

# DEMOCRACY

## FROM A SWEDISH POINT OF VIEW

Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy 2007 in Sweden



Defending  
Human Rights!



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Government Offices  
of Sweden



MINISTER FOR DIALOGUE 3 ACTIONPLAN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS 4 EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION 5  
ALL DIFFERENT ALL EQUAL 9 DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE 9 ROMA IN SWEDEN 10 WOMEN'S CAPACITY 11

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# Let's Work Together for Empowerment, Democracy and Human Rights

**I HAVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE** of dictatorship, and thus I find it enormously exciting to be the Minister responsible for democracy issues and human rights.

When I grew up, politics seemed to be something very dangerous and threatening. Those who did not agree with the ruling party in Congo were thrown into jail. My own father was imprisoned because of his political activity, and he later came to Sweden as a political refugee.

It was actually not until high school that I dared to approach politics. It was my right to vote that made me realise that if I could actually vote, then it was also possible for me to engage in politics.

People must feel secure in order to have the capability or will to engage in the democratic process. They must have confidence in society, and know that they can contribute.

This is why we, in consensus with our partners preparing the Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy, decided that the theme of the 2007 session should be "Power and Empowerment – The Interdependence of Democracy and Human Rights".

We all have to strengthen our efforts in order for the individual to be able to assume control of his or her own life. Civil participation offers a means of exercising influence and bringing about change, in the situation of each individual or in that of others.

**OUR AIM WITH FORUM 2007** is to strengthen democracy, political freedom and citizens' participation. Safeguarding and deepening democracy includes measures to achieve greater and more equal participation on the

part of ordinary people. And issues related to democracy are, in my opinion, closely linked to the efforts to secure full respect for, and wider knowledge of, human rights. Realisation of human rights is crucial for the individuals' chances of empowerment, to be able to be in control. Discrimination is never acceptable, regardless of its grounds.

With the paper you are now holding in your hands we intend to explain our thoughts when it comes to the Forum 2007 session, as well as how the Swedish Government is dealing with issues concerning democracy and human rights at the national level.

When you read this, we have already concluded the Forum 2007 session. Our intention was to provide for discussions and exchange of experiences. I do hope that we will all be able to bring practical tools for our future work with us back home after this session.

I am of the firm conviction that we all have to continue our struggle. We may have different perspectives, but we share the same basic problems in Europe, and other continents. Democracy is always challenged in different ways.

Empowerment contributes to each individuals' self-confidence and integrity, and this is what forms the strength and stability of our democracies. ■

**Nyamko Sabuni**  
Minister for Integration and Gender Equality,  
Sweden





Ms Nyamko Sabuni, Swedish Minister for Integration and Equality believes in defending human rights by dialogue.

## A Minister in Search of True Dialogue

The Swedish Minister for Integration and Gender Equality, Ms Nyamko Sabuni, does not exactly personify a typical European Minister. Consequently, Forum 2007 was not a typical European conference.

**“SWEDEN HAD THE** opportunity to host this conference and we wanted to do it differently. I hope we succeeded; it was an experiment. Hopefully we have inspired others to break the usual patterns and do things a bit differently,” she says. She particularly stresses the importance of creating conditions for a true dialogue.

“What I miss most at ordinary seminars is that no one connects to what others say, as all the speeches are prepared in advance. So despite the intention to create interactivity, it doesn’t happen. I also believe that people can talk more freely in small groups. When in plenary the demands are so high, everything has to be so perfect. This can often lead to speeches not fitting into the ongoing discussion.”

The invitations to Forum 2007 were widely spread. Many NGOs were invited – not only the international NGOs, but also the small, local ones – as well as political representatives

from local, regional and national levels.

“I pleaded with other governments to consider diversity when making up the delegations,” Nyamko Sabuni explains.

One might say that the set-up of the conference was a reflection on the Swedish approach to addressing human rights issues. But even if this approach has been successful at the national level, there is still a long way to go.

**“IN SWEDEN THERE** has been a general belief that human rights violations only happen in other countries. We Swedes sometimes find it difficult to understand that discrimination, men’s violence against women and maltreatment of the Roma people are human rights violations taking place in Sweden. It is important that we clearly communicate that this is the case and continue to work systematically to counteract further violations.”

