



## Opposition As a Dialogue

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## Abstract

The debate regarding a national parliaments' opposition in EU politics is ambiguous and remarkably underdeveloped. Historically researchers argued that opposition in the context of national parliaments and European integration is decreasing at the national level. However, this idea has been challenged during the last few years by a few researchers when studying opposition in EU Member States and specifically Sweden. Even though the idea of a decreasing opposition at the national level has been challenged, researchers have primarily focused their studies on measuring opposition through quantitative approaches. Consequently, there is a shortage of research examining opposition through a qualitative lens which could grant the research field a more nuanced perspective of the opposition occurring in national parliaments. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate if and how opposition takes place in the Swedish European Affairs Committee [EAC], through a theoretical lens of opposition and parliamentary transformations. The thesis offers a comprehensive qualitative analysis of opposition by using a reflexive thematic analysis. The results show that opposition exist in the Swedish EAC. However, political parties repeatedly fail to present alternatives to EU proposals and fail to debate suggestions stemming from the EU. This thesis shed light of how domestic opposition in EU politics can be studied through a qualitative lens and provides a more nuanced depiction of opposition.

**Keywords:** Opposition, Parliamentary Transformations, European Integration, European Affairs Committee, National Parliaments, European Union

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### **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CCS – Carbon Capture Storage

EAC – European Affairs Committee

EFSA – European Food Safety Authority

ENV – The Council of Environment

ETS – European Trading System

EU – European Union

GMO – Gene Modified Organisms

JHA – The Council of Justice and Home Affairs

LULUCF – Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry

REACH - Regulation on the registration, evaluation, authorisation, and restriction of chemicals

TFEU - The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

## Introduction

In an influential article, Peter Mair (2007: 7-8) argued that the European Union [EU] is lacking an essential ingredient of an ideal representative democracy, namely the competition between the government and opposition parties. In particular, the missing ingredient are arenas which allow opposition to form, and work. This idea is intertwined to Robert Dahls (1966: xiii) concept of what makes an institution democratic, namely the role of opposition.

Peter Mair (2013: 138-139) furthered his argument in his book *Ruling the Void* by arguing that the EUs structures and procedures prevent an arena where organised opposition can connect the EU to the national sphere. But why is opposition so important? Some scholars argue that a lack of opposition may lead to decreases in democracy since “there can be no real democracy without opposition” (Helms 2008: 6). Robert Dahl (1966: xv) stated that citizens deprived of political choice within democracies may eventually turn against the democratic polity where they live. Furthermore, opposition demonstrate different views and gives voice to a country’s citizens and not only the citizens who voted for the parties forming a government. With a decreasing role for opposition we also lose the voices of citizens resulting in loss of the control of our political system (Mair 2013: 142). Thus, reinforcing the importance of political choice through opposition is important for a healthy and vibrant democracy.

One strand of research on representative democracy in the Peter Mair (2013) tradition has focused their studies on challenges created by furthered EU integration, resulting in a dominant belief of an occurring deparliamentarisation of the national parliaments (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008). Scholars argue that national legislatures have lost great political and constitutional power through the erosion of sovereignty and since several competencies have been entrusted to the EU. That means that the oppositions have lost much power and that the parliaments control over the national government has been restricted. Deparliamentarisation scholars claim that there are large powershifts within the national sphere, favouring national governments over parliaments since former have become an intricate part in the decision making and negotiation processes of the Council of the European Union and the European Council (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008; Cygan 2011).

However, scholars have criticised the deparliamentarisation thesis in favour of a process of reparliamentarisation where national parliaments have learnt to actually fight back (Raunio and

Hix 2000; Auel and Benz 2005). Reparliamentarisation studies were furthered after the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon since the national parliaments gained new powers such as, subsidiarity checks and parliamentary oversight into EU affairs thus taking back power and control of EU topics and actors (Cooper 2012). These new opportunities could aid opposition in the national parliament to restrain and scrutinise the sitting government.

The two strands of European integration impact at the national level are often discussed in binary terms, implying that there is either a process of deparliamentarisation or a process of reparliamentarisation happening in the national sphere. However, Nina Liljeqvist (2018) introduces a third stand. In her dissertation she argues that European integration is “causing a process of parliamentary transformation, which suggests a much more nuanced understanding of what national parliaments have become in the EU multi-tiered system of doing politics” (Liljeqvist 2018: 225). Liljeqvist states that the role of national parliaments in policymaking processes is ruptured and that their role is transient and everchanging depending on policy area and time. The reason hinges on the power dynamics between the Member States and the EU. She argues that a national parliament may gain influence within some policy areas, whilst they may lose influence in others. The influence of a national parliament in the EU depends on the ability for a joint approach and consensus at the national level (Liljeqvist 2018: 25,225). Policy areas within the union that demonstrate this include such areas as the Environment, and Asylum and Migration.

Even though opposition is deemed essential for a democracy to function, the research field of political opposition and its interconnection to the EU is both remarkably underdeveloped and ambiguous. Amongst the research developed within the sphere of political opposition in national parliaments and the EU most scholars claim that opposition is decreasing at the national level. Over half a century ago, and before the EU had the powers it has today, Otto Kirchheimer (1957) predicted that future parliamentary regimes would consist of a *waning-of-political-oppositions*. He claimed that parliamentary regimes in the future would hold no meaningful difference between political opposition and that citizens will not receive any purposeful policy choice nor alternatives during elections. This is the result of ideological contestation and partisan conflict having declined since mass parties emerged during the early 20:th century. As mentioned, the notion that there is decreasing opposition within parliamentary regimes in Europe has been reinforced through the literature on European integration (Helms

2008; Mair 2007, 2013; Neunreither 1998; Rauh and De Wilde 2018). In this literature, the EU may hinder opposition to form within the political arena in member states. Peter Mair (2007: 14, 2013: 115) claimed that the EU level of decision-making hollows out the competition between political parties within the domestic sphere and the hollowing of competition decrease the opportunity for opposition to form, thus, downgrading the democratic processes. Furthermore, Mair (2013: 139) affirms that EUs indirect impact on the national sphere fosters a domestic opposition deficit. The reason is the intricate and complex structure of the EU and its connection to each member states, thus making it difficult to separate what should be classified as European politics contrasting what is defined as national politics, resulting in a dangerous confusion. The increased European integration has thus created a new and confused playing field for member states in which they struggle to navigate national democracy.

However, as previously mentioned, the research field of political opposition is also ambiguous. For a while, researchers gave us a coherent view of an existing opposition deficit in parliamentary debates within the EU member states and that there is an extensive case of depoliticization. However, during the last few years researchers have challenged this idea, when studying opposition in EU Member States and especially when studying Sweden (Loxbo and Sjölin 2017; Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022). Persson and Karlsson (2018, 2022) test whether there is an opposition deficit within the national sphere. In one of their studies, they hand-coded statements within the Swedish European Affairs Committees [EAC], which is an arena for Members of Parliament and the government to discuss EU matters (Sveriges Riksdag 2022b). The study aimed to examine how much opposition occurred in the Swedish EAC. They coded dependable variables based on a rigorous theoretical framework stating the *type of opposition* as well as the *mode of opposition*. They concluded that there seems to be an arena harbouring organised opposition within the domestic parliaments. Thus, they argue that the opposition deficit may be “more myth than reality” (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 21). Nevertheless, they also argue that the issue of an opposition deficit is still of interest and an important topic for further research since opposition is so vital for a democracy (Karlsson and Persson 2022: 307).

There is still much research that needs to be done and the existing literature contains a research gap of a methodological nature. There is a shortage of research examining opposition in EU politics within the national arena, especially through a qualitative approach. Recently, most research has a quantitative character and utilise predetermined and narrow codes, themes or



categories of opposition when analysing the material (Loxbo and Sjölin 2017; Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022; Auel 2019). Few scholars have attempted a more open approach to the material and used a qualitative approach to study the opposition deficit. There might thus be more than meets the eye when researching the issue of the opposition deficit in EU politics. When using narrow codes, themes, and categories much information might be lost or deemed non-essential. Therefore, this thesis aspires to address Swedish opposition in EU politics through a qualitative approach since we can gain a more nuanced perspective of the opposition in EU politics that exist in the national parliaments.

### Purpose and Research Questions

As mentioned, existing research using quantitative methods claim that there is vibrant opposition in contemporary parliaments, not least in the case of Sweden. However, which form this opposition takes and how the EU influences Swedish opposition is left unclear. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate if and how opposition takes place in the Swedish EAC. I do so by introducing a qualitative method in the form of reflexive thematic analysis.

Against this backdrop, the thesis set out to answer three research questions. These are:

1. Which oppositional patterns can be generated from the debate protocols in the Swedish EAC?
2. How does the patterns emerging in the Swedish EAC debates inform the discussions on parliamentary transformations?
3. What, then, is the role of opposition in relation to Swedish national democracy within the EU?

### Delimitations

There are a few delimitations within this thesis that need some clarifications. First, there is a temporal delimitation to the units investigated whether opposition patterns have changed throughout time in the Swedish EAC debates. The first period considered in this thesis is the time period during the year of 2007-2008. The second period investigated are the years of 2021-2022, up until the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, since there was a change of government in Sweden that day. Therefore, the EAC debates examined in this thesis are all from either 2007-2008 or 2021-2022. The choice of these time periods creating the temporal delimitation comes from careful considerations regarding the Swedish political landscape, especially considering the

composition of the opposition parties and the government. 2007-2008 were chosen since the government consisted of the Moderates (M), the Centre Party (C), The Peoples Party (FP) and the Christian Democrats (KD). The parties forming the government during this time period were commonly known as the Alliance. The opposition parties consisted of the Social Democrats (S), the Left Party (V) and the Green Party (MP). During 2021-2022 the sitting government consisted of the Social Democrats and the Green Party. The opposition parties consisted of the Moderates, the Centre Party, The Liberals (formerly known as the Peoples Party), the Sweden Democrats and the Christian Democrats. Therefore, there are different opposition parties and different sitting governments during the chosen time periods. It is important to point out that the Liberals are formerly known as the Peoples Party, but they changed their name in 2015. Hereby, I will refer to the party as the Liberals, even when referring to the party's contributions during the debates of 2007-2008.

Furthermore, the choice of time-periods has its point of departure in the possibility to investigate different government formations, thus also investigating various formations of opposition. Not only were the government of 2007-2008 a central-right government, they were also the first majority government since 1981 (Aylott and Bolin 2007: 621). In contrast, the sitting government of 2021-2022 was a minority left-of-centre government (Aylott and Bolin 2019). By introducing two different time-periods as a point of investigation I am thereby able to examine different government formations (majority-/minority government), different opposition formations, various ideological constellations of the government (centre-right/left-of-centre government), as well as the introduction of a right-wing populist party such as the Sweden Democrats. Since the thesis set out to investigate opposition as a dialogue the choice of a temporal delimitation can provide rich data and thereby provide a more nuanced picture of opposition in the Swedish EAC debates.

## Terminology

There are a few terms that are essential to highlight. One is the difference between opposition and opposition parties. In this thesis, opposition mainly refers to the relationship between the government and the opposition parties, but it can include also when one level (e.g., Sweden) opposes a proposal at another level (the union.). The interactions between these actors can take different forms such as disagreement and support. The different forms (terms) are later

introduced in the chapter *Opposition as a Theoretical Concept*. In this thesis, opposition parties refer to the political parties who are not part of the government.

## Disposition of the Thesis

The first part of the thesis, to which this introductory chapter contributes, is dedicated to the framing of opposition as a concept, presenting the purpose as well as the thesis research questions. Chapter 2 presents previous research within the area of parliamentary transformations and opposition. The 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter introduces the theoretical concept of opposition as well as parliamentary transformations. Chapter 4 introduces the research design, material and the method used in this thesis. The result of the thesis is presented in chapter 5. Chapter 6 introduces a discussion and analysis of the results presented in the previous chapter. Chapter 7 offers a summary of the research puzzle and the main findings as well as proposals for future research.

## Previous Research

Previous research focusing on the process of European integration famously focused on the perspectives of deparliamentarisation and reparliamentarisation. As mentioned previously, these perspectives often focus on the power struggle between the national parliaments and the EU institutions (Goetz and Meyer-Sahling 2008). However, the deparliamentarisation and reparliamentarisation discussion has been criticised for being too narrow and that the effect of European integration cannot be explained in binary terms. In Nina Liljeqvist's dissertation she explores what role of parliamentary committees, political parties, and individual Members of Parliaments [MPs] hold and how their legislative role has changed throughout time. Liljeqvist further investigate how policymaking in Sweden is being transferred to the EU (Liljeqvist 2018: 2). She argues that research should view European integration through a process of parliamentary transformations and segmentation of legislative functions of the national parliament. This perspective could give a nuanced perspective of the integration effects on national parliaments. Liljeqvist claim that the effects of European integration may take different forms dependent on the policy arena, since the legislative competences vary between policy areas (2018: 30,221,225).

## Earlier Research in More Detail

Early research focused on discussing theoretical concepts and relied on theoretical reasoning when studying political opposition and largely overlooked studying the field empirically (Karlsson and Persson 2018). Although, when researchers in recent time started studying political opposition empirically, they focused on measuring opposition in quantitative terms.

