

Greeting from Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, Director of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the "Culturescapes" Festival in Basel

"Culturescapes" –

Cultural forms.

Landscapes of expression.

A geography of perception.

And: Space for encounters.

In this year's Culturescapes Festival we encounter Estonia. A land with which we have much in common: although small from a geographical viewpoint, both our countries are characterised by a strong will to independence, a pioneering economic spirit and deeply rooted social and cultural traditions.

Estonia and Switzerland are also united in a common space: Europe. Since the end of the Cold War we have used this space to deepen our connections. We have developed numerous fields of cooperation, first within the framework of transition aid and then especially after Estonia joined the European Union, within the bilateral accord between Switzerland and the EU. Manifold human contacts have been established, between politicians, representatives of industry and commerce, scientists and those working in the arts. The reconstruction of the Kunsthalle (art gallery) in Tallinn is an example of this vitality. The premises there were restored over a period of several years thanks to the initiative of the Swiss artist Georg Steinmann and the curator of the Kunsthalle, Anu Liivak. In 1995 they were then opened to the public as a "work of art uniting ethical and aesthetical values".

Despite having such a great deal in common and many connections, in reality we know relatively little about each other. Of course we know the magnificent Estonian composer Arvo Paert; and naturally the works of the well-known Swiss writers Frisch und Dürrenmatt are read in Estonia too. And yet - our very different historical experiences in the 20th century have moulded a geography of mutual perception which is above all limited to what is widely-known, to clichés.

I am therefore especially pleased that this year's Culturescapes Festival is devoted to Estonia. We shall have the stirring opportunity of experiencing Estonia; of discovering musical, cinematic and literary landscapes and shall be able to enter a cultural, but at the same time analytical scientific dialogue with Estonia.

I should like to welcome you most warmly to this encounter between friends, to this celebration of the senses and to wish you many fascinating and beautiful moments.