

First of all thank you all for coming here today. This is the first National Day Reception we have organised since we opened the embassy, and we are truly honoured by your presence here.

On this day, the 17th of May, Norwegians all over the world get together to celebrate.

In Norway today people have been out in the streets from the early hours of the morning, and children have been taking part in parades, organised by their kindergardens and schools. And in contrast to many countries around the world, our National Day is never celebrated by military parades. This is a truly civilian manifestation.

The reason for all these festivities is of course the fact that the 17 May is the date when the Norwegian Constitution was passed way back in 1814.

At that time our constitution was regarded as a modern piece of legislation, based, as it was, on the French Constitution and the American Declaration of Independence. Having a Constitution and being independent was important to Norway – and I think you all can sympathise with that idea.

Today Norway is a small and relatively wealthy country at the edge of Europe with a population of nearly 5 million. We have been lucky to strike oil offshore - and the wealth that has come with the oil has been managed in a way that has benefitted every single Norwegian and not only a few families, dynasties or oil companies. But we should never take wealth and a good life for granted. I remember growing up in post-war Norway. A country which was struggling to rebuild what had been destroyed during WW2.

And I do remember clearly that my father and mother also struggled to make ends meet. We were certainly not rich. And we as children learned from a very early age that honest, hard work was the order of the day.

The fortunate position we as Norwegians enjoy in the world today should make us immensely grateful - and at the same time give us a sense of “corporate responsibility”. A realisation that we have a duty towards those less fortunate than us.

The sentiment that we all are villagers in the global village is something I certainly do subscribe to. And the principle of showing solidarity with those less fortunate than us is a principle that is shared by most political parties in Norway. Together with solidarity runs the basic principle of human rights and respect for people who are different from our-selves.

Today we celebrate the 196 birthday of our constitution. It has taken nearly 200 years to build our democracy.

The constitution of Kosovo was adopted by the Assembly 9 April 2008 and came into force 15th of June the same year, less than 2 years ago.

This should give us some perspective. Kosovo is a young nation, struggling to build its democratic institutions.

This country has come some way in a short time, but we all realise that there is work to be done and mountains to be climbed.

We are still faced with the challenges of building a society governed by the rule of law. And I am sorry to say that we far too often see the ugly head of corruption appearing in the most unexpected quarters. These are challenges that I believe the Kosovo authorities have to deal with - with the help of the International Community

We as Norwegians are here in Kosovo because Norway has decided to assist Kosovo on its way towards a full fledged democracy - a state with well functioning institutions, with a government free of corruption and whose very idea is to serve its citizens.

*So on this 17 May let us celebrate democracy, freedom, solidarity and friendship
Once again welcome and enjoy the evening.*

Sverre Johan Kvale