

Your Majesty the King!
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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to Estonia. Hopefully, your trip from Belgium and the capital of the European Union to the very eastern border of the European Union transpired pleasantly and smoothly. And so it should in a good Europe. A good Europe that we are shaping together—on that is better, safer and friendlier.

Not so long ago, the situation in Europe was completely different—60 years ago Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Prime Minister at the time and one of the “fathers” of the European Union, gave a speech at the Third U.N. General Assembly which is known as the “fear speech” (*Discours de la Peur*). Although it was actually a speech of great courage, in which Spaak announced to the Soviet delegate that the reason for the West’s concern was the behavior of the Soviet empire. At that time, the Estonians thanked Belgium and its brave prime minister. The Estonian exiles that had escaped to the Free World did so in a public letter of thanks to Prime Minister Spaak, while the Estonians at home did so silently, in their hearts.

Today, this is all in the past and when we speak about Europe we speak primarily of Europe’s solidarity and courage—also in respect to its foreign and security policies. Our special thanks go to Belgium for its solidarity and resolve—Belgium never recognized the Soviet annexation of the Baltic countries, including Estonia. We know that Belgians are not afraid to express themselves directly and frankly—they are not afraid to speak from the heart.

We also know that Belgians are not afraid of making decisions. In the spring of 2004, at a time when NATO membership for the Baltic countries was only a few days away, but NATO was still facing difficulties about whether to start a Baltic air defence mission, it was Belgium that boldly stepped forward and voluntarily sent the first planes into the Baltic skies, thereby breaking the deadlock. We experience the results of this decision every day. We are earnestly grateful for this, and will never forget it.

Thanks to your country’s location at the crossroads of Europe, and your experiences based on this, Belgians have always been dedicated Europeans and participated in the establishment and development of both the EU and NATO. I can affirm that Estonian support for the European Union is not only steadfast, but increasing, as is our support for Estonia’s membership in NATO, where our countries participate in the security and stabilization operations of the ISAF in Afghanistan.

We are united by historical and political experiences. However, it is primarily the people behind these experiences whose spirit and wisdom has provided us with our policies and history. We have much that is good uniting us. We are information technology countries, and we are also port and maritime countries.

We have companies in both spheres whose relations are strengthening. I believe that the

business and research seminar associated with your visit will make an important contribution to this. If, in the medieval Hanseatic League, the merchants of Tallinn (Reval at that time) traded briskly with Antwerp and Bruges—and many documents in our capital's archives give testimony to this—why should our business ties not develop in the large network of today's EU, where bilateral relations also have an important place.

Allow me to pause briefly on the people that unite our people and cultures, and on our common values. Already in 1484, 15-year-old Michel Sittow, whose father came from the Low Countries, set out from Reval to Bruges on his way to study with Master Hans Memling; he later became the first internationally recognized artist from Estonia who worked at that time at the courts of Mechelen and Madrid.

The artistic treasures created in the Low Countries also started to reach the Land of Mary in the Middle Ages. Many works by masters from the Low Countries can be found in our museums. Due to their uniqueness, special mention should be made of the tapestries ordered from the Low Countries by the Tallinn Town Council, each of which has the Tallinn coat of arms woven into it along with the mark of Enghien, the place where they were produced. It is very lucky that these tapestries, which were completed in 1547, have survived and we can show them to you.

Of course, contemporary artistic ties are more dynamic, as is time itself—last year there was an exhibit of the works by Eduard Wiiralt, internationally Estonia's most famous artist, in Namur. At the beginning of the same year, 2007, we were able to become acquainted with the works of Felicien Rops here in Tallinn. The works and worldview of Wiiralt and Rops are surprisingly similar.

Your Majesty, your visit is a great and long-awaited event for us. We know that you love to be among your people, being a symbol of your country and its unity.

Honorable Queen, we have heard much about your dedication to charity. Children, education, our future is close to your heart. Your visit tomorrow to Central-Estonia is testimony to your broad gaze and thirst for knowledge. We are well-aware of your active role as a supporter of the fine arts. We wish you energy and success in your noble activities.

In conclusion, allow me to recall a time about hundred years ago, when the emerging Estonian culture was decisively turning its face toward Europe. The “angry young men” that set the tone for the times—today we know them as Young Estonia—were searching for a path for Estonians to enter Europe's cultural space. The motto of Young Estonia was “Stay Estonian, but become European!” In this connection, one usually speaks about France and Paris. However, many forget that an important role in the development of Estonian literature, and especially theatre, as well as in the ideology of Young Estonia as whole, was played by the great Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck, and that “The Blue Bird” and his other plays are produced in Estonian theatres time and again. Thus, without knowing it, Maeterlinck contributed to our becoming Europeans.

I wish the Belgian people good fortune and devotion, and call up you to join me in a toast to the health of the Belgian King and Queen. Here's to the honour of the Belgian people, and the

well-being of us all!