

The Swedish public's view on integration in the Baltic Sea area

– Democratic legitimacy for a Baltic Sea region?



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1. Integration in the Baltic Sea area?

The Sida Baltic Sea Unit has commissioned an opinion poll concerning the views of Swedish citizens on regionalisation of the Baltic Sea area. The poll is available in the form of a report in Swedish. This brochure is an abridged version of the report.

The opinion poll was carried out in accordance with the principles of quantitative methods, which here means an opinion poll commissioned by the Baltic Sea Unit ordered from Sifo Research International, and carried out during the period March 13 to March 16, 2006. The interview population consists of 1,000 randomly chosen persons in Sweden, and the ages of those interviewed varies between 15 and 75.

The opinion poll has been carried out in order to provide stimulation for a discussion around further integration in the Baltic Sea area, from a Swedish perspective. From political quarters, as well as within government bodies, municipalities, regions and organisations, there has been an interest in the views of the public as to the work that is being carried out within the area. Is it legitimate to commit very large resources to regional cooperation across national boundaries? We have chosen to shed light upon the question of legitimacy from the point of view of citizens' attitudes towards their neighbouring countries, as well as concerning the attitude towards deeper cooperation between the countries. The focus is upon the new EU member states and their relationship to the Nordic countries, which means that Germany has been excluded from the poll.

The opinion poll that is described in the following pages, is thus intended to observe the components related to 'identity and a sense of belonging' that could be said to be a part of the regionalisation process in the Baltic Sea area. The intention is that this hopefully will allow a discussion about the phenomenon's democratic legitimacy. With regard to components related to identity, we have chosen such components that link to 'belonging' (both in a geographical sense and between nations), a sense of community, mobility and future prospects. For purposes of comparison, we have chosen to ask questions about the Nordic countries as a unit as well as about EU cooperation as a phenomenon. The Nordic countries have been included on account of this area having a clearly shared identity as well as a high degree of legitimacy. The EU has been included because legitimacy factors are, to a large extent, lacking within EU cooperation. It is also relevant to observe the Nordic countries and the EU for the reason that the Baltic Sea area is included in both of these territorial constructions. The identity components have been selected

with reference to the relative lack of a shared history which is the case between the countries on the eastern and the western sides in the area. Thus there is no proper foundation for a shared identity in a historical sense. Furthermore the area must be regarded as relatively undeveloped with regard to institutionalisation, which in accordance with theory indicates a lack of a shared identity. Taking into account all these factors, the identity components we have selected are of a basic character.

2. The Swedish public's view on regionalisation and integration in the Baltic Sea area

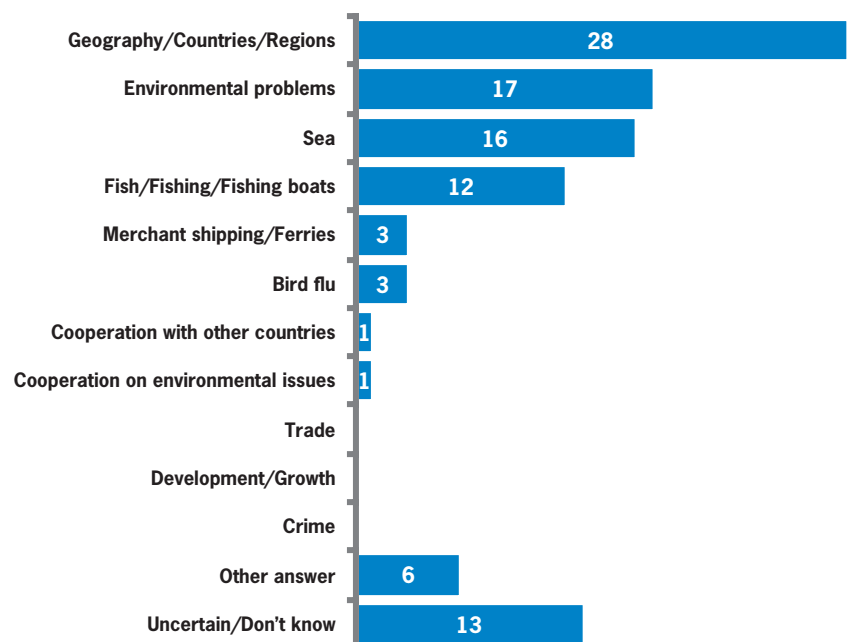
2.1 Associations to the Baltic Sea area

In answer to the question: “What is the first thing you think of when I say *Baltic Sea area*?”, most of those interviewed have named various countries, but their answers have also related to sea, fishing and the environment. As many answers named ‘bird flu’, this is listed as a separate alternative. Several of those interviewed also specifically named ‘toxic algal bloom’ as something they associate with the Baltic Sea area.

The question is intended to create a picture of the public's spontaneous associations with the area. The result shows that the public in general has neither positive nor negative judgements concerning the area as such.

Diagram 1: What is the first thing you think of when I say *Baltic Sea area*?