Several studies test different hypotheses. They then use predetermined definitions of the mode and type of opposition. They seek to establish what kind of opposition exist within national parliaments, aiming to investigate the variation of opposition (Loxbo and Sjölin 2017; Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022; Albrecht et al. 2019). In a study examining if there was more opposition in EU politics than previously assumed it was concluded that the alleged opposition deficit, namely that the EU politics within the national arena is characterised by an absence of opposition, was a myth rather than reality (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 2). The result was derived by a process of coding 6215 statements made by Swedish Members of Parliaments [MPs] during EAC meetings. The predetermined codes were rooted in Kirchheimers (1957) classification of three *modes* of opposition. First is the mode focusing on *classical opposition*, namely opposition of policy. Second is the mode highlighting *opposition of principle*, namely opposition of polity. Lastly is the mode focusing on parliamentary institutions and how they act, referred to as opposition of procedural (cf. Kirchheimer 1957: 127; Albrecht et al. 2019: 236). Persson and Karlsson also coded statements made by MPs into different *types* of opposition, which included support, alternatives, and critique. Neutral statements were also derived from the data and later assorted the code *Other*. Both the type-, and mode of opposition was later interconnected to each other and their hypotheses (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 14). Using this approach they concluded that the alleged opposition deficit could be considered a myth rather than reality (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 21). This result is further supported by another research conducted by Karlsson and Persson (2022) when they compared the oppositional behaviour in the EAC debates in six different EU member states. The study used the same methodological tools and based their codes on the same theoretical concepts of opposition. The results showed that opposition expressed during EAC meetings amounted to nearly 40 percent of all statements made (Karlsson and Persson 2022: 295). The overall results are partially supported by Senninger (2017: 13) who utilised logit regression models and diversity measures to show that opposition parties in Denmark have broadened the range of EU political issues discussed in the Danish parliament.

Altogether, previous research focusing on quantitative approaches and utilising a narrow view of the opposition concept have often discarded the there is a case of an opposition deficit and instead argued that opposition parties in national parliaments do manage to fulfil their role as an opposition party. However, these results are opposed by Rauh and De Wilde (2018), who also utilise quantitative methods when investigating oppositional behaviours regarding EU politics in national parliaments. In their research they used web-scraping and text-mining methods culminating in measures of EU salience brought up by opposition parties. These measures were later tested in a Tobit Regression Model (2018: 195, 205). In the article they argued that “government parties structurally outperform the opposition in raising EU salience” (Rauh and De Wilde 2018: 22). The government thus manages to raise the EU and European topics during plenary debates in comparison to the opposition parties. Rauh and De Wilde (2018: 22) claimed that this occurrence cannot simply come down to a process of agenda-setting. Member States are therefore in a situation where the opposition parties fail at debating the EU in comparison with the government.

In sum, this predominance of studies focusing on either conceptual reasoning or quantitative approaches when studying political opposition opens for an interesting and important alternative research agenda spotlighting a more qualitative approach to political opposition in EU politics. As the sections above displays, there have been numerous attempts to explain European integration and its effect on national parliaments. Yet, I argue that this thesis can shed light on the effects of European integration by studying political opposition through the lens of a qualitative approach. Parting from the traditional quantitative approach this thesis can offer a more nuanced view of a national parliament’s political opposition in EU politics. This can help bridge the gap in the ambiguous research field of political opposition in national parliaments impacted by European integration.

## Theoretical concepts

This chapter provides a further discussion of the theoretical concept of opposition as well as the theoretical concept of parliamentary transformations. Both these theoretical concepts present analytical tools of how I can study opposition as well as how European integration may impact opposition in Sweden. The following chapter explains how I conceptualised opposition and parliamentary transformations.

## Opposition as a Theoretical Concept

The conceptualisation of opposition is rather diverse, and many scholars use various definitions when studying opposition (See. Helms 2008; Loxbo and Sjölin 2017; Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022; Albrecht et al. 2019). Opposition is a complex phenomenon intertwined in our democratic society. The concept has several conceptualisations, and analytical applications. However, most scholars agree that opposition stipulates “different forms of a relationship. It covers relationships between parties... but also relationships that may exist within parties as well as outside the context of party” (Norton 2008: 238). This definition is broad and can apply to many different interactions. However, this thesis will only examine *political opposition* rather than the relationship between actors outside of the party context. Political opposition can be defined as disagreement “expressed by organised actors within the political system...” (Albrecht et al. 2019: 235). It is essential to point out that a party, in a context of the EAC, are represented by Members of Parliament [MPs] that vocalise and express this relationship.

Opposition as a relationship between organised political actors is commonly studied as a behaviour of disagreement (Norton 2008). The point of departure for studying opposition often take place in the basic understanding of opposition drawing on Robert Dahls (1966) classical work *Political Opposition in Western Democracies*. Dahl states that opposition is an expression of *disagreement* with the current government (Dahl 1966, xviii). However, it is important to point out that the relationship and interactions between the government and the opposition parties can take the form of support. The focal point of this thesis is to study the opposition as a dialogue. As a result, both disagreement and support play a significant role in this thesis, which is further discussed in the chapter *An Analytical Tool to Understand Opposition*.

Furthermore, opposition often arise between the government and the opposition parties. However, opposition can also take place inter-party, which refers to opposition from a political party who is a part of a coalition as well as intra-party referring to opposition within a party (Norton 2008: 239). One can thus not neglect the observation that government parties can oppose their own government during the EAC meeting since the Swedish government during 2007-2008 as well as 2021-2022 consisted of coalitions. Moreover, opposition can form in any political system (Dahl 1966: xix). Thus, it is also possible for the national government and national opposition parties to oppose the EU and other Member States during the EAC debates.

## **An Analytical Tool to Understand Opposition**

As we have seen, the conceptualisation of opposition is rather diverse, and many scholars have applied several analytical tools to examine opposition. In this thesis I have therefore created an analytical tool to aid the examination of the occurring opposition in the Swedish EAC.

To create an analytical tool which allows me to analyse the dialogue between the government and the opposition parties in the Swedish EAC I draw inspiration upon Persson and Karlsson's articles from 2018 and 2022. These articles provide scholars with analytical tools which grants the possibility to examine oppositional behaviours in a domestic political system. Their analytical tool highlights modes of opposition and types of opposition which also are concepts used in this thesis. Even though they provided a useful analytical tool I have in some respect diverted from their conceptualisation and operationalisation, which is explained below.

First, this thesis is above all interested in understanding opposition as a dialogue between the government and the opposition parties in the context of EU integration. Therefore, it is important to note that there are two institutional dimensions of which disagreement or support may occur during the EAC debates. As previously stated, the emergence of the EU has created a new playing field within domestic politics, and it has created a new dimension to oppose since disagreement is not exclusively tied to opposition parties disagreeing with the government (Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022). An opposition party can therefore oppose the government as well as the EU. Since the emergence of the EU, I would also argue that it is crucial to acknowledge that the national government can express disagreement within either EU institutions or EU policies, resulting in opposition from the government. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the Swedish government may exert oppositional behaviour towards the EU when debating the Swedish position in different political domains. Hence, it is essential to include statements provided by the government and examine whether these statements in turn include opposition. Furthermore, political parties in opposition to the Swedish government could also express disagreement towards the government but also disagreement directed towards the EU. There is also a possibility for opposition parties to express disagreement towards the national government whilst simultaneously express support towards the EU level. As a result, it is crucial to differentiate between which *actor* (government parties or opposition parties) expresses disagreement but at the same time differentiate between which *level* (national or EU) each actor oppose. This distinction diverts from the analytical tool used by Persson and

Karlsson (2018, 2022). In their article from 2018 they used an indicator to investigate the direction of the opposition by establishing the object of opposition statements. However, they used this classification to control whether opposition statements were directed towards EU affairs and not “a situation where the opposition parties simply utilize the EAC for attacking the government” (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 15). Furthermore, during their study of 2022 they examined opposition statements by parties in the EAC by classifying parties as either mainstream or Eurosceptic. Consequentially, they included opposition statements made by the parties forming the government. However, I would argue that simply using their conceptualisation and operationalisation of opposition could result in failing to capture the full extent of opposition occurring in the Swedish EAC. Therefore, *actors* and *levels* become a vital part in the analytical tool used in this thesis.

Second, there are two different *types of opposition* and these are used in this thesis to better understand the oppositional behaviour occurring in the EAC. A government or an opposition party can express disagreement in the form of *critique* which includes criticism directed at either the government or the EU. Opposition in the form of criticism stems from the Westminster system where opposition serves the purpose of “oppose everything, and propose nothing” (Norton 2008: 238). Critique can serve different purposes depending on who express critique and where they direct it. If an opposition party express critique it is understood as a method of controlling the national government (c.f. Persson and Karlsson 2022; Garritzmann 2017). Critique can take different forms such as asking questions as well as criticising policy, a polity, or a procedure. The second type of opposition is disagreeing in the form of presenting *alternatives*. Presenting alternatives is vital from democracies since it provides citizens with a political choice. Even though presenting alternatives can be viewed as a form of critique it is important to distinguish between critique and alternative since it provides citizens with a political choice. Therefore, presenting alternatives accomplishes something different compared to critique. Alternatives provides citizens with a political choice and by introducing a choice in politics citizens can view elections as meaningful (cf. Karlsson and Persson 2018: 8). As previously mentioned, Robert Dahl (1966: xv) argued that political choice is an essential cornerstone in democracies since citizens deprived of political choice may turn against the democratic polity itself. Furthermore, Mair (2007: 7, 2013: 140) argued that in absence of real alternatives, especially focused on policy, forwarded by oppositions citizens may lose their voice in our democracies.



In sum, this thesis investigates political opposition, meaning the relationship between politicians representing political parties within the Swedish EAC. The relationship can take different forms such as support or disagreement. Opposition can be directed at two political levels creating two dimensions of disagreement. A statement expressed in the EAC can oppose the national government, but opposition can also be directed towards the EU. Since there are two dual channels where actors can direct opposition, it is also possible for the sitting government to express opposition. The analytical tool used in this thesis therefore take into consideration the statements expressed by the opposition parties but also the government. Both actors can furthermore express different types of opposition by either criticising the government or the EU, or presenting alternative standpoints, positions, policies, or processes. The analytical tool deviates from the conceptualisation of Persson and Karlsson (2018, 2022) in two aspects. Persson and Karlsson (2022) examines mainstream and Eurosceptic parties delivering disagreement statements whilst I examine the government and the opposition parties. Furthermore, Persson and Karlsson (2018, 2022) breaks down opposition into smaller components measuring *modes* of opposition resulting in measuring shares of opposition. Contrarily, I stop the conceptualisation by introducing the *type* of opposition and emphasising *actors* (opposition parties and the government) and *levels*. I argue that by introducing both an emphasis on the direction of opposition as well as introducing the actors, the government and opposition parties, I can capture the relationship, thus the essence of opposition, through the study of dialogue, which previous research failed to accomplish.

### Opposition – Changing in Various Policy Domains

Political opposition is, as previously mentioned, defined as the relationship between organised political parties as well as the relationship between Sweden and the EU. However, the form and expression of this relationship may be influenced by the degree of European integration, since EU structures can be assumed to affect opposition in the national parliament (Mair 2013: 138-139). The national parliament has historically been viewed as either gaining or losing power since the emergence of the EU. However, Nina Liljeqvist (2018: 221) argues that European integration may take different forms depending on the policy domain and the legislative competencies that the EU and its Member States holds. There is thus nor a single case of deparliamentarisation nor reparliamentarisation but rather a continuous and ever fleeting case of parliamentary transformations extending over policy areas and time.

The national parliaments change of playing field (transformation) also impacts their functions as well as the role of Members of Parliament [MPs]. Liljeqvist claims that the national parliament “has lost its traditional function in public policymaking and has come to assume a quite different, nonetheless important, task of reviewing legislation...” (2018: 25). As a result, a national MPs’ role has shifted. Traditionally a national parliament, and actors therein, enjoyed the role as a policy influencer or a policy shaper. The legislative role of a MP has historically been to create, influence and control the legislative agenda. However, Liljeqvist (2018: 221, 225) argue that a national parliament and its MPs are becoming policy reviewers, instead of policymakers or even policy influencers. National parliaments and its MPs are therefore tasked with gatekeeping new legislations and safeguarding the principle of subsidiarity within policy areas where the competences are shared between the Member States and the EU (Liljeqvist 2018: 221). As a result, MPs are left with acting in response to new EU measures, rather than initiating policies themselves.

Parliaments could theoretically become effective at gatekeeping EU initiatives and invoke the principle of subsidiarity. However, to become successful a national parliament must synergise and act as a collective and if this is not the case, MPs and national parliaments solely become reviewers of new policies by acting in response to initiatives introduced by EU institutions. Furthermore, whether the national parliament become successful in invoking the principle of subsidiarity is also dependent on the Commission who must listen and act in good faith (Liljeqvist 2018: 221). Nina Liljeqvist (2018: 226) claims in her dissertation that a national parliaments role hinges on how well they manage to safeguard the principle of subsidiarity. How well a national parliament safeguards the principle of subsidiarity looks very different dependent on the policy domain.

