

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Speech by ambassador Jonas Hafström at the opening of
Sweden's EU Presidency July 1, 2009.
“Taking on the Challenges”**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Colleagues,

It's an honor for me to welcome you to the launch of Sweden's European Union Presidency.

We have an exciting six months ahead of us! Six months which will pass quickly, but during which some key challenges will have to be dealt with.

This is a time of transition for the European Union.

Following the European Parliament elections in June, we are now starting the process of appointing a new European Commission. It will take some time, but the new Commission should be in place by the end of this year.

We are hoping that the Lisbon Treaty will be ratified – the expected referendum in Ireland in early October is seen as the most important event in this process.

If this occurs, we will immediately begin to establish new institutions and initiate procedures that will pave the way for a more effective common foreign and security policy for the European Union.

This will significantly reinforce our ability to be an effective partner to the United States – as well as an actor in our own right on the wider global stage.

One of the key lessons learned from decades of European integration is that institutions are important.

But policies are certainly no less important. That is another lesson we have learned: institutions without policies are like hardware without software.

And while an update of our hardware is certainly called for, it is ultimately the software of policies which is decisive, and which will form the basis for Sweden's EU Presidency.

Our primary objectives are helping the EU emerge from the economic crisis in a stronger position, working for a more secure and open Europe, and continuing to take responsibility for the climate threat leading to the United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen in December.

Sweden will work to strengthen the EU as a global actor promoting peace, development, democracy and human rights, and to strengthen the partnership between the United States and Europe. Actually, with the new U.S. Administration in place, the transatlantic relationship is probably better today than at any time in living memory.

Regardless of which of today's great challenges you focus on, the conclusion is the same:

The United States and Europe must stand together. That is paramount to solving many of the world's crises.

Our building – House of Sweden – during the coming six months will not only remain a Swedish landmark in Washington, DC, it will also be a European “home” in the nation's capital. It will serve as an arena for debate, dialogue and exchange on transatlantic relations and global challenges.

Tonight we are also opening an exciting exhibition: *Facing the Future – Sustainability the Swedish Way* – which presents creative ideas on how to solve many of the problems we all are facing. The exhibition shows, among other things, what a future sustainable city could look like and what we can do to live in a more environmentally friendly way.

The concepts in this exhibit will become part of the daily lives of the four local DC families who have been chosen as our special Climate Pilots, and who - with coaching from Swedish families - will try to reduce their carbon footprint during the next six months. The food that is being served tonight is environmentally friendly. The chef took inspiration from many parts of Europe to reflect some of our Presidency priorities, such as enlargement of the EU and sustainability.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my hardworking staff and our Swedish partners who are here with us tonight: the National Property Board, the Swedish Traveling Exhibitions, the Swedish Institute and the City of Kalmar, for your highly valuable contributions to making the exhibition and tonight's opening event such a success.

With these words of welcome, I would like to hand you the first gift from our Presidency!