Per cent of interview population per category

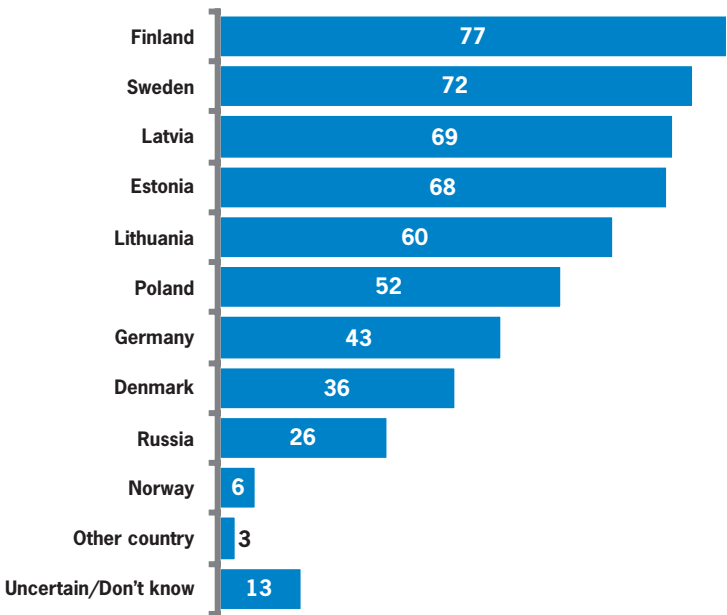


2.2 Which countries are included in the Baltic Sea area?

There are at the present time different definitions of what comprises the ‘Baltic Sea area’, and which countries and regions this actually includes. In a European Union context, the area is seen as starting on the level of southern Finland and ending south of Öresund. According to this definition, the northern part of the Baltic Sea area is a region in itself, the Barents region. Geographers normally consider that drainage areas for rivers are to be taken into account when defining a region. Shipping further divides the Baltic Sea area into different zones, which comprise the Baltic Sea proper, the central Baltic, the southern Baltic etc. It is doubtful whether there is a specific – and agreed between nations – definition of the boundaries that the public can relate to. One can thus not claim that the area is clearly delimited today, and it would therefore be reasonable for the public not to have a clear picture of the area in geographical terms. Who decides how a region should be defined as to boundaries when so many countries and regions are involved? It ought thus to be reasonable to expect the region’s geographical size to become clear over a longer period of time. If we consider that people’s understandings of which areas a region consists of is of relevance in a cognitive as well as an actual sense, the definition of the Baltic Sea area given by the public is of political interest.

The answers indicate that most of those interviewed consider that Sweden, Finland and the Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are part of the Baltic Sea area. It is of interest to note that Lithuania has a lower figure than Latvia and Estonia. A much smaller number of those interviewed consider that Poland is included in the area, and even less Russia, Denmark and Germany. On the whole, the Öresund region seems to be excluded from the Baltic Sea area by respondents. A very few consider that Norway is a Baltic Sea area country.

Diagram 2: Which countries do you consider as included in the Baltic Sea area?
Per cent of interview population per category



2.3 Experience of the Baltic Sea region

One third of those interviewed have some experience of staying in the Baltic republics, Poland or Russia, while two thirds do not have any experience of these countries. A very small number have a family connection to any of the countries.

Diagram 3 a: What is your experience of the Baltic republics, Poland and Russia? Have you ever taken part in a cooperation project or exchange with any country in the area, or have you been on holiday or worked there?

Per cent of interview population per category

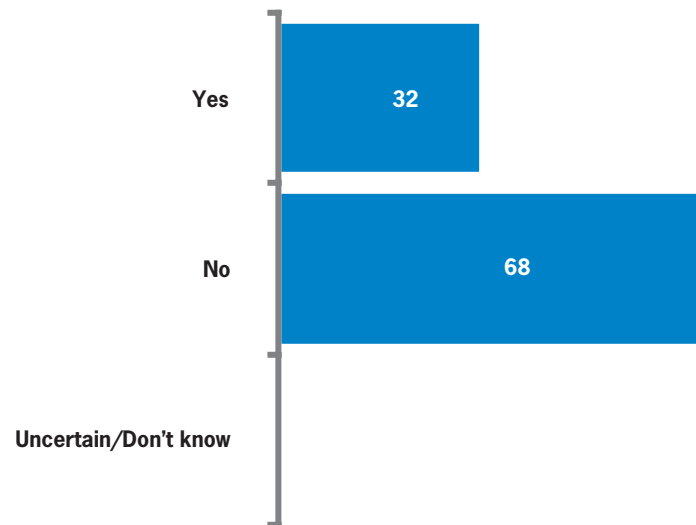
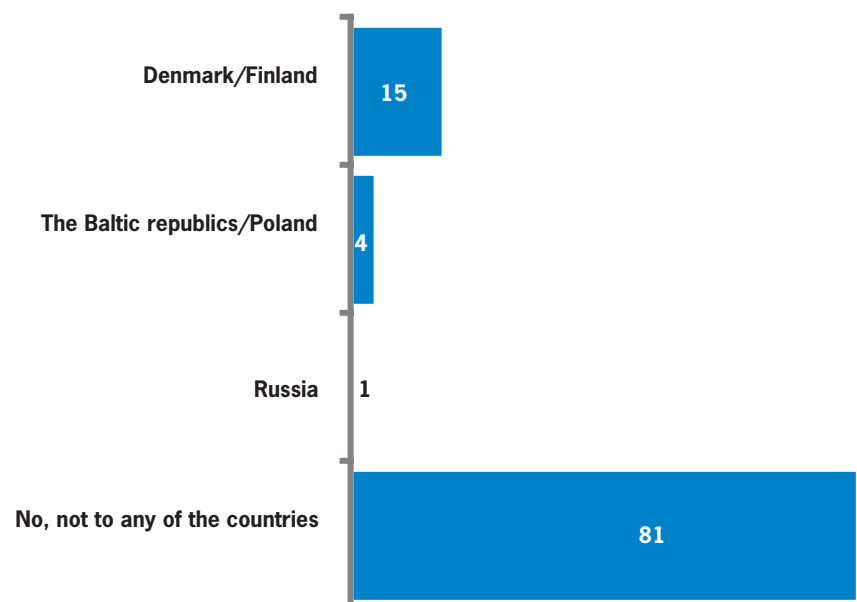


Diagram 3 b: Do you have any family connection to any of the following countries?