In order to examine how the patterns generated from the Swedish EAC debates correspond to parliamentary transformations I focus on the MPs role by highlighting whether they can be described as reviewers or influencers of legislation. This is done by reviewing MPs opposition statements, especially whether statements synergise and if there is consensus in Sweden. Following Nina Liljeqvist argument that to become a successful national parliament influencing EU legislation – through the government or through the European parliamentary parties – they must act as a collective and show a joint front during debates (Liljeqvist 2018: 221).

## Method and Data

The following chapter introduces the thesis research design – which is a case study. Furthermore, the Swedish EAC is presented as the specific case to be examined and in addition to the introduction of the Swedish EAC is a presentation of which policy areas are analysed in this thesis. Finally, which material is used in this thesis is lastly announced in this chapter.

### Research Design

With the thesis research gap, aim and research questions as a point of departure the research design is qualitative by nature, and a single-case study was chosen as the specific design to examine Swedish opposition in EU politics. The case study was chosen since it allows for in-depth exploration in a specific phenomenon (Gerring 2004; Crowe *et al.* 2011; Lewis and McNaughton Nicholls 2014). Since the primary goal of this thesis is to examine a phenomenon, namely Swedish opposition in EU politics by examining if and how opposition takes place in the Swedish EAC, I would argue that a case study design is most appropriate for this thesis. I find it most appropriate since a case study design allows me to deep dive into the phenomenon of opposition and highlight its complexity in relation to European integration. Furthermore, the case is of real-world importance since opposition provides citizens with political choice which is essential for democracies (Dahl 1965, 1966; Mair 2013). Why the Swedish EAC was chosen as a case is further developed in the chapter *The Swedish EAC as a Case*.

Case studies have been criticised for providing little foundation for generalisability as well as sometimes lacking scientific rigorousness (Crowe *et al.* 2011; Bryman 2018). To combat these issues, I have chosen a case, the Swedish EAC, based on previous research and theoretical assumptions. This is further discussed in the following chapter, named *The Swedish EAC as a Case*. Furthermore, I aim to be transparent in my case selection, data collection, reasonings of chosen method as well as my own involvement in the production of the thesis analysis.

### **The Swedish EAC As a Case**

The Swedish EAC serves as a suitable and interesting case for this thesis for three crucial reasons. First, Sweden's is considered a country whose national parliament is strong in EU politics, in terms of institutional strength (Auel *et al.* 2015a, 2015b; Garritzmann 2017). Second, the country is also considered a parliament where oppositions receive opportunities to influence the parliamentary agenda (Garritzmann 2017: 16). Third, the chosen case of the Swedish EAC

provide a context where both the national parliament and political parties are considered strong (Bergman and Strom 2011). Therefore, revisiting the issue of generalisability in case studies, I argue that the Swedish EAC can provide some generalisability since if opposition is low in EU politics within the Swedish EAC it could be assumed to be low in other Member States as well. However, generalisability should not be exaggerated since there are some idiosyncrasies tied to the Swedish case. For example, Sweden is famous for having minority governments which may provide the opposition parties with more space to form opposition. Nevertheless, to minimise this concern I chosen two different time periods, as previously explained in the chapter *Delimitations*. The chosen time-periods are 2007-2008 and 2021-2022. To reiterate, why these are chosen they provide different government/opposition arrangements since during the first time-period there was a majority government and during the latter period there was a minority government (Aylott and Bolin 2007: 2019).

The choice of examining the Swedish European Affairs Committee [EAC] instead of traditional parliamentary debates is based on two important considerations. First, the EAC is an arena where representatives from the government and Members of Parliament [MPs] regularly meet up to discuss specific proposals suggested by the European Commission (Sveriges Riksdag 2022b). Second, the EAC constitutes an important arena for the dialogue and interaction between the opposition parties, the government parties and the specific minister since the debates focus on the Swedish standpoint to future EU negotiations as well as specific policy issues. The debates are therefore a process of anchoring and consulting specific positions in EU policies within the national sphere. Furthermore, every political party is included in the EAC and there are currently 17 MPs sitting in the committee (Sveriges Riksdag 2022b). I therefore argue that the EAC is a suitable arena to examine domestic opposition in EU politics since the policy areas are directly influenced by the EU.

### **Policy Areas**

Some scholarly attempts have been made to analyse several policy areas discussed in national parliaments (Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022; Liljeqvist 2018). However, since one of the main contributions of this thesis is to give a more nuanced picture of domestic opposition in EU politics is not reasonable to analyse every policy area discussed in the Swedish EAC. It is therefore essential to choose the right policy areas to study and my choice is presented below.

The policy areas examined in this thesis are (1) Environment, and (2) Asylum and Migration. The choice of these two policy sectors is rooted in three arguments. First, both policy sectors are a part of the shared competencies between the EU and the Member States in accordance with Article 4 of The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU] (OJ C326/47). This is an area where both the Member State and the Union can adopt and legislate legally binding acts in accordance with Article 2 of TFEU (OJ C326/47). I therefore argue that the political parties, hypothetically, have similar possibility to express opposition in each policy sector since both Environment, and Asylum and Migration are shared competencies between Sweden and the EU.

Secondly, Persson and Karlsson (2018: 903) established that both policy sectors include several oppositional statements when examining the Swedish EAC debates between the years of 1995-2016. Migration policy debates consisted of 57,7 percent opposition statements. The share of opposition statements in the Environment and Energy policy sector amounted to 52,0 percent. I therefore argue that these policy domains are likely to be rich in data and provide a foundation for a thorough analysis aiming to shed new light on the research field of political opposition. However, it is essential to reiterate that the study of Persson and Karlsson utilised narrow and predetermined codes when studying opposition statements in the Swedish EAC debates.

Finally, there has been large developments in both policy areas, between the year of 2007-2008 and 2021-2022. The policy domain of Environment, both in Sweden and in the EU, has seen drastic changes. For example, the EU presented the European Green Deal in 2019 (European Commission 2021) and Sweden said yes to implement Agenda 2030 (Sveriges Riksdag n.d.). Furthermore, the policy domain of Asylum and Migration is also of interest through a temporal lens since much has changed during the last 15 years both domestically and at the EU level. In 2013 the European Commission adopted the Dublin III regulation which introduced new asylum procedures for Member States (European Commission, n.d.b). There was also a widespread refugee crisis in 2015 which impacted the EU and the Swedish domestic debate (Karlsson and Persson 2022: 294). Furthermore, on 23rd of September 2020, the European commission introduced the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. The new pact acknowledges that “no Member State should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that all Member States should contribute to solidarity...” (European Commission, n.d.b). These changes make

both policy areas interesting to examine since these developments can be assumed to have impacted the dialogue between the government and the opposition parties.

### Material and Sampling Strategy

The data examined in this thesis derives from the Swedish EAC debates, which can be found through the Swedish parliaments' website, *Riksdagen.se*. The debates are all documented in *EU-nämndens uppteckningar* and they are public official records. The documented debates used for this thesis are unique since they provide an opportunity to capture the dialogue between the opposition parties and the government, word-by-word. Even though the documents are a unique- and rich source of information there are some drawbacks when using documents as a foundation for analysis. For example, nuances in the material might be lost since it is impossible to distinguish tone and some context from a written document. Furthermore, it is essential to point out that all the debates are held in Swedish. As a result, I have translated all quotations used in the results. There might therefore be a risk of losing information or misinterpreting data leading to a skewness of the results. To combat these risks, I have conducted an analysis containing several steps of re-reading the data and modifying my results, the step-by-step process of how this is made is explained further in the chapter *Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis*.

The sampling strategy for choosing documents examined in this thesis is based on a purposive sampling with inclusion criteria which all documents must fit (cf. Bryman 2018: 495-496). Each criterion is based on previous research and methodological considerations. The first criterion is, the documents must come from either the policy sector of Environment, or Asylum and Migration. Furthermore, the second criterion comes from the temporal aspects of this thesis. As previously mentioned, in chapter *Delimitations*, the temporal considerations made for this thesis is narrowed down to the time periods of 2007-2008 and 2021-2022. There are an equal number of documents chosen from each policy area and each time-period. The third criterion is that the EAC debate shall be held in conjunction with either a Justice and Home Affairs [JHA] Council meeting or Environment [ENV] Council meeting. This criterion was chosen since the JHA is responsible for asylum and migration policies in the EU (European Council and The Council of the European Union 2022b). Furthermore, ENV is responsible for EU environmental policies (European Council and The Council of the European Union 2022a). When an EAC meeting is held in conjunction with council meetings at the European level the

politicians discuss former meetings, EU suggestions as well as the Swedish standpoint. I would therefore argue that it is more likely for opposition to occur since politicians are assumed to debate the Swedish standpoint to EU proposals. The fourth criterion every document must fulfil is the need for each debate to consist of points of discussion or -decision and not solely points of information. This criterion is based on the interest of capturing the dialogue between the opposition parties and the government. A point of discussion or decision opens the floor for discussion and the opposition parties are given the opportunity to discuss the Swedish standpoint in various political topics. I therefore argue that the point of discussion or decision is more likely to consist of opposition statements in the form of support, critique and alternatives compared to point of information, where the government solely inform the EAC about political developments or meetings.

The debates presented in table 1 are the selected material for this thesis and they are chosen following the purposive sampling strategy presented above.

Table 1: EAC debates used as material in this thesis.

<b>Material</b>	
Policy domain of Asylum and Migration	Policy domain of Environment
Riksdagen Stenografiska Uppteckningar vid EU-nämndens sammanträden 2007/08:12 1§	Riksdagen Stenografiska Uppteckningar vid EU-nämndens sammanträden 2006/07:17 2§
Riksdagen Uppteckningar vid EU-nämndens sammanträden 2021/22:24 §3	Riksdagen Uppteckningar vid EU-nämndens sammanträden 2021/22:19 §1

### An Abductive Reflexive Thematic Analysis

In order to fulfil the aim of the thesis the material has been analysed using an abductive reflexive thematic analysis [RTA], which is rooted in Braun and Clarke's classical article from 2006 where they introduced how to use Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019, 2021, 2023; Clarke and Braun 2017). RTA is a strand of thematic analysis which provides researchers with a systematic process of generating themes and codes from qualitative data (Clarke and Braun 2017: 297). However, there are many different approaches to thematic analysis and no such thing as a standardised thematic analysis approach. RTA includes the classical components of a thematic analysis such as developing codes and themes as well as the aim of telling a compelling story by generating themes. However, there are some characteristics that makes RTA its own approach and distinguishes it from other forms of thematic analysis. RTA can be contrasted to approaches such as coder reliability thematic analysis which begins its analysis

by developing themes, and codebook thematic analysis which is guided by a pre-determined codebook or coding frames (Braun and Clarke 2019, 2021). Rather, RTA provides a *reflexive* approach where the researcher produces knowledge and themes are actively created by the researcher. These themes are generated by following a step-by-step roadmap created by Braun and Clarke, including six phases of analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021). The six phases of analysis provide a systematic approach to analysing qualitative material and these phases will be further explained later, in the chapter named *Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis*. The point of departure in RTA is that themes are generated by the researcher through engaging with the data and the analytical process. This can be contrasted to positivist approaches to Thematic Analysis which argue that themes are pre-existing in the material waiting to be identified (Braun and Clarke 2019: 595). Hence, RTA includes inherent assumptions where the researcher develops knowledge, and the analysis is situated in an interpretative reflexive process. However, RTA is flexible since it can under-take many different guiding theories (Braun and Clarke 2021), which in this thesis concerns the conceptualisation of opposition.

There are many common pitfalls which must be navigated when using RTA. The pitfalls include seeing thematic analysis as a unified approach, even though there are many different approaches, as explained above, with different methodological points of departures and various theoretical flexibilities. Another common issue includes the incoherent methodology where scholars unknowingly mash together different approaches to thematic analysis, for example by creating codebooks or coding reliability measures whilst utilising RTA (Braun and Clarke 2021, 2023). To avoid these pitfalls and create a foundation for trustworthy results as well as a rigorous analysis I have applied Braun and Clarke's step-by-step roadmap to RTA. I also included an evaluation tool for good analysis from 2021, which Braun and Clarke originally developed for reviewers and editors (Braun and Clarke 2021). However, I would argue that the evaluation tool can play an important role in ensuring a trustworthy result, rigorous analysis and a coherent methodology, since it allows me to evaluate the thesis application of RTA. The evaluation tool is further explained in the chapter named *Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis*.

I chose a thematic analysis method since it aims to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke and Braun 2017). Furthermore, the specific choice to apply RTA is rooted in the aim of the thesis as well as the research questions and research gap. One could argue that discourse analysis is also applicable to analyse oppositions. However, this



would require another approach to theory because discourse analysis is not merely a method but rather a “theoretical and methodological whole - a complete package” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 2). Other forms of thematic analysis, such as codebook- or coding reliability approaches, could also be used for this thesis. However, codebook approaches rely on pre-determined codebooks and coding reliability approaches start the process by developing themes grounded in data-summaries (Braun and Clarke 2019, 2023). I would therefore argue that the ongoing methodology debate will benefit more from applying a reflexive approach since both codebook and coding reliability approaches utilise pre-determined points of departure similar to the pre-existing quantitative research. Utilising RTA can as a result provide the contemporary research with a new perspective of opposition.

