

**Conference of European National Librarians
Willkommen in Bern**

Sonntag, 17. Mai 2015; 18.00 Uhr

Rathaushalle, Rathaus Bern

Welcoming address by Bernhard Pulver, Member of the Cantonal Government, Minister of Education for the Canton of Bern

Mr President

Members of the Executive Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Bernese Cantonal Government, I have the great **honour of welcoming you here to the seat**

- of the Government
- and of the Parliament,

the "Berner Rathaus".

I believe you have already paid an interesting visit to the **Dürrenmatt** Centre today.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt also came from the canton of Bern.

He was born in Konolfingen in the Emmental, and went to school in the city of Bern. He didn't seem to enjoy it very much, as he said:

"I always had problems at school. I didn't have the memory that was needed; I was a dreamer and could never keep up with the lessons."

I hope you don't have the same problems with my speech today...

You will already have heard Friedrich Dürrenmatt's story in Neuchâtel. So I will leave it at that.

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The "**Berner Rathaus**" was **built in 1400** as the seat of government.

Bern was one of the **most powerful city states north of the Alps**.

Now 600 years old, the building has seen a number of **architectural changes**.

The renovations undertaken from 1940 – 1942 (nineteen forty to forty-two) restored the Town Hall's mediaeval appearance.

This hall here on the ground floor is one of Switzerland's **most impressive interiors** from the late Middle Ages.

The 160 (hundred and sixty) members of the Cantonal Parliament, who meet in the Grand Council Chamber on the upper floor, and the seven members of the government guide the canton's political destiny.

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Switzerland is a **Confederation of twenty six cantons.**

Bern is one of the country's bilingual cantons. Alongside the German-speaking majority, eight per cent of its population have **French as their mother tongue.**

Bern therefore sees itself as a bridge between the German and French-speaking regions, and as a mediator between the two cultures.

The different languages and cultures, and the beautiful landscape make Bern a **microcosm of our country.**

The canton of Bern is not only the political heart of Switzerland. Bern is also a canton of high-tech, education, culture and tourism in equal measures.

Let me say a few words about the **Bernese spirit**.

We have the reputation for

- being rather slow and
- a bit too serious.

These clichés are part of life,

but I truly **believe that taking a slow and steady approach is a quality**, and I know that the Bernese have a very subtle sense of humour (just take as an example Friedrich Dürrenmatt, his novels, his plays and his paintings).

When you live in Bern, you find there is an **atmosphere of tolerance and tranquillity** that makes you feel happy as you walk through the old town.

This is not just my feeling, but has been **confirmed by international surveys**.

When it comes to **quality of life, the city of Bern is number 13** in the world rankings, and according to the **World Happiness**

Report, Switzerland is the happiest country in the world.

I hope that you will have the chance to experience this quality of life and happiness in the next two days!

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As the Minister of Education and Culture for this canton, I am delighted to **welcome Europe's national librarians** to Bern.

I would like to give you a brief idea of what **the library scene** is like in the canton of Bern.

In our canton with just over a million inhabitants,

- we not only have **the Cantonal Library – our university library –**

- but also **twelve regional libraries**,
- 125 (a hundred and twenty-five) **local libraries**, most of which are combined with the school libraries
- and 350 school libraries.

So as you see, we have a whole **empire of libraries** in our canton alone. This just shows **how important and useful libraries are here**.

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The priority for our libraries is to encourage

- language skills
- and reading.

The library world is going through **a time of change.**

Every day, you no doubt have to contend with the digitisation of our world and our knowledge and the effects that this has on our lives and learning.

This raises questions about the future tasks and functions of libraries.

In view of this change, last year the Canton of Bern approved a **new strategy** that will lead our regional libraries into the future.

The aim of our strategy is the basic provision of information.

You may quite rightly say that we are **already supplied with too much information** these days, with all the new channels that information technology has opened.

But we are convinced:

it is here that libraries are needed.

They can be the **key interface** that provides access

- not only to **analogue information carriers**
- but also to their **digital counterparts**.

Libraries can make a **major contribution** to ensuring that the entire population has access to high quality media.

At a time when we speak only of social media, libraries can serve a new function as a social venue, a "**home from home**".

They can become places for social interaction and integration, whereas digitisation tends to encourage people to retreat into their own private domain.

We plan to **consolidate this status** as a **home from home** through our library strategy.

At the same time, we want to **prepare our libraries for the digital future**, which requires

- new infrastructures
- and networks.

So that gives you a brief idea of the main aims of our strategy.

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I am sure you will agree with me when I say that **libraries are far more than the sum total of the tasks they do.**

So I will finish with a quotation from the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges:

"Siempre imaginé que el Paraíso sería algún tipo de biblioteca."

¹ Also „Yo, que me figuraba el Paraíso / Bajo la especie de una biblioteca“.
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“I have always imagined paradise as a type of library”

These words take us beautifully to the point of what libraries are:

- **the entrance to the world around us**
- and **the entrance to stories beyond this world** – to paradise, for example.

I would like to thank you for coming to Bern and wish you a successful conference.

I hope that you **feel at home** in our little paradise and that you enjoy your stay in Bern.

And then I wish you a pleasant return journey to your libraries – to your own much loved paradise.

Thank you very much, cheers and bon appétit!

