

Translation of the Riksdag debate on the ban on uranium mining

Minutes of the debate - 21 March 2023



[Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch \(KD\)](#)

Anf. 8 Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. I have asked me if I and the government intend to work towards lifting the ban on uranium mining.

On 1 August 2018, a new provision was introduced in the Environmental Code which means that it is not possible to mine, process or physically or chemically enrich uranium-containing materials in mining operations or through recycling of extractive waste if the purpose is to extract the radionuclides or use the radioactivity of the material. The ban also applies to test mining. In the Minerals Act (1991:45), uranium was removed as a concession mineral, which means that it is not possible to grant either an exploration permit or a processing concession for uranium.

It is important that the ban on the extraction of uranium is evaluated, something that is also emphasized in the bill (Prop. 2017/18:212) that forms the basis for the ban. It is too early to answer the question of whether the government intends to work towards lifting the ban, and I will therefore have to come back with a clear answer at a later date.



[Eric Palmqvist \(SD\)](#)

Anf. 9 Eric Palmqvist (SD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

It is now five years since the then government pushed through a ban on mining, processing or physically or chemically enriching uranium-containing material, a decision that the then S-MP government pushed through more for ideological reasons than for realpolitik. To put it bluntly, uranium mining in the strict sense of the word was neither ongoing nor planned in Sweden when the law came into force. You could say that the Green Party as usual pursued some kind of placard policy because uranium mining, ie what they wanted to ban, was not something that occurred in Sweden in 2018 and therefore did not constitute a problem.

On the other hand, Madam President, uranium was being explored because uranium is an important guide metal in the search for other metals and minerals that are important for our industrial development but relatively difficult, and costly, to find. This was also something that the industry and the Mining Inspectorate brought to our attention politicians, but here ideology prevailed over reason, and exploration for and mining of uranium was banned in 2018.

It is worth noting in this context that M, KD, SD and L, i.e. all Tidö parties, had reservations about this when it took place in the spring of 2018. The same parties now have a majority in this House, which is why the repeal of the law should be both possible and right - for reasons of political policy but also for reasons of security policy and rationality.

Five years have passed, and a lot has happened since then. The security policy situation has changed dramatically, energy prices have soared, nuclear power is finally making a comeback and people in general have begun to understand the consequences of Europe largely making itself dependent on Russian energy in the form of gas. At the same time, we have seen how the willingness to explore in Sweden has plummeted in an international context. I believe that the uranium ban is part of the reason why this has happened.

In his reply to me, Minister Busch refers to the fact that the ban will be evaluated in accordance with the decisions made when Bill 2017/18:212, which forms the basis for the ban, was considered. Then my question to the minister is why she and the government see themselves bound to this when there should be a parliamentary majority today to tear up the law.

If, however, it is considered that the ban on uranium mining must be preceded by an evaluation, despite the fact that all the parties that today form the basis of the government were opposed to this, my question is: when will this evaluation take place, in the Minister's view?



Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

Anf. 10 Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. I shall come back to the more detailed and specific question raised by the honourable Member at the end, but I would like to begin by saying that I am very pleased that we are now finally discussing access to raw materials with a completely different pressure than we did a few years ago. This is partly due to our four partner parties' basic view on this, that is, that there are some things that have built our country strong, including ore and the forest, but also access to a lot and cheap electricity.

One can summarize it a little crassly by saying that we have major challenges with regard to all three parts now and that is why so much of the four partner parties' time and effort is spent on cleaning and doing the groundwork to change the conditions.

An important part of our green transition and competitiveness has to do with the availability of raw materials. There we are now changing the policy to a much more offensive mining policy. This is what we are driving within the EU and also within Sweden.

Added to this is the issue of uranium, which occurs both in low concentrations in the earth's interior and in higher concentrations in the earth's crust. Sweden's bedrock is actually quite rich in uranium, which many Swedes do not know about, but the local variation is great. The assets can actually be divided into two main groups. One is the large, but low-grade resources are found in, for example, alum shale and phosphorite.

At the time of the bill to which we refer - 2017 - it was not considered to be particularly economically profitable to mine, but just as Eric Palmqvist points out, uranium itself can be crucial when it comes to leading to other things. Regardless, I can offer something that I think is well known, namely that my view as minister and party leader is that there has been an ideological stance against uranium mining in Sweden that has been wrong. That is why there were several parties that opposed what was voted through about five years ago.

Whether active uranium mining in Sweden would make a big difference or not and how it could be used is too early to say, partly because it is a fairly unexplored area, given how it has been treated in recent years.

As I said, we will come back to the issue, but I would like to clarify the government's response, which I outlined and which will be published in writing after this interpellation

debate. We relate to the bill in the sense that we point out that it was indicated in the bill, which was not particularly sympathetic to uranium, that an evaluation should be made. But then we in the government do not have to relate only to this, nor will we do.



Eric Palmqvist (SD)

Anf. 11 Eric Palmqvist (SD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. Thank you, Minister, for the answers I have received. I share the Minister's enthusiasm that we are now discussing the supply of raw materials.

I make no secret of the fact that I and my party believe that this should be a relatively simple matter - to clear the political buffet table containing some other things that are far more difficult to chew.

We need to remove the ban in order to create the right conditions for the exploration industry, which wants to be able to use uranium as a guide. We also need to recognise to ourselves that we are once again striving to become a nuclear nation that should strive not only for a good degree of self-sufficiency in electricity production, but also for the fuel needed for electricity generation.

