

Remarks by ambassador Ole Egberg Mikkelsen at a reception on 13 September 2019 at the embassy residence in Warsaw for Polish audiologists on the occasion of the 150 years anniversary of GN Hearing.

I am very pleased to extend a warm welcome to all of you to the Danish residence in Warsaw.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the 150 years anniversary of a Danish industrial icon, GN Hearing.

Now, you might think that manufacturing hearing aids and headset is pretty much down to earth and not that iconic. In case of GN, however, it is indeed. It becomes clear when you trace the history of the GN Hearing.

GN or Great Nordic is namely a historic symbol of Danish entrepreneurship and of the global approach to business at the time when Denmark started to become an industrial nation with companies seeing the whole world as their market.

Danish industrialist and serial entrepreneur Carl Frederik Tietgen founded the company as The Great Northern Telegraph Company in June 1869. The aim was very ambitious, namely to create a worldwide telegraph company.

The company managed to get a concession agreement with the Russian Tsar in 1869 that gave the company exclusive rights – and obligations – to establish and run a telegraph line in Russia all the way to Vladivostok and onwards to China and Japan. Later on connections were established to London and Paris.

Thus, GN at that time was a truly global company and as the telegraph was the internet of that time, you can compare GN to AT&T or Verizon now a days.

With the emergence of wireless technologies, GN had to reinvent itself and seek new business areas. GN seized the new opportunities and became a pioneer and major player on the GSM-market.

Today GN is a global leader in intelligent audio solutions with a unique portfolio of medical, professional & consumer audio solutions with a research and development capacity that makes it extremely competitive in the med-tech, hearables and intelligent audio field.

Thus, GN is not only a symbol of Denmark's successful transformation to an industrial nation with companies with a global reach. GN has also proved to be extremely adaptive to changes in technologies and market conditions. It is good example of how a company can thrive and prosper despite disruptions.

This is indeed something to celebrate. So let me convey my warmest congratulations to the entire GN-team on this important anniversary. Your achievements over the last 150 years is something to be proud of. Danes are indeed proud of your success. It is not a coincidence that the city of Odense, has named its main industrial park after Tietgen, the founder of GN, and many other Danish companies that are still global leaders in their industries.

But why are we celebrating this in the residence of the Danish ambassador in Warsaw? What does diplomacy have to do with hearing aids and headsets?

Of course, diplomacy is based on official contacts between Denmark and Poland at the governmental level. We are EU-partners and NATO allies, Danish troops are stationed in Poland at the Multinational NATO Headquarters North East in Szczecin. We are neighbors – the distance is only 90 kilometers between Poland and Denmark. Soon, a pipeline across the Baltic Sea will physically connect us.

Both Denmark and Poland are non-Euro countries and we are both heavily dependent on the single European market and free trade. But most importantly: we share the same basic values: freedom, liberty, democracy and free markets.

However, Danish-Polish relations are also about people-to-people contacts and commercial and economic cooperation. Trade and investments are booming between our countries. Poland is now the ninth biggest market for Danish exports. Poland is also an important destination for Danish foreign investment. We estimate, that there are about 500 Danish companies operating in Poland with about 50.000 employees.

Business activities also have a strong impact on Danish-Polish relations. Because each Danish company operating here – big or small – brings with it not only capital, technology and competences. It also brings with it the Danish way of doing business.

Nowadays, it is called corporate social responsibility – CSR – but it has always been in the DNA of Danish businesses: You need to be socially accountable – to your stakeholders, your employees and your local community. If you are a medico company, you need to be accountable to your patients and to those working with your patients.

This is exactly what GN is doing today, celebrating its anniversary by holding a seminar for Polish audiologists interested in what is the state-of-the-art in hearing technology. What GN is doing in Poland, and what you are doing for Polish audiologists are also part of Danish-Polish relations and thus part of diplomacy.

That is the explanation why we are at the residence today.

I wish to conclude by thanking the Polish audiologists present today for devoting your time on this sunny Friday afternoon to competence development. You could have many other things, but you decided to learn about new technologies and new solutions that will give your patients a higher life quality.

It shows your strong commitment to your patients. I am happy to host you tonight.