### **Using Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

As previously mentioned, the thesis is rooted in the roadmap provided by Braun and Clarke's RTA. The roadmap follows six steps, namely: 1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding, generating initial codes; 3) searching and generating initial themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining, and naming themes; and 6) producing and writing a report. However, as previously mentioned I have introduced an additional step for the analysis in this thesis. This step introduces Braun and Clarke's evaluation tool which aims to evaluate the quality of the analysis. The step is introduced as a final phase in Braun and Clarke's roadmap of using RTA. In the following section I present how I conducted the analysis and how all seven steps were adopted.

The first step is a familiarisation phase where the researcher shall familiarise themselves with the data and take notes during this process. The notes can later help the researcher create codes, sub-themes and over-arching themes (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2021). I started the familiarisation phase by immersing myself in the material and reading it multiple times. During my first reading of the document, I started to take notes which later helped me in step two, the coding process. The notes included how I could conduct the coding of the material and ideas that could help me further. The theoretical conceptualisation of opposition became an essential component when taking notes during the familiarisation step. For example: disagreement statements including critique and alternatives was noted as a specifically interesting source of data for the coding process in step two. The familiarisation part is a very time-consuming phase

since I fully aim to immerse myself in the material and re-read the debates multiple times before I even start phase two.

During the second step of the analysis it is suggested to start systematically code all data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2021). The coding process of this thesis was done using a predominantly abductive approach. It is important to point out that the deductive- and inductive spectra is a continuum rather than a pure dichotomy. Thus, making the use of RTA in this thesis not a pure deductive- nor inductive approach but rather an abductive approach (cf. Braun and Clarke 2021).

This thesis is interested in the dialogue between the Swedish government and the opposition parties. I therefore used the theoretical concept of opposition as a key aspect when assorting codes to the debates. Starting the coding process, I coded for opposition statements in the form of critique, alternatives, and support. However, these statements were not merely assigned a code named *support*, *alternatives*, *critique* but rather aiming to capture what, the statement entail. Each identified opposition statement later received codes aiming to capture the statement entail. In sum, the theoretical conceptualisation of opposition aided me to navigate the material and identify data of interest. When opposition was identified in the debates, I broadened the scope to the coding process and utilised a data-driven approach, coding each sentence close to the original material aiming to capture the dialogue between the opposition parties and the government. An example is show below, where Jacob Johnson, a representative for the Left party, introduce a statement of critique (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 25).

Table 2: Critique statement from EAC debate 2006/07:17 2§

<b>Data extract</b>	<b>Generated data driven codes</b>
In accordance with the previous case concerning Hungary, I would like to, as a representative for an EU-sceptic party, claim the principle of subsidiarity and certain civil disobedience, which other member states also claim. We think that Hungary must decide for themselves in this matter (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 25).	EU-sceptic party, principle of subsidiarity, civil disobedience, national concern, Hungary to decide

The statements provided by the government were coded in red and the statements provided by the opposition parties were coded in blue. This choice was made since the thesis wish to investigate the dialogue and create a deeper understanding of opposition.

The third phase within the RTA consist of searching and generating initial themes from the coded and collected data (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2021). During this process I first started to sort the codes into piles of potential themes. The piles of potential themes consisted of identical or closely related codes. After the initial sorting was finished, I created a thematic mapping of each theme that was generated by the coding process. Thus, creating an opportunity for examining how each initial theme corresponds to each other. During this phase I also introduced my initial notes from phase one. They helped me create the initial themes since I could compare my theme piles to my initial thoughts captured through the notes resulting in small alterations of the theme piles.

Phase four consist of reviewing the themes in two levels. The first level involves reviewing the generated theme at a level of the coded data extract (Braun and Clarke 2006: 91). During the first level of reviewing, I focused on each generated theme to examine whether the codes where coherent to each other. Patton's (1990) criteria of *internal homogeneity* was used as a guideline when reviewing whether the data within the singular theme were coherent to each other. After I reviewed each theme, I examined whether there was a clear distinction between each theme, following Patton's criteria of *external heterogeneity*.

The second level involve reviewing the themes validity to the entire data set and whether the themes mirrored the meaning generated from the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). During this level I re-read the data set as a whole, examining whether the generated themes represented the data set. However, this review also gave me the chance to code additional data that I missed in phase 2. This phase was very time-consuming since it had to be revised multiple times to make sure that the themes fully captured shared meanings and that the generated themes mirrored the data set. For example, when I was re-reading the debate of environment from 2022, I also noticed that I missed some codes, mainly referring to the opposition parties critique of the EU. Since I noticed that I initially missed a few codes I went back and re-started phase three again.

Phase 5 involve defining-, refining- and naming themes. Each theme is conceptualised as patterns of shared meaning consolidated by a core concept (cf. Braun and Clarke 2019, 2021, 2023; Clarke and Braun 2017). During this phase it is essential that each theme not merely a summary of a data domain, since that only concerns a shared topic rather than a shared meaning.

Braun and Clarke (2021: 14) argue that a theme consisting of a domain summary is merely an underdeveloped theme thus not compatible with RTA. During this phase I aimed to capture the story of each theme and how they correspond to each other. When identifying each story, I also aimed to consider the themes fit to the overall aim of the thesis and the conceptualisation of opposition. Each theme was sorted through a theoretical lens aiming to capture critique, alternatives, and support. If each theme could fit into one of the theoretical categories I knew that they were relevant for the thesis and that I generated appropriate themes. Braun and Clarke argue (2006, 92) that a researcher can test whether a theme is deemed finished and clearly defined by explaining the scope of a theme in one or two sentences. As a result, I did this test on all themes to ensure that each theme is finished and fully developed.

The sixth phase involve planning and writing the actual analysis. During this phase I had to choose which data extracts should be used in the analysis. However, choosing data extracts proved to be troublesome since I must balance using enough data extracts convincing the reader of the merits of the analysis, and making the analysis efficient, in terms of page usage. As a result, I had to remove some data extracts which I deemed less valuable than others. The decision was based on how vividly the extract captured the essence of the specific theme (cf. Braun and Clarke 2006: 93).

The final phase introduces the evaluation tool presented by Braun and Clarke (2021). The evaluation tool was originally created for editors and reviewers; however, I argue that it can ensure the analytic quality of this thesis. Braun and Clarke introduced 20 questions in their evaluation guideline which should be answered when evaluating a thematic analysis. Due to strict space limitations the detail of this tool is not presented here. Nevertheless, during this phase I aimed to assess each question and ensure that this thesis upholds a good standard of using RTA. This step included questions such as (1) Do the authors explain why they are using TA, even if only briefly? (2) Do the authors clearly specify and justify which type of TA they are using? (15) Are the reported themes topic summaries, rather than ‘fully realised themes’? (Braun and Clarke 2021: 345). By applying the evaluation tool, I managed to find flaws in my justification of using RTA. For example, since introducing the evaluation tool I became clearer in which steps I took during the realisation of codes and themes. Furthermore, to ensure that the themes are not solely topic summaries I made sure that the research questions are not used

as themes. The themes presented in this analysis are instead generated from data underpinned by a common concept.

## Results of the Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The results are structured with the conceptualisation of opposition as a point of departure. First, opposition is conceptualised as a dialogue. Therefore, all debates are presented separately from each other starting with the Asylum and Migration debate from 2007 followed by the Asylum and Migration debate from 2022. After the Asylum and Migration debates are the Environmental debates which also are presented separate from each other and follows a chronological order. Second, introducing each debate is a short summary of the debates content, background, and actors to provide a context for each debate. Third, the themes are presented following the conceptualisation of opposition introduced in the chapter *An Analytical Tool to Understand Opposition*. Thus, each theme is presented by which *actor* expressed opposition and what *type* each opposition statement took. The direction of each oppositional theme is presented within each theme. An overview of each theme generated from the debates is introduced in table 3 (see appendix 1).

### Asylum and Migration Debates

The following chapter introduce the Asylum and Migration debates from 2007 and 2022. Starting the chapter is the debate from 2007 followed by the 2022 debate. Each debate begins by introducing the background and actors involved in the debate followed by an introduction of the generated themes from the debate.

#### 2007-2008: Background and Actors

The debate was held during the 30:th of November 2007. The Minister of Migration and the Labour market, Tobias Billström, presented the commissions new directives regarding legal immigration as well as returning immigrants to third countries. Furthermore, a large component of the discussion introduced the European strategy of circular migration and blue cards. Blue cards refer to a workers permit which is given to high-qualified workers from a third country, outside of the EU (European Commission n.d.c). There are two different forms of circular migration forwarded by the EU. These are either, third-country nationals who live in the EU but also engage in professional-, business-, or voluntary activities in their country of origin. It

may also refer to individuals residing in a third-country but they come to the EU on a temporary basis (European Commission n.d.a).

The sitting government consisted of the Moderates (M), The Centre Party (C), The Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L). The opposition parties were the Social Democrats (S), the Green Party (MP) and the Left Party (V).

### 2007-2008: Generated Themes

The following chapter introduce the themes generated by reflexive thematic analysis. First, the governments' supportive themes are presented, followed by the government critique and alternatives. Second, the opposition parties' supportive themes are introduced followed by the generated themes expressing critique and alternatives.

### **Government Party Support**

#### *Joint Politics*

The first theme generated by supporting statements presented by the Swedish Minister of Migration and the Labour market, Tobias Billström is that there is a need for *Joint Politics*. Billström claimed that the government supports the EUs effort to harmonise the asylum and migration political domain. The efforts are for example to formalise an EU migration network and honing in on circular migration as well as a coherent labour immigration in the union (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 4, 8). Billström stated that the government is in favour for a common legal framework and that they have always argued for a further harmonisation in the policy domain. However, the new legislation shall not infringe on the labour market of each EU Member State (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 3). Furthermore, the Minister said that:

“Sweden welcomes the council's conclusions, and we have a positive outlook of the approach to deepen cooperation around migration with countries outside the EU and to find ways to promote legal migration. Circular migration is an important issue for the EU from a future perspective, so we are positive to further develop the concept of circular migration...” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 3, own translation).

### **Government Party Critique**

#### *Immigrants and Crime*

The first theme generated by critique statements takes its point of departure from statement presented by the Central Partys representative, Fredrick Federley, who argued that the EU tend

to frame immigrants as criminals. The EU's framing of immigrants is argued to be different from the Swedish viewpoint since Sweden gravitates towards a more humane view of asylum seekers and immigrants (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 9). However, it is important to point out that this statement is not in disagreement with the government nor the Ministers' statement but rather directed towards the EU and the EU Member States. Federley questioned whether there is a possibility for the Swedish Minister to influence the EU and introduce a holistic approach to migration, more similar to the approach used in Sweden. He argued:

“Unfortunately, the EU often has the wrong focus, namely discussing migration as dead weight - something negative – and often tied to criminality instead of human rights and the possibility to move between borders” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 9, own translation).

### **Government Party Alternative**

#### *EUs Humanity*

The first theme generated by alternative statements presented by a government party is strongly linked to the critique of the EU framing immigrants as criminals. However, the alternative is directed towards the national arena and more specifically the government. The theme is generated from statements presented by the Central Party's representative, Fredrick Federley, who asked whether Blue Cards could give Sweden the opportunity to steer the debate and create an alternative approach to immigration in the EU. Federley stated that the blue card discussion could possibly become an opportunity for Sweden to introduce Swedish perspectives in the EU debate, namely Swedish perspectives of openness and humanity which could become a factor of success for many “countries around the Mediterranean- without mentioning specific countries – who happen to view migration differently?” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 9). Furthermore, Mikael Cederbratt, a representative from the Moderates, argued that the blue card can become an opportunity for Sweden to introduce humanity in the discussion of immigration, since blue cards provide a way of viewing immigrants as an opportunity compared to an issue. Moreover, Cederbratt argued that the first view of immigrants goes hand in hand with the Swedish standpoint whilst the former is closely associated with the perspective present in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 11).

### *Immigrants Are a Resource*

The second theme generated by the alternative statements presented by the government revolves around the increasing the number of immigrants coming to the EU. Minister Billström directed his argument toward the EU and said that it is essential for them to increase the number of labour immigrants coming to the union since immigrants contribute to the overall financial development within the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 8). Furthermore, labour immigrants also aid the EU to reach their goals within the Lisbon strategy, more specifically goals concerning the aging population as well as the labour shortages in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 8-9). Billström said that the government will push for new rules in the EU which will increase the opportunities for labour migration since it needs to become an intricate part of the new strategies combating labour shortages (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 8). Moreover, Billström stated that the government wish that migration out of choice rather than necessity should become a goal within the EU. However, the issue at hand is that the EU often view immigrants as criminals or a burden. The Minister further expressed that it is essential that not only people who are oppressed or persecuted chose to immigrate to the EU since they can contribute to the European welfare (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 10).

### *Decisions as National*

The third theme generated by the disagreement statements presented by the government is that there is a necessity for certain political decisions to stay national rather than European. Billström presented an alternative approach to the Commissions suggestion, thus directing the alternative towards the EU, by arguing that certain labour market mechanisms, such as setting quotas, must be decided by the Member State, and their labour market (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 10). The Minister more specifically argued that blue card quotas must stay national, and that the EU shall not be allowed to decide this matter. He said:

“But the running point is that, from the Swedish side, we do not want a situation where quotas are established (by the EU) or where the EU in some way tries to limit or put a cap on the individual Member State's need for manpower” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 11, own translation).

