

Dear friends.

A warm welcome to Copenhagen to our friends from Russia and the Baltic and Nordic countries.

Moreover, a warm welcome to all of you.

I would use this opportunity to thank the Danish government, for making this occasion possible, and thank you also to the University of Copenhagen for hosting this conference.

Brita Kvist will take over right after my introduction, and guide us safely through this afternoon. If anyone can, it must be her.

The NORDEN Association presented the idea of hosting this conference on Democracy, Freedom of speech and Freedom of Association to the Danish Government one year ago in conjunction with the Danish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

We were quite aware, that the events in Crimea and the warlike situation in northeastern part of Ukraine have caused a tension in the relation between Russia and Western Europe that brought back memories of the Cold War.

We were also quite aware, that this renewed tension made it difficult to host a conference like this. However, we never take an easy way out - because there are no easy way.

We also knew from the beginning, what we would like this conference to end up with.

As NGO's who represents people, we can see that the confrontational rhetoric makes people unsafe. People know very well, that confrontation in rhetoric as the blink of an eye can have fatal consequences, where you cannot turn back the time.

Therefore, it must be our obligation as NGO's to work hard for a turnaround and put dialog back on the track. It not easy. But if we take our role as NGO's seriously, there will be no alternative, as it stands.

Historically we are coming from different places. Today we should be fellow travelers. Tomorrow we are ending up the same place. Globalization is within few years our terminus.

If we do not understand that, we will miss many great opportunities. If we think, that structural changes are not just around the next corner, but think that everything will stay the same, we will lose.

However, if we prepare ourselves for the undeniable future and the change, and act upon it, we will win.

Thank you again.

I hope we all will have a constructive and challenging afternoon, where we can go from here with hopes of freedom, prosperity and peace. Values we all share.

Then we might be fellow travelers and take the same train that will lead us safely to our common destination.