

EISENHOWER FELLOWSHIPS – 2009 Multi Nation Program
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Karin Pettersson is a co-founder and the editor-in-chief of Sweden's leading weekly newsmagazine *Fokus*, which boasts a circulation of over 47,000. Her responsibilities include overseeing editorial policy, strategic development, editorial writing, and publication schedule. Her fellowship goals were to study the internet's impact on both politics and traditional media and to formulate a strategy for *Fokus* to thrive in this new media environment.

The media industry in both Sweden and the U.S. is in the midst of a paradigm shift where both consumers and advertisers are migrating online from the printed page. However, the U.S. has been more deeply affected by this shift as U.S. advertisers have moved away from print to a greater degree than in Sweden, yet at the same time the online advertising model has been less effective than print in generating revenue. This means that advertisers are not as willing to contribute enough for ads to sufficiently finance original reporting. Karin believes that the decline in resources to sponsor original reporting will pose real problems for democracy, leading to lower standards of scrutiny of politicians and other power structures. The good news, at least for *Fokus*, is that experts believe the future for the newsmagazine is considerably brighter than for the daily newspaper.

While the outlook for many in the media industry is somewhat pessimistic, the general view on the internet's influence on politics is opposite; namely, that it will inevitably lead to more diversity, a less hierarchical political structure, and democratization of the political conversation. In Sweden, and indeed the world, there is a certain fascination with the Obama campaign's successful use of the internet to mobilize voters to win the 2008 presidential election. Many in Sweden are calling for a "true Obama campaign". But some political strategists and campaigners who met with Karin during her fellowship pointed out that many myths still surround the Obama campaign. For instance, there is a misconception—which has played a role in influencing election campaigns throughout Europe—that Obama's was "a true grass-roots movement" with regard to policy formulation, while in actuality it was top-down and centralized. While Karin's view of the internet's influence on politics is positive overall, she does conclude that talk of true diversity and new voices emerging with the spread of the internet is more "wishful thinking" than reality, that structurally it is the same type of people who participate in the debate: well-educated, mostly white people who already have a platform, journalists, academics, political strategists and activists. She writes, "The Internet is a great new means of communication and organizing, but it will not by itself tear down the barriers of entry to the debate on politics."

On a personal level, the fellowship gave Karin an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of good leadership. She found that Americans tend to put more faith than Europeans in an individual's ability to change society and accomplish great things. She still believes that in order for real change to happen, more factors need to be in play than a single individual. But, she says, she upgraded her belief in the individual a notch or two. She concludes, "I will return to Sweden with a better sense of my own capabilities, and I hope as a braver and more visionary leader." However, she cautions, "I think it will be important to be realistic and not come back and think that it's possible to change everything immediately."