

My name is Sofiia Mandrusiak and I come from the Ukrainian city of Kolomyia. I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and for giving me the opportunity to address you here this evening.

The Russian-Ukrainian war began in 2014 (although it has been going on for centuries) and is still ongoing, but the full-scale invasion has changed the lives of all Ukrainians, including mine.

I won't describe all the emotions, experiences, reassessment of values, and everything I felt after February 24, but I want to share with you a special story that happened to me last year.

I came to Ireland, to a country that turned out to be so similar to the western part of Ukraine where I come from. It is in that place that the Ukrainian language, culture and customs are preserved. Ireland immediately and irrevocably stole my heart, and it happened thanks to John Connors, a man who opened up a world 2351 kilometres away for me with all the warmth of his heart.

Sitting at the table in the kitchen after dinner - we were having philosophical- historical conversations, or so John said. I listened and cried, because every time it turned out that history would repeat itself to some extent. The parallels in the history of Ireland and Ukraine could be seen with the naked eye even by me, a young person who is not an expert in history:

- The struggle for independence and territory in Ireland (1919-1921) and in my country (1917-1921);
- Suppression of the national liberation movement spirit, by an aggressor country
- Irish Famine (1845-1849), Holodomor (1932-1933), (1946-1947);

Similar in our Ukrainian history, I would like to quote the Ukrainian historian Serhiy Plokhii: "The Holodomor was not only the destruction of the peasantry and famine as such; it also had cultural and political dimensions. It was during the famine that key decisions were made to actually stop the Ukrainization of cities in Ukraine, and outside of Ukraine, Ukrainization stopped completely. Ukrainian schools in the Kuban and Zelenyi Klyn (Amur) switched to Russian. In fact, the largest non-Russian group on the territory of the Russian Federation had been destroyed, and Ukrainians on the territory of Russia were being turned into Russians.

But the Russian invasion has united us as a people and we as always, now stand strong and firm, - and we know that eventually, victory will be ours.

- The fact of raising the flag in Ireland and Ukraine in 1848, the identity of the colours of the flags of Tipperary and Ukraine, I'm not even going to talk about.

Therefore, looking back, we must draw conclusions, the right conclusions, preserve history and remember that we are creating it now. It is a crime to be indifferent.

On behalf of myself and my family and Ukrainians in general, I want to thank you for supporting Ukraine and Ukrainians in this terrible time, but we are defending not only our territory but also the European border.

Ireland has welcomed many Ukrainians and I am sure that this experience is very positive for them. Your friendliness, openness and understanding win the hearts of Ukrainians, - thank you for that. I would like to express my special gratitude to John Connors, whose home has become my home, to Eddie Stapleton, to everyone I met here, and to those I don't know yet but really want to get to know.

When I came to Ireland last year I intended to stay for 3 days, I remained for 40-42 days. Perhaps this is the greatest proof that this country gently took me into its arms and gave me some of the best emotions during the entire period of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Thank all of you for your kind attention.

Glory to Ukraine, - Slava Ukraini!