

1 • Good morning Ambassador Jan Björklund, thank you for your very kind availability. Your presidency concludes the expected trio, after France and the Czech Republic, what topics do you find and what will you pursue?

Sweden has 4 different focus areas. These are: security, competitiveness, green & energy transition and democratic values and the rule of law – our foundation.

2 • In his keynote address at the start of his mandate, your Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson spoke about the Russia-Ukraine war, energy transition, competitiveness, the rule of law and security. The energy transition is fundamental, but within the path of the green deal, do you agree with the times and methods voted by the European Parliament regarding the car market? Sweden also has a large automotive industry, do you worry about the fallout on employment and dependence on China in the field of electric mobility?

EU has a crucial role to play in the green transition. And that is precisely what the EU has been doing – for example when putting forward the proposal that you are mentioning now, to prohibit the sale of new fossil-fuelled cars by 2035. The EU we must continue to lead the transition.

In Sweden, companies such as the battery maker Northvolt and the car manufacturer Volvo are creating new, innovative ways to reduce Europe's dependence on fossil fuels. These businesses want to benefit from the great opportunities of the green transition, which also can boost competitiveness and productivity, and hence also the employment. EU must provide the right frameworks, and clear directions for the companies.

Also, it's vital that the EU pursues an ambitious, open and sustainable trade agenda, implements ongoing free trade agreements and adopts fully negotiated agreements. This is key to enhancing EU competitiveness and increasing the resilience of EU supply chains.

3 • As regards competitiveness, how do you intend to proceed? What proposals will you pursue? The discussions with the United States regarding the IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) have rekindled the debate on state aid for companies. Do you agree with the proposal for a European fund, such as NextEu or SURE?

Competitive business does not only strengthen the geopolitical importance of the Union, but it contributes to sustainable growth and accelerate the green and digital transitions.

The Swedish presidency will work on EU measures based on fundamental values such as openness, freedom of movement and effective competition. The Single Market's 30th year anniversary is a useful starting point.

However, the fact that we are spending significantly less on research and development than the US or China is problematic. If we want to maintain our leading knowledge-based economies with innovative industries, we need to step up our game.

In the long term, factors such as insufficient spending on research and development or weak productivity, pose greater risks to European competitiveness than a lack of subsidies to production. However, at the same time Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the energy crisis and rising inflation entail significant challenges for European businesses, and as we are facing actions of competitors and partners around the world for example the Inflation Reduction Act by the US. The response of the

EU to these developments needs to be closely analysed and discussed and the measures we take must be evidence-based. It is important that the short-term actions to mitigate the consequences of IRA do not pose an obstacle to the long-term work, to identify a sustainable European model for competitiveness.

4 • The rule of law, one of the Community acquis, has been at the center of many clashes with countries such as Poland and Hungary in recent years, what policy will you follow in this field? Closely linked to this is racism, in the context of your current presidency, the "Conference on the implementation of national action plans against racism" is being held in Stockholm these days, it is an ever-present problem that the world does not can he overcome?

During the Swedish presidency the work to uphold the Union's common, fundamental values, including the rule of law, will continue.

In general, the Union have made significant progress to safeguard the rule of law in the EU in the last few years. Article 7 proceedings have been initiated, and we will move forward that work in a constructive spirit. We will also continue the work on Council's country-by-country rule of law dialogue, which have shown that all member states, not just a few, have room for improvement as far as the rule of law is concerned.

The rule of law is also an important elements of EU cooperation with partner countries, therefore, Sweden will work to ensure that the rule of law have an impact on the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The aim of the "Conference on the implementation of national action plans against racism" was to discuss how to move from development to implementation of national action plans against racism by providing a venue for sharing experiences and gather inspiration.

In order to further emphasize the importance of importance of rule of law, we will organise a symposium on this issue in Stockholm in May.

5 • Following the outbreak of war, Sweden applied for NATO membership, what stage are the negotiations at? Do you think it right that a country that does not stand out for its democracy like Turkey can prevent a large democratic country like yours from joining NATO? Is unanimity, which has already created problems within the European Union, also a problem in other areas?

Sweden has applied to become a member of Nato and that a majority of Natos member countries have now ratified Swedens accession. Promoting EU-NATO cooperation is a particular priority. We are confident that Sweden will join NATO in the near future. In addition, the negotiations with Turkey have now been resumed after a break.

6 • A further point on the European agenda is immigration, the Commission led by President Ursula Von del Leyen presented the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, to supersede the Dublin III Regulation. What is Sweden's position on this issue?

The ministers of European Union have discussed regarding migration in EU the importance of using all the tools in the toolbox to achieve more effective cooperation with countries of origin for effective returns and to prevent irregular migration. Sweden is working with full force to get ahead in the work with the asylum

and migration pact. However, it is a very ambitious plan, and it is going to be difficult to complete it during the Swedish presidency. The aim is make progress during our presidency , Sweden has been working on finding a common European view on the external dimension.

7 • Europe is grappling with a declining birth rate and an aging population, a problem that Sweden also had in the past and which it has since brilliantly resolved. Could you not propose the Swedish model to the European partners to overcome the demographic criticality?

The EU has provided legislation creating minimum EU rights to combine work with family responsibilities. However, all European member states have their specific conditions and design their own solutions for their social welfare. Of course, we are happy to share our experience of what worked in Sweden with other countries when there is an interest.

8 • I respect the convergence to enter the Eurozone, is the idea in your future plans?

Last time Sweden voted about adopting the euro was in 2003 when a majority of Swedes voted against. Opinions on EU and the euro in Sweden have changed over the years. Before the euro crisis in 2008, there was a strong opinion in favour of the euro, but following the crisis, support decreased considerably and has remained low.

9 • Finally, what do you think are the best ways to bring Europe closer to European citizens, other than making yourself available to speak like you in this case, of course.

Föreslår text om inre marknaden, fri rörlighet och möjlighet att studera inom hela EU

A way to keep bringing Europe closer is with strengthening the internal market. Efforts to eliminate trade barriers for both goods and services will continue, along with efforts to improve the application of and compliance with the existing internal market regulations. Apart from that the presidency will promote a connected and automated mobility in road and other modes of transportation. A well-functioning internal aviation market is vital, not only to ensure good accessibility for all EU citizens but also to create conditions that are favourable to improved access to non-EU regions and countries.

The Presidency also wants to high light the benefits and opportunities to study throughout the EU and how this contributes contribute to transition and upskilling.

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