

# **Problems in Election Secrecy and Fulfillment of Democracy in Sweden – A Call to Action for OSCE Election Overseers**

Dear OSCE,

I hereby present you this letter concerning the sub-standard state of election secrecy and fulfillment of democracy in Swedish elections. The observations concern also the Swedish parliamentary elections of 2018, but are not limited to it. The election problems have been a long-standing issue. As a Finn the historical timeframes are not clear to me, but I personally remember news reports of problems from over 10 years past. My conclusion, as referred to earlier, is that the problems have existed for very long time, spanning many elections.

## **The Swedish List Election System**

Sweden has an election system referred to colloquially as the “list election system”. In the Swedish implementation the polling station carries 3 types of ballots. One ballot type contains name of the party. Another ballot type has name of the party combined with list of candidates the voter can choose from. Third ballot type is empty ballot where voter can write name of their party. Ballots are publicly available in polling stations and other voters can see what ballots other voters pick up.

In the Swedish system the ballots are provided by the parties themselves. They need to be of standardized material and the same physical shape, but judging from publicly available press pictures, it seems there can be variation in the content of the ballot.

Parties provide the party-related ballots. Parties get reimbursed for the expenses if they have hit over 1% approval rating in 2 previous elections or if they previously have already seats in the office being polled for.

# **Problems of the Swedish Election System**

The Swedish election system has severe problems. These kinds of problems one would normally expect from undemocratic regimes, not from a modern western welfare democracy. In the following I list problems from 2 different types.

## **Election Secrecy Problems**

The most critical problem of the Swedish election system is the election secrecy problem. In polling station, voters can pick up party ballots. In this way other voters see what party the voter has chosen. A way to circumvent this has traditionally been as follows:

1. Collect publicly the ballots of all parties in the polling station
2. Inside the polling booth enclose the chosen party ballot to elections cover and seal it
3. Hide excess ballots to pockets
4. Return the sealed elections cover to election officials

The system is completely backwards. For an election system, the election secrecy should be automatic and enforced property and not something one achieves only by making additional tricks.

## **Problems in Fulfillment of Democracy**

As discussed earlier, the polling station party ballots are provided by the parties. This creates many problems. One problem is that this favors big parties with comprehensive logistic networks. Smaller parties don't typically have these networks, which in reality makes them being unable to deliver all necessary ballots. In turn this makes the smaller parties lose votes. I consider the practice very undemocratic, especially remembering that parties already having an office get monetary reimbursement for the ballots.

Another, more severe thing is the disappearance of ballots by mischief. Every time in the past years I have been paying attention to the Swedish elections, there have always been cases of ballots which have been lost because the voting officials have decided to hide or even destroy ballots of parties they don't happen to like. This is highly, highly undemocratic. Every action should be taken to prevent this kind of actions from happening.

# Standardized Single Ballot as a Preliminary Idea for Fixing the Swedish Election System

In order to fix the problems in Swedish election secrecy and democracy, a standardized single ballot system could be used. The system is briefly presented in the following.

Voting in the polling station would be essentially carried out as following:

1. The voter takes one single ballot from the voting officials
2. Voter goes to polling booth and selects a single number from the list, writes it down to the ballot, and seals the ballot to the elections cover
3. Voter gives the sealed elections cover to the officials

In the proposed system every candidate and party would have their own number. There would be no party-specific paper ballots, but votes could still be cast for the whole party instead of single candidates if chosen. This would keep the political essentials of the Swedish list election system as they were while automatically and effortlessly enforcing election secrecy. An image of an example elections list is presented below.

Number    Runner

2	Party 1
3	Candidate A
4	Candidate B
5	Candidate C
6	Candidate D
7	Candidate E

8	Party 2
9	Candidate F
10	Candidate G
11	Candidate H

12	Party 3
13	Candidate I
14	Candidate J
15	Candidate K

Single standardized ballots would also make it useless for bad election officials to damage or purposely misplace the ballots as this would not work against a single party anymore, contrary to the current Swedish elections system.

Having single standardized ballots available elections-wide would also make the elections more democratic as all qualifying parties, also smaller ones, could fully partake in the elections without considering the logistics of the ballots.

## **Call to Action for OSCE Election Overseers**

After presenting the problems of the Swedish elections system I humbly call the OSCE election overseers to action. The overseers should communicate the problems to the Swedish government and all other stakeholders in a firm voice and push to change the election system to resemble one of a fully democratic country. It is both shameful and astonishing that this undemocratic and election secrecy -compromising system has been allowed to operate for this long.

Sincerely in Espoo, Finland on 2018-09-13,

**Janne Paalijärvi**

Master of Science (Technology)

janne.paalijarvi @ piraattipuolue.fi