Dear ambassador, Consul General, students, dear friends

I am very pleased to be here today. For me the University of Nordland represents a hub for wisdom and knowledge. And it represents the future. Because if one thing is certain, it is that the society of tomorrow will be built on knowledge acquired by the students of today.

As the renowned magazine National Geographic has pointed out, you are now located in Norway’s gateway to the Arctic.

In fact Bodø and the Crimean Peninsula have something in common; both places were pointed out by National Geographic as two of 20 best places to visit in 2013.

The Arctic is more than beautiful sceneries. The Arctic holds 15 percent of the world's known oil and gas. Additionally the United States Geological Survey (USGS) has estimated that more than 20 % of global undiscovered petroleum resources are to be found in the Arctic.

Not all of this is easily accessible. The Arctic is an enormous area, some of which is covered by ice all year round. However, other parts, such as the Norwegian Sea, are ice free all year round.

The Arctic is definitely a region characterized by major opportunities. Hence, the Norwegian oil and gas industry is moving northwards in rapid pace.

The Barents Sea and the Norwegian Sea are also among the world’s most productive sea areas and are home to the world’s largest cod stock.

The resources located in the Arctic are one of the main drivers for Nordland County’s High North policies. For us it is clear that the University of Nordland is one of the key stakeholders and players in the Arctic. This is also clear when we look at the Norwegian governments white paper on High North issues.

Nordland County has active and entusiastic supported the University of Nordland, also financial to realizing their new research park; “High North Innovation Centre”. Nordland County has also supported The High North Centre for business and governance financial every year since 2009.

These two grants reflect that Nordland County prioritizes the High North. And it reflects that knowledge is core for developing the High North. It is people’s knowledge and day-to-day work that makes it possible to exploit and develop the potential that lies in the north in a sustainable and far-sighted way to the benefit of society.
In that regard the joint master programs in Sustainable Management and in Energy Management, are just on the spot in this urge for knowledge about the Arctic.

**Cooperation between Russia, Ukraine and Norway**

Nordland County has since 1988 cooperated closely with Russia, and we cooperate with Ukraine in the Assembly of European Regions (AER).

Norway’s relationship with Russia has been influential in shaping Norwegian Arctic policy. Russia is by far the leading Arctic State – in terms of territory, resources and activities. Approximately 40% of estimated undiscovered Arctic oil and 70% of estimated Arctic gas are located in Russia.

Norway and Russia have enjoyed peaceful coexistence for a thousand years. In a historical perspective, the Cold war was a parenthesis, but an important one. Since its end, our bilateral relations have come to be characterized by mutual trust, with many points of contacts and increased cooperation.

A very good example of the increased cooperation is the fact that Russia are Norway’s most important fish market with a total export of 6 billion Norwegian kroner.

Ukraine is the single most important marked for Norwegian frozen whole herring. In that regard it is interesting to note that a great proportion of that Herring is landed here in Nordland.

Another relevant example of increased cooperation is the fact that you are now visiting the Norwegian university with the largest Russian student population, by far. The University of Nordland has enrolled about 350 Russian students.

Closing up this short intervention we can locate two insights about the students enrolled in the two joint masters programs. The first is that your knowledge represents the key to developing the Arctic. The second is that you represent something that is larger than your self – namely increase cooperation between Russia, Ukraine and Norway.

With those words I would like to wish all the students a good and fruitful semester here in Bodø.