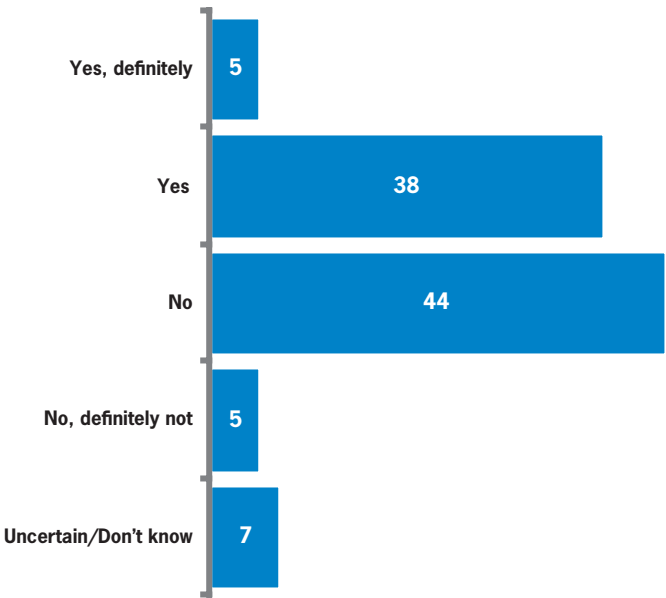
Per cent of interview population per category



2.4 The Baltic Sea area as a unit

In order to gain a picture of how the public understand the status of the Baltic Sea area (in terms of it being a unit), a comparison has been made to the Nordic countries which are normally regarded as being an integrated area with a shared identity. It transpires that more than one third of those interviewed consider that the Baltic Sea region can be said to exist in this respect, while almost half of those interviewed consider that this is not the case.

Diagram 4: Do you think that the Baltic Sea region is an area that one could say exists as a unit in the same way as, for example, the Nordic countries?
Per cent of interview population per category



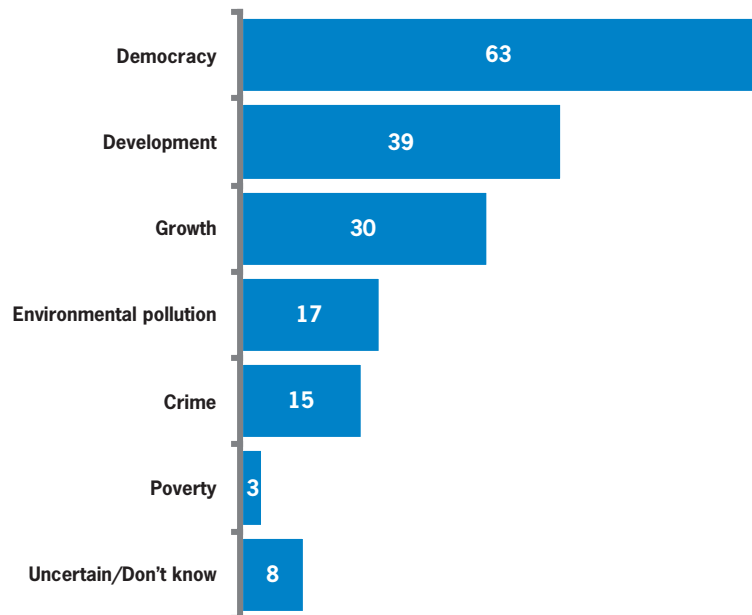
2.5 Societal conditions associated with the Baltic Sea area countries

The countries upon which the opinion poll have focused have been divided into three groups. Sweden, Denmark and Finland have been placed in one category on account of their belonging to the ‘classic’ grouping of Nordic countries (known as *Norden* in Swedish). The Baltic republics and Poland have been placed in another category, because they are former Soviet republics or (in the case of Poland) formerly associated with the Soviet Union. Russia is placed in a category of its own, because it is the only country here that does not belong to the European Union. The societal conditions that have been focused upon have been within three positive and three negative categories: democracy, development and growth; and poverty, crime and environmental pollution.

As regards societal conditions in Sweden, Denmark and Finland, the greater part of those interviewed relate these countries mainly to democracy, development and growth (in the order mentioned). As regards societal conditions in the Baltic republics and Poland, the greater part of those interviewed relate these countries above all to poverty, crime and environmental pollution (in that order). With regard to Russia, the most prominent factors are considered as crime, poverty and environmental pollution.

