

English translation: Excerpts from the Danish parliament's Ukraine list consultation with Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod

Consultation in the Danish parliament on August 19, 2022
Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod About the Ukraine Blacklist, Which Includes Three Experts in Denmark

(The video, in Danish, and the full transcript, in Danish, may be seen here.)

Translated Excerpts in English

Member of Parliament Marie Krarup (independent): My reason for raising the question is that I think it is a serious matter, because this Centre to Counter Disinformation – the centre that has made the list of 72 foreigners outside Ukraine – belongs to the Security Council of Ukraine, and the same day that this list was published, the leader, Andrei Shapovalov, said that the people who are spreading disinformation are “information terrorists,” and they must be held accountable as “war criminals.” Zelensky’s adviser Mikhail Podolok has elaborated these views, in interviews and an article in which he calls on other governments to limit the influence of these people and for them to be subjected to what he called “military cleansing”.

I am therefore, of course, interested to hear whether the Foreign Minister has taken the initiative to carry out a “military cleansing” of Associate Professor Jens Jørgen

Nielsen, peace researcher, Jan Øberg, and Professor in International Politics at Aalborg University Li Xing?

Or has the Foreign Minister made approaches to Ukraine to have these persons removed from the list? Or does the Foreign Minister still believe that we are supporting freedom of expression and democracy by supporting Ukraine? Thank you.

Minister for Foreign Affairs Jeppe Kofod (Social Democrat):
Yes, thank you for that. And thank you to Mrs. Marie Krarup for convening the consultation today.

Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine means that we in Denmark and in Europe can no longer take our freedom and our security for granted. Disinformation, lies and propaganda are an integral part of Russian warfare and attempts to undermine the unity of the West. And as a world community, we must therefore continually consider how to respond, with respect for freedom of expression, and our fundamental democratic rights.

The Centre for Combating Disinformation, under Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, has published a list of speakers who "promote narratives consistent with Russian propaganda." However, the list, which includes four [sic: three] people linked to Denmark, is no longer available on the website.

In addition to the consultation today, the list has attracted considerable coverage in the Danish press, where it was received with astonishment and concern. There are concerns about the criteria for inclusion on the list, and about the use of such a list to silence voices in the debate with whom

one disagrees.

I have therefore also asked the Danish embassy in Kiev to contact the Ukrainian authorities to seek clarification of the activities of the Centre for Combating Disinformation.

In this context, we from the Danish side will support the fight against disinformation, which is an essential element in Russia's warfare against Ukraine.

At the same time, we will underline the Danish position, as is well known, that the fight against disinformation should contribute to strengthening, not undermining, democracy, research and freedom of expression.

When I have a response from the Ukrainian authorities, I will be happy to return to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. And until then, I would like to take the opportunity to make the government's policy absolutely clear:

We must stand firm that research and freedom of expression are important democratic values for the Danish government, there should be no doubt about that.

Next, I would argue that Ukraine is threatened in its very existence. Putin has set out to destroy an entire country, a democracy, in fact, deny Ukraine's legitimacy at all.

I think most people can understand that the fundamental principles may well come under pressure in such a situation....

[Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod continued his initial remarks by outlining Denmark's position on the need to support Ukraine in the war with Russia.]

Marie Krarup: Thank you for the answer. So that basically means that what the foreign minister has done, is to ask the Danish embassy in Kiev to get in touch with the Ukrainian authorities to seek clarification on the activities of the Center for Fighting Russian Disinformation in Ukraine...

That means that contact has been made with the Danish Embassy in Kiev to do something which they always ought to do. I have worked in an embassy myself, and I know how things work there. If there is something going on, in relation to Denmark, then it is obvious that it is the embassy's obligation to immediately get a clarification of what is going on.

That is what the Foreign Minister has done, about a month after three law-abiding Danish researchers were put on a list in which they were called "information terrorists" and they are indirectly threatened with being brought before a war crimes tribunal.

These are researchers who use the quite ordinary Danish freedom of expression to say quite ordinary and banal things, such as one of them has said, "Western sanctions against Russia are not working." Then you are added to a list where you are indirectly threatened as a war criminal. And so, the Foreign Minister, in the month that has passed since the three Danish nationals were put on this nasty list, the Danish Foreign Minister has asked the Danish Embassy in Kiev to do its duty?

