Abstract
During the last decade, a new political party family has attracted a number of voters all over Europe. This party family consists of political parties that can be categorized as radical right-wing populist parties (RRP-parties). These parties have attracted voters due to a political agenda that focuses on politicization of differences among (and between) the population, and where the issue of immigration- and refugee policies is central. The presence of RRP-parties and their emerging support from the electorate have created a discussion concerning the responses of the political establishment towards these types of parties. In relation to discussions concerning immigrant integration and the responses from state and civil society, this discussion is essential. The paper discusses the strategic approaches from the established parties towards RRP-parties. The paper focuses on the Swedish context and the strategic approaches taken by the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party towards the Swedish RRP-party the Sweden Democrats. The paper discusses why the content of the strategic approaches from the established parties towards the Sweden Democrats have changed since the election 2006, but more importantly, why the specific issue politicized by the Sweden Democrats, i.e. the immigration- and refugee issue, have become central in the formation of the strategic approaches used by the two established parties.

Keywords: radical right-wing populism, democracy, political strategies, immigration, political establishment

Introduction
The strategic approach towards radical right-wing populist parties (RRP-parties) by established parties and the content of these approaches are of special focus in this article. The established parties’ strategic approaches towards the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), a Swedish RRP-party, have been an issue of importance ever since the Swedish national election of 2006. As a result of the increased electoral support for the party due to the results of the election of 2006 and 2010, the Sweden Democrats no longer could be seen as a marginal party with minimal electoral support, but rather as a political opponent that the established parties had to deal with. To regard the Sweden Democrats as a random political phenomenon was no longer an option, which have resulted in an intensified debate concerning how the presence of this new opponent strategically should be dealt with (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

Research focusing on the response from the political establishment in relation to the presence of these types of parties is of interest and importance for several reasons. Of special interest are the
strategies used by the political establishment, i.e. strategies used in order to handle the presence of this new political competitor. RRP-parties, such as the Sweden Democrats, belong to a party family which gained more and more electoral support due to a political agenda which questions and criticizes the development of multicultural society and speak in terms of stricter legislation in relation to immigration- and refugee policies. These parties support democracy as a fundamental idea (in contrast to the extreme right which mostly operates outside parliamentarian borders), but these parties are at the same time perceived as challenging certain aspects of liberal democracy, such as pluralism and tolerance.

RRP-parties are often portrayed as the ugly ducklings of politics or as pariah-parties (Downs 2001; Bale 2003; de Lange 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). Knowledge concerning the content of the strategic approaches used by established parties towards RRP-parties is important due to two certain aspects. On the one hand it gives us knowledge of how the political establishment strategically approaches and deals with a new political opponent making its way onto the political arena, and on the other hand it provides important information on how established parties deals with an opponent surrounded by a negatively charged perception and who are seen as challenging certain aspects of liberal democracy.

Furthermore, the presence of RRP-parties can give rise to what can be perceived as a democratic dilemma. The democratic dilemma occurs at the very intersection between, on one hand the mechanisms that control the supply and demands of democracy- as long as there is a demand for this kind of political parties among the electorate, it will be followed by a supply which answers to this kind of demand – and on the other hand the rights of the individual intimately connected to liberal democracy which are seen as inviolable and deeply rooted in international jurisdiction (Schain et al 2002; Eatwell 2004; Mouffe 2005; Fryklund et al 2007; Mudde 2007; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). In contrast to the extra-parliamentary extreme-right, RRP-parties act within the frames of democracy but once established, RRP-parties draw upon a political agenda that might lead to restrictions of the civil rights of individuals with other ethnic backgrounds than the majority in a country. In the long run it can lead to the politically sanctioned exclusion of individuals with migrant backgrounds which in turn might challenge aspects of pluralism and tolerance vivid within liberal democracy (Schain et al 2002; Capoccia 2004; Eatwell 2004; Mouffe 2005; Mudde 2007; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). The presence of radical right-wing populism can therefore be portrayed as a democratic dilemma that state and civil society, and in this particular case, political parties in Europe are forced to face strategically.

