



Guest Editor's Introduction

Reinvigorating South Africa-Sweden Relations: Politics, Economics, And Society

By Sven Botha

The Republic of South Africa and the Kingdom of Sweden are often said to share a special relationship. This relationship, as Anna-Mart van Wyk's article in this special issue illustrates, is firmly rooted in Sweden's support for the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Since then, both South Africa and Sweden, and indeed the world as a whole, have experienced significant political, economic, and social changes. The bilateral relationship between South Africa and Sweden has grown since the former's transition to democracy on the 27th of April 1994. To this end, South Africa and Sweden enjoy a bi-national commission

and a total of 22 bilateral agreements¹ (DIRCO, 2022). In addition to these milestones, innovative initiatives have been established in areas of mutual concern. Chief examples in this regard include the South Africa-Sweden University Forum (SASUF)² and the Cape Town-Stockholm Connect Initiative³, which seek to stimulate collaboration in higher education and business and technology respectively. There have also been developments in our cultural exchanges in recent years. One such example was the facilitation of the Sweden-South Africa Live Connection: Digitally Yours Campaign (hereafter the Digitally Yours

Campaign) which sought to keep both countries connected virtually during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Digitally Yours Campaign ran from the 4th of April 2020 until the 2nd of May 2020 and hosted a number of virtual exchanges⁴ whereby both Swedish and South African artists participated in roundtable discussions and cultural performances in the areas of fashion, poetry, and music (Embassy of Sweden in Pretoria, 2020).

Despite these encouraging and innovative developments occurring in the bilateral relationship between South Africa and Sweden, scholarly appetite on the subject of South Africa-Sweden Relations remains scant as the majority of the scholarship has restricted itself to the pre-1994 relationship (Magnusson, 1974; Sellström, 1999; Sellström, 2002a; Sellström, 2002b; Coetzee, 2020; Glover, 2021; Coetzee, 2021). In response to this reality, two key initiatives have been implemented, namely: the Student Essay Contest on South Africa-Sweden Relations and the publication of this double special issue on South Africa-Sweden Relations. The latter undertaking took place in 2022 and afforded senior or leaving undergraduate students (3rd and 4th year students) from any discipline the opportunity to submit an essay of no more than 3,000 words in one of five categories, namely: gender issues, cultural issues, environmental issues, academic/knowledge exchange, and science and technology. Within the context of their preferred category, participating students were asked to consider how South Africa and Sweden could advance their bilateral exchanges in innovative and collaborative ways. In the end, over 30 submissions were received. The essays were judged by a panel of 14 academics (seven from each country) and the winners within each category were hosted by the Swedish Ambassador, H.E Håkan Juholt, at his Residence in Pretoria in October 2022. This project was jointly hosted by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg, the SASUF network, and the Embassy of Sweden in South Africa with a triangular objective: to foster closer ties between South African and Swedish students, to foster closer ties between South African and Swedish academics, and to create awareness for contemporary South Africa-Sweden Relations.

Building upon the momentum of the Essay Contest, this double special issue sought to elicit

contributions from academics and practitioners from both countries that explain and assess the various aspects of South Africa-Sweden Relations. Matters of historical solidarity, trade, political cooperation within the United Nations Security Council, arts and culture, and higher education are all addressed across the double special issue. In addition to traditional assessments of bilateral relations, this double special issue further contributes to the discourse on South Africa-Sweden Relations by featuring contributions that compare key social and political issues evident in both states. This allows for the emergence of unique insights which could be used to brainstorm ways in which South Africa and Sweden could further expand upon their bilateral exchanges. Articles comparing compliance with good international citizenship as well as responses to mass migration and active citizenship (on the domestic level) are included in the special issue. This project acknowledges that Nordic states other than Sweden have contributed to South Africa's dispensation and have also actively sought firm bilateral relations with South Africa. To this end, an article exploring the prospects for the emergence of a strategic partnership between South Africa and the Nordic bloc wraps up the double special issue. Finally, given that the special issue's means of assessing bilateral relations includes both international and domestic issues, the guest editor pens a concluding article in the second half of this special issue introducing a new analytical framework

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for the assessing of bilateral relations between states within the international system. The key findings and common trends from across the double special issue will also be reflected upon in this concluding contribution.

The facilitation of both the Essay Contest and the double special issues has laid the ground work for the exploration of further cooperation between students, practitioners, and academics from both South Africa and Sweden. The tireless efforts of various colleagues from across both projects is herein duly acknowledged and deeply appreciated. For the Essay Contest a special vote of thanks goes to the Panel of Judges, the SASUF team at Upsala University, the Department of Politics and International Relations and the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg, and the Embassy of Sweden in Pretoria. For the special issue, much gratitude goes to the erudite contributors, the peer reviewers, and The Thinker's editorial and production teams. The collective efforts made by colleagues from across both projects have gone a considerable way to furthering intellectual interest in South Africa-Sweden Relations.

Notes

1. This total includes three joint agreements between South Africa and the wider Nordic region.
2. SASUF is a bilateral network of 40 universities across Sweden and South Africa aimed at promoting exchanges in education, research, and innovation. Refer to the article by Sven Botha and Helin Bäckman Kartal in the next edition of this special issue to learn more about how SASUF has become a leading driver of knowledge diplomacy between both countries.

3. The Cape Town-Stockholm Connect Initiative is a bilateral platform tasked with connecting the cities of Cape Town and Stockholm under the banner of technological innovation and cooperation. For more information, visit: www.siliconcape.com/cape-town-stockholm-connect-csc/

4. These exchanges are still available to view online for free via the Embassy of Sweden's Facebook page. For more information, please refer to the following link: www.facebook.com/SwedeninSA/videos

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