Billström continued by stating that the Commission and Sweden have different opinions in the matter of labour immigration from third countries and the use of blue cards. The Minister stated that the commission may not agree with the Swedish alternative and they may wish to influence the labour immigration by impacting the uses of blue cards (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 11).



## **Opposition Party Support**

### *Preferred Harmonisation*

There were two representatives from the Social Democrats, Magdalena Streijffert and Susanne Eberstien, who directed their support to the governments' attempt to push for a harmonisation within the political sphere of asylum and migration. They both claimed that an increased harmonisation is good for Sweden, since Sweden takes on a lot of responsibilities within the specific political domain (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5-6). For example, Susanne Eberstein stated that “[i]t is good that Sweden wishes to increase harmonisation, especially since there is a large disharmony within the EU at the moment” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, own translation).

Moreover, Madgalena Streijffert supported Ebersteins statement by saying:

“I would like to pick up on what Susanne Eberstein said in relation to solidarity of responsibility within the EU and the importance of lifting these issues. The idea of harmonisation is hopefully to ensure a better distribution of responsibilities in the EU than currently occurring. Sweden for example, takes in 60 percent of all Iraqi refugees in the EU” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, own translation).

## **Opposition Party Critique**

### *Undesirable Harmonisation*

The first theme generated from critique statements made by the opposition parties revolve around not harmonising EU legislation within the political sphere of asylum and migration. Two opposition parties directed their critique towards the government for allowing a harmonisation of common practices.

The theme of *Undesirable Harmonisation* is grounded in statements made by the representative from the Green Party, Ulf Holm, and the representative from the Left party, Jacob Johnson (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, 10). However, it is interesting to point out that their disagreement statements were short, and they did not forward arguments to why they believe that harmonisation of asylum- and migration policies is bad for Sweden. Johnson simply stated that “[w]e do not share the governments ambitions to further harmonise asylum- and migration policies, which is currently happening in the EU” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, own translation). Ulf Holm plainly stated that “[w]e cannot support the Swedish governments position since the Green Party does not like the increased harmonisation of asylum- and integration policies” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, own translation).

### *Fear of Immigrants*

The second generated theme from critique statements made by the opposition parties is directed towards the EU and its Member States. The criticism has a point of departure from statements presented by Magdalena Stenroos (S). She argued that the EU and some of its Member States approach immigration with fear (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 2). Stenroos asked the Minister Billström how the discussions are going in the EU since the approach to blue cards proposed by the Commission does not go in line with the Swedish approach. Previously the Swedish EAC agreed that blue cards should be based on member states' labour shortage; however, the Commission proposed that jobs should be designated to young high-skilled immigrants. Furthermore, she argued that it seems that other Member States do not share the Swedish approach where the national labour market becomes the deciding factor of who should receive blue cards or not. Stenroos continued by arguing that the issue may boil down to the concern and fear of immigration existing in many Member States "to put it kindly" (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 2, own translation).

### **Opposition Party Alternatives**

#### *Interchangeable Points of View*

The theme generated from the opposition party's statements, directed towards the government, presents the importance to push for circular migration. However, this alternative can be understood as an interchangeable point of view. The interchangeable point of view refers to the opposition party introducing an alternative that was already advocated by the government. This theme became apparent from statements presented by the Social Democrats, Magdalena Stenroos. She argued that the government must push for circular migration and the possibility for remittances. However, Billström already argued that it is essential to allow for remittances and that circular migration is an essential aspect for the future of the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 10,12). Stenroos followed Billström's statement by arguing that remittance is good, and that circular migration is positive. She said:

"It is a positive thing, with money going back to these countries. Of course, it also applies that the money is used correctly. It is not always that the money goes to education, infrastructure and so on. Therefore, I think that circular migration is an essential aspect for our future work. Both sides win from this good perspective. I hope that the Minister of Migration understands my intention correctly. It is important to see the issue holistically" (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 13, own translation).

However, the Minister of Migration and Labour answered that circular migration already the governments standpoint and that he always highlights its importance at international conferences (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 13).

### 2021-2022: Background and Actors

This debate occurred on the 25 of February 2022, which is one day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Anders Ygeman, the Minister of Migration and Integration, reported back on previous council meeting as well progress made in the EU regarding the new EU pact regarding migration and asylum (European Commission 2020). The French presidency had just presented a gradual approach to the future work with the pact which included a voluntary responsibility for the distribution of refugees in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 2). It is also important to note that much of the discussion was influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, they also discussed what the EU and Sweden should do in regard to the expected reception of Ukrainian refugees.

The sitting government consisted of the Social Democrats (S) and the Green Party (MP). The opposition parties were the Moderates (M), the Sweden Democrats (SD), The Centre Party (C), The Left Party (V), The Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L).

### 2021-2022: Generated Themes

The following chapter introduce the generated themes from the reflexive thematic analysis. First, the governments' supportive themes are presented, followed by the government critique and alternatives. Second, the opposition parties' supportive themes are introduced followed by the generated themes expressing critique and alternatives.

## **Government Party Support**

### *Conditional Support*

The first theme generated from the governments supporting statements during the debate is that they are willing to compromise their standpoints for the greater good. Anders Ygeman argued that the approach presented by the French presidency of the council of the EU is not favoured by the government. However, the government may support these attempts since they share the same goals, which includes negotiating and finalising the new migration and asylum pact (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13). The French presidency presented a stepwise approach which

would aim to create a pact in several stages instead of a finalised packaged deal (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 12). Ygeman argued that the government would rather support a legally binding packaged deal and not a stepwise approach to the new migration and asylum pact. The Minister stated that “[t]he government *can support* a gradual approach with the purpose of moving forward in the negotiations” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13, own translation and emphasis added). Ygeman continued by saying that “[t]he government *may accept* that this first step is applied on a trial basis for a limited time” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13, own translation and emphasis added). Furthering the standpoint Ygeman said that “[a] gradual approach is okay. I would have preferred that we take everything in one go, absolutely, but we have had a stalemate for several years in the EU” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17, own translation).

## **Government Party Critique**

### *Absence of Solidarity*

The theme generated from the governments critique statements during the debate revolve around that there is an absence of solidarity within the EU. The critique is thus directed towards the EU and its Member States. However, it is important to note that the criticism occurred since it is argued that Sweden always take on large responsibilities during a refugee crisis and always aim to help countries in need historically whilst most EU Member States in the east and south renounced their commitments (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 18). Ygeman claimed that the main issue of the refugee crisis during 2015 was that the EU showed limited solidarity and took little to no responsibility for the refugee reception which made the Swedish refugee reception burdensome and even problematic (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 16). The Minister argued that there are Member States in the EU not helping others since these countries rather wish to safeguard their own country and their interests. Ygeman continued by stating that he was baffled that no Member State helped Sweden when they were in need (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 18, own translation). The Minister argued:

“We took on a huge responsibility when the countries in the south left the dictatorship behind... As for the countries in the East, we took on a huge responsibility when the wall [of Berlin] fell... That's why I became saddened in 2015 when they [the EU] were not prepared to show us the same solidarity as we had shown them, and therefore I think the situation is a bit special now since the countries that previously refused solidarity are now suffering. I'm not going to mock them in any way, but I'm not going to budge either. I will point out that we could have dealt with this situation a lot better in Europe if we had taken joint decisions, shown solidarity, and taken responsibility” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 18, own translation).

Moreover, Ygeman continued arguing that countries such as Poland and Hungary have been resisting solidarity for a long time. As a result, there are little to no tools that the EU can use during a refugee crisis. Furthermore, Ygeman stated that there might be a time where Sweden must financially aid these countries during their reception of refugees. If this ponder becomes reality, they must abandon their resistance against solidarity since “you can’t say that: we don’t want any solidarity, and later scream for help when you become the recipient of such issues. Solidarity is a two-way street” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17, own translation).

### **Government Party Alternative**

#### *Humanity and Solidarity*

The first government party alternative theme generated by the government’s statements is *Humanity and Solidarity*. This theme is generated by statements presented by Maria Ferm, a representative from the Green Party, who directed her critique toward the government. Ferm claimed that it is incredibly important that the government stand up for the rights of asylum seekers and that Sweden is prepared to take on responsibility no matter how large they may be (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 15). She also stated that there is a fear of Russia using this opportunity to show that the EU cannot manage large scale- and complex issues. Ferm claimed that she finds the governments statements remarkably lacking of humanity and that the government wish to rather renounce responsibility since the Ministers’ standpoint continuously refer to the refugee crisis of 2015. Maria Ferm therefore argues that the government should edit their standpoint to take into account asylum seekers rights and solidarity to refugees (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 15). Maria Ferm argued:

“I think it is remarkable that the first comment from the government regarding this is not that we of course stand up for the right to asylum, that we will do our part and that we will see how we can help people, children and women, who are now fleeing for their lives but rather that we should ensure that we do not take on as large responsibilities as we have done previously” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 15, own translation).

#### *Legally Binding Preconditions*

The second alternative theme generated by government party alternative statement revolve around the argument that the migration and asylum pact must become legally binding for all EU Member States, especially redistribution of refugees between countries (Sveriges Riksdag

2022a: 12). The alternative is therefore directed towards the EU. The suggested pact from the EU advocate that solidarity between Member States should take the form of voluntary redistribution of refugees and immigrants in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 12). However, Ygeman argued that a legally binding pact is essential for the EU to resolve issues within the union's reception of asylum seekers and immigrants. The Minister claimed that without a legally binding pact the EU will render incapable of handling an asylum and immigration crisis resulting in a more vulnerable EU. Therefore, policy area cannot continue basing its efforts on the voluntary participation of the Member State since many renounce their responsibilities (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14, 16). Ygeman stated that the only way forward for the EU is a legally binding pact that demand every Member State to take responsibility. The Minister said “[h]owever, it is important for Sweden that the pact becomes *legally binding* and that we get it in place, so that it doesn't become an à la carte where you can choose some part” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17, own translation and emphasis added).

However, Ludvig Aspling representing the Sweden Democrats later stated that a legally binding pact faces much disagreement in the EU since many countries do not agree and claim that a legally binding pact is an intrusion into national legislation (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17).

### **Opposition Party Support**

#### *European Alliance*

The theme generated from opposition party support is directed towards the EU and specifically other EU Member States such as Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Czech Republic, Austria and Estonia. The theme is generated from statements presented by Ludgiv Aspling, the representative from the Sweden Democrats. Aspling stated that he support the general direction of the migration and asylum pact presented by the French presidency, especially the fact that the pact prescribes a stepwise approach and that redistribution of refugees between Member States most occur on a voluntary basis (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14). Furthermore, Aspling commends the Swedish government with a great emphasis on the Social Democrats for changing their standpoint and accepting the step-wise approach to the new pact (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 15). However, Aspling argues that there is a broad coalition in Europe, including the Sweden Democrats, as well as many countries who are against the legally binding redistribution of refugees in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17).

## **Opposition Party Critique**

### *To Rest on Old Laurels*

The first theme generated by opposition party critique is directed towards the government and their standpoints regarding the Swedish responsibilities for Ukrainian refugees. Maria Nilsson, representing the Liberals, and Helena Vilhelmsson, representing the Centre Party, both argued that the Swedish government are resting on the old laurels of 2015 (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13-14, 18). They both argued that the government cannot refer to work Sweden did in 2015 and renounce the responsibilities of today. For example, Maria Nilsson stated that she understands that Sweden cannot take on full responsibility of refugees fleeing Ukraine but that the government must be more clear about that Sweden welcomes Ukrainians. Furthermore, she argued that this is not the time nor place for Sweden to renounce responsibilities and solely refer to their work in 2015 (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13-14). Helena Vilhelsson also shed light on the Swedish refugee reception in 2015 by arguing that Sweden cannot refer to what someone did or did not do in 2015 (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 18).

### *Slander of Character*

The second theme generated from generated by disagreement statements presented by opposition parties during the EAC debates is *Slander of Character*. This theme is generated from critique statements made by the Sweden Democrat representative Ludvig Aspling. The critique is directed towards the Minister of Migration and Integration Anders Ygeman. Aspling accused the Swedish Minister for not caring about Ukrainian refugees and that his “heart does not beat for Ukrainians if they are on Polish territory” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17, own translation). The accusation of the Ministers’ compassion for Ukrainian refugees arose from Ygeman stating that his heart does not beat enough to give major financial contributions to Poland or Hungary “who has spent their time ensuring that we [the EU] are in a worse position than what we could have been” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17, own translation).

## **Opposition Party Alternatives**

### *Voluntary Commitments*

Ludvig Aspling (SD) presented an alternative position for the Swedish standpoint and argued that the Swedish Minister must change his statements when delivering the Swedish standpoint in the EU. Asplings’ arguments were more in line with the French presidency and the general direction presented in the migration and asylum pact, namely that redistribution of refugees

within the EU borders must be based on voluntary commitments by the Member States (cf. Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 12, 14-15). Aspling explained that the Minister should change the Swedish position since the EU should never force its Member States and we cannot let the Union or its authorities to decide over a national parliament's reception nor allow the EU to redistribute refugees across the union (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14-15). Aspling argued:

“Redistribution [of refugees] must be voluntary. It can never happen that the Union or its authorities are authorised to distribute refugees across Europe. It would be a big mistake. The redistribution must be voluntary, which we [the EU] seem to agree upon now” (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14-15, own translation).

