

SKS Honorary award 2023

Dear Mrs President, European commission officials, Government officials, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The most difficult task imaginable

That is how my job has been described. Turning the opinion on nuclear power from negative to supportive means challenging policies and ideas that have been constructed during the 40 years of nuclear phase-out in various forms in Sweden. To put it bluntly: we have experienced 40 years of communication failure of the nuclear industry. The industry has for a long time been so occupied by describing the product in terms of safety, radiation protection and waste management that it has forgotten to mention the benefits the product brings to the society: The power plants primarily generate neither nuclear safety nor electricity. The power plants generate, first of all, social welfare, growth opportunities, inflation protection, geopolitical stability and energy security. Today we are, unfortunately, very well aware of all this. Terawatt-hours is the main ingredient in a prosperous economy and secure society.

When I started my current mission, six years ago, the narrative of a 100% renewable electricity system was the master plan of Swedish energy policy. It was agreed upon by the parliament, it was the basis for the instructions to the authorities. The policy was, and is still today, the corner stone for many NGOs, think tanks, policy makers and influential individuals.

The policy was seldom questioned – and those who tried met an impenetrable wall. Accomplishing a change in this policy appeared to be an impossible task – maybe the most difficult task imaginable.

Or, maybe it was...

The simplest task imaginable

For some of us, that were convinced that the most low-carbon power source, having the lowest geographical footprint, having the lowest resource demand, having the lowest impact on the climate, environment and landscape, having the highest load factor and the strongest impact on grid stability and robustness, it was never a question whether nuclear power would make a comeback or not. The laws of physics and nature are - without exceptions - completely inexorable. If the mission is to protect environment, climate and nature – humankind must listen to the laws of nature. All alternative routes will fail sooner or later. The question was just how long it would take.

Some people may say that the current pro-nuclear landscape in Sweden is just a result of a political game. I claim the change we experience now would have happened with any other government constellation – it might just have taken a somewhat longer time. The physical parameters have always pointed in the

direction of the use of dispatchable power sources, such as nuclear power - it is just a matter of “wait and see”.

Thus, the task of accomplishing nuclear inclusive policies could be described as the simplest task imaginable: the technology speaks for itself. In any case, time could be given some assistance by...

A lonely agent

In countless occasions during the last years, I have had the honorable task to alone represent Swedish nuclear industry at high-level meetings nationally and internationally. I’m very humble for the responsibility given to me when speaking in the name of seven gigawatts of power generation and its surrounding industry and infrastructures. The occasions have been IEA reviews, testimony in parliament committees, meetings with the European Commission and members of the European Parliament and numerous encounters with officials, authorities, elected politicians and journalists. I have, without any doubt, the most fascinating job I can imagine in this field. For this, I’m overwhelmed and indefinitely thankful.

Being the fearless lonely agent has been an often-occurring role during these years. Ten years ago, I participated in the largest energy event in Sweden. Seven hundred energy specialists and policy makers gathered here in Stockholm. I was the only one, out of these seven hundred individuals, representing nuclear power. Although one of the utilities in Sweden at that time prepared for new nuclear power, the general interest in nuclear power in the rest of the society was close zero. That might be one reason why the plans later had to be abandoned. But the needs of the society and the outlooks for the future changed step by step – in line with the laws of nature. The lonely agent continued its work. We got used to the words taxonomy, operational security and dispatchable power.

However, the lonely agent was not the only one involved. There was...

A collective effort

The policy shift in Sweden towards the inclusion of nuclear power is by no means a result of a single individual. It would be very rude of me claiming otherwise. Me standing here tonight represents the contribution of many dedicated and passionate individuals from different parts of the society. Individuals from the industry, the academy, NGOs, politicians and “ordinary people”. The growing insight of the role of nuclear power has flourished from a fragile and distributed group of people with weak or non-existent organizational structure. A growing number of independent voices of nuclear has throughout the years inspired others to finally form a critical mass. I sometimes hear people talking about a well-funded and cunning nuclear lobby. Such description could not be more wrong. What has been experienced is more of a people’s movement built on conviction and engagement. In fact, many times, those of us working in the industry have asked ourselves if the nuclear industry itself believes in its own technology. We

have asked ourselves if the industry is proud of its own accomplishments or not. What we experience today is the result of initiatives of many individuals – a collective effort – by people that never gave up.

In summary

I have described the nuclear policy shift in Sweden as the most difficult task imaginable, but - at the same time - the simplest task imaginable. During this period, a lonely agent has worked hard and with patience to push positions step by step. But the real achievement is a collective effort. I claim that, today, it is impossible to judge whether this was a difficult mission or if it happened just by itself through a deterministic chain of unstoppable events. I also question my own role in this: has my accomplishments been important or just marginal – in relation to the collective accomplishments? Maybe history books of the future will tell us.

Nevertheless, I'm truly honored to receive this award. I take this opportunity to dedicate this award to all of us that have struggled hard to accomplish an inclusive energy policy that will serve our country, its neighbors and, in the longer term, the European Union to a cleaner and more secure society that allows a strong economic growth enabling the climate goals to be met more effectively.

In moments like this, it is easy to feel confident and complete. But we must remember that we have a fragile political situation and a very insecure geopolitical situation. Unexpected event might pull us many years backwards in development. The new policies will be questioned. It is important not to be contented. The development does not stop here. The future is still in need of outstanding accomplishments.

Thank you very much! Again, I'm deeply deeply honored.

Carl Berglöf

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