

# A History of Exchange, A Future of Innovation

## Meet Sweden's New U.S. Ambassador

*Karin Olofsdotter*

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Ambassador Karin Olofsdotter and Alf Karlsson, State Secretary, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, Sweden. Photo: Arno Mikkor (EU2017EE)

**Karin Olofsdotter, Sweden's new Ambassador to the United States, discusses the historical bond between countries, advances in trucking infrastructure, and creating an inclusive global labor market.**

***Why is the relationship between Sweden and America so strong and important?***

Next year, it will have been exactly 200 years since the first American diplomat was posted in Sweden. Shortly after that, we posted a diplomat here. We have a very long relationship. We were one of the first countries after the war that recog-

nized the United States. One-fourth of our population immigrated here in the 1800s. Some found their luck, made money and came back home, bringing with them ideas from the U.S. that they carried out in Sweden. That's the historical relationship.

I think we are very much alike, Swedish people and citizens of the U.S. We are all very hardworking and always looking for new ways to solve things. Even if we have differences in our societies, as a people we are quite similar. Swedes are also very adaptive to U.S. culture.

***What is the current state of Swedish-American relations?***

Very good. When it comes to business, we have significant investments here. Swedish economic ties with the U.S. have created about 500,000 jobs in the United States. Most of our big companies have production facilities here and find the U.S. market extremely important. It is one of our biggest markets outside the European Union. In addition, when it comes to culture, we have great cultural exchanges. Artists and musicians often come and tour in the United States.

Our trade relations are also very strong. We have about 1,400 U.S. companies present in Sweden, and we value their investments in our country. Regarding defense, we have a very close bilateral relationship. For example there were over 1,200 American troops taking part in Aurora 17, the biggest military exercise that we've had in Sweden in 20 years.

***What do you see in the future for trade between the U.S. and Sweden?***

I really hope it will increase. Alongside Silicon Valley, Sweden is one of the most innovative regions in the world. We have much to offer when it comes to innovative models for infrastructure—particularly in road safety. In addition to a strong program for reducing traffic deaths, we are looking toward the future of transportation with the development of technology for driverless vehicles.

***Can you talk a little bit about The Global Deal and in what ways that agreement asks us to reconsider the idea of sustainability?***

The Global Deal is in accordance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It's a way to see our governments, businesses, trade unions, and all other organizations make a commitment to increased social dialogue surrounding the labor market. It's something we do in Sweden on the European level, and now the Prime Minister wants to bring it to a global level. We need to improve relationships between the labor markets so that we can enable all people to gain from globalization.

We are in a huge technology shift right now, possibly the largest since industrialization. Many people in the U.S. have been left out of the labor market because they don't have the right skills. You see this in our country as well. How do we create a labor market and workplace of the future that involves everyone? If we can't do that, we risk confrontations within our society between those who were part of globalization and new technology and those who feel left behind.

***So why is inclusivity important for sustainability?***

If you don't have everyone with you, you have a less sustainable society. It's extremely important. Everyone has to contribute to tomorrow's world to make it as good as possible. We only have one planet.

***Can you speak to how sustainable action will support economic growth and not impede it?***

Yes, absolutely. In Sweden, we recycle 99 percent of our plastic. We have cut down our greenhouse emissions by 38 percent since 1990. Our GDP has grown by 69 percent in the same time period.

All trucking companies are, of course, interested in cutting costs. Fuel is a big cost in transportation. So, if we can find smarter ways to fuel our trucks and commercial fleets in a more economic way, which is also sustainable, then we can really reach something. That's smart economics. We are proof that you can work with sustainable, smart industries and transportation and still see growth.

***What challenges do you see in the future for your current position?***

Finding the areas where Sweden and the United States together can make a difference. That may sound a bit superficial, but it's really not. We are world leading, and the U.S. is world leading. Sweden is a global player in many sectors. We want to advance the EU-U.S. agenda and be a strong partner to the United States.

***Finally, what does it mean for you to be the first woman in your particular post?***

Of course it's an honor. I think we should have had one a long time ago. Now I happen to be the first one. Personally, I don't think about it that much. I'm here to do my job. If I do think about it, I actually think it can be an advantage to be a woman. As a woman you tend to stand out in a diplomatic world still dominated by men. Unfortunately there are not many female Ambassadors, so I do stand out from the crowd.



Photo: Andrea Belluso

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