### *Help Elsewhere*

The Sweden Democrats representative Ludvig Aspling also presented the second alternative directed towards the EU. The alternative presented is explorative arguing that the EU could approach the Ukrainian refugees differently compared to how the refugee crisis of 2015 was handled. Aspling argued that the EU should and could implement a voucher program aiming to help refugees in neighbouring countries, such as Poland. Through a voucher program Member States could send money to refugees in other hosting countries, which is an approach tied to the United Nations (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17). As a result, the refugees could stay in the hosting country, and they would not have to move to another Member State in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17). He stated that this is the easiest and most humane solution since most refugees are assumed wanting to be close to friends and family resulting in them staying in Poland and not coming to Sweden (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14). Nonetheless, Aspling argued that a voucher program is not equivalent to sending Poland financial help in hosting refugees but rather that it is similar to a cash handout from the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17).

### Environmental debates

The following chapter introduces the Environmental debates from both 2007 and 2022. Starting the chapter is the debate from 2007 followed by the 2022 debate. Each debate begins by introducing the background and actors involved in the debate followed by a presentation of the generated themes from each debate.



## 2007-2008: Background and Actors

This debate was held during the 16:th of February 2007. The aim of the discussion was to report on previous council meetings where the council concluded the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive [MSFD] as well as debating Gene modified organisms [GMO] used in agriculture, especially whether the EU should invalidate a Member States GMO ban in corn. Furthermore, the Minister of Environment, Andreas Carlgren, reported that the council debated biodiversity and adopted The Regulation on the registration, evaluation, authorisation, and restriction of chemicals [REACH]. REACH aims to “protect human health and the environment against the harmful effects of chemical substances” (European Commission, n.d.d). Moreover, the EAC discussed emission reduction targets which introduced a mark of 15-30 percent reduction to the year 2020 and 60-80 percent emission reduction to the year 2050. Andreas Carlgren also introduced the discussion of burden sharing of emission quotas in the EU as well as carbon capture and storage [CCS]. The EAC furthermore discussed which contributions they wish to raise during the Euro Summit of spring 2007 as well as the introduction of aviation operations into the trading system of emission rights [ETS]. Finally, they debated the EU strategy to reduce emissions, especially carbon dioxide, released from light cars.

The sitting government consisted of the Moderates (M), The Centre Party (C), The Christian Democrats (KD) and the Liberals (L). The opposition parties were the Social Democrats (S), the Green Party (MP) and the Left Party (V).

## 2007-2008: Generated Themes

The following chapter introduces the generated themes from reflexive thematic analysis. First, the governments’ supportive themes are presented, followed by the government critique and alternatives. Second, the opposition parties’ supportive themes are introduced followed by the generated themes expressing critique and alternatives.

### **Government Party Support**

#### *Support for the Greater Good*

The theme generated from the governments supporting statements during the debate is that they are willing to compromise their standpoints for the greater good and therefore support EU efforts even though the government may not fully agree with them. For example, the Minister of Environment, Andreas Carlgren from the Central Party, stated that they are willing to support

REACH since it provides the EU with a greater protection against environmentally hazardous chemicals compared to previously. However, the Minister also argued that the government wished that REACH would have gone further and aim higher (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11). The same goes for the Swedish position welcoming aviation to the European Trading System [ETS]. Carlgren said that this is positive since aviation is a growing sector with a large impact of the environment and it is good that the EU is approaching the issue with concrete responses and new instruments. However, Carlgren further argued that the ETS should change its form and that Sweden's position aim to initiate a fundamental change in the trading system as a whole (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 18-19).

### **Government Party Critique**

#### *Other Member States Focus on the National*

The theme generated from the governments critique statements during the debate is that several Member States focus on their national legislation and national issues instead of working towards a common approach within the EU. The critique is thus directed towards Member States in the EU. Andreas Carlgren expressed concern that negotiations concerning combating the climate crisis may stall since countries facing a crisis often turn home and let it influence which position they wish for the EU to take (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11). Furthermore, the Minister argued that it is common in the EU that Member States prioritise their own issues and their own opinions before compromising to create common regulations. Sometimes, Member States even put their own issues and opinions above common regulations which they agreed upon in the EU, thus not committing themselves to the necessary work in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11-12). Such an issue appeared in the debate regarding GMO where Hungary and Austria created their own regulations ignoring the common frameworks of the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11-12).

#### *Incoherence*

The second theme generated by critique statements is directed towards the government themselves and expressed by representatives from other government parties such as the Christian Democrats. The criticism took the form of questions of inconsistency in the governments standpoints and bluntly asking the government to change their approach since it is considered non-rational. For example, Sven Gunnar Persson representing the Christian Democrats, argued that the Swedish position should change allowing Hungary to keep their ban

of GMO since it is consistent with previous discussions allowing Austria to keep a similar ban (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 26). However, Persson continued by stating that this would not become a formal complaint nor a formal deviating opinion aiming to change of standpoint since they signed an agreement between the Alliance parties including joint investigations on GMO issues. Persson continued by stating that he was baffled by the Minister of Environment who praised the European Food Safety Authority [Efsa], conducting research on the GMO, since there are many question marks regarding their legitimacy and trustworthiness (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 26).

### **Government Party Alternative**

#### *Essential with Higher Ambitions*

The first theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of alternatives directed towards the EU and that they must aim higher to create more ambitious targets so they can better combat the occurring climate change. For example, the Minister stated that the current legislation regarding chemicals must be revised in REACH and that they wished that the REACH substance list included more hazardous chemicals (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11-12). Furthermore, Carlgren explained that he and Maud Olofsson urged the commission to revise the European legislation and discuss phosphate in laundry detergents and cleaning agents (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11). Carlgren also argued that the EU Member States must reduce their emissions with a minimum of 30 percent by 2020 even though The Environment Council and the European Council set an aim for a 15-30 percent reduction. He continued by arguing that Sweden must convincingly argue to avoid a reduction target of 20 percent (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11, 16).

#### *Polluters Pays Principle*

The second theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of alternatives is also directed towards the EU. The Minister argued that the polluters pay principle must shine through the new EU frameworks and legislations especially in the introduction of the aviation sector into the ETS. The EU introduced an allocation method for emissions rights that should be based on previous benchmarking and auctioning. The Commission's proposal involves auctioning off less than 5 percent (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 18). Andreas Carlgren argued that he will advocate that the council must go considerably further than the Commission's proposal concerning the amount of emission rights that should be auctioned off. The Minister wish to

introduce auctioning up to 100 percent of the European emission rights since actors are treated equally and this would compel aviation corporations to become more environmentally effective (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 19). Carlgren said that “[a]n auction ensures competitive neutrality between companies. Everyone faces the same price. Above all, auction gives expression of the principle that the polluter pays” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 19, own translation).

## **Opposition Party Support**

### *Government is Firm*

The first theme generated from opposition parties support is directed towards the government and their continuous work within the political sphere of environment and climate. The opposition parties praised the Minister of Environment for being firm in EU negotiations and that they are drives for ambitious goals in the EU. For example, the representative from the Social Democrats Carina Ohlsson praised the Minister for having “an active position from the Swedish side, and that you really drive the 30 percent the target” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 14, own translation). The praise of Sweden pushing for a 30 percent target was also brought up by the representative from the Green Party, Per Bolund, who said that “it is good that Sweden is pushing for the 30 percent level” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 14, own translation). Another representative from the Social Democrats praised the Minister for brining attention to the need to regulate ground transports in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 21).

### *Widen The Scope*

The second theme generated by supportive statements by the opposition parties in the Swedish EAC is directed towards the EU. Carina Olsson, representative of the Social Democrats, stated that it is good that the EU is broadening their scope and intertwining sustainable development and their environmental goals with issues concerning biodiversity. She argued that the issues influence each other and that there is a need for a holistic approach to solve the current climate crisis. Furthermore, biodiversity is often forgotten or kept in the background when discussing climate issues thus it is important to add more perspectives that are impacted by climate change and environmental issues (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11).

## **Opposition Party Critique**

### *Blinding Dichotomy*

The first theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of critique is directed towards the EU and concerns that the EU is often blinded by dichotomies and that they frequently fail

to intertwine different perspectives. The key perspectives that are often failed to combine is economic growth and sustainable development. Per Bolund (MP), explained that the party is worried that the EU is losing important parts of the Lisbon process for economic reforms which deals with the environment and sustainable development. Bolund argued that the new Lisbon strategy may interfere with environmental targets and sustainable development goals. He stated that it is essential for the EU to recognise that a sustainable Europe will lead to economic development and create new jobs. There is no need for the EU to prioritise economic growth or reforms over the environment and sustainable development (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 8). Carina Ohlson from the Social Democrats also argued that Sweden must show that it is possible to join economic growth and sustainable development. She argues that Sweden must show that it is possible to achieve one without compromising the other. Carina Ohlsson said that “we can show these countries [Member States] that sustainable development is possible and that it is possible to combine economic growth with ecological sustainability” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 14, own translation).

### *Confusing Contradictions*

The second theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of critique introduced by the opposition parties is directed towards the Swedish government. Opposition parties such as the Green Party argued that they found it strange that the Swedish government voted to allow Austria to receive a postponement in GMO regulation whilst this postponement was not offered to Hungary (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25). Per Bolund claimed that he found it strange that the Swedish government voted for a permission of special rules for Austria and that the only reasonable conclusion should be that the same permission extends to Hungary. The government thus contradict themselves by giving Austria a special treatment (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25). The argument was also forwarded by Jacob Johnson from the Left Party as well as Susanne Eberstein from the Social Democrats (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25).

### *EU Slips into National Competencies*

The opposition parties raised a concern that the EU started to slip into national legislation and started to make decisions that are within the national competencies. These concerns generated the theme of *EU Slips Into National Competencies* and it is directed towards the EU. For example, Susanne Eberstein raised the concern that the EU wish to meddle in GMO regulations in specific countries such as Austria and Hungary. Eberstein explained that these decisions must be taken by the nation state themselves and not by the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25). The

same concern was raised by the Left Party representative Jacob Johnson who argued that Hungary must decide these matters for themselves (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25). Johnson said:

“In accordance with previous cases concerning Hungary and as a representative of an EU-critical party, I would like to assert the principle of subsidiarity and certain civil disobedience, which quite a few Member States agree upon. We think that Hungary must decide for themselves in this matter” (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 25, own translations).

## **Opposition Party Alternatives**

### *National Anchoring*

Per Bolund from the Green Party argued that there is a necessity of national anchoring, and that the government should not be able to go to the EU and make decisions for Sweden without the EAC agreeing. This reasoning generated the theme of *National Anchoring* which is directed towards the government. The argument arose in the discussion of how ambitious the emission reduction targets must become in the EU since the Commission suggested a reduction between 15- 30 percent until 2020. Bolund argued that he is concerned when hearing such low numbers as 15 or 20 percent since there is a need for major cuts of carbon dioxide emissions if the EU shall reach the two-degree targets, which the EU supports (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 14). Therefore, an alternative approach was presented by Bolund. He argued that the EAC should limit the governments mandate and only allow the government to accept a minimum reduction of 30 percent. If the government wish to accept a lower reduction target, they must come back to the EAC and request a new mandate since this procedure proves to the EU that Sweden takes the issues of reducing emissions seriously (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 14).

### 2021-2022: Background and Actors

The debate was held during the 17:th of December 2021. The Minister of Climate and Environment, Annika Strandhäll, introduced that the EU will invalidate the old *directive on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulator* (2006/66/EC). The invalidation has its point of departure in the EU ambition to create a new battery directive. Furthermore, Strandhäll presented that there will be a change in the *regulation of market surveillance and compliance of products* (EU 2019/1020). The focal point of the EAC debate was the 55- percent package which makes the EU’s climate goal of reducing EU emissions by at least 55% by 2030 a legal obligation for all EU Member States (European Council and The Council of the European Union 2023). The centrepiece of the 55- percent package discussion

revolved around the land use, land-use change and forestry sector [known as the LULUCF]. The concluding discussion of the EAC meeting regarded the EU soil strategy for 2030 which creates a framework and introduces concrete measures to protect and restore soils in the EU (European Commission n.d.e).

## 2021-2022: Generated themes

The following chapter introduces the generated themes from the application of reflexive thematic analysis. First, the governments' supportive themes are presented, followed by the government critique and alternatives. Second, the opposition parties' supportive themes are introduced followed by the generated themes expressing critique and alternatives.

### **Government Party Support**

#### *Ambitious Aspirations*

The government presented many supporting statements directed towards the EU. The key theme generated from these statements is that the ambitions of frameworks, legislations and discussions must continue to stay at the highest level. Annika Strandhäll, the Minister of Environment and Climate, argued that the “[g]overnment considers it important to maintain the high level of environmental and Climate ambition” (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 1, own translation). Furthermore, Strandhäll stated that the government welcomes the presidency's reports for the Fit for 55- package since it is essential that the EU adopts ambitious, cost-effective and coherent frameworks to ensure climate neutrality by 2050 (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 3).