Strategies towards other political parties are not an unusual feature in multiparty systems; rather it is a natural consequence of the way the political system is structured. But when it comes to RRP-parties, the content of the strategic approaches are not naturally given. Research from Belgium and Sweden show, that a very common strategy used by the established parties is the strategy focusing on isolation and exclusion of the RRP-party (dismissive strategy) (Downs 2001; 2002; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). This kind of strategy can, on one hand, be seen as a rational solution used by political parties in order to control and diminish the level of competition from their opponents, but it also have a tendency to be perceived as undemocratic by the electorate, since it is used in order to prevent a democratically elected party from gaining access to the political arena. Therefore, the presence of the democratic dilemma contributes to the fact that the strategic process (related to the new opponent in the shape of the RRP-party) becomes more complicated. Reconstruction of the content of the strategic approaches towards RRP-parties used by established parties and the explanation of which factors that influence this
content is therefore an essential contribution to the important question of how established parties strategically handle “the ugly ducklings” of politics.

From this follows two important research questions in focus of this paper. First, how does the political establishment deal with political parties that, to some extent, promote a political agenda that can be seen as challenging certain aspects of liberal democracy? And secondly, how can we from a theoretical and empirical point of view, explain these reactions?

### Sweden as point of departure

The article uses the Swedish context as point of departure with special focus on how representatives for the Swedish political establishment handle the presence of a RRP-party. In this case, the political establishment is represented by two of the major established parties, namely the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party, which are faced with the competition from a challenging RRP-party; the Sweden Democrats.

The empirical material of the paper is based upon data collected in relation to the research project *Dancing out of step with the voters – the Strategic approaches of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party towards the Sweden Democrats* (2010) (Ph.D thesis written together with Jenny Kiiskinen.) The material is based upon interviews with representatives for the Social Democratic party, the Conservative party and the Sweden Democrats, more specifically statements from party representatives on a local level (the level where the Sweden Democrats have representation) concerning the content of the strategic approaches towards the Sweden Democrats. We also conducted interviews with party representatives holding central positions within the three parties. The majority of the interviews were conducted during 2007, i.e. one year after the national election in Sweden in 2006. The material generated from the interviews were analyzed together with statements made in media and the national assembly by the leaders of the Social Democratic party and the Conservative Party related to the strategic approach of the Sweden Democrats (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

### Political strategies – a question of defining goals

Point of departure for the theoretical discussions for the above mentioned research project and therefore also of this article, is the assumption that political parties are actors which act rationally in order to achieve their, in advance, postulated goals. The assumption, which can be extracted from rational party theory, predicts that a party will choose a strategic approach based upon a content which creates the best odds possible in order to achieve and fulfill the goals of the party, such as maximization of electoral support, maximization of power or internal cohesion (Downs 1957; Strom 1990; Håkansson 2005; Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

In order to reconstruct and analyze the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties towards the Sweden Democrats, explanations anchored in the *Position, Salience and Ownership theory* (PSO-theory) by Bonnie Meguid (2005: 2008) were used in the research project and will be further discussed in this article. The PSO-theory goes a bit further in relation to the basic assumptions extracted from rational party theory. When it comes to the relationship between parties that compete for the same group of voters, the goals are also focused on maximizing one’s own party’s relative strength towards its main opponent (Meguid 2008). The content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties in order to deal with the presence of a challenging RRP-party is, in relation to the PSO-theory, dependent of whether the RRP-party poses as a threat to RRP-party or not. The threat is considered in relation to the specific political issue raised by the niche-party (in this case the RRP-party) and to what
extent established parties are electorally threatened by the RRP-party due to its politisation of this specific political issue (Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010). The PSO-theory shows that the established parties have three specific strategies to choose from, a dismissive strategy, a strategy marked by convergence and a strategy marked by divergence. The unifying element of all these three strategies is the specific issue put forward by the niche party. In the case of RRP-parties it is therefore the immigration- and refugee issue which is the issue that the strategies are built around. The PSO-theory clearly state that the strategic response towards the challenging RRP-party begins when a decision is made whether the established party should take a stand in the specific issue put forward by the RRP-party or not (Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

