of this one single door to freedom, how could we then know who would exit first? Would it be the children, the disabled or perhaps women? Even in a case like this, Hopf says, we need to know about norms, cultures and institutions to help explain the structure surrounding the actors.³² The assumption that structure is *both* materially and socially constructed, and that actors gain their understanding of their interests within this historically specific structure, contrasts to rationalists' approach to international relations. Checkel states that:

Constructivists emphasize a process of interaction between agents and structures; the ontology is one of mutual constitution, where neither unit of analysis – agents or structures – is reduced to the other and made “ontologically primitive.” This opens up what for most theorists is the black box of interests and identity formation; state interests emerge from and are endogenous to interaction with structures.³³

²⁸Checkel (1998), p 327.

²⁹Choi (2015), p 114.

³⁰Wendt (1988), p 392.

³¹Hopf (1998), p 172; see Waltz (1979).

³²Hopf (1998), p 173.

³³Checkel (1998), p 326.

According to Hopf, a world without identities would be chaotic, since identities are a prerequisite for order and predictability. They are important because they serve three crucial purposes in society; 1) telling you who you are, 2) telling others who you are, and 3) telling you who others are. By defining who you are, identities enable the defining of interests or preferences in actors' decision making, given a specific context.³⁴ Simply put, an actor needs to know *who it is* before knowing *what to do*. The rationalist premise that identities, norms and interests are exogenously given, does little to provide understanding of the formation of interests. By taking for granted the view that states act rationally according to self-interest, one assumes a disassociation between interests and identity and therefore leaves little attention to the understanding of the mutual constitution between structures and actors. However, the objection against rationalist ontology does not mean that constructivists reject utility-maximization as a possible behavior, simply that constructivists challenge the static view on identity as exogenously constructed.

In the ontological critique of rationalism, constructivists stand united. Ontological assumptions do nevertheless give rise to issues of epistemological significance, and on this point different constructivists maintain somewhat diverging views relating to the role of institutions, rules, norms, and discursive practices.³⁵ John Ruggie argues that constructivists have not yet been able to present a complete theory on international relations, and therefore one should see constructivism as “a philosophically and theoretically informed perspective on and approach to the empirical study of international relations”.³⁶ Hopf makes a binary division between constructivist scholars, employing the notions *conventional constructivism*, in which one finds scholars such as Alexander Wendt and Peter J. Katzenstein, and *critical constructivism*, which has been represented by David Campbell and Jutta Weldes among others.³⁷ Hopf argues that despite their agreements on the intersubjective creation of meaning, contextualization, and the mutual constitution of structure and agency, conventional and critical constructivists lack a common understanding on the concept of identity.³⁸ Constructivists may agree on the basic assumption that identity and structure are mutually constituted, but a coherent understanding on the process of identity formation still remains absent. In addition, meta-theoretical questions about epistemology continue to be unsettled between the two constructivist camps. While conventional constructivists set out to explore the reproduction of identities

³⁴Hopf (1998), p 175.

³⁵Frueh (2003), p 20. See Klotz and Lynch (2007).

³⁶Ruggie (1998), p 856, sic. See also Griffiths (2011) p 156-158.

³⁷Hopf (1998), see Katzenstein (1998), Campbell (1999) and Weldes (1999).

³⁸Hopf (1998), p 181-183.

and to explain how those cause certain actions, critical constructivists invest their attention in scrutinizing the naturalization of certain truths. In contrast to conventional scholars such as Wendt and Katzenstein, critical constructivists do not approach identity as if it were a variable or a potential “cause” for action, but as a process in which myths are given specific meanings.³⁹ Consequently, conventional constructivists attempt to maintain their epistemological positivism while simultaneously arguing for a constructivist ontological view in which actors and structures are mutually constituted. Critical constructivists, however, reject such an epistemology viewing it as impossible to combine with a constructivist ontological position. If actors and social phenomena by definition are non-constant, how could we suggest that social phenomenon A causes phenomenon B without prematurely closing the meaning of A? Doing so, critical theorists argue, would be to challenge basic constructivist assumptions about the fluidity of meaning.

The constructivist disagreements on meta-theoretic questions has, and will likely continue to in the future. The aim for this paper is nevertheless not to engage with constructivists in a debate on meta-theory, but to explore how certain theoretical discussions within the field may provide useful tools to understand the empirical questions of this paper. One such discussion relates, as mentioned above, to the concept of identity. Before this first part sets out to concretize the potential of identity formation and discussing the relation between of ontological security and agency, some clarifications should be made regarding the central matter of analysis in this paper, namely the state itself.

2.2 Subjectivity and identity of the state

To make sense of the process of identity formation, it is imperative to first clarify how to approach the state itself as a subject. One should ask why it makes sense to use the state as a starting point for analysis in the first place. Indeed, it seems problematic to treat states similarly to how we treat individuals as states obviously consist of multiple physical individuals, each one possessing its own subjectivity. To suggest that states themselves have identities is to presuppose that they are subjects to begin with, and while it is possible to question such a proposition, this paper at least acknowledges the analytical usefulness of

³⁹Hopf (1998), p 181-183. See also Wendt (1999)

viewing the state as subject, even in the narrowest sense. Some clarifying distinctions could however explain this position and underline inherent difficulties.

Conventional constructivism

From a Wendtian perspective, states are considered to be "constituted by the self-organizing, homeostatic structures that make actors distinct entities"⁴⁰. The foundation for the state's so called corporate identity is primarily its people and its physical land. This corporate identity assumes the existence of an actor with an awareness and a memory of the Self. In Wendt's words, corporate identity "refers to the intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality. [...] for organizations it means their constituent individuals, physical resources, and the shared beliefs and institutions in virtue of which individuals function as 'we'".⁴¹ In his article "The state as person in international theory", Wendt elaborates these reflections more in detail.⁴² Wendt's discussion stems from two common assumptions, which hold that: 1) the state is a fictive result of the mind, and 2) the state's personality can indeed help us to understand the world. The problem assumes a physicalist understanding of the world, which contends that reality is exclusively constituted by matter, that is to say material objects, and that matter is ontologically prior to mind. Wendt asks why the state, a mere construction of our (material) brains, has been such a useful concept in making sense of the world. To respond to this question, Wendt first clarifies that he approaches the state as a psychological person, not a legal or a moral one, which means that he focuses on the mental and cognitive traits of the subjectivity. Moreover, out of the three criteria for psychological personhood – being an intentional actor, being an organism, and being conscious – states can only meet the first. Wendt explores the possibility of stretching state subjectivity to also meet the second criterion for personhood, concluding that the state despite important dissimilarities indeed shares some core elements with the organism. Wendt lists substantial individuality, organization, homeostasis, and autonomy as the state's central commonalities with organisms, while pointing out the existence of multiple independent individuals within the state and the absence of non-genetical reproduction mechanisms as reasons for ultimately not equating the state with an organism. To meet this challenge, Wendt argues that the state may be seen as a

⁴⁰Wendt (1999), p 224. In the case of individuals, this identity is called "personal identity".

⁴¹Wendt (1994), p 385.

⁴²For an extensive presentation of his argument see Wendt (2004).

“superorganism”, defined as “a collection of single creatures that together possess the functional organization implicit in the formal definition of organism”.⁴³ By employing the concept of superorganism Wendt bypasses the limitations of the analogy with an organism, allowing him to go further in his endeavor of personifying the state.

What makes superorganisms individuals, in the sense of having a spatiotemporal identity, and thus potentially being persons? In the case of organisms the answer is physical, the skin. But this criterion won't work for superorganisms, since they are composed of physically separate beings [...] The idea here is that it is the participation of individuals in a collective thought process (in this case, in a 'narrative of state'), whose boundaries are instantiated by the practices that produce and reproduce that process, which enables the superorganisms to survive.⁴⁴

The Wendtian, or conventional, way of defining the state's agency is an attempt to give the state an real subjectivity without ascribing it any essential meaning. States are not, as realists claim, power-seeking and egoistic by nature, but are still given an essence by the subjectivity attached to them. States are thereby holders of essence, although a weak one. Wendt still contends that the state exists only as long as people, not least IR scholars, continue to reproduce their existence by treating them as if they were real; “Given IR's claim to authoritative knowledge about world politics, the continual performance of this narrative in IR theory contributes importantly to making this 'fantasy' a reality”.⁴⁵

Critical constructivism

Wendt's argument pictures one possible way of grappling with the issue of the state's subjectivity which allows for continued focus on the state as a given corporate entity. The argument is however not fully satisfying due to the apparent essentialist assumptions. To conclude that the state possesses subjectivity by pointing to the criterion of intentionality is, at the very least, a small, yet substantial, leap of faith. Steve Smith highlights this problematic issue in Wendt's account on international politics, arguing that Wendt ignores the discussion on how actors receive their subjectivity in the first place by assuming the stability of the state as a social construction. In Wendt's view, where state subjectivity is pre-social, language is

⁴³Sloan Wilson and Sober (1989) quoted in Wendt (2004), p 309.

