

Mr. Mayor, dear friends

Thank you very much to the Youth House for inviting me to the opening of the Danish-Ukrainian youth house in Mykolaiv.

I have been a frequent visitor to Mykolaiv over the last three years. During my visits I have met some of the youth activist here and they have all told me the same thing: That they would love to have a house of their own.

The need for a physical facility that would facilitate cultural exchange and be a hub for various democratic initiatives, was also one of the requests that we received from you Mr. Mayor very early on.

We have done our best to accommodate this wish. I am very happy that this is finally happening. Thanks to a grant from the Danish Foreign Ministry it is now possible for the Danish-Ukrainian Youth House in Kyiv to set up this satellite in Denmark's partner city Mykolaiv.

I have travelled extensively in Ukraine since the full scale Russian aggression. I have visited many of the frontline cities and communities. Apart from Mykolaiv I have been to Kharkiv, Zaporizia, Dnipro, Kherson, Izium and many more.

Everywhere I meet the same strong spirit of resilience and perseverance. The people of the frontline cities and communities do their utmost to try to restore normality in the midst of Russian atrocities. But many young people have left these communities due to the hardship and the continued Russian aggression.

Unlike the older generation the young generation is highly mobile. They can easily move to Odesa, Kyiv, Warsaw, Berlin or Copenhagen, wherever they see better opportunities for their personal and professional growth.

That is why it is so important to do something for young people in the frontline cities. Their conditions are far worse than the situation for young people in for instance Kyiv, who live a life in what resembles normality, except of course during air attacks.

Much is at stake. If young people leave the frontline cities they will stagnate and sink into decay. And this is exactly what the aggressor is aiming at. Depriving the frontline cities of life and youth so they slowly become ghost cities that can easily be taken over.

I am therefore very happy that the Danish-Ukrainian youth house is now operational here in Mykolaiv. But this is not the only thing that we are doing for young people in Mykolaiv.

When I visited Mykolaiv in November 2024 I was invited by president Zelensky to accompany him when he visited the Agricultural University of Mykolaiv.

The students were very keen to have to dormitories repaired so they could attend classes off line. We managed to have the dormitories fixed and students are now back.

On my very first visit to Mykolaiv back in 2022 I visited another university, the National Shipbuilding University named after Admiral Makarov. It was hit by Russian missiles twice in 2022 and severely damaged. I met with students and faculty, who were clearing the rubble and boarding of windows. They were desperate to get the university back in operation. And I promised that we would do whatever needed to make that happen.

Just before Christmas a Danish foundation, the Orient Foundation, announced that they would make a substantial grant that will cover the stabilization and conservation of the buildings as well as the construction of a shelter.

A team of Danish engineers working pro bono for the NGO called Engineers Without Borders have already been in Mykolaiv to plan the construction work.

On top of that the foundation is also financing a partnership between the Shipbuilding University and the University of Aalborg in Northern Denmark, aiming at modernising the research profile and teaching methods of the university, so it can be instrumental in Mykolaiv's future transformation from a traditional industrial city to a high tech and innovation powerhouse.

These are all initiatives that will make it more attractive for young people to stay in Mykolaiv instead of moving away. I am happy that the Youth House is now part of this.

Let us not forget that the only reason why this is happening is the unique Denmark-Mykolaiv partnership proposed by president Zelensky when he spoke online to the Danish parliament on 29 March 2022.

This was in the darkest hour of the Russian aggression. On that day a Russian missile struck the regional administration building in Mykolaiv's central square, killing 40 civil servants as they gathered for their daily morning meeting.

In the beginning there were not much enthusiasm for the idea of a patronage for Mykolaiv in Copenhagen. There were voices advocating that reconstruction should only take place once there is peace and we should leave it to international organisations.

But our Prime Minister came to Kyiv a couple of weeks after the speech and met with president Zelensky. They agreed on the partnership and work has been ongoing since then.

We now have an embassy office in Mykolaiv, supporting the partnership. The team on the ground—comprised of both Danes and Ukrainians—is doing outstanding work to support our shared goals.

This reflects Denmark's deep and unwavering commitment to Mykolaiv. Our embassy office is not just a diplomatic mission; it is a symbol of our dedication to the region, its people, and its future.

And there are bold visions for the future of Mykolaiv. The mayor once told me that he wanted his city to become a small Denmark on the Black Sea, just as affluent, just as innovative, just as green and just as non-corrupt.

The future will primarily be built by the young people and this is where the Ukrainian Danish Youth House comes into picture. I hope that the Youth House will help bringing this bold vision to life.

I am often being asked why Denmark and the Danes are so supportive of Ukraine. We are far away from each other, we speak different languages and we have a very different history.

The answer is very simple: we share the same fundamental values: freedom, liberty, democracy and justice — this is what unites us. And Danes know that your freedom is also our freedom.

Let me conclude by thank all who have made today's opening possible.