

**Opening remarks by H.E. Mr Viacheslav Yatsiuk, Ambassador of Ukraine to the Kingdom of Norway at the event on tourism promotion between Ukraine and Norway “Explore Ukraine” (Oslo, 26 January 2017)**

Ladies and Gentlemen!  
Kjære venner! Дорозі друзі!

It is my distinct pleasure to open our today’s “Explore Ukraine” evening in Oslo devoted to the presentation of the tourism potential of Ukraine. This event is one of the products of the strengthened cooperation between the Embassy of Ukraine and the Norwegian-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce.

At the same time this is quite a unique event, not least because it represents maybe the first serious attempt to address a rather strange situation. On the one hand, we have Norwegians as one of the world’s biggest travellers. The average Norwegian takes more than 5 outbound trips a year. This is hardly surprising, because if we recall the Vikings times, Norway can even claim the title of the founding father of the European tourism.

On the other hand, we have Ukraine as not only a very beautiful country, but maybe, one the most travelled through lands in human history. This is not surprising either – one just needs to take a glance at the map to understand that it is difficult to bypass Ukraine while crossing the lands of Europe both from north to south, or from west to east. So through many centuries Ukraine used to be a meeting point of various cultures and civilisations. This explains our unique cultural heritage. Of course, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine was closed to the outside world behind the iron curtain. But today Ukraine is rapidly rising in the ranks of the world’s top tourism destinations.

So by the laws of nature, Ukraine and Norway would have been expected to be such a perfect match in the realm of tourism. But sometimes even the laws of nature require an impetus. Therefore, we have invited you here with the intention to explain the main arguments in favour of the importance of Ukraine’s stronger presence on the radars of the Norwegian tour operators, Norwegian media, and ultimately Norwegian tourists.

I hope we devised a winning strategy for our event, since various elements on its program attempt to address all basic human senses. You will see wonders of nature and culture of Ukraine. You will hear beautiful Ukrainian songs. You will taste the home made Ukrainian food. You will be informed about the ongoing efforts to eliminate some of the natural obstacles to the Ukrainian-Norwegian tourism exchanges, such as the absence of direct flights between our countries. And you will meet interesting people both from Ukraine and Norway who will present you various perspectives in support of Ukraine as a tourist destination.

So the program is really interesting and, actually, I have to confess that this is one of these occasions when the organisers are as excited about the event as the invited guests.

Of course, in my short introduction remarks I am not going to present you all arguments in favour of Ukraine. At the same time I would like to single out three main reasons why Ukraine could be such a great destination specifically for the Norwegians.

First, deep historical roots that unite Ukraine and Norway. According to the historical sources, at least four great Norwegian kings who ruled Norway in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries had very strong ties with the Kievan Rus. Olaf Tryggvason, Olaf Haraldsson or St Olav – the Eternal King of Norway; Magnus Olafsson; and Harald Hardrada – all of them spent many years of their lives in Kyiv and other cities of the Kievan Rus. And today the guides of the Kyiv St Sophia cathedral – very beautiful and most important church for the Orthodox Christians – never forget to draw attention of foreign tourists to a portrait of the Norwegian Queen Ellisiv – spouse of Harald Hardrada – painted on the cathedral's walls. But this is just one example, and I am certain that Norwegians would be interested to know better about this historical heritage and explore the lands that were so important to their ancestors.

Second, after my first six months as Ambassador to Norway I think I understood well what represents one of the unique features of Norwegians – it is their very special attitude towards nature. And I am convinced that Norwegians would be fascinated and overwhelmed by the Ukrainian nature – its gorgeous fields, mountains, rivers, forests – and their sentiments will be reinforced and multiplied by quite unique Ukrainian traditions of hospitality towards foreign guests.

Third – and I think this would be especially important factor for the Norwegians – they will discover Ukraine as a nation that goes now through, maybe, the most defining moment in its history. They will see a country that is in the midst of the most far-reaching transformations. They will meet Ukrainians full of enthusiasm, determination and confidence for their future despite so many real challenges that they have to face now. They will witness the nation in the making. And I think we could use the title of one currently popular song in Europe “Grab the Moment” as another way of describing this unique experience of visiting Ukraine.

So, without further ado, I would like to invite all our guests to experience Ukraine during this evening in Oslo. And I would especially welcome two honoured guests today. I am pleased to introduce Mr Joakim With Steen, better known as JOWST. As we all know, JOWST will represent Norway in the Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv in May, with the mentioned song "Grab the Moment" along with vocalist Mr Aleksander Walmann. I hope our event will be interesting for them as well, since this is going to be their first visit to Ukraine ever.