It is not reasonable that, in a shaky world with the geopolitical challenges we face, we should make ourselves dependent on imports from distant countries, sometimes with dubious governance. Thankfully, we have stopped importing nuclear fuel from Russia, but until recently we bought fuel from there. I do not think that is justifiable.

on behalf of the ALDE Group. I have mentioned that the ban on uranium mining had an ideological character and was a bit of a non-issue because any uranium mining for the purpose of using uranium as nuclear fuel has not taken place in Sweden for several decades. Thus, repealing the law would not mean that uranium mines would pop up like mushrooms out of the earth. We all know, at least those of us who work with mineral policy issues, that mining establishments are not exactly dense in Sweden.

The establishment of a uranium mine is also regulated by the Environmental Code, the Minerals Act and the Nuclear Technology Act. In addition, there is the municipal veto, which means that the municipality concerned must approve the activities. A repeal of the laws would, as I see it, not give rise to any kind of uranium bonanza in Sweden, but rather be a logical position, justified on both energy policy and geopolitical grounds.

My question is: does the Minister for Economic Affairs not share this view, and is she concerned that the legislation I have just mentioned is not sufficient to regulate possible uranium mining or to stop any dubious projects?



Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

Anf. 12 Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. Mr President, I shall begin by responding precisely and briefly to the honourable Member's question and supplementary questions here in the second round.

I do not have the evidence to dare to express an opinion on this, given that this has not been tried. Our legislation has not been tested from these aspects for a very long time. Nor can I rule out the possibility that further tightening up may be needed somewhere. The intentions

today are absolutely crystal clear. At first glance, one might think that this would be enough, but I cannot rule out the need to carry out a review with these glasses, so to speak.

I would also like to touch briefly on the issue of how uranium is mined in mines today. Sweden is completely dependent on the nuclear power we have today. It is well known that the four parties regret and have often pointed out the great risks involved in shutting down four fully operational nuclear reactors which, with the required maintenance, could have had a longer service life. We have also pointed out the seriousness of the fact that the design work for Ringhals 5 and 6 was not completed. By then, we would have been eight years into them. Now the Swedish people in particular are noticing the dramatic consequences of the removal of nuclear power.

But we are an established nuclear nation. We intend to expand the nuclear power element in Sweden so that we can meet the expected doubling of electricity demand in the coming years, and then we need to get uranium from somewhere. The largest producers of uranium ore are Australia, Kazakhstan, Canada, Namibia and Niger, which together account for more than 50 percent of world production.

Within the Euratom cooperation, the Euratom Supply Agency, ESA, helps coordinate the Member States' purchases of uranium, and this is how Sweden gets its supply. Among the countries that were on the shopping list in 2021 are Canada, Namibia and Kazakhstan, as I mentioned earlier, and in the group of other countries are mainly Australia but also Russia, from which many states have managed to sharply reduce their share.

Several of the countries have a completely different view of working conditions and completely different conditions for their mining and do not, I believe, ethically defensible mined uranium. There has been enormous hypocrisy here from many parties in Sweden - that we need nuclear power and uranium for this nuclear power, but that we do not want to take responsibility for which countries the uranium comes from.

We are slowly but surely changing this policy. It is not done overnight. But in view of this, we in the four cooperation parties have had the basic position that we have had on uranium mining in Sweden when this has previously been voted on in plenary.

As I said, I intend to come back to this issue.



Eric Palmqvist (SD)

Anf. 13 Eric Palmqvist (SD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. I thank the Minister for her review of what uranium production looks like and which countries the uranium comes from. I believe that what the Minister is saying is another reason why we should abolish this legislation.

The motive that we heard in the previous answer that this has not been particularly profitable is not really an argument for anything to be prohibited. It is up to the market to live up to the demands that we make from politics. And if this can be done with good profitability, then just say so good. And if it is not profitable, then one will not be interested either.

We will shortly be debating in this House the Committee on Industry's report No 13 on mineral policy. This year, it contains nothing to remove the ban on prospecting for and mining uranium. I regret that. One reason for this may be that the government has actually been busy with other things in the Government Offices since it took office and had other balls to play on that have been more prioritized.

But now that the smoke has cleared around electricity subsidies and other urgent issues, it is my and the Sweden Democrats' hope that the government wants to play on this ball and that

the government in time for next year's mineral policy report comes up with a proposal aimed at repealing this legislation. In that case, we can make such a decision at the next parliamentary session when we deal with the mineral policy report.

My final question to Mrs Busch is therefore whether she will work to lift the ban on uranium mining in connection with the handling of the mineral policy report next year.



Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

Anf. 14 Minister of Energy and Enterprise Ebba Busch (KD)

on behalf of the ALDE Group. Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking Mr Palmqvist for highlighting this issue. I hear that the honourable Member's voice rings from one of all our wonderful Swedish dialects, but I also note that Eric Palmqvist is sitting on the Norrbotten bench.

The view of mines and of the producing parts of Sweden is an important part of the four partner parties' reorientation of policy. We need to take advantage of the natural resources that we have in our country. We need to make much greater use of the forest and of what can be extracted from the ground. It is not possible to have such high climate goals as Sweden has and at the same time safeguard economic growth, growing welfare, competitiveness, that more companies will grow and grow and that more Swedish mothers and fathers should have a job to go to unless we take advantage of what is available in the producing parts of the country.

Northern Sweden is very crucial here, and our view of the mining industry in general is also crucial here. It is also important for Sweden to be able to contribute to reducing the EU's total dependence on China, to put it bluntly. China accounts for about 70 percent of the world's production of the metals needed to facilitate the green transition. Everyone understands and should have learnt the lesson, following the fatal decisions taken on Russia, in terms of the consequences of putting so much of a country's or continent's future in the hands of one country. Now we repost this.

Otherwise, I think it has become clear what the basic position of the government parties and the four cooperation parties is in their view of uranium. Any further than that, I will not agree to offer information today. We will return to the issue of uranium, hopefully in the near future.