In these endeavours, Ms Sabuni stresses the importance of the National Action Plan for

Human Rights, which has been launched for the period 2006–2009. A central measure that has been carried out as part of the action plan is the establishment of the Delegation for Human Rights in Sweden.

The Delegation is composed of persons with experience from politics, public administration, civil society and the private sector. Its task is to support long-term work to ensure full respect for Sweden’s international human rights commitments in the activities conducted by government agencies, municipalities and county councils.

“I believe we have good reasons to be proud of the Action Plan, and I hope it can serve as an inspiration to other countries that are willing to admit and address these problems.”

**ONE IMPORTANT ASPECT** of the Action Plan is the political consensus; all political parties supported the idea of adopting such a plan and around 400 actors from all sectors of society were invited to take part in compiling it.

“When addressing these issues I believe it is important to look for consensus; these kind of long-term plans should not be discarded when a new government is elected,” Ms Sabuni underlines.

The Swedish Action Plan was actually drawn up under the leadership of the former Social Democratic government, and is now being implemented by the newly elected Alliance for Sweden Government.

“Focus may be a bit different in our implementation, but we are continuing on the same track to create long-term sustainability and to keep working to ensure full respect for human rights in Sweden.”

**DISCRIMINATION, REGARDLESS OF** its type and motive, is the one thing she wants to particularly stress and this is a common theme throughout the Action Plan. Is this linked to her personal experiences?

“I did not usually realise until it was too late that I had been discriminated against. So in that respect, I am not a good example. Intellectually I know what discrimination is about, but I don’t let it get to me emotionally. But my advice is to speak up at once when you feel something is wrong. Never let it stay within and turn into aggression and bitterness.”

She recalls one time when she was young and applied for a job. The initial interview over the phone went fine, and she was called for a meeting. When she turned up, the potential employer lost his cool and burst out: “Oh, are you that black!”

“Well, what could I say? I am this black! So the incident was no shock to me. This man had an image of what a Swede should look like. This Swede just looked rather different!” ■

# A Commissioner who Makes a Difference

“Working with human rights is a never-ending process. No matter how much is done, there is still room for improvement in all countries,” says Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights.



Photo: The Olaf Palme International Center

Thomas Hammarberg (left), a dialogue partner for human rights.

**THE COMMISSIONER FOR** Human Rights is an independent institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in all Council of Europe member states.

For Thomas Hammarberg, the second Commissioner for Human Rights since the start, the role is a logical continuation of his previous work as Secretary-General of Amnesty International and Swedish Save the Children.

“I have a strong mandate from the Council. I cannot be dismissed if some member states disagree with what I say, and that is very important,” he says.

When visiting a country Hammarberg and his team generally start by meeting civil society organisations, prisoners, policemen, judges and other field workers – before meeting politicians. The team also spends a lot of time as a dialogue partner with the human rights ombudsmen that exist in most European countries.

“Human rights is very much a question of values. Work on achieving them can only be efficient if it is done in permanent dialogue with all stakeholders. In this, I see our role a bit like the International Red Cross, in which we talk to all important actors, regardless of their diplomatic status,” says Thomas Hammarberg who believes in a bottom-up approach.

One question that preoccupies him is discrimination against homosexuals.

“The right not to be discriminated against because of your sexual orientation is a kind of litmus test for the society. If a society can’t accept that homosexuals have the same rights as others there is something lacking. Some politicians are unwilling to stand up for universal principles of human rights when they become too sensitive politically. This is why it is so important that we stick to these principles.”

**OTHER AREAS OF** priority are the detention of immigrants and asylum-seekers, and violation of human rights in the fight against terrorism. “We must protect human rights at the same time as we fight terrorism.” Another priority is the Roma population of twelve million, the most oppressed group in Europe. Half of the Roma children do not attend school. This exclusion is nothing short of a catastrophe!”

But changes in attitude are also taking place. One example is the shift in attitude towards people with disabilities, from charity to a rights-based approach, which will shortly be embodied in the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

But can the Commissioner make a difference? Yes, says Thomas Hammarberg and gives an example from the internal conflict in

## MOVING FORWARD: A NEW NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**IN MARCH 2006** the Swedish Government adopted its second national action plan for human rights. The plan, which spans the period 2006–2009, was the result of more than a year of identifying human rights problems in Sweden. Almost 400 actors were invited to take part in the process by submitting their views and opinions.

