

**Minister of Culture Tõnis Lukas' welcoming speech  
at Estonian Institute's Culture seminar 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2019**

I am happy to welcome you here today at the seminar dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the Estonian Institute.

The Institute was established as civic initiative by our legendary former President Lennart Meri with the aim to develop cultural and educational relations and to present Estonia abroad. Lennart Meri, by the way, would have celebrated his 90th anniversary this year.

During its first years, the Estonian Institute partly fulfilled the role of a hotbed for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the future Estonian diplomats. The Institute's information and culture points operated in various places in Western Europe and Scandinavia, and quite a few developed into an embassy of the Republic of Estonia in the course of restoring diplomatic relations. Soon things took their normal course and the institute focused on sharing information about and promoting the culture of Estonia. Today the institute contributes to learning and promoting Estonian language and culture in Estonia and abroad. With its branches in Helsinki and Budapest, it contributes to strong cultural and linguistic ties between our Finno-Ugric people. And being part of the EUNIC network and the co-president of the Tallinn cluster at the moment, the Estonian Institute also participates actively in international cooperation and discussions about future trends of cultural internationalization.

So, Estonian Institute is in every way fit to host today's seminar about cultural exchange and enhanced cultural cooperation.

Our former President Lennart Meri has said „Trust isn't a dowry that you collect into a big coffer until it's full. Trust needs to be renewed every single morning, restored from day in to day out, to grow as a capital and to keep as the initial capital.“

It is needless to say here at today's seminar, bringing together Nordic and Baltic cultural institutes and the members of EUNIC Tallinn cluster, that **CULTURE IS THE VEHICLE OF TRUST**. Cultural cooperation and doing things together is bridging the gap between people and societies. Culture builds mutual understanding. Moreover, we all need this in these changing times.

And further, culture is the sphere where the size does not matter, where smaller countries can be equal to big ones and play the same active role on a wider international scene.

Again our former President Lennart Meri has said: „In the ever changing world the victory belongs to those who walk at the same pace as the rest of the world, who walk a little bit faster than the rest of the world, to those who reached ahead of the world, can foresee those problems, questions and those solutions that the life puts in front of them.“

Here, I think culture is just the perfect answer. Culture and cultural cooperation open up new horizons. Culture can be an answer to problems and questions facing us both in equal opportunities, health and social welfare as well as economic growth and innovation. To cater for all this culture needs nourishment. Yes, it also needs finances, but dialogue and cooperation are equally important. Our creative people can develop and flourish only in mutual international contacts with others. So has it been throughout history and it is nowadays.

Finally, yet importantly, culture is tightly connected to language, and Estonian culture lives hand in hand with Estonian language. If we look at all the 8000 languages in the world, Estonian is a big one among them. We all should make great efforts to keep it and to ensure our culture stay big in the future as well. Here, the Estonian Institute has an important role to play with its language and culture courses, Estonian language teachers' network and the very recent global Estonian week. Learning and teaching a language opens a door to new world, new way of thinking.

Dear friends, I wish you good and fruitful discussions today with many interesting ideas for future cooperation.

Thank you!