

## **Kristi Jõelett-Nastaj – SEA’s president who moved back homeland**

### **You were away from Estonia for 14 years. What changes do you see in Estonia and in Estonians?**

I went to study in Switzerland right after high school so I don't have any previous work experience here, so I can't bring so much contrast in my work. At the state level, however, it can be seen everywhere. There are many companies that have been established in Estonia and now operate on a global scale. It is visible to the eye that there are many modern buildings, everything is being renovated, just made beautiful. We have a lot of driving and we can feel how roads are better. In terms of free time, new areas have been established, such as Noblessner and Telliskivi - these are pretty cool places to get together and spend time comfortably.

The digital side of Estonia has to be also highlighted. In almost no other country is everything so digital. Here you can give digital signatures, do banking, school systems and healthcare are digital. It is great that we have this, and especially now in the time of the corona, it greatly simplifies all operations.

### **How did you come to the idea to move back to Estonia? How long did it take from idea to realization?**

I have never ruled out that I will actually return to Estonia. That feeling just arose. I felt I had been away long enough to make that decision whether to stay or move back. The idea came about some time ago, but the implementation of the plan went really fast, in a few months.

### **What made you most happy thinking about living in Estonia again?**

That I can be more with my family, loved ones and friends. I don't always have to plan for months or weeks in advance to go to someone's birthday or have a meeting. It's much easier. Of course, getting together during the corona time is a bit more tricky.

### **What did you worry about most when you returned home?**

I didn't worry at all.

### **Your decided to move in this spring, when there was a special situation in Europe due to Codiv-19. How did this affect the whole process?**

The move went surprisingly well. We didn't know whether the moving car would be sent back to Switzerland and later to Estonia or what would become of our belongings, but everything went according to our plan. I was able to fly at the desired time, but the only difference was that the airports were empty and I had to fill in a declaration when I arrived in Estonia.

Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to have a good-by-party with my friends and colleagues in

Switzerland. It was a pity. Maybe someday in the future.

### **Does living again in Estonia correspond to your expectation? What surprises have you experienced?**

Yes, it corresponds to the idea. I got a good job in a financial institution and I can also spend a lot of time with family and friends, just as I had hoped. The weather has also been quite pleasant, maybe we have just been lucky so far. It gets dark early, but it doesn't bother me much. There are other activities with which we compensate.

### **What do you do in your free time?**

I'm playing tennis now. I have always liked tennis and I have been actively watching it, whether on TV or on the spot - in Stuttgart, Paris, etc. I have wanted to play for a long time, but in Zurich there was no such opportunity. Many people play tennis here and now I train four times a week, relatively intensely. I totally enjoy playing tennis so much that I can play it early in the morning or late at night.

### **Your Swiss husband is also in Estonia. How has he adapted?**

He has always liked Estonia and he came here happily. Thanks to his will, our relocation plan came true. He found a job and is very happy with it. Quietly, he starts to make his own friends and he learns Estonian well. He learned Estonian a little before we came to Estonia. Sometimes I wonder that he already knows so much and has been able to learn. We try to talk to him as much as possible in Estonian, but this, of course, requires the will of both parties.



**What do you miss the most when you think of Switzerland?**

I miss my good friends and also colleagues, I would like to meet them from time to time. I had a plan to fly to Switzerland sometimes for the weekend, but at the moment it is simply not possible to do so.

I also really enjoyed going for a day or two for skiing, make a weekend trip, which is not possible in Estonia.

**What did you leave behind in Switzerland?**

Friends and a good team at work. We were together for a long time and we got along very well.

**Tell me, how did you find Meribel?**

When I announced my decision to move to Estonia and asked the interested presidential candidates to contact me, Meribel contacted me. That's where it started, on her own initiative.

**Do you keep an eye on the associations' activities in Estonia? What role do you have as co-president right now?**

Sure, I still keep eye on the things that are going on, I read through all emails that are sent. Meribel and Annika took over the daily activities of the association, so I have a minimal role in the activities of the SEA.

**What did you learn / enjoy the most during your leadership role? It was probably completely different from your previous work (or did you have anything similar experience from earlier?).**

It was interesting to meet new people and interact with them. It was a special feeling to do the Estonian thing in Switzerland. I liked to organize events and coordinate the activities of the association. All this planning and organization is in my blood. Many events, birthdays and meetings in the fellowship are often organized by me. It is time consuming, but when everything is finally done, it feels good that something cool has been done.

**Are you a member of any association in Estonia or are you planning to do so?**

I am not affiliated with any association at the moment. There has been a lot of engagement.

**What do you take with you from leading SEA?**

There are many things to remember. When leading an association, one has to communicate with many different people with different ideas. Bringing personalities and goals together was a different experience. In addition, it was kind of challenging to organize events in a place where you don't speak local language and the organizing team has only a few members. On the other hand, there is certainly no shortage of creative thinking, and all the organizers have many interesting ideas that are exciting to discuss and then (either in part or in full) turn into reality.

The most memorable events are Midsummer's Day, Christmas Eve, the Estonian Independence Day with Ivo Linna.

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Annika Fibbioli

Meribel Hagen

Swiss Estonian Association