The plan is divided into two parts. The first is an action plan consisting of 135 measures to be implemented during the period 2006–2009. The second is a base-line study on the human rights situation in Sweden in 2005.

The selection of human rights issues is based on three pillars: compliance with international conventions; the evaluation of the first action plan; and points of view and proposals from the reference groups that took part in the consultation process.

The general focus of the action plan is the principle of non-discrimination. A central part of the document deals with human rights education, information and awareness-raising.

At present, Sweden, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway are the only European countries that have approved national plans for human rights.

“Sweden is definitely one of the pioneer countries. We hope that, during the conference here in Stockholm, Sweden will inspire other countries to initiate the work on their own plans,” says Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights.

Read more at: [www.humanrights.gov.se](http://www.humanrights.gov.se)

Georgia/Abkhazia, where political prisoners from both sides were released as a result of his visit.

“Our most important mission, however, is to influence and change structures and laws. The important thing is not to point a finger at a country, but to make an analysis which is useful for governments and other actors so that we can help them improve the human rights situation.” ■

*A journalist by training, Thomas Hammarberg never hesitates to express his viewpoints and publish them: [www.commissioner.coe.int](http://www.commissioner.coe.int)*



Photo: Lars Pehrsson/SVD/Scampix

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. Here exercised in a manifestation in commemoration of the murdered Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh.

# Swedish Democracy Policy: Emphasis on Empowerment and Participation

Historically, efforts by the Swedish Government and Riksdag to develop Swedish democracy have taken the shape of constitutional reform and traditional legislative measures. However, since the mid-1980s a number of Government inquiries have addressed wider concerns, such as enhancing public influence on policy and decision-making processes.

**IN 1998, A MINISTER** with special responsibility for democracy issues was appointed. This marked the beginning of more systematic efforts to structure national initiatives aimed at promoting democratic development.

In 2001, a special policy area for democracy issues was established in the central government budget, reflecting the high political priority accorded to the issue. Another aim was to facilitate coordination of government action and thereby ensure a coherent and concerted approach to democratic development.

In the spring of 2001, the Government Bill *Democracy in the New Century* set out a new long-term strategy incorporating goals and measures for broad public involvement in the context of representative democracy.

Since 2004, there has been an emphasis on the interdependence of democracy and human rights. Democracy is predicated on the realisation of human rights. Human rights, for their part, presuppose the existence of democratic governance based on broad citizen participation.

Over time, several initiatives have been

taken to safeguard and deepen democracy: legal reforms, financial support for local development, the development of democracy indicators, and, not least, evaluations of the various government initiatives. One recent evaluation points to the success achieved by supporting local civil society as an arena for meetings between citizens and politicians at a time when membership of the political parties is declining.

**BASED ON THE LESSONS** learned during the initial years of democracy policy, further, more strongly focused steps are now being taken in the light of the new challenges facing Swedish democracy today. These new challenges are quite often interrelated with the challenges facing the international community, making it vital to exchange experience and ideas with other countries. The discussions that have taken place over these three days of the Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy have been one such occasion. The issues are general and of common concern to us all – how to build a strong representative democracy based on respect for human rights,

how to empower individuals in their everyday lives, how to use modern tools for making the processes of political decision-making transparent and accessible, how to integrate citizen participation into regular decision-making processes and how to support an independent, diverse and flourishing civil society. The experience shared and the conclusions drawn at the Forum will be of great importance for the further development of Swedish democracy policy. ■

Read more at: [www.sweden.gov.se](http://www.sweden.gov.se)



# Democracy Initiative Boosts Election Turnout

Sigtuna municipality had a very low turnout for the 2002 election, so low in fact that the political majority decided that something had to be done.

Photo: Stefan Bladh



Dating back to around 980, Sigtuna is the oldest still existing town in Sweden. Sigtuna municipality has 37 000 inhabitants and is near the capital of Stockholm. Sweden's largest international airport, Stockholm Arlanda, is located in the municipality.