The dismissive strategy is used in cases when the specific issue is not seen as important (from a political point of view) or too difficult to address. In cases like this, the established parties can use a more passive strategic response, by which they try to ignore the specific issue. By doing so, the established parties tries to send a message to the voters saying that the specific issue is not of importance and by doing so the established parties also tries to tell the voters that a vote for the challenging RRP-party is a lost vote. If the dismissive strategy is successful it will lead to the RRP-party losing voters as a direct consequence of the fact that the voters have been influenced by the established party and view the specific issue as not important and the threat posed by the RRP-party have therefore been averted (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Downs 2001; van Spanje & van der Brug 2007).

But there are also strategies which, in contrast to the dismissive strategy, focus on a more active stand taken by the established parties in the specific issue. As a result of the usage of these strategies, the specific issue rose by the RRP-party, gets a lot more attention, becomes more legitimized and can therefore also become more important to the voters. If the established party chooses to take an active position in the specific issue, there are two strategies to choose from.

The first one of these strategies is the strategy of convergence. By choosing this strategy, the established party meets the challenge posed by the RRP-party by move its positions in the specific issue closer to the positions of the challenging RRP-party (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Downs 1957; Sjöblom 1968; Downs 2001; Widfeldt 2004). The aim of the strategy is to neutralize the success for the RRP-party by undermining the uniqueness of the position of the party in the specific issue. In cases when an established party use a strategy of convergence in order to meet the challenge of an RRP-party it provides the voters with two parties holding similar positions in the issue to choose from. Voters more ideologically close to the established party will, according to the PSO-theory, abandon the challenging RRP-party in favor of the established party (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Downs 2001). By choosing this specific strategy the established party also tries to challenge the RRP-party when it comes to the “right” to claim ownership of the specific issue. According to Meguid, it will also appear as more attractive for the electorate to cast their vote for the “copy” (the established party) rather than the “original” (the RRP-party) (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also van Donselaar 2003).

But there are also some risks attached to the usage of the strategy of convergence. If the strategy is not successful, there is a high risk that the electoral support for the RRP-party increases instead and the attention given by the established party towards the specific issue can also result in the issue becoming more important to the voters. By moving its positions in the specific issue towards the positions of the RRP-party can also provide an image that the RRP-
party is seen as a political colleague which in the future could be seen as a potential coalition partner (Art 2007).

There also exists a third strategy which is the strategy of divergence. This specific strategy could become useful in situations when an established party wants to create an image (directed to the voters) that the party want to distance itself from the position taken in the specific issue by the RRP-party. This is done by the established party taking an opposite position in the specific issue as to the position taken by the RRP-party (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Downs 1957; Sjöblom 1968; Capoccia 2001). A difficult aspect related to the strategy of divergence is its risks of having an contra-productive effect since it actually reinforces the position of the RRP-party as the legitimate owner of the specific issue, which also can provide the RRP-party with more voters sharing the same views in the issue since none of the rest of the established parties holds a similar position in the issue (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

It can seem rather strange that an established party, which bases its decisions on rationality, chooses the strategy of divergence in order to meet the challenge of a new political opponent. But, and as the PSO-theory states, in multi-party systems (such as the Swedish political system) where a number of different parties compete for the same voters, a strategy which reinforces the electoral support of the RRP-party could be used in order to diminish the electoral support of the main opponent of the established party positioned on the other side of the political scale. At the same time as the strategy of divergence reinforces the support for the RRP-party it also weakens the main opponent loosing the most voters to the RRP-party. The expression of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” clearly identifies this situation (Meguid 2005; 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