⁴⁴Wendt (2004), p 311.

⁴⁵Wendt (2004), p 316.

perceived as an instrument for state agency rather a constituent part of it.⁴⁶ David Campbell is equally skeptical to Wendt's view on state subjectivity, arguing that Wendt makes a “powerful rationalist pull” by defending the anthropomorphic view on the state.⁴⁷ While the Wendtian view on state subjectivity rests on the ontological presumption that states, at least in a narrow sense, exists prior to interaction with the international system, critical constructivists hold a significantly more skeptical opinion on the matter of state subjectivity. Critical scholars instead contend that the state lacks ontological basis outside the exclusionary practices of discourse, and as such cannot exist prior to action. The objection against pre-social state subjectivity does not mean that critical constructivists also reject the idea of state identity, only that any identity of the state is unstable and constantly under reproduction.⁴⁸ By drawing upon Judith Butler's notion of performative constitution, Campbell makes an analogy between gender and the state identity, claiming that just as the body receives its gendered identity through social codes, the state receives its identity through “*a stylized repetition of act*”.⁴⁹ Luiza Bialasiewicz *et al* explain that discourses are performative, meaning that discourses constitute the subjects of which they speak, whether it is an individual or a state. The state therefore comes to existence by discursive practices such as debates, political speeches, economic investments and immigration policies. Discourse is both ideal and material and “refers to a specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible”.⁵⁰ In a similar vein, Erik Ringmar argues that the state acquires its ontological status from narratives about the state. Due to the difficulty of defining a phenomenon for what it is “in itself”, one should talk about phenomena, such as the state, as something which exists under a certain description, that is to say a certain narrative. Meaning is not given by fixed definitions, but through resemblances between one thing and another: “Metaphor is rock-bottom. To ask for something more fundamental is to ask for too much, but also to ask for more than we need”.⁵¹ This study draws upon this view on the ontological status of the state and employs narratives as a central component for the upcoming analysis. It will be successively knitted together with theory and the method throughout the argument.

⁴⁶Smith (2000), 160.

⁴⁷Campbell (1999), p 220. Anthropomorphism means the attribution of human characteristic to non human forms.

⁴⁸Cho (2012), p 309.

⁴⁹Campbell (1999), p 9-10. Italics from Campbells quotation of Butler, see Butler (1990).

⁵⁰Bialasiewicz *et al* (2007), p 406.

⁵¹Ringmar (1996), p 450-451.

Summarizing a position

It has here been argued that conventional and critical constructivists depart from somewhat different ontological positions, displayed by their disagreement on state subjectivity. Their distinct starting points also explain their separate focus of study; conventional scholars focus mostly on the international system and the interaction between states with given corporate identities, while critical scholars are more concerned with the internal process of subjectivity production. By using the notion “performativity” instead of “construction”, critical scholars stress the fluidity and the repetitive discursive production of the subject, turning the attention of inquiry to the creation of the state's Self. Young Chul Cho points to the advantages of both conventional and critical approaches, claiming that neither is superior to the other but that they are concerned with rather distinct processes of identity formation. Cho suggests a pragmatic approach to the study of identity:

Whether one adopts either constructivism depends not on selecting the correct way to comprehend the nation-state, but rather on research purpose and question. [...] The pragmatic approach is that, without being immersed heavily in the meta-theoretical strife between the two seeming conflicting constructivist camps, both constructivisms should be treated as different analytical frameworks for capturing different (internal and/or external) faces of a state's identity [...]⁵²

This paper acknowledges this distinction between the two constructivist ontologies while leaning toward the critical research interest in the internal formation of subjectivity. This must not be understood as a rejection of states' central role in international relations. To study the internal representation of state subjectivity is not to deny that states may act “as if” they possessed a unitary subjectivity. The focus on internal representations of state subjectivity must however not divert the analysis away from relations between states. “Internal representations” refers to the multiple discursive performances internal to the state and not to domestic politics. These internal representations, such as political speeches, can then go on and perform state subjectivity by advancing a specific foreign policy, that is to say, promote a certain relation to another state. The point of accepting this “as if” notion of the state – slightly less ambitious than Wendt's idea of a superorganism – is that most people accept the cognitive existence of states and their influence on our thinking. The assumption is practical,

⁵²Cho (2012), p 311.

as it motivates the critical inquiry of state-internal struggles over the performance of state subjectivity without rejecting the state's impact on our daily lives. The empirical evidence is simply too convincing to dispute that states remain the principal players in the field of international peace and security.⁵³ Wendt's attempt to ontologically ground state subjectivity in the criterion of intentionality should be taken for what it is; a theoretical simplification to make sense of the international system. One should also note that Wendt has little interest in identity formation and foreign policy in his theorizing, but in the international system as a whole.⁵⁴

The debate between conventional and critical constructivists nevertheless raises a crucial question related to the theoretical coherence of this study. As this paper examines the contending views of Sweden's state subjectivity, it rejects the given subjectivity of the state while assuming the subjectivity of those groups assumed to compete for stabilizing state subjectivity, namely political parties. If one postulates that subjectivity is acquired through performativity (“*a stylized repetition of acts*”), this point of departure seems to encapsulate what appear to be an ontological contradiction. One may rightly ask: if subjectivity is constantly created through performative discourses, why should we take political parties and alliances for granted as relevant subjects? If we assume that political parties have pre-social subjectivities we assign them corporate identities in the same fashion we reject states those very same. This critical argument could of course continue, as long as one presupposes the preexistence of ontological subjectivity, not least of subjectivities attached to groups. The question is then: where do we begin to study identity formation, and how far may we extend such a theory without assigning stable subjectivities to corporate identities?

This paper acknowledges the position held by Campbell and other critical scholars insofar as it shares the aim to explore the performative articulation of Sweden through the study of foreign policy. To facilitate the study of Sweden's state-subjectivity and the discursive competitions within, some theoretical simplifications must be made. Political parties and alliances are in this paper viewed as corporate identities. Therefore, this paper also gently collides with a poststructural research interest. Simplifying political groups by viewing them “as if” they were real, however allows for increased attention to the making of state subjectivity, which political parties themselves intend to seize and perform. There will be reason to return to this question in the following section, which outlines the theoretical linkages between security, identity, and action.

⁵³Björkdahl (2002), p 47.

⁵⁴Cho (2012), p 310, footnote 7. See Wendt (1999).

2.3 Ontological security and nation branding

Ontological security

The concept of ontological security is related to the poststructural assumption that subjectivity is created through actions. It underscores a mutual reinforcement between identity and action by claiming that individuals conceive anxiety as a threat to their identity. In the study of performative representations of Swedish foreign policy, this concept offers a theoretically informed perspective on the formation of identity and the need for stable narratives about the Self. The term ontological security was initially used by sociologists and scholars such as Anthony Giddens⁵⁵ but has become more widely used also within international relations. Ontological security refers to the individual's sense of security in the Self, which contrasts to a traditional realist view in which security is related to the body or the state. While realists study security as a struggle for survival, constructivists employing the notion of ontological security instead focus on the security of being and the survival of biographical narratives.⁵⁶ In this paper, which sets out to examine contending narratives of Sweden's state subjectivity, this theoretical concept offers a way to interpret the meaning of action and its performative connection to the securitization of subjectivity.

As realists and constructivists adopt different views on what to securitize, their understandings of the sources of insecurity appear as slightly different. In contrast to realists' focus on states' fear of physical threat, the concept of ontological security instead captures anxiety as the source of insecurity. This theory claims that individuals possess a latent fear – an existential anxiety – regarding their identity, which is directly linked to their ability to act. Simply put, identity and agency are closely intertwined.⁵⁷ Maintaining ontological security furthermore means to assure a certain level of stability and coherence in one's perception of the Self. When ontological security is threatened, individuals engage in a search for one stable identity as a way to securitize their subjectivity. To nourish a cohesive picture of the Self the agent needs to act; ontological security is gained through practice, but to enable action individuals simultaneously need to securitize their subjectivity, that is to say defining who they are.⁵⁸ What the concept of ontological security illustrates is, hence, a mutually constituted

⁵⁵See Giddens (1991).

⁵⁶Steele (2005), p 527.

⁵⁷Mitzen (2006), p 345.

⁵⁸Kinnvall (2004) p 749; Mitzen (2006), p 344.

relation between identity and action in which each one sustains the other. This relates back to previous discussion which concluded that an actor needs to know *who it is* before it knows *what to do*. To this idea we can now add that an actor also need *to do* in order to sustain the idea of *who it is*.

