

2020 03 04

Speech at GMA

Dear Ambassador, colleagues and friends,

Thanks for electing me as the Honorary Member of the Board. It means a lot to me. This day is very special to me. It is a day full of emotions. It feels like something has come to an end after many years - and of course it is true.

I will take some minutes of this meeting giving you a short background of our Chamber, since without a rear view mirror it is very difficult to drive forward.

I visited Lithuania for the first time in 1994 and already in 1996 I was involved in my first projects here. In those years, a lot of Swedish citizens were working in Lithuania. Telia/Sonera, a number of Swedish banks and a few other big Swedish companies were established in the second half of the 90-ies. In such way, I met many Swedes, most of them businesspersons.

I was mainly working with the public sector and NGO's, but quite soon I recognized the need of a meeting point for contacts between Sweden and Lithuania. I discussed this with Carl Berneheim, CEO of CEBECOTIMBER and Gunilla Possenius, chair of the newly established SWEA in Lithuania. (Sorry to say, but Carl passed away some years ago, but I am sure he is with us now somehow).

As a result of these discussions, we presented a proposal to establish a Swedenhouse in Vilnius in December 2000 at our monthly business meeting at the Swedish Embassy. As it is common for Swedish people, a working group was established to find out more about the possibilities to establish a Swedenhouse in Vilnius. A lot of work and meetings were held in the upcoming months.

In December 2001 it was decided to establish a Swedenhouse in Vilnius. This initiative was supported by 12 companies, NGO's and institutions from Sweden and Lithuania.

In January 2002, Swedenhouse in Vilnius was officially established and registered. The first AGM was actually held on 4th of March 2002, exactly 18 years ago. Without any budget or premises and only with 12 members a lot of different small events were organized, and more members joined.

In 2004 we received our premises in a newly built Hanner house at the Europe center. During these years, no one was employed. One person who became important for us was Giedre Berzelionyte, who is now working at the Swedish Embassy. She put a lot of time and engagement into a Swedenhouse, completely voluntary. Thanks for that - it meant a lot!

In September 2005, the members decided to establish a Swedish Chamber in Lithuania by transforming Swedenhouse into a chamber. Bylaws were revised and in January 2006 the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Lithuania was established.

We have used office premises in many places in Vilnius. It started in Hanner business center in Konstitutijos ave. moving to sv. Ignoto and then to premises at the Swedish Embassy and now finally to the recent premises at Workland in Gedimino ave.

Since the Chamber was established, things developed rapidly. More joint members meant increased income, which meant more events and improved services. Today we have appr. 100 members and we are still growing. Our Chamber has a good reputation and is cooperating with many other chambers in Lithuania with the purpose to offer more events and networking opportunities to our members.

All this would not have occurred without a deep engagement of people, companies and institutions believing in the basic democratic values of our Chamber. Respect, tolerance, humility, transparency, cooperation etc. The list of these values is long but important, because it unites us as members of this Chamber. It should always remain as a spirit of our Chamber.

Finally, a big thank you to all of you who have put time and effort to the Chamber in different positions during all the years. It has been a pleasure to work together with you and I have learnt a lot.

Good luck in the future, wishing you all good business. I will still follow everything happening at the Chamber from my bench of retired persons 😊

Thank you.

Jan Hansson

Former Vice Chairperson, Co-founder and Honorary Member of the Board of SCCL