**Diagram 5 a: Which societal conditions do you primarily associate with Sweden/
Denmark/Finland?**

Per cent of interview population per category



**Diagram 5 b: Which societal conditions do you primarily associate with the Baltic
republics/Poland?**

Per cent of interview population per category

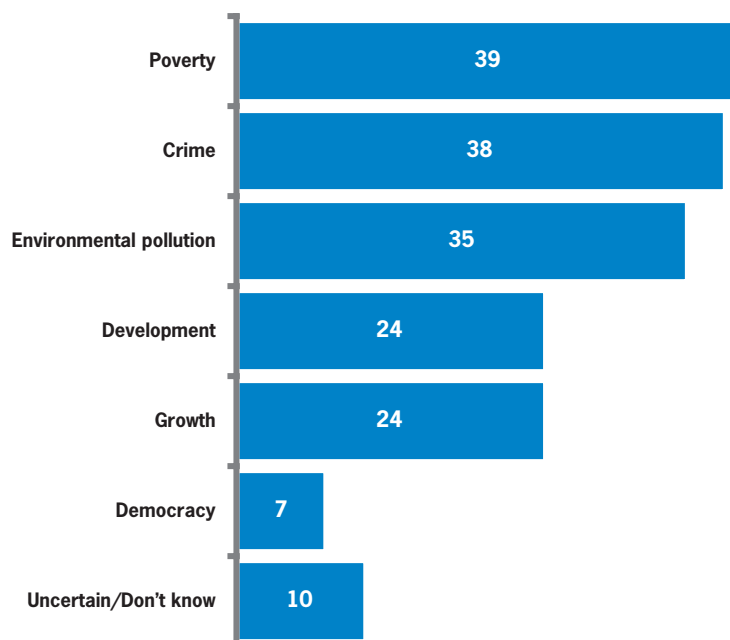
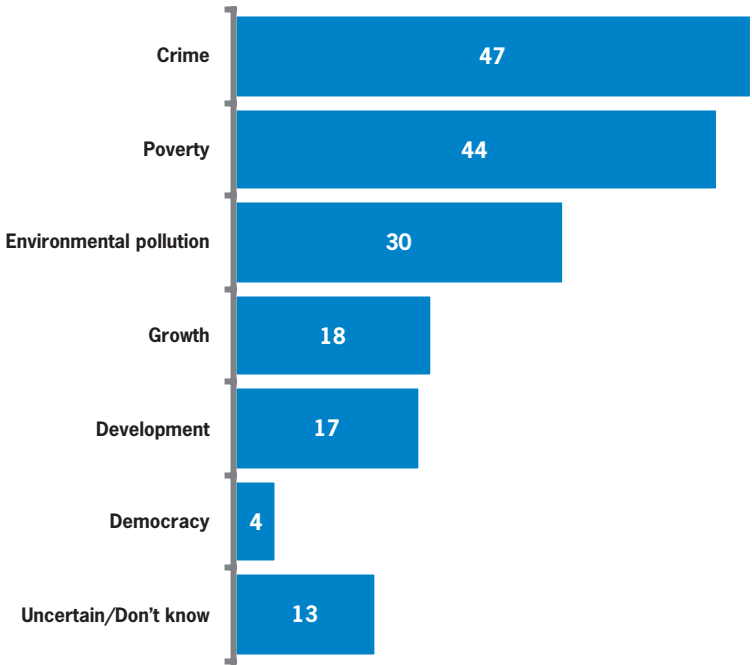


Diagram 5 c: Which societal conditions do you primarily associate with Russia?

Per cent of interview population per category



2.6 Future prospects for the Baltic Sea area countries

Despite the negative picture people have of the countries from the former eastern bloc that are included in the Baltic Sea area, most of those interviewed do in fact have a positive view as to the future prospects for these countries. They have a clear picture of the general future prospects of the Baltic republics and Poland as being positive – just as positive as those of Sweden, Denmark and Finland. As far as Russia is concerned, they seem less certain: an equally large number of those interviewed has said that they are ‘neutral’ to the question.

Diagram 6 a: What do you think the future prospects are like for Sweden/Denmark/Finland?

Per cent of those answering.

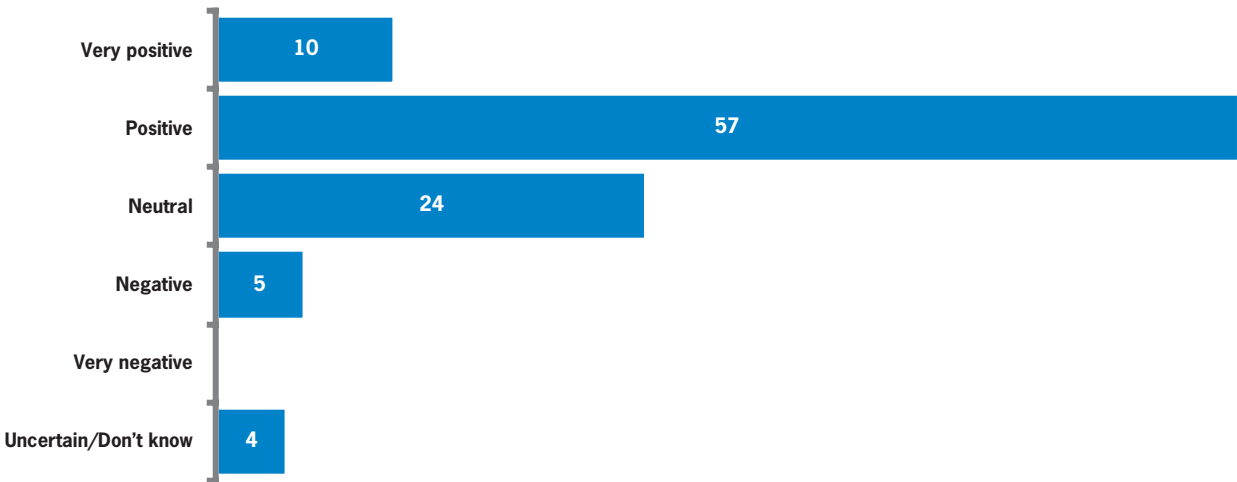


Diagram 6 b: What do you think the future prospects are like for the Baltic republics/Poland?