I think that is a very poor response to the quite unbelievably gross situation that three Danish researchers are being prevented from carrying out perfectly legal research activities because they now have to live with threats hanging over their heads.

Has the Foreign Minister contacted the police and asked them to ensure that the three researchers' safety is guaranteed?

Jeppe Kofod: I'm afraid I have to, unfortunately, correct Mrs. Marie Krarup. The Danish Embassy HAS contacted the Ukrainian authorities, so it is not the case that I have asked the Embassy to contact them. They have contacted them. And we are awaiting the reply from the Ukrainian authorities. And in that context, the contact that the Danish Embassy has made, the Danish Embassy has also expressed concern about the list, which, by the way, has been taken down, as I understand it. And then, just in relation to the CCD, according to what I have been told, it is the acting leader of this center who is quoted as putting forward the idea that the information space could be protected from disinformation by means of a new law which would allow the prosecution of disseminators of disinformation as war criminals – that is what I think Marie Krarup has referred to. It is said to have been put forward at a round table discussion, with the support of the U.S. Department of State, organised by the National Security Service Academy, the Civilian Research and Development Foundation of the U.S., the International Academy of Information, and the coordination platform the National Security Cluster. We were not present at this roundtable. But there is nothing immediately indicating that the statement is about individuals on the list we are discussing today.

As mentioned, and I would like to stress this, I have asked the Danish Embassy to investigate the statement further, and get an explanation from the Ukrainian authorities about how

they will ensure, and I hope that Mrs. Marie Krarup agrees with me, concern for freedom of expression, freedom of research and democracy with such a law.

Once the Ukrainian authorities have given their statement, I will ensure that this committee, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, is informed. And I think it is important that we hear the Ukrainian authorities' explanation. Also in a situation where there is a lot of misinformation out there...

.....

Excerpt 2:

Marie Krarup: How can the Foreign Minister accept that three law-abiding Danish scientists were put on a list to scare people and make them stop. How can the Foreign Minister accept that?

And, by the way, I must dispute the fact that these answers from the head of the CCD and President Zelensky's adviser, Mr. Podolok, were not referencing this list. There is a very clear statement that there IS reference to this list, calling on governments to carry out what has been called 'military lustration,' which I think should be translated as 'cleansing', or to impose sanctions on them. So, will the Foreign Minister follow the call of President Zelensky's adviser to put these three perfectly law-abiding scientists: a professor at Aalborg University, a lecturer elsewhere, and a peace researcher, will the Foreign Minister follow the call of President Zelensky's adviser to make sure that these three people can no longer speak freely?...

Excerpt 3:

Jeppe Kofod: ... So I think it's really a slightly skewed

debate. There should be a lot more focus on what Russia is up to at the moment. With cyber attacks, disinformation, misinformation, as an attempt to destroy our way of life. I hope that Mrs Marie Krarup will also be concerned about that.

Marie Krarup: Thank you. I would be very happy to organise a new meeting to talk about combating Russian disinformation, because of course we must counter any kind of lies, of course we must counter any kind of restrictions on freedom of expression – that is absolutely clear, I will do that at any time!

Now, what we are dealing with here is three Danes, perfectly law-abiding debaters, who have been put on a list as an indirect threat to their security. It is an attempt to silence them. Because they make perfectly legal and almost boring statements, such as that the Western sanctions against Russia are not working. Should it be a criminal act to say that? It is true that the list is not available right now. Thank goodness.

That might suggest that Ukraine's government has figured out that making such a nasty list is shooting itself in the foot. Because it is obviously not an expression of freedom of speech and democracy to put people in the stocks and start behaving like the neighbouring country. Because what is the point of us restricting freedom of expression in Denmark and restricting freedom of expression in Ukraine, and thereby coming to resemble Russia, where freedom of expression is restricted to such an extent. Are we going to turn our countries into tyrannies?

No, we must not! We must fight it! But the list exists! There are clever people who had it printed out as soon as it was available. And here it is. And I'd gladly pass it on. There are many ordinary sensible scientists listed here who are in no way breaking the law with their research. Highly recognized and respected professors, for example, John Mearsheimer, who has been very active in this debate and, of course, has said nothing at all illegal. Has not incited hatred, or violence, or anything, whatsoever. Perfectly legal speech. And that's what this is all about. We can have many other consultations, about everything else, but right now it's a consultation about what to do to ensure the freedom of expression of Danish debaters in Denmark?

