

Address by Ambassador Stefan Estermann

Dear Alumni of EHL
Dear Guests
Dear Friends

I am deeply honored to greet you tonight on the occasion of the “EHL in Athens” Alumni Networking Event.

My name is Stefan Estermann and I am the Ambassador of Switzerland to Greece since September 2022. Over the past two years, I have had the privilege to discover a fascinating and beautiful country, with a rich, if sometimes also complicated history.

The relations between Switzerland and Greece are intense ever since the foundation of the modern Greek State, when Greece liberated itself from the Ottoman occupation. Switzerland was at that time an epicenter of philhellenism, a pan-european movement that supported the Greeks in their fight for independence.

Today, we are two nations with a deeply rooted European identity, different in many ways, but united by strong bonds of friendship and common values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

And there is one more value that both of our countries share, but where Greece without any doubt excels: It's “Philoxenia”, the love of the stranger, the Art of welcoming and making a stranger feel at home. I experienced this amazing hospitality in so many instances, be it in Athens, Patras, Thessaloniki or Iraklion, on a small remote island or in a mountain village on the foot of the legendary mount Olympus. Greek hospitality is unique without any doubt, because it is so spontaneous and authentic. And it is surprising again and again, it never becomes a meaningless routine.

EHL, the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne, is the world's leading hospitality management school, and I am thrilled to discover that there is such an important Alumni chapter here in Greece. Greece is one of the world's most famous tourist destinations. Last year alone, we were counting 560'000 Swiss visitors coming to Greece. This is an amazing number given the fact that we are a nation of only 9 million...!

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Alumni, you have studied at EHL and are now working in Greece's thriving hospitality sector. You are hospitality Ambassadors, and you are the best bridges between our two countries.

I am happy to celebrate hospitality and be with you tonight in beautiful Glyfada!