Per cent of those answering.

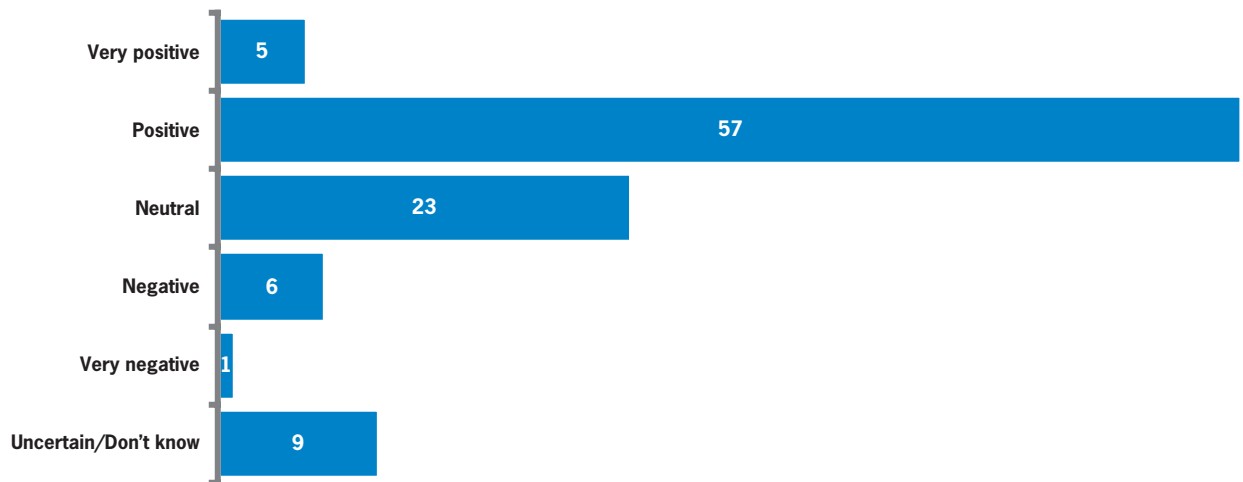
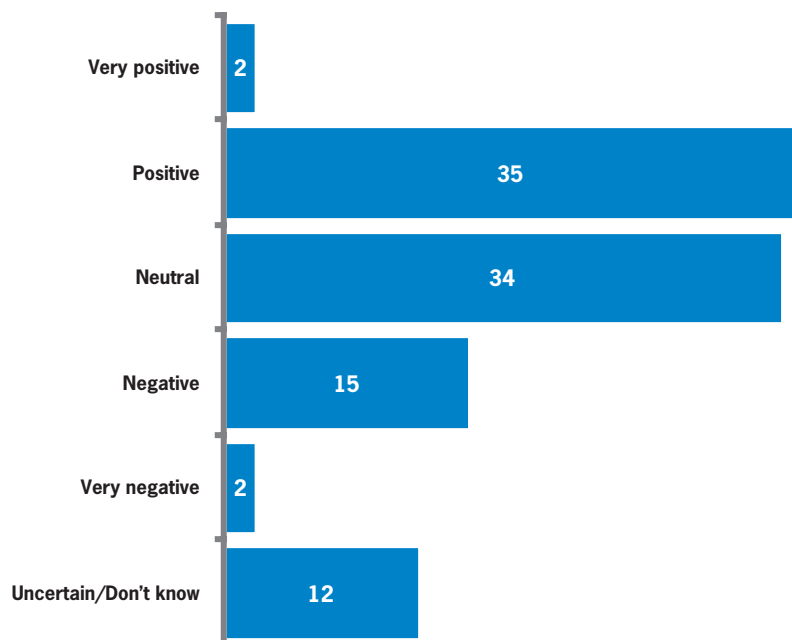


Diagram 6 c: What do you think the future prospects are like for Russia?

Per cent of those answering.



2.7 The scope of the cooperation

As to the question of whether the cooperation with a number of groups of countries in the Baltic Sea area can be seen as sufficient, a considerable majority thought that this was the case with regard to Denmark and Finland. As regards cooperation with the Baltic republics and Poland, a majority considered that Sweden does not cooperate with these countries to a sufficient degree. A large majority considers that Sweden does not cooperate with Russia either to a sufficient degree.

Diagram 7 a: Do you think that Sweden cooperates with Denmark/Finland to a sufficient degree?

Per cent of those answering.

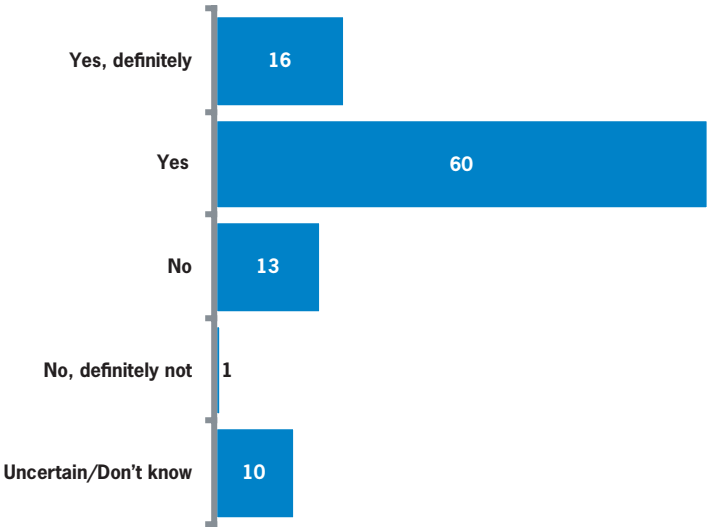


Diagram 7 b: Do you think that Sweden cooperates with the Baltic republics/Poland to a sufficient degree?