The claim that individuals seek to secure a firm sense of continuity in their conception of the world suggests that narratives are essential for enabling action. Needless to say, narratives are constantly in the process of making through routinized behavior, which means that they can change and clash with contrasting narratives. A narrative may also be challenged by critical situations which force the individual to cope with the potential conflicts between its own narrative and its actual behavior. Brent Steele explains this situation by referring to the notion of *shame*:

Shame occurs when actors feel anxiety about the ability of their narrative to reflect their behaviour; put another way, they feel shame when there exists too much distance between this biographical narrative and the actions they seek to fulfil a sense of self-identity. [...] It is unnatural for a state to identify itself one way and to 'perform' acts in a different way.⁵⁹

The notion of shame illustrates the mutual constitution between identity and actions. Negative outcomes of a security challenge are traditionally understood as physical harm, but from this perspective negative outcomes are instead defined as shame. The degree of cognitive dissonance is directly associated with this feeling of shame, just as realists view material resources and damages as measures of negative outcomes. The following table, adopted from Steele, displays the theoretical concept of ontological security.

Table 2: Traditional vs. Ontological security

	Traditional security	Ontological security
(1) Security as:	Survival	Being
(2) Agent structured by:	Distribution of power	Routines and self-identity
(3) Source of insecurity:	Fear of threat	Anxiety
(4) Outcome of incorrect response to challenge:	Physical harm	Shame
(5) Measurement of outcome:	Change in material capabilities	Difference between biographical narrative and

⁵⁹Steele (2005), p 527.

		actual behavior; discursive remorse.
(6) Structural change:	Change in distribution of power	Routinized critical situations, change in self-identity, change in agent's routine

Source: Steele (2005), p 527.

By analyzing discursive representations of the state of Sweden, this paper illustrates a securitization of Sweden as an “as if” subject. Sub-state actors like political fractions possess and perform distinct biographical narratives for the state by giving descriptions of who it is. Biographical narratives are not innately different from other narratives, but simply concern the descriptions of the Self rather than something else. This is the narrative which provides the subject with a definition of *who it is* and an idea of *what to do*, referred to before. Narratives are therefore not simply instruments used to interpret the world, but normative accounts about what the world is and what it should be. They play a key role for states in maintaining their ontological security by providing “autobiographical justification and continuity with the 'good past'”. Consequently, biographical narratives are both inherently political and inseparable from the state itself.⁶⁰ This postulation also suggests, in accordance with the concept of performativity, that narratives are confined within – or at least in close proximity to – action, as any action must be followed by an explanation for that particular act. Whether or not an actor needs to explain its action for, say the mass media, it needs to explain the action for itself. It must know why it is doing what it is doing to become itself and maintain its ontological security.

It should be noted that this paper makes no uncompromising distinction between political parties and the state, without for that matter suggesting that they comprise a unitary subject. Political parties do not constitute the state but they all do, at least in the context of this study, aspire to seize the representative power of the state. Despite the fact that parties can promote diverging narratives of the state, they are nevertheless engaged in the making of the state; political alliances are not equal to the state but institutionally integrated in the process of its making. Suggesting an interwoven relation between political groups and the state also means that the state, despite its non-given “as if” subjectivity, certainly do matter for political actors battling for defining its identity. One could of course question whether political party A is able to experience shame if the behavior of political party B challenges A's

⁶⁰Subotić (2015), p 5.

biographical narrative of Sweden. This paper, however, does not support such an extreme separation between political parties. It is more productive to assume that the state, despite its questioned subjectivity, serves as ideational glue which connects political groups despite ideological differences. The “as if” approach allows for a study of the internal performing of the state without rejecting the state's mental impact on actors claiming to act in its name.

This way of employing the concept of ontological security enables the study of narratives performed by groups within the state. Studying groups by using a concept designed for individuals is however somewhat problematic. The question is therefore; is it possible to apply the notion of ontological security to political parties and alliances just as theory does to individuals? And if possible, why not continue and apply it to the state as a whole? If political parties can be given anthropomorphic attributes such as ontological security, why not attach similar traits to the state? This is a valid question, and should be addressed at least briefly. First of all, one should keep in mind that this study aims to illustrate narratives as performative activities within the state of Sweden. Engaging in reductionist arguments in which nothing is more than the sum of its parts would certainly offer little support in this endeavor. Although it is certainly possible – as Mitzen and Wendt have argued elsewhere⁶¹ – to assign ontological security to the state, this paper goes half way and emphasizes the impossibility of fully separate political parties from the state. However, as Mitzen accurately points out; any ontological assumption, such as the anthropomorphic attribution to groups, is only as useful as the knowledge it produces.⁶² The advantage of starting from the level of sub-state actors is that it enables the illustration of multiple discursive performances of the state. In combination with a soft understanding of the state's subjectivity this approach supports a critical take on the state's subjectivity, while recognizing that the state nevertheless remains a fundamental idea that is not fully distinguishable from groups within.

Nation branding

To create a slightly more tangible link between the concept of ontological security and the Swedish case, this study draws upon Christopher Browning's notion of nation branding. Browning argues that national dignity and self-esteem in the past mostly were affected by successes and failures on the battlefield, which were then upheld by narratives pronouncing

⁶¹See Mitzen (2006) and Wendt (1994).

⁶²Mitzen (2006), p 353.

the state's successes in terms of geopolitical gains earned through violence. Browning argues that in an increasingly globalized world where pre-Westphalian norms of geopolitical anarchy at least institutionally have been mitigated, ontological security and a sense of self-esteem have become more important.⁶³ The need for national identity narratives did not simply vanish with the decline of past norms of military conquests. The shift from one norm to another did not eliminate the need for national identity, and suggesting this would also contradict the claim that ontological security is intrinsic to human psychology.

The shift to Westphalian norms however changed the practical means of upholding state identity, and one such mechanism is nation branding. Browning describes national brands as similar, yet not equal to identity on the following points; 1) brands are more directly related to strategic action and the forming of emotional ties to the nation itself, 2) brands are more stable, less nuanced, representing a temporally closed definition of state identity, and 3) brands are not requisites for the performing of subjectivity.⁶⁴ Brands may seem superficial at first sight, but their role in the creation of national self-esteem is not irrelevant, certainly not in global communities in which marketing power yields stronger acceptance than military force. By using the notion of branding, Browning introduces “market-based rationalities” into the process of identity formation, arguing that “[w]hat really counts, though, is the recognition of one's wealth by one's peers. [...] Accordingly, national self-esteem becomes dependent upon having an attractive brand given the desires for conspicuous consumption in the global marketplace”.⁶⁵

The idea of nation branding corresponds to the previous discussion on Sweden's so called foreign policy exceptionalism (see section 1.2). Browning argues that Sweden and the Nordic states have shared a consciousness of the notion of a Nordic model, encompassing certain “Nordic” approaches to economic and foreign policy. This model, which has been key for the Nordic countries' national identity construction, has also been marketed as a brand for an international public, displaying an ideal state. This model started to decline after the fall of the Soviet Union as elements of this Nordic model become more and more accepted within an emerging idea of a European model.⁶⁶ With this in mind, one may reasonably ask what happened to this brand. Is it still present or has it merged fully with some sort of “European brand”?

⁶³Browning (2013), p 6.

⁶⁴Browning (2013), p 7.

⁶⁵Browning (2013), p 10.

⁶⁶Browning (2007), p 44-45.

Browning's notion of branding shifts the focus from outside security threats to the state's attention-seeking behavior toward like-minded and competing states.⁶⁷ The branding notion provides a useful analytical entry for this study by tying together ontological security with foreign policy. Adopting the concept of branding must however not force the exclusion of threat definitions as a part of identity formation. Conversely, brands themselves could in fact be constituted by articulations of “othering”. There are no reasons to claim that the forming of “emotional ties” and “closed definitions of the state identity” would exclude articulations of outside threats. An attractive brand promoted in the so called global marketplace could possibly even benefit from threat definitions, as long as these articulations yield positive attention from a state's peers. It also makes sense to ask whether it is possible to identify multiple state brands working in parallel, but since brands represent strategic and temporal closures of state identity, this seems unrealistic. This does not mean that brands cannot be challenged, only that competing nation-state brands are unlikely to be promoted simultaneously. Identity conflicts will still be apparent within the state, and the branding of the state may remain disputed by internal disagreements on the identity of the state. Brands should therefore be understood as stable, politico-strategic representations of a certain dominating identity. A brand is however not necessarily inherent to a biographical narrative, but may be deeply connected to it as the Nordic case has shown. Whether such a brand can be identified or not is an empirical question.

2.4 Methods and material

Studying narratives

This study analyzes state identity formation within the foreign policy debates between the Social Democratic Party and the center-right coalition, the Alliance. To study identities is to engage in the study of discursive performances, and narratives are perhaps the most apparent form of discursive performance. Capturing a narrative is however somewhat difficult due to the constant struggle between different discursive representations, which all reach for hegemony by stabilizing the meaning.⁶⁸ In this study, the Swedish state is treated as an unstable re-

⁶⁷Browning (2013), p 10.