And what has the Foreign Minister done to investigate what is going on? Does the Foreign Minister think that it is supporting democracy and freedom of expression, to support a government that is asking us to sanction Danish researchers in Denmark? And to be interested in what my opinions or feelings are in other contexts – is just not within the subject of this consultation. I think that something terrible is happening in Ukraine, absolutely terrible, and I want this war to stop. I think it's a crime that Russia has invaded, that's just not what it's about right now. Right now, it is about the fact that the Ukrainian government, which the Danish government supports, is calling for the Danish government to sanction Danish researchers and restrict their freedom of expression.

And I have not received any answer from the Foreign Minister, except something about perhaps the embassy being asked to do its job, or is the embassy just doing it by itself? There is simply no public statement to the effect that we cannot vouch for this. It may be that the next arms shipment will be delayed because we do not think it is OK for a professor of

international politics at Aalborg University – he is being criminalised for saying that Western sanctions are not working against Russia. I have not heard the Foreign Minister express any criticism; I would very much like to hear the Foreign Minister do so here. Is it OK for Ukraine to encourage us to sanction perfectly law-abiding researchers in Denmark?

Excerpt 4:

Jeppe Kofod: Now Russia has started a war of conquest, illegal war of conquest in the country, and there we have to respond again, and defend the Ukrainians. And therefore, there can not be, in any way, as Mrs. Marie Krarup spoke about, talk about our arms donations. The arms donations that we are giving to Ukrainians, for their defense fight, we will continue to do that, and we are working very hard for others to contribute as well, so that we can ensure Ukrainians that they can live without Russian invasion.

They must win, the Ukrainians, and the fact that they must be able to win requires us to continue with our arms supplies, which we certainly intend to do, irrespective of what Mrs. Marie Krarup mentions here.

Christian Juhl (Unity Party): I have put my name on the list. I would like to hear from the minister. We are friends of Ukraine, we support them in this terrible situation. And I think in my time, since February 24, I have spent thousands of hours defending Ukraine, but also spent, about ten minutes, or fifteen minutes looking at the allegations that have been made that Ukraine, in the harsh situation, is actually also at risk of violating some of the basic rules that we think belong in a democratic society. It is also our duty as politicians and ministers to try to see the nuances of the situation. Even if it is serious. So that the foundation stone of the democracy which is to be developed further after the war and after the Russians have withdrawn their troops, must develop. We will have at least as great a task to help with that, in my

opinion. Reconstruction, development of the country, etc.

I would like to ask two questions there. When we are friends with Ukraine, it is also important that we are honest friends. Real friends are honest friends, right?

That means that if we find something incomprehensible, we tell each other. Just as I think the ministers who have visited from Ukraine have done to us. They have been very clear when we were foot-dragging, and cut through: This is not what we are talking about, we don't need friendly words, we need weapons, they say, for example in the meetings. These are honest friends who say such things to their partners. Does the minister think that there can be arguments for restricting freedom of speech in an extreme situation, like the one Ukraine is in at the moment, and it would be legal, in the minister's opinion, for Ukraine to say, we cannot afford to have freedom of speech here?

Or, for example, it has been debated in the media lately that they are preparing an anti-union law in Ukraine, there are a number of European trade unions and individuals who have protested violently against that because, what does that have to do with the war? Because that is a fundamental principle that we also support. So a question: can there be a situation where you have to give up freedom of expression in such an extreme situation as Ukraine is in, during the occupation. In the minister's opinion?

That's the one. The other one is: can the minister confirm that we are indeed, monitoring the laws of war on both sides? And that we actually believe that everybody should abide by the laws of war, including occupied countries. Because that forms the basis for things not escalating into a completely crazy situation. Or is this also a place where we have to say that it is only one side that has to respect the laws of war.

I only ask because I think it is important that we have some universal approaches to some of these things.

The last question is a Danish question. I would like to know whether the Minister believes that the three researchers have used blatant propaganda and disinformation, or that the Minister suspects that the three have done so? It is a little because we might as well play it over on the Danish court straight away. If they haven't done it, then we should defend them, in my opinion. If they have done it, then we need to have it on the table. And then we must know, where does this conflict with Danish law.

[op cut begin]

Marie Krarup: Thank you. It's not strange to abolish freedom of speech in a country that's at war. And I have the impression that that's pretty much what they've done in Ukraine. What is strange is that we say that we are defending democracy when we support a country that is asking us to abolish freedom of expression in our own country.