### **Government Party Critique**

#### *Unfair Expectations*

The first theme generated from the government's disagreement statements is that there are unfair expectations on Sweden and their commitments. The criticism is directed towards the EU and their decisions making Sweden take on large commitments in the forest sector as well as the Swedish commitments to work with carbon sinks (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 3, 9) . The Minister Annika Strandhäll argued that LULUCF unfairly regulates goals, disadvantaging forest-rich countries such as Sweden. The calculation model setting commitments for Member States do not take into account climate benefits which forests contribute with thus making the Swedish commitments unfair since the forest is not weighted in the calculation model (Sveriges

Riksdag 2021: 3). Furthermore, Annika Strandhäll argued that the calculation in the LULUCF overestimated Sweden's carbon sinks resulting in an even more unfair treatment of the Swedish environmental commitments (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 9, own translation). She said:

“Commitments assigned to Sweden until the year 2030 will be disproportionately high... The Commission has constructed a regulation [LULUCF] that makes it extremely difficult for countries to know which commitment they should achieve by 2030... I think it is important that we must have high ambitions together, but the systems we design must also have a broad anchoring and it must be perceived as fair” (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 9, own translation).

### *What Are National Concerns?*

The second criticism is also directed towards the EU and more specifically the Minister criticised the EU for overstepping their boundaries by wishing to regulate within political spheres which should be considered a national competency. Such sectors include forestry policies which Annika Strandhäll noted is a national competence (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 5). Furthermore, the Minister of Climate and Environment further argued that there must be a territorial responsibility for emissions tied to land sectors and that the government believes that climate neutrality targets by 2035 must be set at a national level rather than a European level (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 9). Strandhäll further argued that environmental issues tied to soil is considered a national competence. The Minister stated that soil issues are essentially a national competence with limited cross-border significance and the scope of EU legislation must therefore be limited. Finally Strandhäll noted that the government will monitor future soil proposals and the new land strategy of 2030 so they respect the division of competences as well as the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 10).

### **Government Party Alternative**

#### *Undesirable Double Work*

The alternative proposed by the government is directed towards the EU. The Minister argued that the government will argue against undesirable double regulation within the EU and argue against ineffective double funds. Annika Strandhäll claimed that the new land strategy of 2030 must be designed with caution since several targets are decided within other processes. It is therefore essential for the government to aim to influence the Commission to avoid unnecessary confusions and double work (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 10). Furthermore, the Minister highlighted that the government intends to shed light on eventual double regulations of substances and chemicals tied to new treaties should be regulated by REACH (Sveriges Riksdag



2021: 2). The arguments of double workload and not using pre-existing treaties also transfers to the Commissions assessments of initiating a new climate social fund. Annika Strandhäll argued that the government sees little to no need for the initiation of a climate social fund since there are many pre-existing instruments in the EU which allows Member States to seek compensation for climate transitions and compensatory policies which includes solidarity and justice aspects. The Minister noted that it is therefore redundant for the EU to introduce a new fund which could increase the EU budget and become a cost for many Member States (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 5).

### **Opposition Party Support**

#### *Susceptive Government*

The supportive theme generated by the statements presented by the opposition parties is directed towards the government and more specifically that the government is firm yet susceptible. The Minister received praise for being firm and arguing for ambitious targets in the EU. However, the representative from the Moderate Party Jessica Rosencrantz praised and recognised that the Ministers changed the Swedish position after previous discussions in the EAC. Rosencrantz said that it is good that the Swedish position regarding double regulation is now more firm and that the government now emphasise that chemical and substances should all be regulated through REACH (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 2).

### **Opposition Party Critique**

#### *Weak Standpoints*

The first theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of critique is directed towards the government not being ambitious enough and presents a weak Swedish standpoint. The criticism was forwarded by the Left Party's representative Jens Holm. Holm argued that the Swedish position regarding LULUCF, and land and forest use is extremely deplorable. Holm said that Sweden sends the wrong signals to the rest of Europe when renouncing commitments and basing their arguments in unfair expectations of Sweden (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 7). Additionally, Holm claimed that it is not strange if Sweden receive larger commitments compared to other EU Member States since Sweden has the largest forest in the EU. One cannot simply claim that ambitious commitments are unfair when all countries have different assets (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 7).

### *Overstepping National Legislations*

The second theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of critique is directed towards the government. Jessica Rosencrantz (M) stated that the Swedish government will accept targets and commitments through the LULUCF which is not in accordance with the Swedish Climate Act. The commitments accepted through the LULUCF could have major negative effects on the Swedish forestry and as a result the commitments should not be accepted by the government. Rosencrantz argued that it is essential to note that if these commitments are accepted the government is overstep national legislation and they undermine the Swedish Climate Act (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 4). The criticism was also forwarded by Sofia Damm, representative of the Christian Democrats (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 8).

### **Opposition Party Alternatives**

#### *Short-sighted*

The first theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of alternatives is directed towards the government. The representative from the Liberal Party, Joar Forsell, argued that the EU often suggest short-sighted solutions to combat climate change and the environmental issues of today (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 2). For example, the EU presented the new battery directive regulating large batteries. However, the new directive excluded small batteries. Forsell claimed that there is a need for regulating small batteries since these can contribute to larger consequences for the environment. Forsell thus argued that the government should change their standpoint to argue that the new battery directive also must include small batteries (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 2).

#### *Delicate Wordings*

The second theme generated by disagreement statements in the form of alternatives is also directed towards the government. The majority of alternatives presented by the opposition parties mainly included that the government must or should change their wording of specific standpoints. Niklas Kinnunen, the representative from the Sweden Democrats for example explained that he rather hear the government say that they *note* proposals such as including road traffic in the European Trading System [ETS], instead of the current wording of *welcoming* the proposal (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 6). Furthermore, Jens Holm stated that it is essential that the submitted Swedish position allows for Member States to have higher ambitions than the rest of the EU concerning road transportations (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 7). Minor additions to the

Swedish position were also forwarded by the Moderates representative Jessica Rosencrantz when discussing lowering the emission ceiling in the European Trading System [ETS]. She explained that the government should further emphasise that European competitiveness must be ensured whilst lowering the emissions. Especially since Sweden advocates that the ETS should phase out the free allocation of emission rights (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 4-5).

## Discussion

The following chapter is structured after the research questions presented in the chapter named *Purpose and Research Questions*. As a result, this chapter is structured as followed, (1) Which oppositional patterns can be generated from the debate protocols in the Swedish EAC? (2) How does the patterns emerging in the Swedish EAC debates inform the discussions on parliamentary transformations? And finally, (3) What, then, is the role of opposition in relation to Swedish national democracy within the EU?

### Which Oppositional Patterns Can Be Generated from the Debate Protocols in the Swedish EAC?

I have generated several oppositional themes from two separate policy domains, namely the policy domain of asylum and migration as well as of the environment. In the following chapter I present a discussion regarding which main patterns can be generated from the themes of the EAC debates.

The first pattern identified in the debates is intertwined with the conceptualisation of opposition, more specifically associated with the direction of opposing statements. The findings suggest that the opposition parties often support both the EU and the national government. The Persson and Karlsson study from 2018 mentioned that support expressed by opposition parties towards the EU seldom occur. Their research indicated that 3.2 percent of all statements expressed by oppositions in the EAC between 1995 and 2016 could be classified as the type: support with the object EU (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 15). Even though it seldom occurred in Persson and Karlsson's research it has been possible to capture support directed towards both the EU as well as the national government by using reflexive thematic analysis. For example, the theme named *European alliance* is support directed to the EU and specifically a few member states. The theme is generated from statements expressed by the Sweden Democrats who convey that there are many EU Member States who agree on the direction of EUs future work, within the field

of asylum and migration. Furthermore, this approach is not forwarded by the Swedish government and the statement takes a point of departure in a stronger sense of connection with specific Member States such as Denmark, Poland and Hungary (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 14). Remarkably, the supportive theme *Widening the scope* expressed by opposition parties in the Environmental debate of 2007 is also directed towards the EU. More specifically. The EUs will to widen the scope of the work within the Environmental policy domain (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11). Acknowledging Persson and Karlsson's (2018) result of seldom reoccurring support towards the EU, it is intriguing that two separate themes were generated from two separate debates both supporting the EU and its Member States.

The second pattern identified from the generated themes is the clash of working towards harmonisation or aiming to counteract harmonisation. The pattern of how political parties view harmonisation take its point of departure in two different approaches to European integration. Namely that there is a need for furthered harmonisation of common EU legislations or that harmonisation is something that must be antagonised since it infringes on the nation states legislative sovereignty (cf. Auel and Benz 2005). The government has generally advocated for harmonisation and this advocacy is not subject to change dependent on time-period nor policy domain. For example, in 2007 the government argued that the EU must have a common approach to solve the climate crisis (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a, 2021), and in 2022 the government argued that the EU would be more effective if they agreed on common frameworks to combat a refugee crisis (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a). However, it is important to point out that the government did criticise the EU for sometimes overstepping their boundaries and intrude on national competencies, such as wishing to regulate a Member States climate neutrality targets or environmental issues tied to soils (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 9). When examining inclination to harmonisation from opposition statements expressed by opposition parties, it is much more diverse. In both policy domains there are opposition parties criticising the EU for imposing harmonisation of common regulations, frameworks, and legislation. For example, during the asylum and migration debate of 2007 both the Green Party and the Left party disputed the idea of harmonisation, whilst the Social Democrats favoured the common approach (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 5, 10).

The third pattern sheds light on the alternatives presented in the EAC discussions. Most alternatives expressed by the government concern the EU and how whether they accept, reject,

or adjust an EU suggestion (cf. Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 11-12). Nevertheless, the interest in this pattern lies within the alternatives presented by the opposition parties or more specifically the lack of real and tangible alternatives presented by them. If contrasting these findings with the view presented by Persson and Karlsson there is a noticeable clash. Persson and Karlsson argue that the national opposition deficit is rather a myth than reality since there are a vibrant and healthy amount of opposition in the Swedish EAC debates. They claim that 40.8 percent of all opposition statements in the Swedish EAC is the type, alternatives (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 297). However, when examining what these alternatives entail it becomes apparent that the majority concern changing the Swedish standpoint slightly and they are often directed towards the government. For example, during the Asylum and Migration debate of 2007 a theme was generated named *Interchangeable point of view*. The alternative has its foundation in statements presented by the Social Democrats who argued that the future work within the policy field should be guided by circular migration, which the Swedish government must forward in the EU. However, Circular Migration was already advocated by the Swedish government thus leaving the alternative redundant and solely reinforcing what the government stands for and expresses as important (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 10,12). Furthermore, during the Environmental debate of 2022, opposition parties presented alternatives to the Swedish standpoint, resulting in the generation of the theme *Delicate Wording*. The presented alternatives were only concerning specific wordings such as saying that Sweden *note* proposals instead of *welcoming* proposals (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 6). As both Peter Mair (2013) and Robert Dahl (1965: 12, 1966: xv) argued, alternatives are vital for democracies since they provide the citizens with a political alternative and choice. Whether the alternatives identified in the debates fill this important purpose is rather questionable, since most alternatives does not shed light on new policies or discuss what type of policy should be pursued in the future.

However, there are some noticeable exceptions to the lack of alternatives presented by the opposition parties. For example, Sweden Democrats presented an alternative during the asylum and migration debate in 2022. The alternative was directed towards the EU and presented new tools, namely introducing a voucher programme, for helping refugees so the EU could better their response to a refugee crisis (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17). Another example comes from the EAC debate of 2007 within the environmental policy domain. The Green Party argued that there must be a national anchoring and that the EAC should limit the governments negotiation mandates in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a). National anchoring was directed to the national

government and aim to restrict their negotiation powers in the EU. Both alternatives present alternatives that, in theory, could create political choice for citizens.

The fourth pattern identified in the EAC debates is the existence of internal disagreements among and within the government parties. Following the definition of opposition introduced by Helms, namely that "... relationships ... may exist within parties as well as outside the context of party" (2008: 238) there were patterns of inter-party opposition where a government party opposed the Minister (Helms 2008: 239). The inter-party opposition was not attainable to examine in either of Persson and Karlsson's scientific articles from 2018 and 2022. However, by applying RTA on the EAC debates aiming to capture opposition through the dialogue between the opposition party and the government it is possible to identify internal disagreements. For example, during the environmental debate of 2007 the Christian Democrats criticised the government for being incoherent in their decisions (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 26). Furthermore, during the Asylum and Migration debate the Green Party criticised the government for lacking solidarity and humanity in their statements. The Green Party even expressed that the government should change their wording of their standpoint to include more humanity towards refugees (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 15).

Finally, the final pattern discovered in the EAC debates is interconnected with the different time-periods and the arrangement of government/opposition parties. Since researchers historically gave us a coherent view of an opposition deficit and that Persson and Karlsson recently tested the opposition deficit, the time-period became an interesting pattern to examine (Loxbo and Sjölin 2017; Karlsson and Persson 2018, 2022). Especially since the different time periods introduce different government and opposition party arrangements. During the RTA it became apparent that the debates from the 2007-2008 consist of supportive statements, critique and alternatives presented by the opposition parties. Nevertheless, the statements were short and straightforward. For example, during the asylum and migration debate the Green Party merely stated that they do "not share the governments ambitions to further harmonise asylum- and migration policies, which is currently happening in the EU" (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 5, own translation). In comparison, during the asylum and migration debate from 2022 the opposition party statements were longer and more informative (cf. Sveriges Riksdag 2022a). It is also of interest to highlight the different government arrangements during these debates. For example, there was a majority government during the debate of 2007-2008. Whether or not the

government arrangements contribute to less critique and shorter statements is difficult to answer and it is not within the aim of this thesis. However, it is worthy to point out that during the 2007-2008 debates there were only three opposition parties whilst there were six opposition parties during the 2021-2022 debates. Furthermore, government parties, such as the Christian Democrats, argued during the 2007 environment debate that they would not make formal complaints since they signed an agreement with the rest of the government parties not to do so (Sveriges Riksdag 2007a: 54).