“WE STRIVE TO TAKE representative democracy seriously, but that doesn’t mean we can’t involve our inhabitants in various ways between elections,” says Gun Eriksson, Deputy Chair of Sigtuna municipality, and, since January 2007, Chair of the Sigtuna Democracy Board, the first of its kind in a Swedish municipality.

To improve public involvement, Sigtuna municipality holds what they have chosen to call “deliberate referendums” and invites citizen proposals. Deliberate referendums are held when a certain issue in a specific area in the municipality emerges between elections. Everyone who is a resident in that area from the age of 16 is allowed to vote, and the municipality has decided that the result should be conclusive.

“Clear and tangible suggestions are very important. As for the municipality, the approach is: Ask the question. Accept the answer. Carry out the decision,” explains Gun Eriksson.

**SIGTUNA HAS SO FAR** held ten “deliberate referendums”. A survey conducted by the municipality showed that more than 90 per cent of the electorate were aware of the referendums as they took place and 78 per cent were favourable to the idea of “deliberate referendums”. The citizen proposals have also proven a success. Suggestions have arrived in great numbers on issues ranging from the local environment to cultural events and local organisations.

Sigtuna municipality also focuses on the

children in the community. Pupil councils in schools are normally consulted about where to build playgrounds and bicycle paths for example. Smaller children are also consulted, but using slightly different methods. They might for instance be asked to draw their dreams. Two questions are asked prior to every major decision: What effect does this have on youngsters and have we asked their opinion?

The 2006 general election proved that the democracy initiative was well worth the effort. Turnout increased by 3.4 per cent in the municipality as a whole, and by as much as 7.4 per cent in some areas.

“We have come a long way but are not resting on our laurels,” concludes Gun Eriksson. “Democracy has to be won every day.” ■

## DEMOCRACY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Referendums at local government level have had legal sanction since 1977. Local referendums have advisory status only, but municipal councils tend increasingly to abide by referendum results. The ‘popular initiative’ provisions incorporated into the Local Government Act states that if supported by 5 per cent of the voting population a referendum can be requested.

Since 2002 municipal assemblies have been free to introduce citizens’ proposals schemes, i.e. the right to raise matters in the municipal assembly. The Swedish municipalities are also at liberty to arrange public consultations on particular issues, or to establish citizen panels.

For more information contact Special adviser Jan Andersson: [jan.andersson@integration.ministry.se](mailto:jan.andersson@integration.ministry.se)

## Council of Europe



The delegates arrive to Riksdagen, the Swedish Parliament.



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Mr Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.



Photo: Stefan Bladh



Photo: Stefan Bladh

The delegates at Hotels in Sigtuna, discussing the involvement of Civil Society.

# Forum for the Future of Democracy 2007 in Sweden

Photo: Stefan Bladh



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Delegates arriving to Stockholm.



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Ms Nyamko Sabuni, Swedish Minister for Integration and Gender Equality giving her opening speech.



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Mr Anders Knape, President of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.



Mr Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe.



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Delegates leaving for Sigtuna.



Photo: Stefan Bladh

Animated discussion during the workshop.



Photo: Sara Nykäsenoja

More discussions during coffee break.

Photo: Sara Nykäsenoja



Pointing out important issues at Hotel Kristina.

Photo: Sara Nykäsenoja



The World Café method allowed many new meetings and acquaintances.

# Government by Discussion Paves the Way for Democracy

“Deliberation is not only a way of reaching decisions, but also a strategy for tolerance and social cohesion.”

**ACCORDING TO DANIEL TARSCHYS**, who is one of three general rapporteurs at the Forum for Future Democracy in Stockholm 2007, democracy is about talking, listening and taking the views of others seriously. It is government by discussion.

Former Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, and co-author of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Mr Tarschys is an authority on democracy and human rights. As a professor in Political Science at Stockholm University, he inspires students to become engaged in the broad range of perspectives that arise from these issues.

“Several dimensions of representative government have very deep roots in this country. The long period of peace has also been favourable for democracy. Sweden was last involved in a war some 200 years ago. Another advantage is the principle of public

access to official documents – a cornerstone of democracy.”

