Peter Dahlen – Managing Director, American Chamber of Commerce in Sweden



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The American Chamber of Commerce in Sweden promotes trade and investment between the USA and Sweden. Peter Dahlen,

AmCham Sweden's managing director, outlines the significance of Swedish American ties, both macroeconomically and from a healthcare investment standpoint. This is in addition to the success of American companies in the country that are continuing to help drive forward Swedish healthcare and life sciences.

The goal of the chamber is to promote trade and investment between the US and Sweden. Could you give our readers an overview of American-Swedish economic ties?

As an overview, Swedish-American trade is based on a robust, centuries-old relationship. In 1783, Sweden was the first neutral country not involved in the US war for independence to enter into a free trade agreement with the new democracy. This relationship has evolved into over 73,000 jobs in Sweden created by US companies. Moreover, in the US, Swedish companies create more than 200,000 jobs. US companies invest nearly USD 35 billion in Sweden and export approximately USD 4 billion worth of goods and nearly USD 6 billion in services. We have a strong relationship and have witnessed a considerable amount of trade and investment between the two countries.

In terms of commercial relations between the US and Sweden, some of the most recent developments include an uptick in investment from US tech companies investing in server farms (data centres) with examples including Facebook, Amazon Web Services and Microsoft, which is building two 100 percent sustainable, zero-waste datacenters here – to the healthcare sector with Pfizer doubling its biotech manufacturing capacity to GE's continued investment in healthcare and advanced manufacturing.

US foreign direct investment (FDI) in Sweden has declined since 2010. How is the chamber working to reverse this trend?

Sweden is a great place to invest in. The barriers to entry and establishing a business are low. There is world-class talent and nearly everybody speaks English. That said, if Sweden wants to continue to attract investment from the US, it will need to address concerns related to talent mobility, work permits, housing, and cloud services, as well as to quicken the pace of 5G roll-out.

We try to help our member companies make the case to their head offices in the US on why Sweden is an attractive investment destination. And there are things that Sweden could do to bolster its case, such as quickening the pace of the rollout of 5G technology and clarifying misperceptions surrounding the US CLOUD Act.

However, we have seen significant investment from the US into Sweden, including in 2015 when GE made a significant investment in their manufacturing plant in Uppsala, north of Stockholm. So, it is not all negative, but something needs to be done to increase FDI figures.

Sweden has an advantage and a key role to play in attracting US FDI, especially in light of trade tensions between China and the US In general, US businesses are opposed to tariffs, primarily because tariffs are taxes. Both American, Swedish and European companies in general, not to mention governments, recognise the real threat of China. China is a mercantilist system. If you invest in China, it is not on the same terms that a European company can invest in the US There is a lack of technology transfer and of intellectual property protection, which are long-standing concerns shared by both Europe and the US

The chamber has created a Life Science Working Committee, one of only six such professional groups. What is the importance of the Life Science Working Committee for your members?

Firstly, we are an entirely member-driven organisation – a non-profit, which is owned by our members. Our job is to promote trade and investment between Sweden and the US and US commercial interests in Sweden. The Life Science Working Committee is driven by its members and focused on an agenda that they have put forward and that is aligned with a crucial part of Sweden's business landscape.

They see an opportunity here because Sweden is sitting on a goldmine of data regarding health; data that is siloed in Quality Registries throughout the country in various institutions and governmental bodies. Yet, despite this unique and invaluable resource, there is not a robust system for sharing this data, even among healthcare providers. There is a real opportunity for Sweden to take the lead as a place to invest with regard to R&D and improving health outcomes for patients by taking advantage of this real-world data.

What are the main goals of this committee?

The members of our Life Science Working Committee work to contribute to Swedish healthcare by providing solutions to improve patient outcomes, delivering scientific and societal value. The members of our committee span a broad range of companies from pharmaceuticals to medtech, biotech and even tech companies. These are becoming increasingly involved in healthcare as more companies are collecting data from smartphones, fitness trackers, etc. and providing crucial technology such as cloud services and 5G that are being leveraged to help improve healthcare.

The committee is focused on access to real-world data at the moment. Our member companies believe that using the real-world data that Sweden has been collecting for generations can help improve healthcare in the country.

US healthcare systems are far more fractured than those in Sweden. But there are many powerful examples of leveraging data to improve healthcare such as at the Mayo Clinic and the Cleveland Clinic. Other Nordic countries are taking advantage of similar data, and it will attract foreign direct investment.

Together with Business Sweden and the Commercial Service of the US Embassy, AmCham is working on an Advanced Manufacturing Initiative. What are the objectives of this initiative?

We have a few objectives with the initiative: First, to convene US and Swedish business executives, experts and other stakeholders. Second, to provide a forum for knowledge exchange and dialogue, and to promote optimal business climates for advanced manufacturing in both countries. Initially, we are focusing on additive manufacturing. Eventually, however, the scope will broaden, and the idea is to create a platform to come together, get to know each other and collaborate. The initiative is also meant to be a platform bringing those companies together with representatives of both the Swedish and US governments as a way to give feedback to the governments of the United States and Sweden about any obstacles to advanced manufacturing in the US and Sweden.

What are Sweden's strengths as a manufacturing location of advanced products?

What makes Sweden particularly interesting from an overall technology and investment perspective is that the government works together with the private sector to create the right conditions for investment and trade.

GE bought a company called Arcam a few years ago which specializes in additive manufacturing. Sweden has other leading examples both in additive manufacturing and automation. Another company with Swedish roots, ABB, has produced some of the most advanced robotics in the world over the years. Today, ABB incorporates digital connectivity and AI. This is the kind of innovation that makes Sweden a global leader in advanced manufacturing.

In the next few years, how do you aim to develop the relationship between America and Sweden?

Our mission is to promote trade and investment between Sweden and the US, so we would certainly like to see more investment from US companies in Sweden as well as investment from Swedish companies in the US Overall, if you look at the arc of the history of US-Swedish trade and investment, there is a steady increase over time. Although FDI from the US decreased in recent years, we believe this to be an exception and that investment will continue to increase in the years ahead. Naturally, we would welcome those new investors as members of AmCham Sweden.

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