The choice of strategic approach towards the challenging RRP-party is, as stipulated by the PSO-theory, constituted by factors such as to what degree the RRP-party threatens the established parties and moreover, how this threat is distributed among the established parties. If one of the established parties is threatened more than its main opponent (i.e. an asymmetrical threat), the PSO-theory stipulates that the party will (in order to maximize the electoral support) engage in a strategy of convergence, i.e. adopt a position on the specific issue similar to the RRP-party. The other party (which is not threatened to the same extent), will adopt a strategy of divergence in order to strengthen its relative power towards its main competitor. This is done by strengthening the electoral support of the RRP-party, which will lead to the other established party possibly losing even more votes to the challenging RRP-party. If both parties are equally threatened by the RRP-party (i.e. a symmetrical threat), the most rational choice of strategy is, according to the PSO-theory, a strategy of convergence, since the strategy will challenge the RRP-party’s position as owner of the specific position held in the political issue. According to Meguid, this strategy is seen as the most rational one since it is supposed to create a favorable situation for the established party in order to win the competition concerning the support from the voters. The voters are assumed to cast their vote for the established party rather than the newcomer (Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

If neither of the established parties is threatened by the new RRP-party, the PSO-theory state that the parties will most likely adopt a dismissive strategy by which they try to send a message towards the electorate that the issue put forward by the RRP-party is not important. Therefore, the PSO-theory provides knowledge on how the established parties can, with help from the three strategies, not only influence the position of their own party in the specific issue, but also...
influence the salience of the issue put forward by the RRP-party and affect which party the voters perceive as the owner of the issue. The possibility to, with help from different strategies, influence the position, salience and ownership of a certain political issue, is a powerful weapon which the established parties have access to. If the established parties take measures that change the salience of the issue or which affect the status of the RRP-party as owner of the political issue, it can have direct consequences for the electoral support of the RRP-party (Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). In sum, the PSO-theory provides an understanding for the strategic interplay between competing parties, at the same time as it highlights the central importance of the specific issue politicized by the challenging RRP-party.

**Tendencies towards divergence and convergence: The content of the strategic approaches**

The research project *Dancing out of step with the voters – the Strategic approaches of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party towards the Sweden Democrats* clearly shows that the Social Democratic party as well as the Conservative party view the Sweden Democrats as a potential competitor towards which a strategic approach is needed. Before the election of 2006, the Sweden Democrats’ did not constitute a potential threat towards neither of the two established parties. The Sweden Democrats didn’t get more than 1.44% of the national votes and was viewed, by the two established parties, as a marginal party which positioned itself on one single issue, the refugee- and immigration issue, a political issue not given much attention by neither the established political parties nor the electorate. Therefore, the Social Democratic party as well as the Conservative party chose a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats based upon a dismissive strategy. The content of the strategic approach was, due to the status of the Sweden Democrats as a marginal party, also a rational one in relation to what the PSO-theory stipulates. However, in the middle of 2006, things changed. In the national election of 2006 the Sweden Democrats got 2.93% of the votes which did not provide the party with seats in the national Parliament but, nonetheless, provided the party with more than 280 seats in local municipalities in Sweden. The party also got mandates in different regional parliaments. Suddenly, the party became a more potential threat towards the established parties. In the aftermath of the election of 2006 it also became clear that, even though the Sweden Democrats attracted voters from both established parties, a significant number came from former Social Democratic voters. Even though the party still retains a loyal electorate, the Social Democratic party lost more votes to the Sweden Democrats than its main competitor, the Conservative party (Sannerstedt 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

A reconstruction of the content of the strategic approaches by the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party towards the Sweden Democrats used the period after the election of 2006, shows that the refugee- and immigration issue (the specific issue politicized by the Sweden Democrats) has become increasingly important for the formation of these strategic approaches. This change does follows the initial paths stipulated by the PSO-theory, which claims that the issue put forward by the RRP-party will become more in focus of the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties once the RRP-party becomes a more prominent threat towards the political establishment. The reconstruction also show that both parties have left the previous dismissive strategy behind and are instead moving towards strategies which imply a stronger position in the issue put forward by the Sweden Democrats, i.e. the refugee- and immigration issue. Moreover, the results from the research project indicate that the Social Democratic party is adapting a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats based upon
divergence whereas, in the case of the Conservative party, we can see tendencies of the party taking a rather hesitant strategic position but slowly adapting a strategic approach based upon vague tendencies of convergence. Both parties also combine the issue-based strategy with a strategy of demonization of the Sweden Democrats which focuses on demonization of the party and its members by portraying it as extreme, odd and with a position in the specific issue closely related to a xenophobic attitude which is not seen as acceptable (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

