

Your Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to visit Sweden, a friendly country that is close to the hearts of Estonians, and to convey our thanks and regards. No country on earth has had a greater influence on Estonia's history and present course.

Our history and our current affairs have become entwined in a manner unprecedented anywhere in the world. The countless ties between Sweden and Estonia date back to even before the Viking era. The Ynglinga Saga makes mention of how King Yngvar of Svealand made an incursion to Estonia, fell in battle and was buried by the sea in Adalsysla.

Much later, the 16th and 17th century became instilled in the minds of Estonians as the "good old Swedish era". Reduction of landed estates, emancipation of the Estonian peasants from serfdom on crown manors, establishment of parish schools and initiatives to educate the population all led to sweeping changes in the nation's psyche. The flowers that budded in the good old Swedish era are in full bloom today, showing that the seed fell on fertile soil. The Estonian literacy rate was more than 90% at the end of the 19th century and the Academia Gustaviana founded in Tartu more than 380 years ago is still operating fruitfully. This institution has had an invaluable influence on science, education and culture in Estonia and the entire Baltic region.

The passing of centuries could not extinguish the ethos of the good Swedish era, nor is it surprising that the Estonians who fled to Sweden in 1944 kept alive their dream of restoring an independent Estonian state. After all, "the worst feeling of all is losing your faith in your country and homeland," wrote the writer August Gailit, who lived in exile in Sweden.

More than 20,000 Estonians found safe refuge on the other shore of the Baltic Sea. For a time, before moving on to America, my family was among them, and Stockholm is the city of my birth. But Estonians found much more here – an understanding and supportive attitude, and opportunities for getting a good education and becoming full-fledged members of Swedish society. Sweden became a second home and remained so for decades.

Thanks to all this, when we started to rebuild our own country 20 years ago, we were able to draw on Swedish advice and Sweden's experience of living in the free world, which was especially essential and welcome. Estonian economic and cultural life received a boost, and so did the foreign service and government service as a whole. This is Sweden's contribution to Estonia's future and as such it is very highly appreciated. But in a similar manner, we can find Swedish Estonians among Sweden's diplomats, politicians, artists and businessmen. The contribution has thus proved to be mutually strengthening and conducive to mutual understanding.

Viewed from either the east or west shore of the Baltic, we are currently living in the most secure, peaceful era history has known. The door to this era was opened for Estonia by very strong support and carefully considered actions of our friends both near and far. Swedish diplomat Lars Fredén, an insider in Sweden's Baltic policy circles in the 1990s, wrote the following in his memoirs: "It is actually noteworthy that former torturers, prison guards and informers who are now in their retirement lived, and still do live, side by side with their victims, without anything happening." Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians are peaceable peoples. Sweden must be thankful that things went as they did.

Sweden's support for Estonian integration with the European Union was conspicuous in all fields, but the political and moral support was the most important: it led to a sense of security about the future, a future that is in our own hands and which we can use for building, once more, a safe, secure and free home.

Today Sweden and Estonia are good partners in the European Union and see many issues the same way. We are developing the Baltic Sea strategy further. We support European Union enlargement and integration of the Eastern Partnership. Estonia and Sweden are also united by successful cooperation in the field of development assistance. We offer public servants in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova training programs at the Estonian School of Diplomacy. These programs have now evolved into an Eastern Partnership training centre to be opened shortly in Tallinn, above all intended to support these countries on their road to reforms, partly on the basis of Estonia's own experience.

Thanks to Sweden, we were able to build our own national defence structures faster. Today Estonia is a member of the world's strongest defence organization, and along with Sweden we contribute to broader security as part of the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan and the European Union's Nordic Battle Group. In facing today's challenges, we put great importance

on cooperation with Sweden in the field of cybersecurity. We have provided advice and assistance to each other also in dealing with this new and growing security threat. As a natural continuation, we will be discussing relevant cooperation opportunities at tomorrow's cybersecurity seminar at the National Defence College, where a number of Estonian cyber-experts are currently studying.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt, who is likewise one of my best Swedish friends, called Estonia the European economic tiger. Major investments from Sweden have a role in this. Particularly at the beginning of re-independence, these investments lent credibility to the choices Estonia made in the eyes of the world. With the good state of its national finances, Estonia currently confirms the traditional Nordic understanding of accountability and sustainability.

Both Estonia and Sweden are emerging from the recession stronger than they were before. Forecasts are calling for Estonian economic growth to be the highest in the Eurozone this year. The Swedish economy has recovered at a record pace and the forecasts are optimistic. As of December we are also partners in the OECD. It is clear that accession to the Eurozone will raise the attractiveness of the Estonian economy even more, by contributing to new job growth, innovation and stimulating trade. It is a quality label that supports the primary values for the economy – trust and self-confidence. If we are sure of ourselves, others will have confidence in us, too.

Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,

The kings of Sweden have had contacts with Estonia since the 14th century, the time of Magnus Eriksson. The historical continuity and the Swedish royal family's ties with Estonia are symbolized by Swedish St. Michael's Church in Tallinn. Alongside Your Majesty, the names of your father Gustaf Adolf, grandfather Gustaf VI Adolf and great-grandfather Gustaf V are also memorialized on the marble plaque there.

In April 1992 Estonia was dressed in resplendent array on the occasion of the first visit to the country by King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia. This was a historic moment. It was as if the white ship, which had symbolized the two-way maritime relations of the era 50 years prior, had finally called in Tallinn's port in the form of the *M/S Visborg*. At no time before or since then has Tallinn seen more people on hand to welcome a ship.

Yet the first crowned head of Sweden to make a state visit to Estonia was Gustaf V in June 1929, in a return visit after Estonian head of state Jaan Tõnisson travelled to Sweden on the occasion of the King's 70th birthday. When, a few years later, the last pre-war Estonian ambassador to Stockholm, Heinrich Laretei, presented his credentials to King Gustaf V, Laretei had managed to utter only "Votre Majesté", before the king stepped up to meet him, accepted his credentials and said: "Let us dispense with the decorum and sit down by the window and have a chat."

In the same manner, without excess pomp, and springing from genuine interest and trust, our relations are developing today as well, 75 years later. We sit and have a chat, discuss the current issues, take pleasure in each other's successes. We are able to draw on our mutual friendship and together take strides toward future challenges. This is a foundation that will endure over time.

I thank you for your friendship, support and generosity.

Let us raise our glasses in your honour, and to Sweden's health and prosperity!