⁶⁸Jørgensen & Phillips (2002), p 43.

sult of discursive performances within the state, represented by contending parties and their respective narratives about Sweden's identity. More specifically, what concerns this paper is where to draw the boundaries for Sweden as a subject. A central question is how to perceive the spatial boundaries for Sweden as a state. As the poststructural literature points out, identity is created in relation to the other, and by emphasizing certain historical alliances or threats, narratives mold policymakers' way of thinking when developing a political position.⁶⁹ Should Sweden be seen simply as “Sweden”, a “Nordic state”, an “EU-member” or perhaps as a mere fragment of a border-less global community? The narrative of the Self is connected to the narratives of spaces, or as Campbell phrases it; “the constitution of identity is achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serves to demarcate an 'inside' from an 'outside,' a 'Self' from an 'other,' a 'domestic' from a 'foreign’”.⁷⁰

It is time to outline some central questions that will serve as guidelines for this study. The first question to be answered concerns the *spatial boundaries* represented in the biographical narratives. Spatial boundaries are established through the performing of geographical limitations which include certain groups or individuals within a collective while simultaneously excluding others. These boundaries can be performed in subtle ways and not necessarily by a direct statement which determines the lines of division. To locate a spatial “home” means to study the assumptions about a collective “we” and an alien “other”. This meets general principles of methods aimed at studying identities. As Hopf states, “finding identities” requires us to ask the fundamental question on how both “we” and the “other” is described in a text.⁷¹ The questions however make up two sides of the same coin, as the definition of a “we” just as well may be articulated by the defining of a threatening “other”. By articulating outside threats using specific narratives, some identities within the state may be forced to succumb due to their incompatibility with such an identity.⁷² For this reason, this study pays attention to both the Self and the Other. The following questions serve as guidelines for the empirical study:

- What is included in the discursive performance of Sweden as *we*?
- How are *threats* defined?

⁶⁹Subotić (2015), p 4.

⁷⁰Campbell (1999), p 9.

⁷¹Hopf (2009), ”Identity relations and the Sino-Soviet split”, p 289. In Abdelal *et al* (ed.), *Measuring Identity*.

⁷²Aydin-Düzgit (2012), p 7.

The first question relates to spatial and ideational boundaries to the state. By examining how political agents through discourse express assumptions about a group, one can acquire an understanding of the normative message they wish to convey. Assumptions about groups are not normatively neutral, certainly not since political discourse often is directed straight to the public as a way to establish a certain “truths”. By studying the discursive formation of groups, one also gains an understanding of why some political alternatives are more feasible than others; “Group formation is to be understood as a reduction of possibilities. People are constituted as groups through a process by which some possibilities of identification are put forward as relevant while others are ignored.”⁷³ One could therefore expect a narrative defining a certain spatial boundary to also merge with an articulation of ideational boundaries. However, emphasizing space and ideas separately provides more analytical clarity as it directs the attention to notions such as “democracy” or “freedom” as well as to spatial notions like “Europe”, “Sweden” or “West”. Spatial and ideational boundaries can be associated with institutional arrangements such the EU or the UN, which both represent spatio-ideational bodies. A state's suggested – or assumed – role within such institutions is therefore a discursive performance of group formation and the making of a “we”. In a study of Denmark's relation to the EU, Henrik Larsen outlines a set of articulations which provide a useful framework for analyzing how subjectivity is performed through discourses on states and their relation to institutions⁷⁴ For example, if a national politician narrates its state's action as “EU's action”, it silences the subjectivity of the member state, while reproducing the EU as a taken for granted subject. Conversely, if the state is articulated as a unique, separate entity with accentuated virtues, it shifts the subjectivity back to the state itself. In the ensuing study, Larsen's considerations serve as useful guidelines in the study of identity formation.

The second question, regarding *threats*, shifts the attention to external elements of identity formation. To examine the performing of threats means to localize norms and actors from which the speaking agent distances itself. The act of distancing may at its purest form appear as guilt blaming and outspoken criticism toward the other. Defining others by assigning them undesired attributes is one concrete way of limiting possibilities of action. As an example, in his study of the United States' foreign policy Campbell shows how a discourse articulating an emerging communist threat made it difficult to advance any alternative view able to challenge the hegemonic anti-communist discourse.⁷⁵ In the upcoming analysis, threats are broadly un-

⁷³Jørgensen & Phillips (2002), p 44.

⁷⁴See Larsen (2014), p 371.

⁷⁵Campbell (1999), p 195-205.

derstood as definitions of what the state must avoid becoming, whether such definitions include ideational or spatial limitations.

These two questions provide practical support in the following study of the empirical material. Needless to say, these should not be seen as separate from one and other. Conversely, each one may be viewed as inherently dependent on the other to define itself. The separation simply makes it more easy to grapple with the empirical material.

Two narrative events

To examine discourses on state subjectivity, the following analysis draws upon two narrative events in contemporary debate on Swedish foreign policy. The first narrative event is constituted by formal presentations of foreign policy doctrine. The purpose of studying this type of event is to attain a broad understanding of the identity tendencies in foreign policy discourse. Due to the official nature of these narrative events, they are well suited for this exact aim. The second narrative event relates to Sweden's candidature to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 2017-2018. Sweden's candidature was announced in 2004, but was intensified when the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party formed a government coalition in 2014.⁷⁶ This event differs from the first in the sense that it more concretely relates to Sweden's participation in international institutions; a successful candidature will result in a two year tenure in the highest authoritative body of the UN. The candidature to the UNSC makes up an intriguing case as it raises questions about Sweden's relation to the EU and the CFSP to which Sweden has declared its commitment.

Empirical material

Meaningful analyzes of narratives or other forms of discourses benefit from the use of a wide variety of genres. Different genres means different speaking situations, and by studying multiple genres it is possible to see both dominating and unstable conceptions about the questions outlined for this study. Broadly speaking, "genres" may include anything from political

⁷⁶*Statement of Government Policy*, 3 October 2014.

speeches, policy documents, debates, literature, movies and pictures. This study, however, rests exclusively on the first three genres.

A vital piece of material is the *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*⁷⁷ (from now on simply “Foreign Policy Declaration”). These statements are made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the annual debate on Sweden's foreign policy. It is intended to in a comprehensive manner explain the course of the government's foreign policy and is in this study used in conjunction with the *Statement of Government Policy*. As the latter describes national policy more broadly, the analysis is centered mainly on the segment describing foreign policy. These two official documents allow for direct comparison between two assumed rivals of the narrative of Sweden's subjectivity, namely the Alliance and the Social Democratic Party/Collaboration government. Political announcements of this kind expose the actor's own account of its behavior, which is of highest interest for this study. As stated previously, narratives are central elements in agency as they allow the actor to justify its decisions and avoid disharmony between action and self-esteem. The government's statement is itself announced in a forum where it channels its narratives to the press, the public, and the political competitors, and by doing so it works as a justification directed toward those likely to question its action. Committee bills are also used to sketch a broad narrative. The Social Democratic Party's and the Moderate Party's respective bills “En rättvis värld” (“A just world”) and “Frihet och utveckling i världen” (“Freedom and development in the world”)⁷⁸ serve as general accounts on the performance of Self. Since a substantial part of political debate takes place outside the parliament, press sources are also used in this study. The analysis of the second narrative event – Sweden's candidature to the UNSC – is based primarily on two parliamentary interpellations relating to the candidature.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Government Offices of Sweden (2014 & 2015), *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*.

⁷⁸Motion till riksdagen: 2013/14:U303; Motion till riksdagen 2014/15:2993.

⁷⁹Interpellation 2013/14:102. Interpellation 2014/15:363.

3. Identity in Swedish foreign policy

3.1 A voice for Europe or the World?

It is time to search for an answer to how the political discourse performs representations of a “we” and its “threats”. It is worth noting that these questions remain intertwined, which makes it natural to grapple with both questions at the same time. As the title for this section suggests in an intentionally simplified way, the point of departure assumes two opposing positions – one European and one global. Since this dilemma has been suggested in previous literature on Swedish foreign policy identity, the following investigation employs this assumed opposition as a theoretically supportive tool for the study of the empirical material. That being said, it is important to question this very same construction of the mind.

The forthcoming analysis is organized in the following way: The first part of the study sets out to broadly sketch out narratives in official foreign policy doctrine. By analyzing the *Statement of Government Policy* and the *Foreign Policy Declaration* including committee bills, this part follows up on previous research's concern for the successive development of a more pronounced “European identity” at the expense of a traditionally strong internationalist rhetoric. The conclusions from this section are then applied in the succeeding section which investigates the debate on Sweden's candidature to the UNSC.

Statements of Government Policy

The Alliance

In 2013, Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt presented the Alliance's most recent Statement of Government Policy.⁸⁰ In one of the opening paragraphs of the speech, Reinfeldt states that:

⁸⁰Quotes from this source have been translated by the author.