THAT is where I think the problem is. To be handed a list with three Danes on it and be asked by the head of the Center [for Combating Disinformation] and Zelensky's adviser to sanction them. And when the minister claims that there is nothing to suggest that this is what happened, then I must refer to the statements that the head of the Center, Shapovalov, made, on July 14, about people who spread disinformation, they are information terrorists, and they must face a war crimes tribunal. And something similar was written by the same person in Ukraine's Pravda on 2 August.

And Zelensky's adviser, Podolok, said on August 5 about the people on the list that they are calling for them to be sanctioned by other governments, their influence to be limited, and then they are to be subjected to this 'military purge', which I don't quite know what that means.

So that's what is a call for us, in our country, to put restrictions on perfectly legal Danish researchers' freedom of expression. THAT's what I'm asking the minister to address. I am surprised that the Minister has not somehow said to Ukraine, because, as was said earlier, if you are friends, then you are, of course, honest friends. And if we are to help Ukraine become a democracy, as I certainly think we should, then freedom of speech is part of that.

And it may well be that they cannot have it now, in the current war situation, I actually understand that, in their own country, but the fact that they are calling for us, in Denmark, to abolish freedom of expression, in certain areas, is not good. We should therefore say to Ukraine that you have to stop that. You have to take our people off the list. We will not sanction our researchers. We do not think that it is Russian disinformation or an illegal statement to say that "Western sanctions against Russia are not working," as a professor of international politics from Aalborg University has said.

Does the minister think that's an illegal statement? Or that it is spreading Russian propaganda to say that Western sanctions against Russia do not work?

[op cut end]

Excerpt 5:

Jeppe Kofod: 1. Ukraine has not asked us to abolish freedom of expression in Denmark, as has been claimed, I want to make that clear.

2. There is no request from the Ukrainian government to us, about the researchers about whom Mrs. Marie Krarup addresses us.

3. We have not received any list.

I really think we should be careful that such debates do not

get out of proportion, when we consider what it is a task we face, in terms of disinformation, misinformation. You can pick your battles as you like.

Excerpt 6:

Marie Krarup: So the Foreign Minister might deny that the list exists? It was published, it was taken down, thank God, shortly after, for example, Jyllands-Posten wrote an editorial about it. So Jyllands-Posten also lives in an alternative reality where they believe that list exists?

It does exist. And there were statements from the head of the center, and from Zelensky's advisor, Podoljak. I know that the Foreign Ministry has received documentation about that, with the translation of those documents. Where the head of the center, and Zelensky's adviser, calls on the governments, where the foreign – these are 72 people living outside Ukraine – where they are called on to take action against them. This is not an official request. That is absolutely correct, I fully agree. But it is a public request. And the Foreign Minister is apparently totally indifferent about that.

Documentation has been sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I know, because I myself received it on the same occasion.

So the question is: will the Foreign Minister follow these calls to restrict the freedom of expression of Danish researchers? I think that would be wrong. I also think it would be appropriate to say to Ukraine that we will not do that and call on them to distance themselves from the list. It is very good that it is no longer available on the website; it is still visible on their Facebook page. With photos of the people they don't like. Who they want sanctioned. So, in that way, it still exists.

I hope it's not the case that if Russia approaches Denmark, unofficially or officially, and asks to restrict the freedom of expression of some Danish researchers, that they say "never mind". Or just look out of the window.

Then I wish that they would officially distance themselves from it. Because it is just wrong.

And now that we are talking about a country which we support, and which we support because we say that it is a democracy, I just think it seems odd that no statement is being made. Jyllands-Posten could at least write an editorial about it and denounce it. And I think that the government should do the same. And then guide the Ukrainians in a friendly, honest way and say: this is a bad idea. You should not do that. We will not follow your calls to sanction Danish researchers in Denmark, no matter how terrible the situation you are in. Because they are in a completely terrible situation. It is so appalling. No matter how terrible the situation you are in, we will not destroy our own democracy, our own freedom of expression.

An honest friend of Ukraine should have said that to Ukraine. And you should also do it for the sake of the researchers, who obviously don't find it nice to have this kind of indirect threat.

