

You have given a number of interviews to many different kinds of media. Your opinion counts, you are quoted and sometimes criticised. Thus, the responsibility for each word and each sentence is considerable. Do you like giving interviews, or is it rather a tedious duty inevitable in your high office?

With interviews, much depends on the subject and the questions. If the journalists know their subject and its background, and pose interesting questions, giving an interview is not a tedious burden. In such cases, an interview is more like an exchange of thoughts or a conversation.

When interviews are concerned, I have rather been disturbed by selective quotations, and the poor quality of translations back to Estonian if an interview has been given to foreign media. In such cases, the original point and the context of my words may get lost and confusion may occur.

Does it disturb you to be called a foreign Estonia?

Of course it does. I am an Estonian, simply an Estonian. Dividing Estonians into those living at home and those living abroad was perhaps justified at the time of the Iron Curtain, but not any longer. For instance, speaking of my fellow Estonians living in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Edmonton or Ottawa, I use the generic term „Canadian Estonians”.

Furthermore, it is common to label as foreign those Estonians who were – or whose parents were – forced to leave Estonia to escape the last World War. But what about the ten thousands that have left Estonia in the last two decades, after the opening of the borders?

You have personally been appealing to Estonians to return home, and also the Estonian state has a special programme for Estonians moving back to their native country. Unfortunately the response has not been substantial, at least not in Canada. Have you got any ideas on how to change people's attitude in this respect, how to "serve" the invitation to return home in an even more attractive way?

I fully appreciate how complicated such a move may be. On the one hand, you are going to your native country, if we are talking about the first generation. You may have relatives there, but your own family, in many cases, remains here, as well as friends, habits and customs that have become part of your nature. Such a change is never easy.

On the other hand, it is not an opportunity to be abandoned lightly. What does Estonia have to offer? Almost similar quality of life, but in a purer environment; prices that are in many respects comparable to Canada's, while your economic well-being would be considerably over the Estonian average; an opportunity to live in the ambience of the Estonian language and ideas.

The Canadian Estonians of the second and third generation, on the other hand, could look upon Estonia as a rapidly developing and changing country on the coast of the Baltic Sea, offering to inventive people and those open to challenge a multitude of opportunities that are no longer to be found in a so-called well-established society. Just an example: Kyllike Sillaste-Elling, foreign policy counsellor to several Estonian Prime Ministers, once a highly appreciated colleague of mine in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one of the most brilliant brains in Estonia's foreign policy, can one day write a book of memoirs – quite a different book from the one she could have written if she had stayed in Canada.

What are your views on the future and mission of foreign Estonians today, when the first generation is coming to the end of their journey and the following generations are melting into the population of their adopted countries? What could be their role in introducing Estonia in the world? Could they be of better use to their country if they were in Estonia?

Everyone is of the best use where he or she feels safest and best. The role of Estonian

communities abroad is to build a bridge between Estonia and their adopted countries. And more than that. Last summer, I was proud to see the Canadian Estonian choirs walking in the Song Festival procession. Also, I am very grateful to Maret Truuvert and Henn Kurvits, who have for many years made it possible for the Estonian officers studying at Borden to feel at home in Canada.

Let us also keep in mind that *The Singing Revolution*, a film by Jim Tusty and the producer Steve Jürvetson, both of them belonging to the second-generation Estonians abroad, is one of the most successful projects of positive advertising for Estonia of all times. Judging by their language skills, the authors of the film may not seem so Estonian at first sight, but still they have used their money, their skills and their interest in introducing the land of their forefathers to the world.

The relations between Canada and Estonia are traditionally friendly, yet there seems still to be a lot of room for development. Is Estonia planning to appoint a resident ambassador to Canada?

Looking at the activities of Rasmus Lumi, the charge d'affaires ad interim in Ottawa, I can see that he is just as brave and efficient as an ambassador would be. Appointing ambassadors and opening new embassies is the job of the Government, or more precisely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it is not proper for the President to interfere with it. Still I do think that Estonia must be duly represented as a state in all our NATO partner countries.

What could be done to promote economic and cultural relations between Canada and Estonia?