When we take in our surrounding world we are reminded about Sweden's virtues. The possibilities it entails to grow up in a country which has peace, a well developed democracy and a sound welfare. [...] there is also reason to reflect on how the world views us. Although we are a small country, many eyes are turned on us. When USA's president Barack Obama recently visited us, we discussed Sweden's economy and how we resisted the crisis. How more of openness and trade is good for growth in the whole world and often increases the resistance against crisis.⁸¹

The statement advances two basic conceptions about Sweden. First it underlines the values of peace, a well developed democracy and a good welfare system. This harmonizes with the stereotypical picture of Sweden described in earlier research. In the second part, Reinfeldt is slightly more specific, claiming that Sweden's success depends on policies of openness and promotion of international trade. Reinfeldt continues the argument in the following paragraph, stating that “our ability to unify competitive growth economy, successful enterprises, and high welfare ambitions with reduced impact on the climate awakens interest”.⁸² The foreign policy segment of the statement explains Sweden's relations to the rest of the world, putting certain emphasis on Sweden's role as a part of the EU. In the introductory paragraph, Reinfeldt states that “Sweden should be an active part of a strong, united, and open Europe. A Europe which rises strengthened from the economic crisis and which is more capable to assert its interests on the international arena.”⁸³ This position reflects the notion of a “European identity” as it calls for a united and strong Europe. Consequently, Sweden's subjectivity is articulated as subordinate to the EU, which in turn is ascribed a higher purpose. The next paragraph goes on to emphasize the benefits of being part of the union; “[a]ccess to the world's largest unitary market – as a consumer and producer. The possibility to study, travel, or work in any of EU's 28 member states. But also a unique opportunity for Sweden and other European countries to jointly meet the great challenges we face.”⁸⁴ The strongest bonds, however, are those Sweden shares with its fellow Nordic countries, which is explained by the “deep roots” of this community of neighboring countries.⁸⁵ However, the Nordic community remains undefined and never receives far less attention than the EU. The formulations regarding the Eastern partnership (EaP), in which Sweden has been one of the driving forces, further signals an assumption of a spatial unity between Sweden and the EU: “The challenges in *our* eastern neighborhood remain. [...] But the difficulties do not change the fact that it is a strong Swedish interest to

⁸¹Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 1.

⁸²Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 1.

⁸³Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 11.

⁸⁴Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 11.

⁸⁵Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 11.

develop and strengthen the European Union's politics for the countries in the Eastern partnership.”⁸⁶ The Eastern neighborhood is articulated as “our” challenge, which suggests that Sweden and the EU share equal challenges through common spatial boundaries. The notion of “Eastern neighborhood” itself represents a politico-spatial articulation which merges the subjectivity of Sweden with that of the EU. One may rightly ask if countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine really are neighbors of Sweden given the political and spatial distances. This would obviously make little sense, because the concept of “Eastern neighborhood” refers exclusively to the expansion of “our” European collective. When Bildt talks about the challenges in “our eastern neighborhood”, he then talks about the challenges in EU's neighborhood. Sweden's subjectivity is again defined in relation to the EU, when Reinfeldt asserts that Sweden should be a “strong voice for an open union prepared to accept new members”.⁸⁷

The Collaboration government

The Collaboration government's Statement of Government Policy from 2014 offers a quite different view on Sweden's state identity. In an initial paragraph of his statement, Prime Minister Stefan Löfvén expresses the new government's view of what Sweden should be:

Our country should be a leading and inspiring force in the world. [---] It is this government's firm will to make Sweden a global example, in our development, our equality, and our leadership in fighting climate change. A country characterized by peoples' equal value, confidence, solidarity and the belief that the future can be changed.⁸⁸

Löfvén assigns slightly different virtues to Sweden than Reinfeldt, who rather accentuated peace, democracy, and open trade policies as the recipe for Sweden's success. Löfvén's statement echoes the rhetoric from the past by articulating Sweden's uniqueness, or “critical edge” as Agius phrases it. Although the Alliance's statement pronounces a set of attributes assigned to Sweden, it does not bear the self-inspirational narrative apparent in Löfvén's statement. Löfvén's speech describes Sweden as an “inspiring force”, a “global example” and a country with “confidence”, words which were nearly absent in the Alliance's official statement. This narrative is further illustrated when Löfvén claims that “Sweden should be a strong voice in the *world* for freedom, peace, human rights, and solidarity. We shall actively participate in the

⁸⁶Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 12. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷Government Offices of Sweden (2013) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 13.

⁸⁸Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 1.

international cooperation, so that both the UN and the EU take responsibility to solve the conflicts and give aid to those in need”.⁸⁹ In comparison to the Alliance's statement, the Collaboration government is more eager to add “global” or “world” when defining the course of Sweden's foreign policy. This is also evident in the segment about the EU and the Eastern neighborhood – described as one of our biggest challenges – where Löfvén adds that Sweden should work for a union which takes responsibility for development and security not only within the proximity of the EU, but also globally.⁹⁰ The assertion advances the idea that the EU not only bears regional but also global responsibilities, thus challenging the significance of the spatial boundaries of Europe and its neighboring areas. EU's responsibilities in terms of development and security do not end at the border to Central Asia. The Collaboration government's call for EU to pronounce a more distinct global ambition points to a tendency to differentiate the Swedish state subjectivity from the EU. The following passage demonstrates this point effectively:

Sweden should be an *engaged* and *constructive* member of the European Union. Prioritized Swedish interests will be pushed for actively. Issues related to the increasing of jobs, an ordered labor market, increased equality, and progressive environment and climate policies are of certain interests. EU's crisis resolution must develop both globally and in EU's neighborhood.⁹¹

The choice of words reveals a shift from the Alliance's more positive view on the EU. First of all, the statement leaves out the previous formulation which claimed that Sweden should be an “active part of a strong, united, and open Europe”, challenging the narrative performing Europe as one coherent subject. The Collaboration government does not argue that Sweden should be an “active part” but rather an “engaged” and “constructive” member which actively promotes Sweden's “prioritized interests”. Perhaps one could argue that these examples merely illustrate semantic variations, but considering the situation in which these text are produced, each word have been carefully selected before being printed on paper. One plausible interpretation is that the Collaboration government by replacing “active” with “engaged” and “constructive” attempts to display Sweden's independence as a both a progressive leader and a critic within the EU. Technically, being active in the context of the EU could simply mean to cast a vote, while “engaged” suggests a more spirited participation in EU affairs. The meaning of being “constructive” is equally hard to determine; one interpretation is that it refers to the

⁸⁹Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 16. Emphasis added.

⁹⁰Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 16.

⁹¹Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy*, p 18.

future improvement of the EU, since the segment proceeds by making constructive demands for reforms of EU's crisis resolution. The paragraph also makes an important point when declaring that prioritized, Swedish interests will be pursued actively. By explicitly pronouncing the mere existence of Swedish interests, this articulation reproduces Sweden as a separate subject with interests potentially distinguishable from the EU.

Foreign Policy Declarations

The Alliance

The Alliance's Foreign Policy Declaration begins by stating that Sweden's foreign policy is based on those values carrying “our” society and interests that are “ours”.⁹² Sweden is here vaguely articulated as a separate subject in possession of specific values and interests. The succeeding paragraphs, however, bring back the European narrative by directly referring to a common European history. Bildt reminds the parliament of the shots fired in Sarajevo and the ensuing wars which plagued Europe for seventy-five years before Europe could unite and heal its wounds. The fall of the Berlin wall is then described as the moment when ideological obstacles were shattered, leading to the rise of democracy and forging of new bonds.⁹³ As the Moderate Party states in their committee bill, the European cooperation has historically secured freedom, peace, and democracy among its member states. It is described as a cooperation deeply founded on set of common values and a consolidated European interest.⁹⁴ The emphasis on Europe's shared subjectivity is explicitly illustrated by the following passage:

For most of these states [member states joining after the Cold war], [the fall of the Berlin wall] was the ultimate confirmation that the brutal oppression of the iron curtain had been replaced with the hopefulness of European integration. The history of Europe – *our history* – reminds us of the horrors of war and dictatorship, but also of the phenomenal power of cooperation and freedom. And of the duty that our generation – and the next – has to discharge and cultivate.⁹⁵

⁹²Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1.

⁹³Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1.

⁹⁴Motion till riksdagen 2014/15:2993, p 8-11.

⁹⁵Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1.