Per cent of those answering.

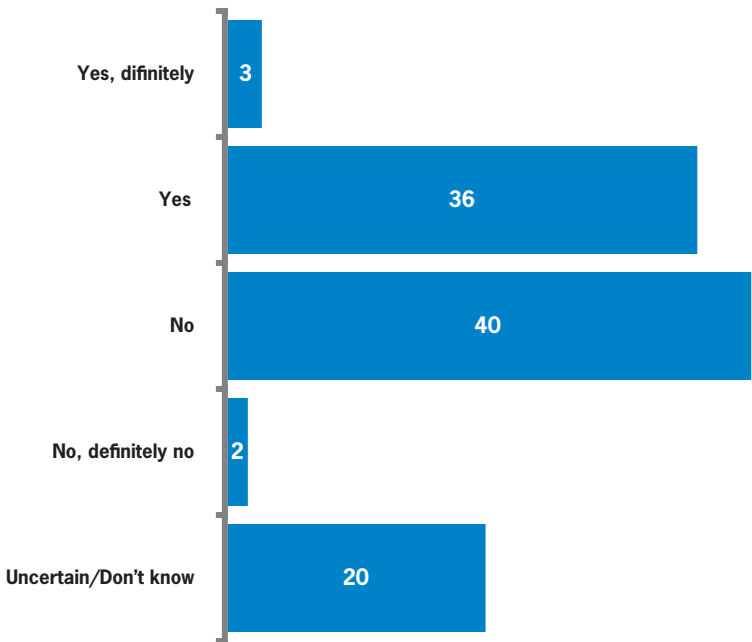
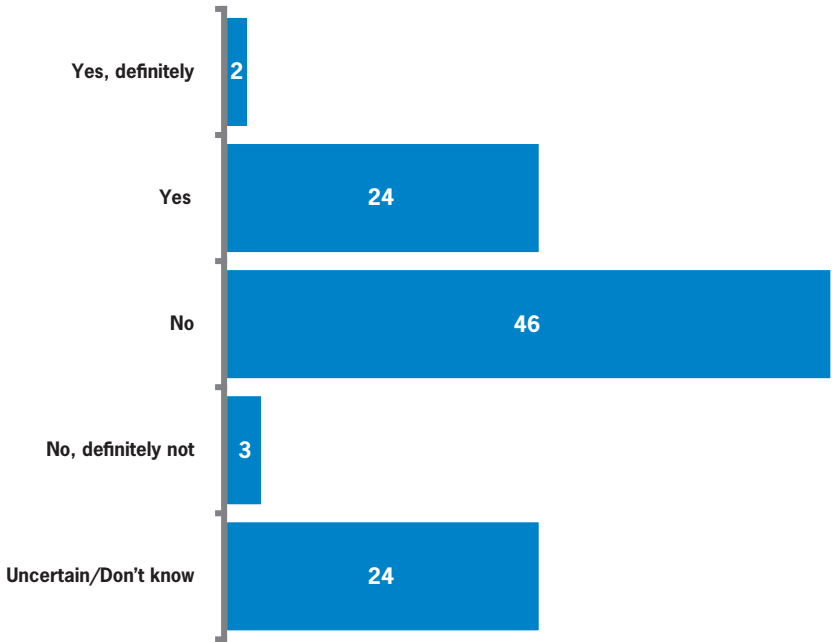


Diagram 7 c: Do you think that Sweden cooperates with Russia to a sufficient degree?
Per cent of those answering.



2.8 Equality and mutuality in the cooperation

As regards the understanding of whether there is equality and mutuality in the cooperation, a very large majority experiences that this is the case between Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Concerning the cooperation between Sweden, the Baltic countries and Poland, about half of those interviewed consider that the cooperation is not equal and mutual, while a smaller number consider that it is, or that they are uncertain. As far as Russia is concerned, a larger proportion is uncertain, while the majority answer 'no' to the question.

Diagram 8 a: Do you think there is a condition of equality and mutuality in the cooperation between Sweden, Denmark and Finland?
Per cent of those answering.

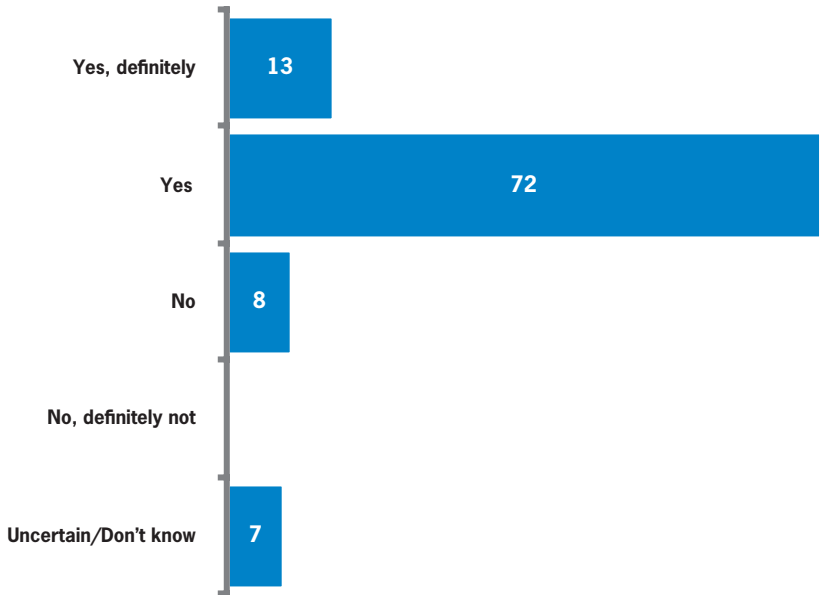


Diagram 8 b: Do you think there is a condition of equality and mutuality in the cooperation between Sweden and the Baltic republics and Poland?