“But democracy is never safe. A worrying issue today is xenophobia and the emergence of racist political parties. In the 2006 elections, a party with an outspoken xenophobic programme gained a foothold in 145 of the 290 municipal councils in Sweden. Immigration always enriches a country through the introduction of new ideas, perspectives and lifestyles. Economic globalisation, however, brings about changes that are negative for certain groups in the short term for which immigrants often become the scapegoats,” Mr Tarschys continues.

**“THE ANSWER MUST** be an inclusive society that is also receptive and responsive to the diverse needs of different groups. All groups must be allowed a forum, and their fears and



Daniel Tarschys, general rapporteur at the Forum.

Photo: Jerker Ivarsson/Scanpix

worries addressed. This is an imperative of civic equality, but also one of its consequences and preconditions. Democracy and respect for human rights are inseparably interconnected.”

The democratic advances in Europe over the last 20 years have been impressive, Mr Tarschys adds. Despite some disappointments here and there, the main direction is clear. New forms of engagement and communication are constantly emerging, for example, e-democracy, blogs and networks.

“The important thing is for people to find ways of sharing views and opinions. Respect for human rights springs from social empathy and ‘seeing the other’, not only focusing on your own needs and interests,” he concludes. ■

## ALL DIFFERENT, ALL EQUAL – FOR DIVERSITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION

**“THANK YOU FOR** coming here today. This is the first time ever that I have had the opportunity to speak out loud about prejudices,” says a sixteen-year-old high school student from Trelleborg in the south of Sweden.

She and her classmates have just experienced the School Tour of the Swedish version of the *All Different, All Equal* campaign. For five weeks young information officers from eight youth organisations toured Sweden.

*All Different, All Equal* is a Council of Europe campaign for Diversity, Human Rights and Participation. Young people from all 47 countries in Europe are participating to fight exclusion, locally and globally.

The Swedish campaign is based on peer education, training for trainers and, most importantly, youth participation: “It is our responsibility to involve young people in human rights work. We believe that non-formal education, role play and interactive methods are more effective than lectures if we want to reach our target group,” says

Swedish campaign manager Sara Sjöman.

In Sweden the *All Different, All Equal* campaign is coordinated by the National Council of Youth Organisations.

**THE CAMPAIGN HAS** strong backing; the Minister for Integration and Gender Equality, Ms Nyamko Sabuni, spoke at the launching, and the Delegation for Human Rights in Sweden is a very active national campaign committee, that has also given financial support.

Although the Swedish campaign will be



Minister Nyamko Sabuni at the launching of the campaign.

Photo: Johan Göransson



The team of the School Tour.

Photo: All Different All Equal

running for three more years, the Swedish Government is hosting the final event for the European campaign in October 2007.

“We see this as a good opportunity for young Swedish participants to learn from best practices in other countries,” explains Hanna Simberg. “Participation is so much more effective than words on a piece of paper,” says Sara Sjöman.

Read more about the European Youth Campaign: [www.alldifferent-allequal.info](http://www.alldifferent-allequal.info) and about the Swedish version “Alla olika alla lika”: [www.allaolikaallalika.se](http://www.allaolikaallalika.se)



# The Opposition – a Vital Part of Democracy

**DEMOCRACY IS A BALANCE** between consensus and conflict. Opposition is not only a constitutional process, but also a way of ensuring that the rights of individual citizens are formulated.

“The opposition is an institutional promise that a change of government is possible and a reminder of the temporary nature of authority and power.” say Göran Lindblad, Chairman, and Björn von Sydow, Deputy Chairman of the Swedish Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Mr Lindblad is an MP for the conservative Moderate Party and Mr von Sydow an MP for the Social Democratic Party, in opposition since 2006.

The way the opposition works differs according to the electoral system. In the UK and other European countries with a two- or three-party system, the governing party has a solid majority. Sweden, however, has a seven-party system and an electoral system where the parliamentary seats are shared strictly according to the votes. Due to this system, Sweden has almost always had minority governments since the country introduced universal suffrage in 1921.

In Sweden a tradition of compromise and obstruction has developed between the Government and the opposition. A precondition for this system to work is that the opposition has certain rights, such as the right to obtain information from the Government, the right to initiate alternative policies, the right to participate in discussions, the right to make the government accountable to the Riksdag (Parliament) and the right to have resources to accomplish its mission.