This narrative distinctly links the definition of “we” with that of “Europe”, which gives the European bond precedence over alternative definitions of Sweden's state identity. Sweden is not only spatially and politically connected to Europe, but also historically and morally. Common suffering of brutal oppression are put forward as the basis for European unity along with a phenomenal power of cooperation and freedom. “Sweden's history” is pushed aside in favor of a narrative which instead accentuates a coherent European past. It continues to produce a European subjectivity by claiming that “our generation” – which presumably refers to Europeans – must discharge and cultivate a certain duty. The declaration continues:

And to those voices – in Sweden and in the rest of Europe – who want to dismantle or weaken European cooperation we want to send a clear message: the historical responsibility for breaking down European cooperation will be a heavy burden to bear. Weakening European cooperation means weakening the prospects for welfare and development.⁹⁶

The statement implies that those arguing against the EU are essentially wrong. European cooperation is equaled with prosperity and progress, while voices against such cooperation are dismissed and left for the future to judge. The tone in Bildt's statement is more accusing in a following statement in which he claims that “[t]he forces of opposition to this open cooperation – xenophobia and [euro-hostility]⁹⁷ – go hand in hand. We must combat this coalition of narrow-mindedness with vigour and conviction.”⁹⁸ The opposition against European cooperation is here directly pointed out, although still obscurely described in terms of xenophobia and euro-hostility. The notion “euro-hostility” itself explains close to nothing about what these forces of opposition are hostile against. At first, one may ask if euro-hostility is intended to be equaled with xenophobia, If not, what does it refer to? Economic policies of the EU? Intergovernmental organizations in general? Some kind of cultural trait of the European continent? The answer appear somewhat hazy, but the Moderate Party's committee bill from the following year gives a clearer message: “The European cooperation is a common construction of values against protectionism, nationalism and myths about self-sufficiency”.⁹⁹ It is evident that the notion of euro-hostility adds a distinct threat definition to the formulation of state

⁹⁶Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1-2.

⁹⁷The official translation says ”euroscepticism”, while Bildt himself uses the word ”Europafientligheten”. ”Euro-hostility” is a more adequate translation given the phrasing in the original speech.

⁹⁸Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 2.

⁹⁹Motion till riksdagen 2014/15:2993, p 8-9.

identity. Also, by bundling together those holding euro-hostility with xenophobia, this narrative illustrates a case of “guilt-by-association” in which a vaguely defined group of EU-critics is accused for xenophobia. This discourse is apparently imbued with tendencies from the contemporary domestic debate in Sweden in which xenophobia is attached to so called extreme right-wing parties such as the Sweden Democrats. By placing the Sweden Democrats under the same roof as proponents of euro-hostility the narrative creates an ambiguous threat category. In such a category it is theoretically possible for the Sweden Democrats and the Left Party, which strongly opposes the former's ideology, to perfectly fit together. In sum, the concept of euro-hostility both entrenches an axiomatic idea of a unified European subject and upholds a vague conception of an anti-European threat. Xenophobia, nationalism, narrow-mindedness and so called myths of self-sufficiency are lumped together and labeled with the intangible notion of euro-hostility.

The idea of a European subject reappears throughout the Foreign Policy Declaration. “Our Europe is a global Europe”, says Bildt before explaining the EU's relations to non-European countries across the world. Bildt asserts that Sweden is devoted to a EU which strengthens its links to other global actors, stating that “[w]e want to see an ambitious transatlantic trade and investment partnership between the EU and the United States by 2015”, and that “[w]e want to see a relationship with Russia that rests on respect for international rules, institutions and principles”. Bildt continues, making clear that “[w]e want to see a more extensive European partnership with China”, and that “we want the EU to deepen its cooperation with countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa on important issues concerning the climate, research and economic growth”.¹⁰⁰ These statements continuously sustain the European narrative by defining relations as something between *x* and the EU. The political interests formulated in the text are not connected to Sweden but to Europe, which takes the shape of a homogeneous subject possessing certain given interests. Sweden nor any other member state are explicitly differentiated from the EU. This point is further illuminated by the following message:

Our Europe is a Europe with a clear foreign policy vision. [...] At the European Council meeting in December, a further step was taken toward realising the Swedish proposal on a European global strategy. Work is now being stepped up to formulate the EU's international goals and interests in our surroundings.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 5. The note refers to all five quotes.

¹⁰¹Regeringskansliet (2014) *Regeringens deklARATION vid 2014 års utrikespolitiska debatt i Riksdagen onsdagen den 19 februari 2014*, p 5.

Sweden is here pronounced as a more driving actor, yet still as an actor with the overarching goal of achieving a unified European global strategy. The emphasis on Sweden's proposal for a global strategy however articulates Sweden's subjectivity as possibly different from others. The segment which specifies Sweden's relation to the UN provides some support for this observation. Bildt states that; “Given our national commitment to global multilateral cooperation, it is natural that we promote a European Union that contributes to the UN's work, not least in the lives and reality of vulnerable people.¹⁰² This assertion reflects previous research's descriptions of Sweden as a committed proponent for the UN as a forum for cooperation. The brief mentioning of a “national commitment” hints of something possibly unique for the state of Sweden, but as the focus directly shifts toward the EU, little or no effort is made to formulate a specific Swedish subject. Sweden is not the central agent in the UN, the EU is.

It is evident that the Alliance make limited efforts in distinguishing Sweden as unique and different from the EU. The observations of some scholars therefore seem to be fairly accurate. It requires skill to point out any signs of a Nordic or a Swedish brand, nor is it possible to see any clear attempts to emphasize Sweden's “critical edge” in relation to others. This is a result of a manifest narrative in which the “we” is spatially, ideationally, and also historically linked to the idea of Europe. This biographical narrative gives little space to articulate Sweden as a subject – which is likely to have political consequences – and also makes it possible to articulate threats by creating dichotomies between EU or anti-EU. The broader implications of this will be discussed in the conclusion of this section.

The Collaboration government

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Margot Wallström begins her Foreign Policy Declaration by making the following claim:

We share a *common destiny*, and we do so at a time of greater insecurity. [---] Our common destiny confers two main tasks on Swedish foreign policy. We must make the most of the benefits, which are so significant. And we must manage the risks. Our foreign policy is therefore focused on broad international collaboration and cooperation: with our neighbours, within the European Union, and as a more active member of the United Nations.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Government Offices of Sweden (2014) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 7.

¹⁰³Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1. Emphasis added.

Notable in this opening passage is the comparatively imprecise definition of the “we”. This marks a difference to the Alliance's declaration which explicitly develops a narrative in which a pronounced “European destiny” is at stake. This vagueness perhaps make more sense considering previous research's observations of Swedish social democracy. As af Malmberg claims, the traditional neutrality rhetoric to which the Social Democratic Party has adhered rests on a so called Mitranian view on peace. The Mitranian view holds that peace must be reached universally, as regional federations risk to produce rivalries between whole continents.¹⁰⁴ The political shift toward a more active role in the UN – a global rather than a regional organization – can be understood as a way to maintain such a Mitranian ambition.

Similar narratives to those in the Alliance's declaration do however also appear in the Collaboration government's statement, which adds a certain blur to the line between the opposing parties. As an example, Wallström argues that a strong and concerted EU is a Swedish interest and that Sweden's voice is stronger when joined with other EU member states.¹⁰⁵ As in the Alliance's declaration, the EU is articulated as an almost monolithic institution through which “Sweden's voice” can be channeled to gain strength. Although the statement leans toward a europeanized view of the subject, it is comparatively weak in comparison to Bildt's description of a common European history.

The Collaboration government's move away from a eurocentric definition of the Self is reflected by the decision to restore UN's place in Sweden's foreign policy. “We want, and are able to take responsibility for joint solutions through the UN. Sweden's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2017-2018 is a concrete expression of the Government's desire to influence the course of global politics”¹⁰⁶, says Wallström, without mentioning the EU as part of the “we”. The “we” is instead defined as “Sweden” and “the Government”. In this connection, Wallström continues to describe the global ambitions of Sweden's foreign policy, stating that:

Through the UN we can take a number of important steps, and 2015 is a key year for global efforts. To achieve peace and development, we need initiatives for democracy, sustainable develop-

¹⁰⁴af Malmberg (2001), p 187.

¹⁰⁵Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 1-2.

¹⁰⁶Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 2.

ment, gender equality and prudent use of our natural resources [...] At this year's climate conference in Paris, *Sweden's goal* is to reach a global, fair and legally binding climate agreement [...]¹⁰⁷

A shift to a foreign policy which advocates a more vigorous engagement in the UN is directly linked to the need for articulating Sweden as a unique subject. By saying that “Sweden will be a bridge-builder and have a strong voice in international development policy”¹⁰⁸ Wallström attaches subjectivity to Sweden, and creates incentives for the renewed prioritization of the UN. As stated earlier, an actor needs to know *who it is* before knowing *what to do*. By defining “who” Sweden is, Wallström provides an explanation for the goals her government decides to pursue. If Sweden is distinct from the EU, then it is plausible to suggest a more pronounced Swedish agenda in the UN.

The shift away from a eurocentric narrative is perhaps best illustrated by the reoccurring reference to the “common destiny”.¹⁰⁹ Just as in the opening piece of the statement, Wallström raises the concept when summarizing the declaration:

The values that guide Swedish foreign policy still stand out as an uncommonly modern basis on which to organise a community. Cooperation with our neighbours, to guarantee peace and create common security. Solidarity that knows *no borders*, aimed at increasing equality and eradicating poverty. [...] These are the building blocks for a foreign and security policy to feed into a broader discussion in our country. A policy that is guided by the necessity of common security and the realisation that we share a *common destiny*. The Government is determined that, in these unsettled times, Sweden will take global responsibility by being a *strong voice in the world*.¹¹⁰

The Collaboration government changes the narrative from centering on a European to a global “we”. Compared with the European subject performed by the Alliance's declarations, this subject is more vaguely defined in spatial terms. Sweden is obviously not fully separable from the EU – such rhetoric would be surprising coming from a member state of the union – but clearly defined as something more exceptional than the EU, and certainly more connected to some undefined collective outside the borders of Europe. The notion of a “common destiny”

¹⁰⁷Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 4. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 4.