The importance of credibility
Interestingly enough, a deeper analysis of the results from the research project show that the choices made by the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party when it comes to the choices of strategies to use in relation to the Sweden Democrats, does not follow the ideal model of strategic approaches stipulated by the PSO-theory. As noted earlier, the theory stipulates that the party most threatened by the challenging RRP-party should, in order to get the voters back, move towards a strategic approach based on convergence. The other established party, not threatened to the same extent as its counterpart should instead, in order to strengthen its power towards its real opponent (the other established party) conveys a strategic approach marked by divergence. But, the results show the opposite tendencies as regards the Swedish context. The Social Democratic party, albeit being the party who (out of the two established parties) is seen as being most threatened by the presence of the Sweden Democrats, has not engaged in a strategic approach marked by convergence, but has engaged in a strategic approach showing tendencies of divergence. The party has position itself rather distant from the position held by the Sweden Democrats in the specific issue and has also, from a rhetorical point of view, tried to make this position very visible. Lägg in empiriskt exempel. The Conservative party has, on the other hand, taken on a strategic approach marked by a rather reserved position. When answering the questions of how to strategically deal with the Sweden democrats, the representatives of the party have not been as outspoken as their counterpart the Social Democratic party. But in relation to some of the propositions made in questions related to the immigration- and refugee issue, the party have for instance proposed for stricter legislation in this issue, which could be interpreted as being signs of (even though very vague) tendencies of convergence (in relation to the political issue politicized by the Sweden Democrats) (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). Lägg in empiriskt exempel. But how can the results generated from the Swedish context be explained?

The results show that credibility, in order to explain the strategic choices made by the established parties, is an important factor. The factor of credibility is important for a number of reasons, such as keeping internal cohesion within the party (Meguid 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). This factor is especially relevant for the Social Democratic party which, in order to keep internal cohesion in relation to the immigration and refugee issue, needs to engage in a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats focused on divergence instead of convergence (as would be the most rational strategic approach in order to diminish the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats), since a strategic approach marked by convergence is associated with high costs to pay when keeping its credibility in relation to the party members. Over the years, the Social Democratic party has taken an ideological position in the immigration and refugee issue rather distant from the position taken by the Sweden Democrats. Therefore, if the Social Democratic party changed its position in the issue and moved it closer to the position taken by the Sweden Democrats (which a strategy marked by convergence implies), it would probably cause problems for the Social Democratic party when it comes to keeping the credibility of the party in relation to the party members. The strategic approach chosen by the Social Democratic
party showing tendencies of divergence can therefore be explained. In the case of the Conservative party, a similar discussion is applicable. The Conservative party have, in relation to its counterpart the Social Democratic party, held a more critical and strict political position in relation to the Swedish immigration- and refugee policies. The vague tendencies of convergence showing in the strategic approach of the party towards the Sweden Democrats can therefore neither be seen as contradictory to the views among the party members and does not challenge the credibility of the party in relation to its own party members. In other words, the strategic choice does not directly contradict the views in these issues held by neither the electorate nor the party members (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

Other factors that have had implications for the content of the strategic approach of the Sweden Democrats chosen by the two established parties are the position of the voters in relation to the immigration- and refugee issue. The two parties have to listen to their own electorate and their position towards the issue. In the case of the Social Democratic party, a strategic approach based upon convergence might interest voters who left the party in favor of the Sweden Democrats in the election of 2006. But at the same time, this kind of strategic approach (even though, according to the PSO-theory, the most effective in order to diminish the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats), might also be associated with an altogether to high cost to pay in relation to the goal of keeping a stable electorate. The same discussion can be applied to the strategic approach of the Conservative party towards the Sweden Democrats. In relation to the voters it’s therefore important to maintain credibility in relation to the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats. The voters of the Conservative party have, over time, proven to be the most critical ones when it comes to how the question of immigration to Sweden should be dealt with. Therefore, the vague tendencies of convergence, in relation to the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats, cannot be seen as challenging the credibility of the party among the electorate (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