**“MANY OPPOSITION PARTIES** realise that they no longer form the political agenda and this might cause a need for enforced ideological orientation towards original values. The party becomes more ‘orthodox’,” comments Björn von Sydow. “But generally, during the term of office of a parliament, parties who want to return to power are forced to orientate towards the ‘middle’.”

Two years prior to the September 2006 election, the four non-socialist opposition parties joined forces and formed a joint manifesto. They won an absolute majority and have now formed a coalition government. With the Social Democrats in opposition, Sweden has a large opposition party, which may affect the way the role of the opposition is carried out. ■

Swedish opposition leader and leader of the Social Democratic Party, Mona Sahlin, and Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt.

Photo: Henrik Montgomery/Scanpix

## Dialogue – Democracy in Practice

“Dialogue is about thinking and listening together. When dialogue is at its best hierarchies cease to exist, everyone’s voice is equally valid and all perspectives are equally important.”

**ANNA LINDSTRÖM AND** Johanna Lampinen are senior advisors on democracy, and specialists in dialogue techniques at the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The organisation strives to promote and strengthen local self-government and has many years’ experience in using dialogue as a means for democracy.

“The essence of democracy is not to get what you want, but to be listened to”, says Anna Lindström. “Dialogue is more about listening and jointly investigating than debating and defending your points of view. When you meet in a true dialogue, you learn not only to express your own needs but to reflect them against the needs of others.”

There are several established methods and tools for dialogue, such as Open Space, World Café, Future Café and Future Search. They all start off from a common priority issue and take into account the collective experience in the room. The preparations and introduction to the workshop must make clear the condi-

tions for dialogue. All participants should be present the entire time – no running in and out – and no spectators are allowed, everyone in the room should participate in the dialogue on equal conditions.

**IN ADDITION**, the dialogue must take place prior to actual decision making, when it is still possible to influence the process. Lastly, the organiser should be very clear on the status of the conclusions reached at the workshop: are they binding or just advisory? Feedback after the workshop is also a prerequisite for a successful process.

One common misunderstanding is that dialogue takes place in some sort of chaos. Anna Lindström and Johanna Lampinen point out that it is exactly the opposite. “A good dialogue requires very detailed organisation and a clear structure. It is actually much more demanding to arrange a dialogue workshop than a traditional seminar!” ■



Thinking together. The essence of democracy is not to get what you want, but to be listened to.

**To find out more about methods for dialogue visit these websites:**

Open space: <http://www.openspaceworld.org>

World café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

Future search: <http://www.futuresearch.net>

Future café: <http://www.thefuturecafe.com>

**For more information, please contact:**

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Photo: Cissi Jonson/Bilduppslaget

“It will take more than one generation to put 500 years of prejudice behind us,” says Soraya Post.

## Roma Face Same Problems throughout Europe

“The Roma in Sweden have a long dark history; 500 years of oppression and exclusion. It may not be as obvious as it once was, but stereotypes and prejudices about Roma are just as strong as ever.”

**SORAYA POST IS A STRONG VOICE** for the Roma population in Sweden and internationally. She is a human rights activist, Chair of the International Roma Women Network (IRWIN), and a member of the European Roma and Travellers Forum. In Sweden she is a member of the Delegation for Human Rights and the Delegation for Roma Issues.

Sweden has been criticised by several international organisations, among them the Council of Europe and the UN, for the treatment of the Roma. According to a study in Sweden’s National Action Plan for Human Rights, the Roma are discriminated against in all central areas, such as education, employment and housing, and the Roma as a group are a particular target of prejudice. This prompted the government to introduce a series of measures to combat discrimination and intolerance towards the Roma population. The Delegation for Roma Issues was set up in 2006 with the aim of pursuing sustainable improvement.

“We feel new hope, but it will take more than one generation to put 500 years of mistrust and prejudice behind us. But that just means that we have to keep working.”

The vulnerable situation of the Roma population is the same throughout Europe. “In many Eastern European countries the situation is very bad with extreme poverty and outspoken racism. But I have very high expectations of the democratic tradition in Sweden and I find it unacceptable that one group can be so excluded even here.”

