

**Esther Waeber-Kalbermatten, Présidente du Conseil d'Etat
Cheffe du Département de la santé, des affaires sociales et de la culture**

Reception of the Ambassador of the Slovak Republic

Mardi 04 décembre 2018, 11h00, Château Mercier, Sierre

**Your Excellency Madam Andrea Elscheková
Motisová, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic**

**Members of the delegation of the Slovak
Republic**

**President of the Cantonal Parliament, Anne-
Marie Sauthier**

Cantonal Councilor Roberto Schmidt

Cantonal Vice-Chancellor, Monique Albrecht

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Guests,

A Hearty Welcome to the Canton of Valais!

It is a special honor for me to welcome you on behalf of the government, dear Ambassador, to the Chateau Mercier for your official visit to the Canton of Valais today.

Relations between Switzerland and the Slovak Republic are particularly close at the level of civil society. In 1968, with the end of the Prague Spring, around 13,000 Czechoslovak refugees were admitted to Switzerland.

In addition, since 2007 relations between Slovakia and the Swiss Federal Council have intensified. This is mainly due to the bilateral framework agreement on the implementation of the Swiss-Slovak cooperation programme to reduce economic and social disparities within the enlarged European Union.

The Slovak Republic and Valais also have a couple of geographical, topographical, ecological and sporting characteristics in common:

- Beautiful and worth protecting landscapes – *you*, with the primeval beech forests in the Carpathians and the caves of the Slovak and Aggtelek Karst and *we* with the Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch and the Glacier of Aletsch, have a UNESCO natural heritage that was formed by ice and glaciers.
- Enthusiasm for ice hockey – Switzerland was able to beat Slovakia for the first time in ice hockey at the 2018 World Championship. At the next Ice Hockey World Championship in the year 2019, hosted by *you*, the Slovak Republic, *you* might be able to take revenge. Our most famous ice hockey player from Valais is currently Nico Hischier, who plays for the New Jersey Devils in the NHL (National Hockey League).

- Like Switzerland, the Slovak Republic is a landlocked and transit country that has to deal with different groups of interests and demands.
- Also when it comes to the animal world, we have things in common; Since lynxes, in somewhat higher locations than yours, hunting game and foxes are also at home in Valais. I noticed that at the 2019 Ice Hockey World Championship the mascot will be a bear. For several years now, the wolf has been reappearing in our region. The majority of the people is fighting the wolves and it is mostly hoped that no bears will follow.

The canton of Valais is particularly famous for its natural landscapes. You are certainly familiar with the unique Matterhorn, the fascinating Glacier of Aletsch and the beautiful Rhone Valley, which we overlook from Chateau Mercier.

Besides, the Valais also has modern industrial sites, such as Lonza in Visp as a chemicals group or Novelis and Constellium in Sierre, which are active in the aluminum industry.

Furthermore, the Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) conducts innovative research in the field of energy and sustainability in the capital of the canton of Sion.

Finally yet importantly, the Valais is characterised by agriculture. Probably best known are our vineyards, of which the Valais wines are among the best in Switzerland.

The building where we are today, Chateau Mercier, was built between 1906 and 1908. Today it is a bit like the "Château of the Government", but a castle whose use is multiple: a place of reception for the Government, a place for seminars or weddings, a place of exchange (literary meetings, Orient-Occident meetings, film writing workshops), a place of culture and relaxation.

I am looking forward to learn more about the Slovak Republic of today by your presence and to discover further similarities with you during lunch.

Finally, I hope that the good understanding between our countries will remain in the future and that you will be able to personally experience and enjoy the pleasant particularities of Switzerland and Valais.

Welcome !