Even though we see vague tendencies of convergence in the content of the strategic approach from the Conservative party towards the Sweden Democrats, neither of the two established parties are willing to engage in a strategic approach strongly marked by convergence. Another factor important in order to understand the results from the Swedish context is the usage by the Sweden Democrats of the anti-establishment strategy. The party portrays itself as a party “outside” the political establishment holding a position in the immigration- and refugee issue which is strongly influenced by the views “of the people”. Neither the Social Democratic party nor the Conservative party can engage in an outspoken strategic approach marked by convergence (i.e. close to the position taken by the Sweden Democrats in the specific issue) since these parties are part of the establishment. Being part of the political establishment makes it difficult for the two parties to adopt a position in the specific issue which is similar to the position taken by the RRP-party, which is posing as a party outside the political establishment. A clearly outspoken move towards a strategic approach of convergence, i.e. a move closer to the position held by the party seen as being outside the political establishment, would probably challenge the credibility of the two established parties (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

An extended understanding for the strategic approaches towards RRP-parties: concluding remarks
The PSO-theory has served as point of departure for the research project on which this article is based. The theory has provided substantial understanding for which factors affect the content of
the strategic approaches used by the established parties in relation to an opposing RRP-party. The importance of and the focus on the specific issue politicized by the RRP-party in relation to the content of the strategies, has provided the necessary knowledge needed in order to analyze and understand the empirical results of the research project presented in this article. But the results generated from the Swedish study, needs to be developed and analyzed even further. First of all, the results from the Swedish study clearly show that there exist some limitations when it comes to the capacity of the PSO-theory in order to fully explaining the results generated from the Swedish context.

First of all, even though the PSO-theory focuses on the specific issue politicized by the niche-party, the theory does not take into account what kind of political issue that is in focus. The PSO-theory has been emanated from a study focused on three different types of niche-parties, such as environmental parties, RRP-parties and ethno-territorial parties. The theory does not take not account the different issues raised by the different parties, but rather focuses on a more general perspective where the fact that these parties build their rhetoric around one single issue is used as point of departure. But when it comes to understanding the strategic choices made by established parties in order to meet the challenge of the RRP-party, it seems like the specific issue politicized by the RRP-party, needs to be analyzed further.

In the case of the Sweden Democrats, it have become clear that the strongly value-charged issue, which the immigration- and refugee issue can be portrayed as, have had an impact on the strategic choices made by the established parties. It’s an issue marked by a discourse where dichotomies such as “right-wrong” and ”tolerance-intolerance” are highly vivid, where issues of moral and ethics is debated and where parties belonging to the political establishment promotes an image of being the one’s holding a political position in the specific issue which is seen as the morally right one (Hellström 2010; see also Mouffe 2005) and distant from the (unmoral) position held by the Sweden Democrats in the issue. Therefore, this discourse also puts restraints on the strategic choices available to the established parties and can be used in order to explain the fact why neither of the two established parties in Sweden in focus of the research project have conveyed into a strategy marked by strong convergence. The use of such a strategy have the potential risk of being interpreted as a sign of moving closer to the “unmoral” position held in the issue by the Sweden Democrats, which in the long run also could be seen as a marker of “acceptance” of this position. The need of keeping the distance to the Sweden Democrats in this highly value-charged issue is therefore of high importance for the Swedish political establishment and can therefore also be useful in order to understand why the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party have not engaged in a strategy strongly marked by convergence in order to meet the challenge posed by the Sweden Democrats.

Furthermore, in the case of Sweden, yet another important factor has proven to be important to take into account when analyzing and trying to understand the strategic choices made by the established parties. The perception of the Sweden Democrats has proven to be an important factor with potential to influence the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties which needs to be taken into consideration when trying to understand the strategic choices available to the Swedish political parties in order to handle the challenge posed by the Sweden Democrats (Kiiskinen & Saveljoff 2010). This negative perception is not unique for the Sweden Democrats; most of the RRP-parties in Europe are faced with the same negative
perception. But, the negative perception surrounding a lot of RRP-parties is not taken into account by the PSO-theory.