Soraya Post believes in integration rather than assimilation. “I want us to leave what is bad behind, but to keep that which is good. I want the Roma of Sweden to develop and grow in harmony with the rest of society.”

Roma working at the Office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Government Offices and other institutions provide important role models. “This is exactly what is needed.”

As a member of the Roma Delegation, Soraya Post seeks to promote the Delegation in all her international work. “I think it is an excellent method and I hope the Council of Europe and the EU will promote it, too. I am very honoured to have this post and I feel that the Delegation can make a big difference. It feels like we are making history,” Soraya Post concludes. ■

### DELEGATION FOR ROMA ISSUES

**IN THE AUTUMN** of 2006, the Swedish Government set up the Delegation for Roma Issues with the task of improving the situation of Roma people in Sweden. Counteracting discrimination and breaking social, political and economic exclusion requires close dialogue and cooperation with the Roma community.

One of its first tasks is to conduct an inquiry into the situation of Roma in Sweden. The Delegation will also promote and support municipal projects and services aimed at improving the situation of the Roma and spread knowledge and information about the Roma. In partnership with government agencies, organisations and Roma representatives, the Delegation will also arrange conferences and seminars, take part in international cooperation on Roma issues and examine the need and scope for building up Roma institutions.

The Delegation consists of ten members, half of whom are of Roma origin. A number of experts and a broad reference group consisting of representatives of Roma associations have also been appointed and will be consulted on a continuous basis. A final report is to be presented to the Government in December 2009, together with a proposal for how work to improve the situation of Roma is to continue.

Sweden has five national minorities: the Jews, the Roma, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers. In 1999, the Swedish Parliament approved ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. A minorities policy was adopted in 2000.

*For further information please contact the secretary of the delegation:  
Ann-Marie Algemo, +46 8 405 30 75*

#### FACTS

Officially there are around 40 000–50 000 Roma in Sweden, including Travellers, but Soraya Post estimates that the number of Roma is more likely to be 60 000–80 000.

# “Women’s Capacity Not Recognised”

Does equal representation mean equal power? What would enable the empowerment of women? These are questions the Romanian Ambassador to Sweden, Ms Victoria Popescu, often muses over.

**SHE HAS DEVOTED** a great deal of work to promoting the empowerment of women and equality – particularly as former Chair of the Consultative Committee of UNIFEM and CEDAW expert.

“Good representation of women is a prerequisite for shared power and for democracy. Gender equality is deeply linked to human rights – there is no genuine democracy without ensuring equal opportunities and equal division of resources and power for women and men. But shared representation does not automatically turn into shared power. That is why gender equality is so important.”

It saddens her that women’s capacity to contribute to the welfare of society is not being sufficiently recognised – and that old sexist stereotypes are slowing down change. But living and working in Sweden since 2004 has inspired her and she calls Sweden a Happy Example.

But no country can boast about having

reached equal opportunities yet. According to Victoria Popescu, the largest problems are to be found on the labour market, and the most vulnerable area is the private sector. “Pay gaps, part time work that leads to smaller pensions for women and few female CEOs are all signs of male exclusiveness.”

At the Council of Europe Forum in Sweden, Victoria Popescu is a keynote speaker about gender equality and shared power and she is convinced that a wide range of measures are needed to create change. “The temporary special measures, as called for in Article 4 of the UN Women’s Convention, CEDAW, are very important for accelerating de facto equality.”

**SHE IS A STRONG** supporter of both measures to eliminate remaining discrimination against women and gender



Photo: Susanna Blåvarg/Johnér/www.imagebank.sweden.se

## GENDER EQUALITY IN SWEDEN

Members of the Parliament:	47% women
Ministers of the Government:	41% women
Managers, Private and Public Sectors:	25 % women
CEO:s in listed companies:	1 % women
Share of population in the work force:	80 % of all women
	86 % of all men
Women’s average salary compared to men:	83 %
Men’s use of parental leave	19 %
Women’s unpaid work	43 hrs per week
Men’s unpaid work	26 hrs per week
Women’s share of university bachelors degrees (2005)	63 %
Professors at universities	14% women

Source: *The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, www.jamombud.se*

Photo: Johan Göransson



mainstreaming to promote equality throughout society, which has been encouraged by both the Council of Europe and the UN.

