



Russian Influence Operations Target Swedish Elections

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years, the Kremlin has attempted to interfere in democratic elections in the West, particularly in countries that it perceives as potential adversaries. As the accompanying excerpt from the Swedish source, *Svenska Dagbladet* indicates, Moscow's latest target may be Sweden, which represents a concern to Russia considering its close ties to NATO and membership in the European Union. The article discusses how the Riksdag (parliamentary) elections, which were held on 9 September, could be an important target for Russian influence operations.

The article quotes an Estonian defense official who asserts that "a massive wave of disinformation is engulfing Sweden, which is now in the crosshairs of Russian meddling before the Riksdag election." This same official warns that it would be a mistake to "underestimate Moscow's ability to establish networks that influence the political debate in the long term." For instance, the article discusses the rise of the far-right Sweden Democrats party and questions whether its increased popularity might be the result of its exploitation of the migrant crisis and an increased crime rate, but also Kremlin meddling. According to another Swedish expert quoted in the article, since NATO membership for Sweden is a "red-line" for the Kremlin, they would be willing to support the anti-NATO and anti-EU sentiment found in the Sweden Democrat party.

In the time approaching the election, Swedish officials began to take more notice of the tide of disinformation circulating around the country. As the excerpt points out, fake news stories promoted the ideas that Sweden was on the brink of collapse due to migrants and that it was being overrun by Muslim influence. As another expert points out, while "the Swedish security services know quite well what is going on and who is doing what... the question is how to put a stop to the whole thing." Since the results of the election have already been tabulated, Swedish officials are examining the factors which caused a shift in voter choices. This article suggests that the Kremlin leadership will continue to exploit information and disinformation in pursuit of its geopolitical goals. **End OE**

Watch Commentary (Dimmick)



Hybrid flag of Sweden and Russia.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Sweden_and_Russia.png CCA Public Domain.

“‘Moscow is playing the long game’ and its intent is to divide and weaken the West in order to strengthen its grip on power at home.”

Source: Thomas Lundin, "Varningen: Så försöker Ryssland påverka valet (Warning: So, Russia is trying to influence the election)," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 8 August 2018. <https://www.svd.se/varningen-sa-forsoker-ryssland-paverka-valet>

A massive wave of disinformation is engulfing Sweden, which is now in the crosshairs of Russian meddling before the Riksdag election a month from now. Estonia's intelligence chief now warns against underestimating Moscow's ability to establish networks that influence the political debate in the long term.

There is a massive wave of disinformation, half-truths, and distorted descriptions engulfing Sweden. "Swedish children forced to pray to Allah in school;" "Sweden hiding positive doping tests;" "Sweden considering sending its army to Donetsk;" "Migrants fighting a war in Sweden;" or "Sweden near collapse -- 55 death zones." "We will see more and more of this," says the head of the Estonian intelligence service, Mikk Marran....

At a meeting of experts in Riga, arranged by the NATO strategic communications center StratCom, his message is that "Moscow is playing the long game" and that its intent is to divide and weaken the West in order to strengthen its grip on power at home.... "The core of Moscow's influence strategy is to influence parliamentary elections long before they take place," says Marran.

[Lundin] How resistant is Sweden? "Sweden has woken up at the last second and today is one of the more resistant nations in Europe," believes Janis Sarts, head of StratCom in Riga, which is studying the Russian influence attempts.

[Lundin] What methods is Moscow working with against Sweden?

[Sarts] They are investing in networks that take years to build up.

[Lundin] Are the Sweden Democrats part of these networks?

[Sarts] I will only say that the Sweden Democrats definitely fit into the pattern.

... "The NATO issue is extremely important to Russia," Lieutenant Commander Patrik Thome, head of the [Swedish] Armed Forces' psychological operations unit, also confirms.

Erik Lagersten, former communications director of the Armed Forces and now one of the military's advisers at StratCom, says that Swedish NATO membership is completely out of the question for Moscow. That is where the red line goes. "In that connection it's obvious that the Sweden Democrats serve Russian interests," he says. He does not want to comment on whether it takes place deliberately and actively or unintentionally.

Jonas Survila of King's College in London is a communications expert and has been an adviser to several election campaigns. He is convinced that Russia monitors Sweden intensely. "The Swedish security services know quite well what is going on and who is doing what. But the question is how to put a stop to the whole thing," he says....