

Taking on the Challenge

Honourable. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Your Excellency Ambassador Gudmundson, Excellencies and representatives of the Diplomatic Missions in Malta, Honourable Member of the European Parliament), ladies and gentlemen,

Efforts to tackle the financial crisis and to deal with the rising unemployment that is currently affecting Europe and managing climate change are the two main priorities of the Swedish presidency of the EU Council for the second half of this year.

In a joint press conference with EC President José Manuel Barroso on July 1, Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt stated that “The most important thing is to ensure that we are able to gather the EU together to respond to the challenges that people face and where strong European cooperation can make a difference.”

Taking on the challenge of connecting the EU to the people is a priority in itself. The lack of interest expressed by a majority of EU citizens who chose not to cast their vote for the EP elections last month is ample proof of this. People need to be convinced that Europe has made a considerable difference for the better in their daily lives and that the “Cost of Non-Europe”, would be very dear indeed.

Taking on the challenge also means explaining in simple terms to people that by being members of the EU, we have been provided with a shield that is acting as a buffer between them and the far worse consequences of the current economic crisis we would have to face had we not been in the EU.

Taking on the challenge means translating nice words into effective policies that save jobs and also create new jobs to compensate for jobs that are lost and to provide employment for school leavers.

Taking on the challenge is also about showing not only that strong European cooperation can make a difference but also **how** it is making a difference.

It is therefore with great honour and pleasure that MEUSAC and the Ambassador of Sweden to Malta are hosting this Public Dialogue on the Programme and Priorities of the Swedish Presidency. May I state what a pleasure it has been to get to know Ambassador Gudmundson and to organise with her and her collaborators in Malta this event.

It is also a great honour for us to have with us the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Dr. Tonio Borg who will speak after Ambassador Gudmundson and spell out the Maltese Government’s priorities within the EU for the next 6 months.

Just a brief introduction about our co-host and co-speaker this morning:

Ambassador Ulla Birgitta Gudmundson presented her credentials to the then President Eddie Fenech Adami on the 27th November 2008. She studied at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, USA between 1967 and 1968 on a scholarship. She furthered her studies at the Uppsala University in Sweden and obtained a B.A. Political Science and English and a B.A. School of Social Work and Public Administration.

After completing her studies she worked as Assistant at the International Graduate School in Stockholm University and subsequently was Secretary to the National Council for the Disabled and the Swedish Preparatory Committee for IYDP. She also held the post of Bureau Director at the Swedish National Audit Bureau.

She has spent the Greater part of her diplomatic career on European and Euro-Atlantic issues, starting off in 1983 as Second Secretary within the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a year later was posted at the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok. In 1987 she was promoted to First Secretary forming part of the Swedish Delegation to the EC and subsequently working within the Asia Department at the Foreign Affairs Ministry. She was a member of negotiating team negotiating Sweden's accession the EU

After serving as Expert at the European Commission, she worked as Director to the Western European Department at the Swedish Foreign Affairs Ministry followed by the post of European Correspondent within the Ministry. Between 1995 and 1999 she was posted to the Swedish Mission to NATO as Deputy Chief. Other important posts held within the Ministry were that of Senior Adviser (2003 – 2004), Director Policy Analysis Office (2004 – 2007) and Deputy Director-General as from July 2007 to date.

Ms. Gudmundson is also Sweden's Ambassador to the Holy See.

The Ambassador comments regularly on international issues in the Swedish media and has published a book on NATO and a number of essays on foreign and security policy and on other subjects. She speaks Swedish, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish.

It is therefore with immense pleasure that I ask the Ambassador to deliver her address during which she will be outlining the Programme and Priorities of the Swedish presidency of the EU Council.