### How Does the Patterns Emerging in the Swedish EAC Debates Correspond to Parliamentary Transformations?

Nina Liljeqvist argue that the legislative role of MPs has changed over time. Since the emergence of the EU their role has shifted from the traditional policy influencer or policymaker to becoming policy influencers. She states that a MPs role is highly dependent on the fleeting division of competencies amidst the national parliament in a Member State and the EU. Furthermore, to become a national parliament with large influence in the EU there must be consensus at the national level (Liljeqvist 2018: 221, 226). This chapter presents a discussion of how the patterns identified in the former chapters corresponds to the conceptualisation of parliamentary transformations, aiming to capture the dialogue in the EAC between the opposition parties and the government parties through a lens of an ever-fleeting European integration.

The findings suggest that there are little consensus and that the opposition parties managed to express opposition in the form of criticism and occasionally present alternatives, regardless of policy domain. For example, during the asylum and migration debate of 2022 the government parties received critique for their standpoints, especially that they were resting on old laurels. Alternatives were also forwarded such as the alternative of voluntary commitments. This alternative was in favour of the positions put forwards by the EU but against the standpoints of the Swedish government (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a). Similar patterns were evident in the Environmental debate of 2022. For example, the government received critique for overstepping their negotiating powers in the EU (Sveriges Riksdag 2021). Following the arguments forwarded by Liljeqvist, a lack of synergising statements and a lack of consensus should render the MPs to the role of policy reviewers. Since the opposition parties managed to raise their opposition in both policy domains there is a chance of the MPs in the EAC solely become policy

reviewers instead of policymakers or even policy influences (cf. Liljeqvist 2018: 221, 225-226).

However, it is important to point out that there was a case where the MPs in the EAC synergised their opinions and expressed concern of the EU overstepping boundaries. This lends support to the concept of MPs being policy reviewers, aiming to safeguard the principle of subsidiarity (cf. Nina Liljeqvist 2018: 226). During the environmental debate of 2022 the government argued the EU were overstepping their competencies and that the suggested new land strategy of 2030 introduced measures that are supposed to stay a national matter. Finally the Minister stated that the government will monitor future soil proposals and the new land strategy of 2030 so they respect the division of competences as well as the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality (Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 10). This argument was later favoured by the majority of the opposition parties. However, whether this is a true case of successfully safeguarding and later invoking the principle of subsidiarity is highly dependent on the future work of the Commission. Because, as Liljeqvist argued, for a national parliament to become successful at invoking the principle of subsidiarity the Commission must also engage in good faith and listen to the national parliaments (Liljeqvist 2018: 221).

### What, Then, Is the Role of Opposition in Relation to Swedish National Democracy Within the EU?

Having considered what oppositional patterns and themes were generated from the Swedish EAC debates, as well as how these correspond to parliamentary transformations, I here turn to what role opposition play in relation to Swedish national democracy within the EU. With the point of departure in the importance of opposition, there are two noteworthy insights regarding the role opposition plays in the national democracy in Sweden.

First, Persson and Karlsson argue that there is a case of a vibrant and healthy opposition in Swedish EU politics. According to them the opposition parties manages to present critique and introduce alternatives, thus fulfilling their role in the Swedish national democracy (Persson and Karlsson 2018). The findings in this thesis also suggest that there are several expressed forms of opposition. However, there is a noticeable difference when contrasting the findings in this thesis with Persson and Karlsson findings. As previously mentioned, the findings in this thesis propose that most alternatives as well as critique presented by opposition parties are directed



towards the government changing specific wordings and standpoints (cf. Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 4-6). Suggestions at the EU level therefore fail to be thoroughly debated by the opposition parties since they focus their opposition at the national level or announce whether they are supporting or disapprove of EU proposals. However, there is a noticeable exception coming from the asylum and migration debate of 2022 where the Sweden Democrats introduced an alternative tool in the EU's refugee reception (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 17). Nonetheless, the opposition parties repeatedly oppose the government's suggestions however they seldomly discuss what type of politics and policies they wish to pursue in the EU (cf. Sveriges Riksdag 2021: 7). Lending support to Rauh and De Wild (2018: 22) who argued that opposition parties repeatedly fail to debate the EU in the national arena. However, the government parties occasionally also fail to bring attention to what type of politics and policies they aspire to pursue in the EU. For example, the government party express that they *welcome* conclusion (Sveriges Riksdag 2007b: 3) or that they *support* an approach or *accept* a proposal (Sveriges Riksdag 2022a: 13). As a result, both the government parties and the opposition parties frequently fail to debate suggestions at the EU level as well as debating what they wish to pursue in EU politics.

Second, when parties fail to shed light on and discuss proposals at the EU level, what role does opposition further play in the Swedish national democracy within the EU? Since both the government- and opposition parties fail to discuss EU policies, especially in the form of presenting alternatives directed at the EU level, citizens are deprived of a political choice of how EU politics should be pursued. In accordance with the findings of this thesis, citizens commonly receive the representation by political parties, in the national parliamentary sphere, which either accept or decline EU suggestions, or discuss the government's standpoint (Sveriges Riksdag, 2007b, 2007a, 2021, 2022a). Citizens are left with fewer political choices of how EU politics should be pursued and as a result, citizens may lose their voice in this process and the national democracy as such (cf. Mair 2007: 7; 2013: 140).

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine opposition in the Swedish EAC in a context of European integration. Traditionally researchers argue that opposition domestically wither when a country becomes a part of the EU. Recently, researchers contested this notion arguing that the national opposition in EU politics is vibrant and healthy. Nonetheless, these new contributions are solely

focusing on quantitative research methods aiming to measure the amount of opposition, leaving much unclear. This thesis therefore embarks on contributing to a more nuanced research field and wish to provide a new perspective to the methodology debate within the scientific sphere. The purpose of this thesis is to investigate if and how opposition takes place in the Swedish EAC. To fulfil this purpose this thesis set out to answer three research questions. Namely, (1) Which oppositional patterns can be generated from the debate protocols in the Swedish EAC? (2) How does the patterns emerging in the Swedish EAC debates inform the discussions on parliamentary transformations? And lastly, (3) What, then, is the role of opposition in relation to Swedish national democracy within the EU? A conceptualisation of oppositions as well as the European integration theory of parliamentary transformations provide the thesis with its theoretical framework. Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis is used as a method since it provides a qualitative approach to analysing the material, which came from European affairs committee [EAC] debates from two policy domains. Namely the policy domain of Asylum and Migration and the policy domain of Environment.

To summarise the findings, there are five patterns generated from the two policy domains. The patterns concern who the political parties direct their opposition towards as well as the lack of tangible alternatives presented in the EAC debates. Furthermore, a pattern highlighting whether harmonisation is preferred or not is presented. A pattern of internal disagreements within the government is also identified in the debates. Lastly, there is a pattern highlighting different government/opposition party compositions as well as how it varied over time.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the members of parliaments [MPs] role in the EAC is comparable to Liljeqvists' description of policy reviewers rather than influencers. Namely that MPs are tasked with reviewing legislation and policies rather than creating and influencing them (cf. Liljeqvist 2018: 25). For example, the criticism and alternatives directed towards the EU level most often regarded whether a political party accept or reject EU proposals or that Sweden must safeguard the principle of subsidiarity. The remaining criticism and alternative are often supported by singular parties and there is little consensus. Therefore, the MPs unsuccessfully managed to synergise with each other to present critique and alternatives leaving them fruitless at influencing future EU policies (cf. Liljeqvist 2018: 221). The findings furthermore suggest that political parties are unsuccessful at discussing proposals at the EU level since they often fail to present alternatives to EU policy suggestions. For example, the

opposition parties commonly oppose the governments standpoints, and the government parties focus their opposition on the EU by either accepting or rejecting EU proposals instead of presenting new alternatives regarding which policies should be pursued at the EU level. As a result, the opposition play various roles in the Swedish national democracy in EU politics. Opposition both create and at the same time deprive citizens of a political choice resulting in citizens occasionally losing their voice in the Swedish national democracy in the EU.

The findings in this study contribute to the methodological debate concerning opposition since it is noteworthy that a qualitative approach can provide a new perspective and a more nuanced depiction of domestic opposition in EU politics. By measuring the amount of opposition in EU politics in Sweden Persson and Karlsson argued that the assumed shortage of opposition was rather a myth than reality (Karlsson and Persson 2018: 21). The findings in this thesis also suggest that opposition exist in the Swedish EAC. However, by deep diving into each debate using a reflexive thematic analysis [RTA] I can examine what the opposition voice. Consequently, my findings indicate that political parties fail to discuss alternatives and proposals directed to the EU level, thus, depriving citizens of a political choice in Swedish EU politics. However, this does not equvalate a hollowing out of the national democracy nor that Peter Mair's (2007: 14, 2013: 115) claims are fully accurate since he argued that the EU hollow out political competition and decrease the opposition at the national level. By using RTA, it is possible to highlight that there is domestic opposition in EU politics but at the same time identify one core issue. Namely, that political parties can express different forms of opposition, but they fail to properly debate suggestions stemming from the EU.

These finding shed light on a larger and very interesting puzzle that this thesis cannot solve. Namely the concepts of achieving influence in the EU and attaining a healthy domestic opposition contradict each other making it difficult, or even impossible, to accomplish both simultaneously. At one hand, we wish to attain opposition and present alternatives so citizens can view politics as meaningful and obtain a political choice during elections. At the other hand, to become influential at an EU level and become a policy influencer the domestic level must show consensus, at the same time as the Commission acts in good faith. This contradiction ties into a larger question which have large implications for MPs in Sweden, namely, what role should the national parliament have in EU politics?

Since this thesis solely focus on two policy domains, namely the environment-, and the asylum and migration policy domain, there are some limitations that should be discussed. For example, there are some limitations to the thesis generalisability to other policy domains. For example, the alternatives presented in the environmental debates might not be similar to alternatives in other policy domains. Nonetheless, there are some findings that I would argue could transcend policy domains and time. These are (1) findings indicating that MPs in the Swedish EAC are policy reviewers hence focusing on safeguarding the principle of subsidiarity, (2) political parties fail to discuss alternative solutions at the EU level. I would argue that these findings offer some generalisability since the principle of subsidiarity is intertwined with a MPs role where Sweden and the EU shares competencies, and the political parties repeatedly failed to discuss suggestions at the EU level in all debates. Furthermore, the debates occur during two different time periods with different arrangements of opposition- and government parties. It is possible to assume these two findings are still occurring today in 2023 even though Sweden has a new government compared to my initial investigation.

Finally, I propose two different pathways that researchers could highlight in future studies. First, even though this study has contributed to the methodological debate by using a qualitative approach to study opposition there is still much that needs to be done in the scientific field. Since this study focus on one case, namely Sweden, future research should scale up the ambitions and apply qualitative approaches when investigating domestic opposition in other Member States. Second, since the findings suggest that opposition exist in the Swedish EAC future research could highlight whether citizens are aware of the opposing ideas presented in the political debates. Because what democratic bearing does opposition have if citizens are not made aware of the different political options that exist in domestic EU politics?

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## Appendix 1.

Table 3: Overview of themes generated by the reflexive thematic analysis.

<b>Themes</b>				
<b>Policy Domain</b>	<b>Asylum and Migration Policies</b>		<b>Environmental Policies</b>	
<b>Category</b>	2007-2008	2021-2022	2007-2008	2021-2022
Government Party Support	(1) Joint politics	(1) Conditional support	(1) Support for the greater good,	(1) Ambitions aspirations
Government Party Critique	(1) Immigrants and arime	(1) Absence of solidarity	(1) Other member states focus on the national, (2) Incoherence	(1) Unfair expectations, (2) What are national concerns?
Government Party Alternatives	(1) EUs humanity, (2) Immigrants are a resource, (3) Decisions as national	(1) Humanity and Solidarity, (2) Legally binding preconditions	(1) Essential with higher ambitions, (2) Polluters pay principles	(1) Undesirable double work
Opposition Party Support	(1) Preferred harmonisation	(1) European alliance	(1) Government is firm, (2) Widen the scope	(1) Susceptive government
Opposition Party Critique	(1) Undesirable harmonisation, (2) Fear of immigrants	(1) To rest on old laurels, (2) Slander of character	(1) Blinding dichotomy, (2) Confusing contradictions, (3), EU slips into national competencies	(1) Weak standpoints, (2) Overstepping national legislations
Opposition Party Alternatives	(1) Interchangeable points of view	(1) Voluntary commitments, (2) Help elsewhere	(1) National anchoring	(1) Short-sightedness, (2) Delicate wording