

Mr Mayor, dear Mr Loodmaa, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today in Tartu we witness an important milestone in the cooperation of Finland and Estonia: the opening of an Honorary Consulate of Finland. I am truly pleased that I have the honor and the pleasure to represent Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland in this happy occasion and open the Consulate.

As the President of the Republic Sauli Niinistö has said: we Finns and Estonians are very close to each other. We are neighbors. We are language relatives. We have shared history. Our bilateral as well as our regional and European union partnerships unites us. These together with the most significant factor, the people who move around our two countries, create a real bridge between our countries. In Tartu the other end of the bridge will be the Consulate and the carefully and well-chosen consul, Verni Loodmaa.

The challenges of today are best faced together. Together we can build our common region on both sides of the Gulf of Finland to be even better, more stable and prosperous. To be successful we need innovation, education, training, energy and transportation development as well as strong tradition in industry.

Tartu is known in Finland as a University City and city of culture. But Tartu is also a significant economic center. It is important that Finnish entrepreneurs get to know better the possibilities Tartu offers and not to stay only in Tallinn region. From touristic point of view Tartu offers a lot of interesting sights. But the story is the same; too many Finnish tourists stay only in Tallinn. In this respect the Honorary Consulate has an important role and I am convinced that Mr. Loodmaa has all the skills and networks to strengthen economical and touristic ties between Finland and Tartu and to provide the Embassy and and the Finnish companies with invaluable assistance when they seek to make contact with representatives of business and industry.

For the last five years the Team Finland network has promoted Finland and success of Finnish companies abroad, enhanced their internationalization, attracted foreign investments to Finland, and supported Finland's country brand.

The long-standing focus in honorary consular activities has been on legal and administrative services for Finnish citizens. Nowadays, the role of fostering economic, commercial and cultural relations has increasing emphasis.

There are now three Honorary Consulates in Estonia; Pärnu, Narva and Tartu. The honorary consuls form the basis of Embassy's regional network. Other functionaries of Team Finland network are the Finnish-Estonian Chamber of Commerce, offices of Finnish Cultural Institute in Tallinn and Tartu, local Finland Associations, Ingrian communities, Finnish Church, Finnish Schools in Tallinn and Tartu, as well as all Finnish companies and all Finns living in Estonia. In Estonia the network is in deed very broad and reflects the wide scale of interests neighbors share.

Honorary consuls play an important role also in enhancing the perception of Finland locally. The overall Finland promotion and networking that is a part of the duties of honorary consuls complements their economic and export promotion activities. Mr Loodmaa has all these skills and is well known for his talent and reliability.

With these words it is my great pleasure to wish you, Mr Loodmaa all the success in your important work as the honorary consul of Finland.