Per cent of those answering.

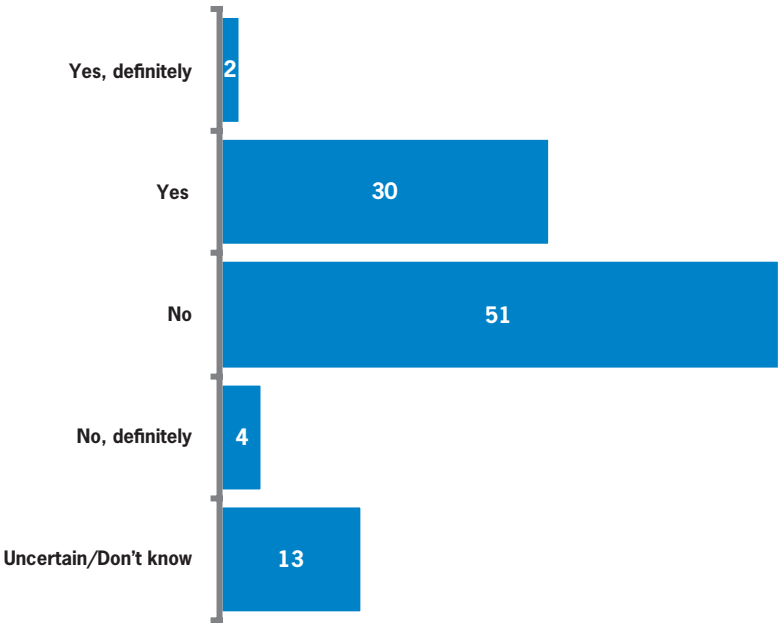
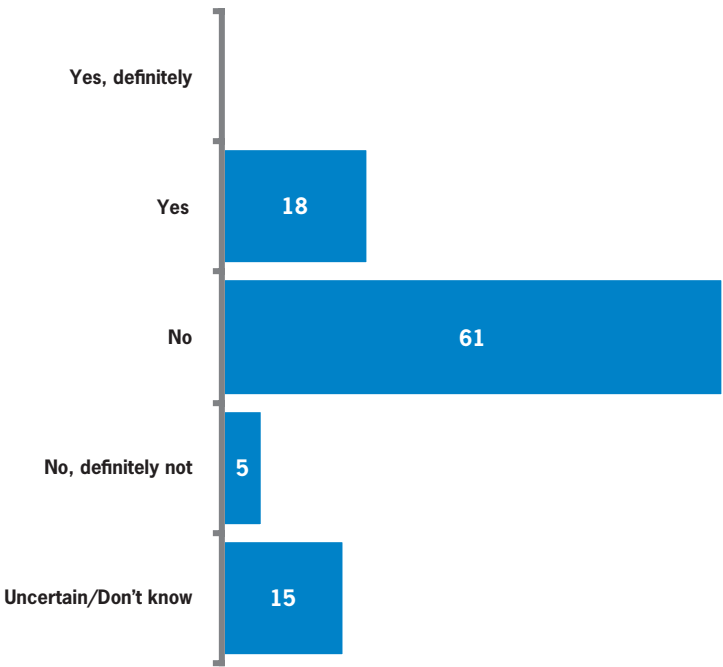


Diagram 8 c: Do you think there is a condition of equality and mutuality in the cooperation between Sweden and Russia?

Per cent of those answering.



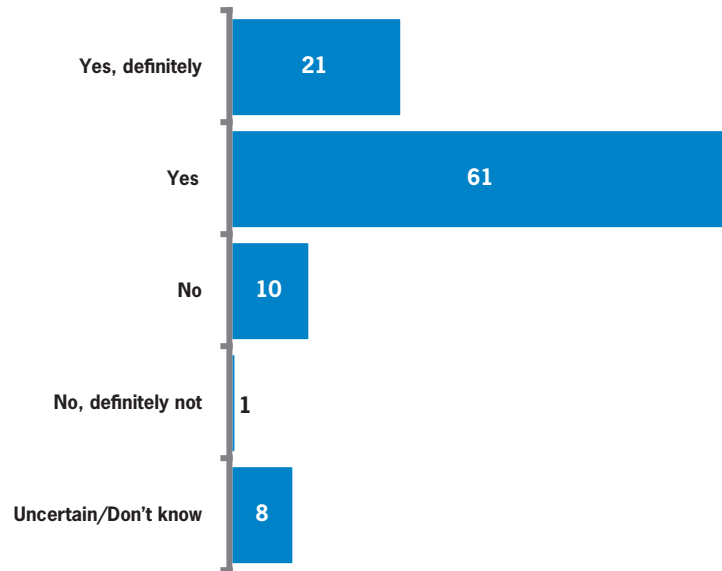
2.9 Politics for unity

A very large majority considers that Sweden ought to carry out an active policy to create more unity between the countries in the Baltic Sea area. What is meant by ‘an active policy’ is not included in the question, but it

ought reasonably be interpreted as meaning both that resources should be invested and that activities should be undertaken to inform public opinion so as to give the question a greater focus in the public debate.