“The European nations are very advanced in the promotion of de jure equality – most of them have non-discriminatory legislation and legislation about equal opportunity. The focus needs to be put on implementation.”

Ambassador Popescu does not want to pretend that equality is a gift to men. “It is a question of sharing responsibilities and to help everybody perform more effectively. It is a way of enriching personal life – but to be frank, men are not yet very interested,” she adds with a shrug.

In Sweden she has seen many young fathers take care of their babies and found that very encouraging. “Men should be more involved.” ■

Victoria Popescu, Romanian Ambassador to Sweden: “it is encouraging to see Swedish men taking care of their children”.

# What did you think about the Forum?



Photo: Stefan Bladh

**THOMAS BUCHSBAUM,**  
Chair CoE, Committee on e-democracy

**Which issue at the Forum is most central to your work?**

"The process in itself is very important. In this Forum the focus is on an open discussion, with participants from all parts of society. The most important thing is not what people represent, but what they say, their input. Besides this, I believe that e-democracy is a very important area for strengthening democracy in the future."

**What does empowerment mean to you?**

"Making people participate in the democratic process with better political decisions as a result. This in turn will also give the democratic system better legitimacy."

**How, and why, could different parts of society interact?**

"Interaction is fundamental for democracy, but today people have little time to take part in political activities. With e-democracy we can create tools that increase interaction and participation, not least between people with different backgrounds and in a less biased way, as it will not be possible to judge the other person on the basis of their position, job or gender."



Photo: Stefan Bladh

**ANA ISABEL LEIVA DIEZ,**  
State Secretary of Territorial Co-operation,  
Ministry of Public Administrations, Spain

**Which issue at the Forum is most central to your work?**

"There are several, but in general terms I would like to underline the importance of the role of the local and regional governments in Spain to make effective a large set of rights of people, especially in the arena of social and political rights."

**What does empowerment mean to you?**

"Empowerment is a key action in order to strengthen rights and to make equal and universal opportunities available to everybody. So, empowerment should be a crucial part of the public powers' activities in relation to citizens."

**How, and why, could different parts of society interact?**

"It is necessary to design and to implement public policies according to mechanisms of good governance, engaging the main social actors concerned. It is necessary in order to strengthen the sense of responsibility, transparency and social capital. But even so, democratic public powers have to retain ultimate responsibility in the decision making process."



Photo: Stefan Bladh

**MICHAEL RAFAEL,**  
Campaign Manager, Youth Campaign  
"All Different, All Equal"

**Which issue at the Forum is most central to your work?**

"Discrimination against many different groups; we see growing tendencies towards islamophobia and antisemitism today. Also, how we can achieve active participation of young people in the political process. So far, many governments have not been successful in engaging youth in the co-management system where young people take an active role in making decisions."

**What does empowerment mean to you?**

"It is very much a question of changing perception, how to make a real space for young people to get involved."

**How, and why, could different parts of society interact?**

"In a dialogue we need to bridge differences and this takes time. And it is not enough just with words, young people need tangible results. We must ask them what they want, and be ready to invest the resources needed in order to create a change."



Photo: Stefan Bladh

**NINA BELYAEVA,**  
University professor and Chair of the  
NGO Coalition "We, the citizens!",  
Russian Federation

**Which issue at the Forum is most central to your work?**

"Respect for the needs of NGOs, and respect for freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. The first step is the recognition of the right of independent citizens to be heard. In certain states there is not yet any tradition for this."

**What does empowerment mean to you?**

"It is a reminder that it is the citizens who have entrusted power to their representatives. The citizens must understand that they ARE the power – and that by voting they share their power with their representatives. They must feel that they have the strength and the right to participate."

**How, and why, could different parts of society interact?**

"In representative systems those elected make decisions on behalf of the others, but in the process many become distanced from the citizens they represent. This is why an ongoing dialogue is so important. And that is why this "Forum" is in search of new methods to keep the dialogue alive and effective."

Read about the forum at:  
[www.sweden.gov.se/democracyforum](http://www.sweden.gov.se/democracyforum)