

Mr. Deputy-prime minister, Mr. governor, Mr. mayor, Mr. Cillier, dear friends

First of all, I wish to thank mayor Senkevych and governor Kim for inviting me to be among the speakers at this conference on the future economic development of the city and the oblast of Mykolaiv.

But what is the role of the Danish ambassador in this context? The future development of Mykolaiv is a domestic issue. So what is the Danish envoy doing here?

My presence here is of course a reflection of Denmark's unique partnership with the city and the oblast of Mykolaiv.

This partnership was suggested by president Zelensky, when he spoke online to the Danish parliament on the 29 March 2022, in darkest hour of the Russian aggression.

In the beginning there was not a lot of enthusiasm in Copenhagen about the idea of a Danish patronage.

Normally we are supporting reconstruction and recovery through international organizations and only when there is peace. And what about the risk of corruption some were asking.

But our Prime Minister came to Ukraine three weeks after president Zelensky's speech. During that visit president Zelensky and our prime minister decided to go ahead with the partnership.

Work started immediately focusing on winterization of the city and establishment of emergency water supply as the Russians had cut of the water supply from neighboring Kherson Oblast.

It went well thanks to a seamless cooperation with the local, regional and national authorities and Danish and international humanitarian organizations.

We have now moved on to the next phase, focusing on rebuilding social and physical infrastructure and not least restarting economic life by assisting private enterprises getting back in business. This is a big wish in Mykolaiv. It is an enterprising city and region and they want to earn their own money.

It turned out to be difficult because no lenders would lend money to local businesses because of the proximity to the frontline. Denmark had to create a special facility in the Danish Ukraine fund that can issue export credits and loans to enterprises close to the frontline.

It has worked well and we have helped a major company in the agricultural sector to get back in business. Many jobs are back and once the employees are getting a salary they start paying taxes, thus supporting the local economy. They also bring back their families.

We are also focusing on helping educational institutions to restart. That will bring back young people and strengthen the capacity for research and development.

The agricultural university is back in operation with Danish assistance. Right now we are in process of raising funds for the reconstruction of the National Shipbuilding University in Mykolaiv. At the same time, we will support a modernization of its research and teaching profile in a partnership with the technology department of the University of Aalborg.

This will make the university a strong asset for the economic development of the whole region. The city of Aalborg is now the partner city of Mykolaiv. There are many similarities between the two cities. Aalborg used to have a lot of heavy industry. Now it is a high tech hub and a center for research and development. I am sure that Aalborg can serve as a source of inspiration for Mykolaiv.

So all in all, the partnership has been working extremely well and we now have an embassy office in Mykolaiv supporting the partnership.

There are still many challenges but progress has been remarkable, thanks to the efforts of the authorities and the people of Mykolaiv. It demonstrates that reconstruction and development does not have to wait until there is peace as some are saying.

For me as Denmark's envoy it has been amazing to witness this development. In just over two years the city has gone from a warzone city to a bustling metropolis.

Last time I visited the city I experienced a traffic jam for the first time. And in September it was possible to have bicycle event in Mykolaiv with hundreds of participants and a cultural event for children.

Today's conference is a sign that the city and the region have now reached a point where it is possible to look ahead and develop a vision for the future of the city.

When I met mayor Senkevych back in 2022 I asked him why Denmark was seen as an attractive partner. He responded that is because I want my city to become a "small Denmark on the Black Sea", just as affluent, just as innovative, just as

green and just as non-corrupt. This was your bold vision at a time when your city was under daily shelling.

As your partner Denmark is happy to provide you with inspiration on how to achieve this vision. This is why Denmark financed the development of a masterplan for Mykolaiv. It has as its headline "Towards a sustainable and carbon-neutral city" and its recommendations will undoubtedly bring Mykolaiv closer to become "a small Denmark on the Black Sea".

But Denmark is certainly not the only source of inspiration. During last visit to Mykolaiv I met with young students at the Agricultural University. I asked them about their vision for the future of their city and their region. There was a girl who said: I want Mykolaiv to become "a small Dubai" on the Black Sea with skyscrapers, motorways and big shopping malls.

So there are many visions out there. It up to the citizens of the city and the oblast to decide.

But whatever direction you may choose, rest assured that Denmark will assist you as agreed by president Zelensky and the Prime Minister of Denmark.

Danes are proud to be the partners of the City of Heroes.

I wish you a successful conference!