¹⁰⁹The actual word used by Wallström is “ödesgemenskap”.

¹¹⁰Government Offices of Sweden (2015) *Statement of Government Policy in the Parliamentary Debate on Foreign Affairs*, p 8. Emphasis added.

reappears in an earlier speech at the Swedish United Nations Association's seminar to which Wallström attended. In her speech, Wallström holds that:

We share what Olof Palme once described as a “common destiny” [---] “I look forward being [replaced] by people like [Nobel peace prize laureate] Malala and by new generations of young politicians when we together shape the answer of one the most important questions of our time: how the UN, our most important global actor, should be used to handle the *common destiny of the citizens of the world*.¹¹¹

In sum, the Collaboration government conveys a message based on a firm internationalism. The spatial boundaries are not as explicitly defined as in the Alliance's statement. Moreover, by creating an internationalist narrative the Collaboration government also permits itself to sketch a distinct Swedish brand. In terms of *threats*, this narrative is not as specific as the Alliance's. Perhaps this is due to the strong internationalist convictions within the Social Democratic tradition in which a Mitranian vision remains prevalent. One likely interpretation is that the threat to Swedish state subjectivity instead stems from increasing regionalization which would threaten the social democratic identity and vision of a Swedish exceptionalism. However, any clear threat definitions remain absent in the material studied in this paper.

An ambiguous state identity

Foreign policy doctrines of sub-state actors point toward an evident ambiguity in Swedish state identity. The Alliance's position illustrates how the state subjectivity is ontologically securitized through the establishing of a firm European identity which embodies both common values and a shared European history. The world-view is based on a European unity which corresponds to what Brommesson has described as a “normatively europeanized foreign policy”. The analysis of the Collaboration government's foreign policy however shows that a strict normative europeanization is simultaneously challenged by a comparatively internationalist foreign policy doctrine. A world-view based on an idea of a common destiny and a principal belief in broad international cooperation are apparent throughout the Collaboration government's policy declarations. This division, which despite some overlapping tendencies is

¹¹¹Speech at the Swedish United Nations Association's seminar 22 October 2014. <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/svtforum/fn-och-islamiska-staten-granslosa-utmaningar>. Emphasis added.

clearly visible, points to the continuation of contesting identities and narratives about the Swedish state subjectivity. Despite clear consensus on the institutional integration with the EU, the matter of Sweden's state identity – its interests, values, history and affiliations – is far from settled. The shift from an internationalist to a europeanized foreign policy identity appears to be experiencing what appears to be a backlash. As the following section shows more concretely, these contesting identities provide fundamental support for political action.

3.2 Sweden's candidature to the UNSC

Sweden's candidature to the UNSC is a political goal supported by all parties within the Swedish parliament.¹¹² Despite overall agreement regarding the candidature itself, the issue lends itself well to display diverging views on the matter of Swedish state identity. The surrounding debate on the candidature serves as a narrative event in which identities are pronounced and defended against each other. It is important to underscore that political action and identity formation are inherently connected. As stated previously, interests and identities are mutually constituted, as agents refrain from acting in ways which cause disharmony with their biographical narrative, causing what Steele calls “discursive remorse”. To maintain ontological security, the agent has to assure stability and continuity between action and Self. The following analysis continues the discussion from the preceding section and links it to the debate on the candidature to the UNSC.

The Swedish candidature was announced in 2004, but little or no activity was noticeable during the first ten years.¹¹³ In November 2013, social democratic MP Urban Ahlin, questions the lack of activity in the candidature, asking which measures the Alliance government plan to take to be successful. In the answer, Bildt declares that although Sweden historically has had a strong commitment to the UN and that a strong and effective UN lies in Sweden's interest, the candidature should be based on Sweden's merits instead of so called “shuttle diplomacy”. Bildt asserts that one must acknowledge the limitations of the UN and actively try to mitigate these, continuing to argue that “[a] romanticized picture of the UN benefits no one, very least

¹¹²”Olika syn på vägen till FN:s säkerhetsråd”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, published 2015-04-06.
http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/olika-syn-pa-vagen-till-fns-sakerhetsrad_4463953.svd.

¹¹³ This was due to overlapping candidatures such as Sweden's own candidature to the United Nations Human Rights Council and Finland's candidature to the UNSC.

the UN itself".¹¹⁴ Social democratic MP Monica Green responds by saying that the Alliance government has lost its interest in the UN and that Sweden's reputation, opposite to what Bildt argues, has declined within the UN.¹¹⁵ Green's argument draws upon Ahlin and Löfvén's critique put forward in an article in *Dagens Nyheter*. In this article, Ahlin and Löfvén argue that the Alliance government has been silencing Sweden's voice in the UN by trying to hide away the UNSC candidature through proposing coordinated candidature cycles between EU member states. Ahlin and Löfvén contend that to assure Sweden's influence, Sweden has to develop a UN strategy not only together with the EU and the Nordic countries, but as an individual state bearing a historically steadfast commitment to the UN.¹¹⁶

The social democrats' arguments for a potent candidature is clearly based on a self-esteem imbued with a consciousness about Sweden's historical role within the UN. This is explicitly expressed by MP Green when she asserts that "we can engage ourselves more in the UN. We have a proud history to look back at, and Bildt should make use of this record more than he does".¹¹⁷ By establishing a narrative in which Sweden is understood as a committed and internationalist state actor, the social democrats align their interests and identity in a consistent order which enables the securitization of their subjectivity. The commitment to the candidature can be viewed as both a "result" of an internationalist identity, but also as a way to reinforce that identity through political action.

The debate continued as the Collaboration government was installed and started running the candidature on a higher gear. The Alliance's reaction to the formally announced intention to intensify the candidature¹¹⁸ is captured by an interpellation posed by MP Sofia Damm, who serves as the Christian Democrats' spokesperson on foreign policy. Two central topics can be identified in Damm's interpellation to Wallström. The first topic concerns the meaningfulness of the political priority itself, considering the UNSC's limited efficiency in conflict mediation. The second topic refers to the framing of the candidature, which Damm views as potentially contradictory to the notion of a common European foreign policy. Damm holds that the Collaboration government's claim to have an interest in a unified EU is inconsistent with the prioritization of the UNSC candidature, as it entails competition with EU member states.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴Interpellation 2013/14:102. Anf. 2.

¹¹⁵Interpellation 2013/14:102. Anf. 3.

¹¹⁶"Sveriges röst måste bli tydlig och stark i FN", *Dagens Nyheter*, published 2013-10-08.

¹¹⁷Interpellation 2013/14:102. Anf. 9.

¹¹⁸See Statement of Government Policy and Foreign Policy Declarations from 2014 and 2015 respectively.

¹¹⁹Interpellation 2014/15:363. Anf. 58.

The need for a unified European foreign policy is stronger than in a very long time. We have heard this not least in today's debate. There is ongoing war in Sweden's neighborhood, and in terms of security policy it is remarkable to in the [UNSC] campaign slogan, "Global commitment, independent voice" raise and emphasize Sweden's independence. [...] I would like to hear the Minister for Foreign Affairs develop the reasoning regarding the independent foreign policy. Why this rhetoric? What are we independent from?¹²⁰

Damm's questions point to the central conflict line between the two political groupings. The questions reflect a concern for a foreign policy which shifts not only rhetoric but also political action from dependence to independence. The issue of Sweden's state subjectivity thus emerges at the core of the debate. The response from social democratic MP Olle Thorell furthermore shows that the subject position of Sweden needs to be negotiated to meet the two seemingly contrasting identities of normative europeanization and strong internationalism.

I would like to question Sofia Damm's view on dependence and independence. Sweden is a loyal EU member – nobody could say anything else. That is how it is, and how it should be. It is important that we speak with one voice in EU contexts. But this does not mean that we have ceased to have our own voice. We have not ceased to exist as a country. We exist. We have opinions. We have values we stand for. We say what we mean, and we mean what we are saying. We are independent in the EU, but we are not independent from the EU – this in an important distinction.¹²¹

It seems as if the candidature needs to satisfy two contrasting identities to appear as a feasible political effort. Despite the Collaboration government's articulation of an internationalist foreign policy based on a narrative of common destinies and unique Swedish brand, the slogan "Global commitment, independent voice" evidently lacks full support from the parliament. Thorell's response to Damm shows that the commitment to the EU and the CFSP has become such a fundamental facet of Swedish state identity that behavior challenging the idea of a unified EU must be met with modifications in self-identity. This is further illustrated by Wallström's response that "[w]e absolutely do not have tunnel vision. We work actively with our EU engagement, just as we do with the UN engagement".¹²² In 1 May 2015, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs dropped the slogan, after criticism from the opposition and conservative columnists who maintained that the CFSP leaves no room for an independent

¹²⁰Interpellation 2014/15:363. Anf. 58.