The Sweden Democrats is surrounded by a negatively perception given an almost hegemonic status. The perception of the Sweden Democrats is often related to discussions concerning principles of liberal democracy such as pluralism and tolerance (i.e. the democratic dilemma). This negative perception surrounding the Sweden Democrats have clearly had an impact on the strategic choices available to the established parties and actually reduces the strategic choices available to the two established parties. It has consequences for the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties towards the Sweden Democrats and can also be used in order to explain why neither of the two established parties convey a strategic approach strongly marked by convergence. Since the position of the Sweden Democrats in relation to the immigration- and refugee issue is portrayed as too extreme, xenophobic and undemocratic, neither of the two established parties is willing to fill their strategic approach with a content that can be seen as a position in the issue close to the position of the Sweden Democrats. The negatively charged perception of the Sweden Democrats (and their view on the immigration- and refugee issue), is therefore putting restraints on the strategic choices accessible to the established parties. A strategic approach marked by a content that strongly opposes this general perception of the Sweden Democrats, where at the point in time when the study was conducted, therefore associated with too high a cost for the established parties to pay (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

Even though the content of the strategic approaches made by the established parties does not coincide with the ideal typical approach stipulated by the PSO-theory, we can still view the choices made by the Social Democratic party and the Conservative party as rational choices. The answer can be found in the analysis of the factors proven to be central to the content of the strategic approaches used by the two established parties. Both parties have chosen a strategic approach which will provide the two parties with positions as favorable as possible in relation to the national election in Sweden in September 2010. The analysis of the factors concludes that diminishing the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats has not been the primary goal of the two parties. Rather, keeping up an image of credibility in relation to its party members and the electorate (in relation to the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats) is given higher priority. The strategic approach and its contents have instead provided the two established parties with tools which can be used in order to relate to the arguments among the electorate concerning more political debate in the specific issue. Through this position the parties can, indirectly, challenge the Sweden Democrats when it comes to electoral support (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

**The presence of radical right-wing populism: A democratic or strategic dilemma?**

How can the presence of RRP-parties on the political scene be analyzed? Can we still conclude that their presence constitute a democratic dilemma for the political establishment to handle? With the results of the research project *Dancing out of step with the voters – the Strategic approaches of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party towards the Sweden Democrats* as a point of departure, the answer to the question can be both yes and no. The democratic dilemma is present within the discussions from the two established parties (but with variable degree). But the democratic dilemma gets accentuated by the fact that the content of the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats needs to be woven around a specific issue which is strongly related to human values and principles such as pluralism and tolerance.
Neither the Social Democratic party nor the Conservative party give answers as to how to solve the democratic dilemma, but signals that the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats needs to be formed in such a way that it gives the established parties the possibilities to handle this democratic dilemma. Therefore, the presence of the democratic dilemma causes a strategic dilemma, in relation to which the established parties need to weigh the goals they strive towards through the strategic approach of the RRP-party, at the same time as they relate to the strongly value-charged issue politicized by the RRP-party and towards the democratic dilemma which the presence of the RRP-party gives rise to. Due to this fact, the character of the democratic dilemma is somewhat changed, and the goal of not losing more votes has become paramount. As a result, the democratic dilemma becomes subordinated to the strategic dilemma which the presence of the RRP-parties also give rise to (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

With the results of the Swedish national election on 19th of September 2010 as point of departure – where the Swedish radical right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats got representation in the national parliament for the first time – it becomes clear that the presence of RRP-parties represented on a national level, now also is a fact within the Swedish political context. In the aftermath of the election results, much of the debate have been focused on how the presence of the Sweden Democrats within the national parliament should be dealt with and what kind of influence the party will get in Swedish politics in relation to its electoral support. It is therefore possible to conclude that the current Swedish political context shows the topicality of research related to the presence of RRP-parties within the democratic institutions, But the results from the research project which has been in focus for this article, also clearly shows the need for further research and extended theoretical understanding for what factors that are important in understanding the strategic choices made by established parties when meeting the challenge of parties seen as the ugly ducklings of politics.

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