So, after this consultation, I assume that the Foreign Minister now, after getting some more information, and hopefully getting a deeper understanding of what this is about, will take action on this, and address the Ukrainian government and say something about that freedom of expression in Denmark must not be destroyed, because there is a terrible situation in Ukraine, and if Ukraine wants to be a democracy, in the long term, then it has to respect freedom of expression.

Will the Foreign Minister do that?

Excerpt 7:

Jeppe Kofod: [About that Marie Krarup alleged that I] denied that there is a list, I have not. I have simply said that we have not received it. We have not received a list, from the Ukrainian Government, sent to the Danish Government of any individuals. I mentioned that it was a list that apparently has been taken down from the website, and I also believe that there are organizations, including the Schiller Institute, that have sent this material, probably to Marie Krarup, and also to me.

Excerpt 8:

Jeppe Kofod: And then once we've heard about this list, the work of this Center for Combating Disinformation, we'll come back, to the Foreign Affairs Committee. Then we can take the debate further there, if it is still relevant. (00:58:35:00)

Marie Krarup: I would like to, if it's possible. But I'm glad the minister doesn't deny it. Actually, that's not what it was about. What I find embarrassing is that the minister has not taken action to defend the freedom of expression of Danish researchers. Thank you for giving me the floor.

Christian Juhl – [Thanks the minister and Marie Krarup.] We would like, in the Foreign Affairs Committee, to receive a written briefing, when it is available, with the facts about it, and then we can consider an extension of the consultation. Thanks to all.

The video, in Danish, and the full transcript in Danish may be seen here.

Jyllands-Posten editorial, August 11, 2022 at 6:30pm. Jyllands-Posten is one of the three major Danish daily newspapers. Here are some excerpts.

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Title: Ukraine and free speech

Kicker: It is worrying when Ukraine blacklists researchers and others who have a different view of the conflict from the unequivocally pro-Ukrainian one.

Beginning: "If not before, then certainly since February 24 this year, the Ukrainian people and their President, Volodymyr Zelensky, could not have any doubt that a united West and the EU are fully behind them....

[In speeches, Zelensky] "skillfully appealed to unity and emphasized what we know, that Ukraine's struggle for freedom is ours too. It has helped to underline and convince, even more, that Ukraine naturally belongs in Europe, and eventually in the European Union – one day on the other side of the war.

"But to get there, there are conditions to be met. Among them is the fundamental acceptance of free speech. Even before the war, there were stories that freedom of expression, particularly for the media, did not always enjoy favorable conditions in Ukraine, and it is obvious that this is even worse in a war like the present one. But that is why it is still necessary for the country, and especially its President, to show that it accepts free speech and the right to disagree.

"The Centre for Countering Disinformation sounds like something out of George Orwell's '1984', but it is a center under Ukraine's National Security Council. The center presumably has a central function during the war, but it has also recently been used to blacklist 72 international politicians, thinkers and researchers, including four Danes [really three Danes and one Swede- mr]: Russia expert Jens Jørgen Nielsen, peace and conflict researcher Jan Øberg, chairman of the Schiller Institute in Sweden Ulf Sandmark and Aalborg University professor Li Xing.

“What the four Danes have in common is that they took part in a seminar at the end of May on alternatives to the current security policy structure in the world in order to reduce tensions and the division of countries into, for example, members and non-members of NATO. Li Xing, among others, opposes Russia’s attack on Ukraine, but he has also questioned the long-term impact of the sanctions policy based on his research. Both – the theme of the seminar and the questioning of Western sanctions policy – are of course perfectly legitimate in a free and open society.

“It is therefore worrying when Ukraine blacklists researchers and others who have a different view of the conflict. For it can hardly be seen as anything other than an attempt to silence them and label any angle other than the pro-Ukrainian one as pro-Russian, and thus on the wrong side of history.

“Ukraine’s fight for freedom in the face of its opposite, Putin’s barbaric unfreedom, is heroic and deserves all our support. But in rejecting free speech, free research and free debate, it is precisely Ukraine and its President who are in danger of moving to the wrong side, far from the ideals that they will hopefully pursue on the other side of the war, to emphasize that they are part of us, as we now see their struggle as ours.” End of the editorial.

It should be noted that Jyllands-Posten led an international campaign for free speech after they printed derogatory cartoons of the prophet Mohammed in 2005. Now, they have something much better to defend.

pictures: Marie Krarup: screen grab
Jeppe Kofod: Michelle Rasmussen