Diagram 9: Do you think that Sweden ought to carry out an active policy to create more unity between the countries in the Baltic Sea area?

Per cent of those answering.

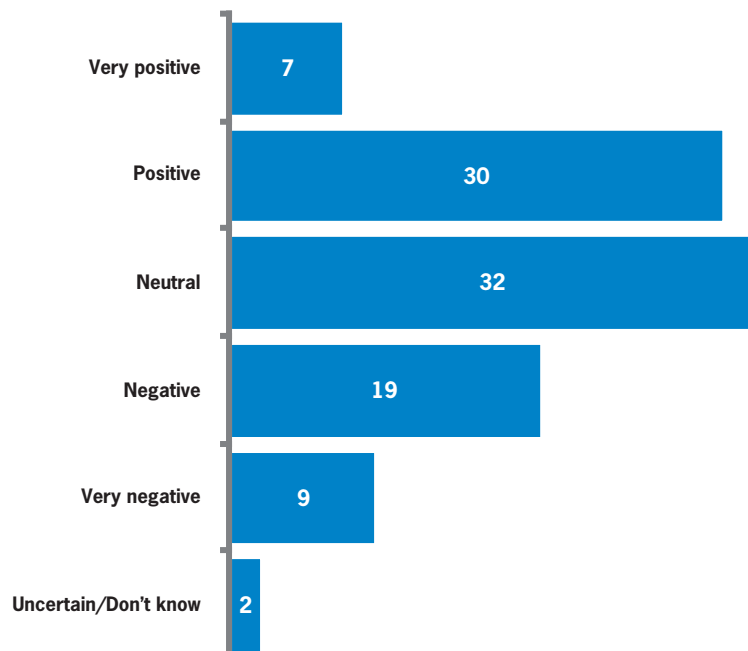


2.10 Attitudes towards the EU

Attitudes towards the European Union are very positive or positive for just over one third of those interviewed, while almost one third are negative or very negative. A further third do not have any fixed opinion as to this question. The proportion of 'uncertain' can thus be regarded as very large in this context.

Diagram 10: What is your general attitude towards the European Union and European integration?

Per cent of those answering.



3. Legitimacy for the Baltic Sea area's regionalisation and integration

Is it possible to talk of a commitment from citizens in the form of beginning of a shared identity in the Baltic Sea area (as seen from a Swedish point of view) which is necessary if an integration process are to be seen as successful? The opinion poll shows that the Swedish public has a very negative picture of societal developments in the Baltic states, Poland and Russia, while it has a very positive picture of societal developments in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. There is also an understanding that the cooperation between Sweden, the Baltic republics, Poland and Russia is not equal and mutual. Relatively few people have visited any of these countries, yet there is a very clear understanding that poverty, environmental pollution and crime are very prevalent in contrast to the positive picture of familiar circumstances. Furthermore, the majority do not regard the area as a unit. Only a few of the countries are seen as primarily belonging to the Baltic Sea region, and in relation to the Nordic countries, a majority of those interviewed consider that the Baltic Sea region can not be regarded as a unit in the same way that the Nordic countries are.

In the present situation, it would be difficult to speak in terms of a shared identity in the Baltic Sea area. People are however overwhelmingly positive towards increased integration in the area. It is clear that identity aspects in their basic sense comprise a relevant measure for judging integration in the area. The model would, however, have needed to embrace more dynamic components. Unfortunately, it is difficult to carry out advanced operational studies in the form of opinion polls. Could one claim that there is a lack of democratic legitimacy for the Baltic Sea area's regionalisation and integration due to the relative lack of a shared identity in the area? It would have been useful for us to have had reference points back in time in order to be able to connect the present with the future. We have therefore chosen to relate the conditions to the European Union and to the Nordic countries. There is also knowledge available of the legitimacy of these phenomena, which to a certain degree can be of assistance in the context. In that respect, the situation must be said to be looking hopeful. There are clear opinions when it comes to Baltic Sea area integration, while EU integration meets with greater reluctance. In comparison to the Nordic countries, most of those interviewed consider that the Baltic Sea area can not be said to exist in the same way, while a relatively large proportion nevertheless see the comparison as relevant. As the opinion poll has involved the question

(orientated towards the future) as to whether there is a wish for closer cooperation within the Baltic Sea area in the future, and as to whether Sweden can be regarded as cooperating with neighbouring countries to a sufficient degree, it is nevertheless possible to introduce a legitimacy aspect in the discussion. This discussion must then be conducted in relation to the named perspective (orientated towards the future), not least because identity and legitimacy are dynamic phenomena.

It is thus clear that Swedish citizens wish to see a development in a direction towards integration in the Baltic Sea area. The citizens do, admittedly, have a negative view of existing societal conditions in neighbouring countries, but would like to see more active cooperation between the countries and more Swedish political initiatives to keep the region together. It must thus be considered possible to claim that the regionalisation of the Baltic Sea area has a base in a good democratic legitimacy, and that closer integration in the area should be regarded as desirable seen from this horizon.

Should, then, the regionalisation process in the Baltic Sea area be strengthened with regard to integration when it comes to the encouragement of a shared identity? The answers that have come from the opinion poll tend to present a picture that the public still see the participation by neighbouring countries as a consequence of Swedish aid measures. A more active encouragement of measures towards integration in the area ought also to lead the public to reappraise their attitude towards neighbouring countries, which in the long term not least must surely bring with it increased mobility of goods, services and ideas within the area.

Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



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