Economic relations depend mostly on decisions made by companies and entrepreneurs. With her liberal economic policy, Estonia has extended a hand to everyone wishing to invest in

Estonia or do business in Estonia.

The issue of Canadian-Estonian relations is in fact much broader. I believe we have much to learn from each other and quite a lot to discover about each other. For instance, in the meeting with the Canadian Minister of Defence, we were invited to participate in the NATO international centre of cyber defence, as cyber defence is directed against one of the threats and challenges of the 21st century, which all countries must be prepared to fight.

I fear that Estonians and Canadians know unacceptably little about each other. It is probably not an overstatement when I say that for many Estonians, Canada mostly means the neighbourhood of the US and ice hockey. Besides those things, it is still worth knowing that Canada has breathtakingly beautiful and pure nature, cities that have topped international lists of the world's most liveable cities for years, and a wildly manifold culture –from the author Michael Ondaatje or the poet Robert Bringhurst to the band *The Arcade Fire*, my favourite of recent years.

Relations can only be developed by learning and mutual interest. I hope my visit to Canada will further both of them.

Estonia and the European Union. From time to time we hear alarm signals that Estonia has yet again joined a union that tries to regulate Estonia's domestic affairs „from above”. The Parliaments of Latvia and Lithuania ratified the Lisbon Agreement in May, and in the Estonian Riigikogu there will be a vote in June. Is it in Estonia's interests to approve the Lisbon Agreement?

The short answer is „yes”. Did you know that for quite some time, Estonians were the greatest supporters of the European Union among all the member states? Estonians like the European Union, owing to our membership, all Europe is open to us; and it is thanks to the European Union that life has got a boost in many rural areas of Estonia.

But I would like give a longer answer. Today, the European Union is facing serious challenges concerning the competitiveness of the Union. If we cannot master these challenges, we will – in no longer than 25 years – have lost part of the well-being that we are enjoying today. Europe can avoid the gradual loss of its competitiveness in the globalising economy if we do something about it. The reforms agreement is our first step, because – as I said this spring when speaking at the European Parliament – without expanding Qualified Majority Voting we will founder in paralysis, without a President and a Foreign Minister we simply will punch far below our weight.

Europe will be a strong partner in the world only as a solid union, not as a group of member states with their different interests. It does not matter whether we are talking about the competitiveness of the Union, the climate change, the energy security, migration, or about the voice of the European Union on the international arena in the most general terms. For small countries, this is self-evident, but even the interests of large countries would be better protected this way.

The European Union should revert to one of the most fundamental truths forming the basis of the Union: national interests are best protected when we all give up a fraction of them, for the Union as a whole to benefit. And we must look into the future. We need a vision and an understanding of the world in 20 or 25 years.

What is Estonia's greatest challenge today, and the greatest concern?

Estonia's greatest challenge is to mature into a country where it is safe for all the inhabitants to live, to work and to raise their children. In the past 20 years, Estonians have done an enormous job, transforming a former Soviet republic with its outdated infrastructure, dysfunctional economy and mentally frustrated main nationality into a successful and developing member of the European Union.

The greatest concern is the population. Estonian men do not have a very commendable lifestyle, and therefore their life expectancy is not very long. Less alcohol and stress and car-racing, more exercise and healthy food – there is a recipe that could help to change the situation. Luckily, in the last few years, many children have been born and the current trends

give us hope that in the near future, we can talk about the natural growth and not the decrease of the population.

We must still work hard to modernise our education system and enhance the competitiveness of our economy. But we shall manage. A recent research placed the skills of Estonian secondary school students second in Europe and fifth in the whole world. Only Finland, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong did better than we.

Estonians are tenacious, and they won't stop before they have caught up with their closest neighbours. Finland is a great example to us, and we compare ourselves with Finland at every step. This spurs us on, and a reasonable amount of envy and desire to keep up with your neighbours is always better than letting yourself go. Looking at the Estonians' optimism and increasing self-reliance, and the beautiful, attractive villages that only recently were shabby kolkhoz centres, I am quite sure that we keep on doing very well.

We thank you for your answers, Mr. President, and wish you all possible success. See you in Toronto!