Swedish refugee policymaking in transition?

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Akademisk avhandling


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The aim of this dissertation is to examine the Swedish government’s responses to the Prague Spring, the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, the anti-Semitic campaigns in Poland and, first and foremost, to Czechoslovak and Polish-Jewish refugees fleeing their native countries as a result of these events during the formative period of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This has been accomplished by examining the entire process from the decision to admit the refugees in 1968, to their reception and economic integration into Swedish society during the seven-year period necessary for acquiring Swedish citizenship. This study also analyzes discourses in Swedish newspapers relating to these matters and compares the media’s treatment of these two groups. The investigation is guided by factors influencing refugee policy formation such as bureaucratic choices, international relations, local absorption capacity, national security considerations, and Cold War considerations. Press cuttings, diplomatic documents, telegrams, protocols from the departments and government agencies involved, as well as reports from the resettlement centres, and, finally, refugees’ applications for citizenship form the empirical basis of this study. The period under investigation coincides with three key developments in Sweden’s foreign, refugee, and immigrant policies – the emergence of a more activist foreign policy, the shift from labour migration to refugee migration and, finally, the shift from a policy of integration to multiculturalism. In this regard, the overarching objective of the study is to shed some light on these developments and to determine whether the arrival, reception, and integration of these refugees should be regarded as the starting point for new policies towards immigrants and minorities in Sweden, or if it should rather be seen as the finale of the policies that had begun to develop at the end of World War II. The results demonstrate that Sweden’s refugee policy formation of the late 1960s and early 1970s was hardly affected by these major developments. It could be argued that a more active foreign policy was evident in the criticism of the events in Czechoslovakia and Poland and in the admission of the Czechoslovak and Polish-Jewish refugees to Sweden, but a detailed analysis of the motives shows that these decisions were primarily the result of international relations, national security considerations, and economic capacity, along with other considerations that had guided Swedish refugee policy in previous decades. Similarly, at the centre of Sweden’s reception of the Czechoslovak and Polish-Jewish refugees during the late 1960s and early 1970s was, like in previous decades, the labour market orientation of Sweden’s refugee policy. The Czechoslovaks and Polish-Jews did not experience any multiculturalist turn. Overall, Sweden’s responses to the Czechoslovak and Polish-Jewish refugees were consistent with the objectives developed at the end of World War II and thus did not represent a transition in Swedish refugee policymaking.