

Damian Szacawa

Pragmatic Idealism: A New Strategy for Danish Foreign and Security Policy

Keywords: Denmark, Ukraine, NATO, EU, Foreign Policy, Security

On May 16, 2023, the Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, presented a new strategy for foreign and security policy based on three priorities: enhancing security, creating global partnerships, and building a resilient society. All these goals are part of the continuation of efforts to support Ukraine and the international political and economic isolation of Russia.

Priorities of the new strategy: a substantial shift in emphasis. In the narrative accompanying the announcement of the new Danish foreign and security policy strategy, Minister L. Løkke Rasmussen emphasized that in an uncertain and complex world, Denmark should be guided by the principle of pragmatic idealism. For him, this means pursuing national interests through an ambitious foreign policy based on a realistic assessment of Danish capabilities and close cooperation with partners in Europe and the transatlantic area to actively defend core values (democracy, fundamental freedoms, and human rights). The previous strategy, adopted in January 2022, on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, focused on a commitment to universal values and prioritized diplomatic solutions and dialogue based on existing institutional frameworks (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 536](#)).

In the current strategy, the Danish government has focused its actions around three priorities, which stem from the need to adapt to a new international reality characterized by increased distrust towards other actors, the long-term consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and unpredictability. Firstly, there is a significantly greater emphasis on ensuring the security of Denmark and Europe in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Secondly, the need to strengthen global partnerships and alliances has been signalled. Thirdly, attention has been drawn to the need for building a more robust and resilient society in terms of supply chains, energy security, and critical infrastructure.

Increasing the role and significance of the European Union. In light of this document, the European Union (EU) is beginning to play a key role in Denmark's foreign and security policy. It is mentioned over 150 times in the short text as a significant geopolitical actor that should take greater responsibility for security in Europe and further utilize the opportunities provided by its economic position. This means that Denmark's interests lie in any actions aimed at increasing cooperation in the field of security and defence within the EU (since May 23, 2023, Denmark has participated in the Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO), especially after the Danes voted in a referendum on June 1, 2022, to renounce the opt-out clause regarding EU defence policy (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 645](#)).

At the same time, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and strong transatlantic relations remain pillars of Denmark's security (in February 2022, Denmark began negotiations with the United States on a bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement). Their importance in the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic is increasing with Finland's accession to the Alliance (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 822](#)) and the expected ratification of Sweden's accession protocol (Denmark was one of the first states to ratify both accession protocols on July 5, 2022). The completion of the ratification process will enable further harmonization of the activities of the Nordic countries in the field of defence policy, including joint military exercises and coordination of defence plans. The steps taken so far include, among others, the signing of a letter of intent on March 16, 2023, by the air force commanders from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden regarding the establishment of unified Nordic air defence. This initiative aims to create a common concept of air operations based on four areas of cooperation, which include: (1) integrated command and control, operational planning, and execution of aviation operations; (2) a flexible and continuous support system, including the resilient deployment of air forces and flexible use of



bases in other states; (3) shared situational awareness in airspace, including joint monitoring of that airspace; and (4) joint education, training, and exercises of air forces.

Global partnerships and alliance building to support societal resilience. The new global situation which emerged after Russia's aggression against Ukraine requires much greater involvement of Denmark and EU states to take into account the interests of Asian, African, and Latin American countries. The Danish government has acknowledged that the competition for influence in these regions as well as building equal partnerships with these actors (e.g., based on the EU's Global Gateway strategy) will be crucial in safeguarding the interests and values of Denmark and the European Union, especially those related to energy transition towards green energy. Therefore, Denmark intends to intensify its green diplomacy, leveraging both EU climate policy and measures within official development assistance (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 192](#)).

Emphasizing the need for a further shift in the approach to China towards a more stringent relationship, drawing on experiences resulting from China's presence in the Arctic (see more: ["IEŚ Commentaries", No. 130](#)), Minister L. Løkke Rasmussen also pointed out the growing importance of China in global trade. The dynamic development of the Chinese industry and the accompanying increase in greenhouse gas emissions already pose a challenge to achieving the climate goals set in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

The overall future efforts aimed at shaping global partnerships present Denmark not only with challenges but also with numerous opportunities to enhance the resilience of society to various crises. At the same time, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's cabinet recognises the need to support Danish companies operating in the areas of energy transformation, transport, and digitisation in terms of investment control, cybersecurity, and export control of key technologies. This will lead to changing and shortening of supply chains, thereby strengthening Denmark's internal security.

Support for Ukraine. The centrist coalition led by Prime Minister M. Frederiksen is convinced of the necessity of both long-term military and economic support for Ukraine as well as a continued commitment to Ukraine's post-war security. Assistance from Denmark to Ukraine has not been the subject of significant debates – on March 15, 2023, with an overwhelming majority of parliamentary parties, the Ukrainian Fund was established with a value of 7 billion Danish kroner (approximately 940 million euros). Since February 2022, Denmark has supported Ukraine with funds totalling approximately 1.5 billion euros (of which military aid accounts for approximately 1.3 billion euros and civilian aid approximately 192 million euros).

Previous military packages included the delivery of anti-tank weapons, Harpoon anti-ship cruise missiles, and other military assistance including training of Ukrainian soldiers. Additionally, on May 20, 2023, Defence Minister Troels Lund Poulsen announced that Denmark would participate in training Ukrainian pilots on F16 aircraft. The country also promised to transfer 14 Leopard 2A4 tanks worth 165 million euros (a joint initiative with the Netherlands) and 19 French Caesar wheeled self-propelled howitzers (ordered in 2017 and 2019, which means Denmark is getting rid of all armament of this type). Furthermore, Denmark shares the costs of aid provided to Ukraine by EU institutions, and there were over 36,000 refugees from Ukraine on its territory as of April 30, 2023.

Conclusions

- The main reason for the preparation of Denmark's new foreign and security policy strategy is Russia's aggression against Ukraine, perceived by the Danish government as one of the turning points (critical junctures) in world history. Therefore, regardless of the outcome of this war, the Danish government maintains that European states must adapt to the new reality, including the direct consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine (related to providing continuous support to Ukraine and its integration into European structures) as well as indirect consequences (energy and food crises, radicalisation of sentiments, increased irregular immigration).

- The newly adopted strategy for foreign policy and security will also impact other key areas for Denmark's defence. This includes the ongoing negotiations for a new defence agreement for 2024-2029, in which most of the parties represented in parliament participate (excluding the left-wing Alternative and the Red-Green coalition). The remaining seven parties agree on the goal of allocating 2% of GDP to defence spending by 2030. The projected increase in defence spending will translate into greater combat capabilities for Denmark and its ability to operate in the Arctic, the Baltic Sea region, and the rest of the world.
- However, the influence of the new strategy on Denmark's policy within the European Union will also be significant, including the preparation of the 18-month programme of the Trio Presidency of the Council of the EU for 2025-2026, which will consist of Poland, Denmark, and Cyprus. In light of the Danish strategy, increased cooperation within the EU should lead to better countering of hybrid attacks and higher societal resilience to external shocks in EU states.