¹²¹Interpellation 2014/15:363. Anf. 59.

¹²²Interpellation 2014/15:363. Anf. 63.

Swedish voice. The critics argue that issues brought up in the UNSC in any case ought to be prepared within the EU, making an independent Swedish voice rather obsolete.¹²³ Against this background it makes sense to ask why the Collaboration government, obviously aware of this fact, would go on with such an approach to the UNSC candidature. The quick withdrawal of the slogan indicates that the idea itself was poorly thought through. Although the high priority of the candidature may accurately correspond with an internationalist identity, it appears to cause a “discursive remorse” when clashing with a normatively europeanized foreign policy identity. In the case of Sweden, a state which bears a tradition of parliamentary consensus on foreign policy¹²⁴, this matter could clearly be difficult to master, as the candidature relies on broad support from all political parties represented in the parliament. This is clearly displayed by Wallström's repeated expressions of appreciation for the opposing parties' general support of the candidature.¹²⁵

This dilemma captures the theoretical discussion outlined previously, which emphasized the merits of viewing the state as a product of negotiations between various conflicting sub-state identities. In this case, such negotiations seem to not yet have halted the Collaboration government's ambition to make the UNSC candidature a top priority despite a modified campaign slogan. Quite oppositely, the Social Democratic Party's idea of the state's Self as uniquely internationalist appears to still heavily influence the intensity and character of the candidature. The narratives of Sweden as a strong global voice and a bridge-builder reappear whether the Collaboration government champions its own candidature or criticizes the Alliance's more modest configuration. Wallström holds that a seat on the security council not should be underestimated and that it would be meaningful having “an important and strong voice in the security council which can cooperate with others, which does not have an hidden agenda, and which is used to being a bridge-builder”.¹²⁶ This narrative serves, just as the Alliance's europeanized narrative, to uphold and remind the actor itself about *who* they are. As a reminder; an actor needs to know *who* it is before knowing *what* to do. If one draws upon a narrative which articulates Sweden as a subject with a unique “critical edge”, the use of campaign slogans such as “global commitment” and “independent voice” appear not only as feasible but also appropriate. Conversely, with europeanized narratives, such notions cause

¹²³”UD backar från omstridd slogan”, *Dagens Nyheter*, published: 2015-05-01.

¹²⁴For example, see Bjereld & Demker (1995).

¹²⁵See interpellation 2014/15:363 and 2013/14:102 for some examples.

¹²⁶Interpellation 2014/15:363. Anf. 63.

discursive remorse and an insecurity regarding the state as a subject. This could explain the Alliance's comparatively careful approach to the candidature.

A central aspect of the debate also relates to the valuation of the UNSC's capacity as an international institution. Bildt argues that global impact best can be achieved through joint EU effort “although this might not be consistent with old Swedish imaginations” and that the possibility to influence the UNSC is limited for non-permanent members.¹²⁷ Center-Party MP Kerstin Lundgren holds that a seat on the UNSC is easily overestimated as it remains blocked by its permanent members. “One cannot resolve Ukraine, one cannot resolve Syria. This is one's task, to secure peace, and one does not manage to do it”.¹²⁸ Oppositely, Wallström and State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Annika Söder, instead stress the positive effects of a successful candidature, holding the council as a unique platform for Sweden to promote its peace policy and affect the course of world politics. Söder says that “[w]e want the Security Council to work better, make more countries realize that politics about war and peace ultimately are about people. Real power is not only about muscles but also about cooperation.”¹²⁹ Although these reflections share the opinion that the UNSC currently lacks efficiency, the views on Sweden's role on the council are quite different. Apart from asserting the relative redundancy of advancing a particular Swedish voice on the council – a collective EU position is already present through the presence of Great Britain and France – the Alliance is less optimistic about the prospects for institutional change. The Collaboration government's optimism toward such a change follows the internationalist and Mitranian ideal of universality and equality between states instead of regions.

This analysis illustrates that the branding of Sweden's foreign policy is a rather difficult endeavor. The definition of the state subject – its relations, its history and its virtues – is too ambiguous to create a consistent brand of what Sweden is and what it represents. With the Social Democratic Party's return to power, some sort of Swedish brand however appears to be under reconstruction. The current branding of Sweden, as illustrated by the narrative events presented in this study, points to a tendency to awaken the notion of exceptionalism and that foreign policy will follow the same course, despite obvious challenges. The concern that Sweden would lose its self-perceived exceptionalism through the establishing of a European identity thus seems to be momentarily appeased.

¹²⁷<https://carlbildt.wordpress.com/2015/03/30/om-sverige-och-fns-sakerhetsrad-och-allt-detta/>, 2015-05-18, 12.40.

¹²⁸”Olika syn på vägen till FN:s säkerhetsråd”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, published 2015-04-06. http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/olika-syn-pa-vagen-till-fns-sakerhetsrad_4463953.svd.

¹²⁹<http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/18334/a/250349>, 2015-05-18, 14.34.

4. Conclusion

This paper has investigated Sweden's state subjectivity through the analysis of biographical narratives in foreign policy doctrine and debate. By departing from the constructivist supposition claiming that subjects are given meaning through performative actions, this paper shows that Sweden as a state subject embodies contrasting ideas on the state's Self. It has been argued that the Collaboration government, lead by the Social Democratic Party, has embraced a narrative in which Swedish exceptionalism still is present, and in which the world is tied together by an idea of a common destiny. Conversely, the Alliance maintains a normatively europeanized foreign policy which holds European history and values at its core. Needless to say, these conclusions are analytical constructions based on ideal types and ought to be seen as robust categorizations rather than exact reflections of a complex case. In spite of obvious nuances, this study holds firmly to the conclusion that Sweden's state identity currently passes through an ambivalent phase in which an internationalist identity is being reincarnated. The Collaboration government's doctrine demonstrates a world-view and set of priorities which rest on an internationalist narrative embedded with references to historical roles and past commitments. Conversely, the Alliance's narrative of a spatially and ideationally united Europe explains the strong adherence to the EU as a collective project. Both cases illustrate how actions and a sense of Self are linked through political discourse, and illuminates the need for ontological security.

This conclusion does not claim that biographical narratives determine an agent's actions. How interests are created in the first place depends on more than just identity, although identity is indeed fundamental. What "causes" the Alliance's commitment to the EU or the Collaboration government's prioritization of the UN is of course also a question about ideology and rationality. The purpose is not to entitle identity the status of master explanation but to show that ideology, rationality and identity instead are closely interrelated. As an intrinsic component to identity, ideology obviously matters, however not apart from the perception of the Self. Rationality, likewise, should not be seen as predefined and exogenous to identity, but as formed endogenously. Rationality is simply inconceivable without any prior understanding of identity. The debate on the UNSC candidature illustrates this by showing

how sub-state actors draw upon different biographical narratives on state-identity to rationalize their positions. However, this paper only sketches a broad picture of Sweden's foreign policy identity and is also limited to one single example. Future research within this field may find the “Feminist Foreign Policy” and Löfvén's so called “New Global Deal” particularly interesting for closer study, being two high-reaching political undertakings by the Collaboration government.

From a broader perspective, a Swedish brand appears to have reemerged with the Social Democratic Party's return to government. Equally intriguing is the parallel articulation of what could best be described as a European brand. In spite of the fundamental agreement on the importance of a unified EU, the Alliance – with Bildt as its nucleus – makes a noteworthy effort to articulate threats stemming from what is described as a “euro-hostility”. This type of threat-laden narrative is presumably an expression of an anxiety over a European identity currently undergoing heavy crisis. In this context, a stable narrative about a solid European identity serves to preserve EU cohesion as a sensible political aim. Moreover, the synchronous advancement of a European and an exceptional Swedish brand respectively, underscores the non-fixed constitution of the state subject. Just as anarchy is what states make of it, states and supranational institutions gain their purpose through continuously performed actions. The state certainly resembles a subject because of its current function in the international system, and this paper makes no attempt to challenge this perception. Principally, because the state continues to matter, not only legally but above all mentally. What this study does is to stress discrepancies regarding the latter, showing that biographical narratives of the Swedish state convey at times evidently contending ideas about the state's spatial and ideational allegiances. To scholars holding a fear for the dissolution of Sweden's internationalist role in foreign affairs, this paper may offer a sense of comfort. The future outcomes of this sudden political shift must nevertheless be carefully assessed, especially if the current government accomplishes its top foreign policy goal and successfully acquires a non-permanent seat on the UNSC. Whether or not an internationalist Swedish brand would thrive at the heart of “our most important global actor“ is yet a question for future inquiry.

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