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Denmark/Ukraine

# Return from Ukraine

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**The Nordic left is making great strides in its thinking on questions of popular defence and security in Europe. This reflection is nourished by its sustained and permanent commitment in favour of Ukraine. It actively supports Ukrainian trade unions and social movements as well as progressive anti-fascist fighters who combat Russian imperialism.**

**Bjarke Friborg, a member of the Danish Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) has returned from Ukraine where he visited Solidarity Collectives with Helene Vadsten. He was kind enough to answer our questions.**

**Could you introduce us to Enhedslisten (Red-Green Alliance), its history and political orientations?**

The Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) was founded in 1989 as a united front of several radical left traditions in Denmark, notably the Left Socialists, the Communist Party, the Trotskyist SAP (Fourth International) and a Maoist group. After initially struggling to cross the 2% electoral threshold, the Red-Green Alliance entered parliament in 1994 and has since become an important parliamentary and extra-parliamentary force of the Danish left.

Today, the party combines a strong ecosocialist and internationalist profile with an emphasis on growing social inequalities and general questions relating to the working class. We systematically criticise capitalist austerity and an ecological transition that is too slow and incoherent in the face of climate catastrophe. The party works closely with popular movements, trade union activists and remains a pluralist organisation with strong internal democracy. Since 2011, we generally obtain 5 to 7% of the vote nationally, and in the last local elections in 2021, we obtained 24.6% of votes in Copenhagen, making us the most popular political party in the city.

In recent years, debates have taken place around questions such as the EU, NATO, Ukraine and Palestine. Some accuse us of having "betrayed our principles" because we now present socialist candidates to the European Parliament instead of advocating exit from the EU, because we support arms deliveries to Ukraine, even if they transit through NATO, and because we defend a free Palestine whilst condemning Hamas as a far-right terrorist group. However, for the majority of party members, we are simply defending coherent and practical international solidarity in favour of workers', women's and minorities' rights.

**The Red-Green Alliance is strongly committed in favour of Ukraine and more particularly in favour of the Ukrainian left. What is the political meaning of this commitment and how does this translate concretely?**

From the beginning of the large-scale invasion, we have maintained that this is a question of fundamental solidarity with people who resist oppression and imperialist aggression. The Russian invasion is clearly an imperialist war of conquest, and Ukraine's right to self-determination must be defended, which, in practice, includes military support. This does not mean, however, that we support the Ukrainian government, the oligarchs or corruption.

On the contrary, we collaborate with the Ukrainian left, trade unions and civil society organisations that fight not only for national independence, but also for democracy, social rights and workers' control. In collaboration with the Green party Alternative, and since 2023 via the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD) [1], we have obtained direct financial aid for the progressive organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh (Social Movement). Thanks to this support, they have been able to open social centres in Kyiv, Lviv and in the industrial city of Kryvyi Rih [2], in the east of the country. We are always impressed by the work of these activists, which unequivocally confirms that Ukrainians are

not simply pawns on the geopolitical chessboard, but rather the actors of their own struggle for liberation.

### **Do you think there is a Russian threat to Europe? How do you characterise it?**

It is obvious that Russia is itself a European country, and a large one. However, if you are referring to the European Union and allied countries such as Norway, as well as other neighbouring countries of Russia, the threat posed by Putin's regime is undeniably very real. Not necessarily in terms of "tanks entering Paris", but certainly as a threat to democracy, sovereignty and the principle that borders cannot be changed by brute force. As a left organisation, we oppose Russian imperialism just as we have opposed American and NATO imperialism: not by supporting one bloc against another, but by defending peoples' right to self-determination and supporting democratic and progressive forces in Russia and its client state, Belarus.

### **How do you articulate a policy of popular defence alongside your social emancipation policy? And how is this perceived in the "left" in general?**

For us, the key concept is that of popular defence – a democratic defence based on citizens and anchored in civil society, and not a militarised state apparatus serving the interests of corporations, the arms industry and imperialist interventions in Africa, Central Asia or elsewhere. Defence is not limited to weapons and armies, but concerns the collective capacity of people to organise and protect their communities.

Some on the left see this as a contradiction, but we maintain that it is coherent: opposing militarism does not mean ignoring the necessity for peoples to resist aggression. The alternative to popular defence consists of leaving the field open to authoritarian powers.

**Faced with the Russian threat, the Western left has found itself helpless. Its mostly obsolete anti-militarist traditions place it in insoluble contradictions. On the one hand it denounces the military-industrial complex and rearmament but on the other it demands arms deliveries for Ukraine. It denounces NATO but remains silent on military alliances between Russia and China. And says nothing about the extraordinary armament effort of the latter. How do you approach these defence and therefore also military questions both at the level of your country and at the European level?**

The left has always been divided on security questions, but Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine has clearly brought about a new rebalancing and rejection of certain dichotomies. For us, members of the Red-Green Alliance and the Nordic left in general, there is no contradiction between military support for Ukraine, and criticism of NATO and of the arms industry. We firmly condemn Russian aggression, but we also oppose massive [western] military reinforcements based on arbitrary objectives set by Donald Trump.

At the same time, we call for the socialisation of the arms industry, the prohibition of EU arms exports to countries such as Israel and China, and a global security architecture based on mutual disarmament, cooperation and popular sovereignty – and not on a new arms race.

[The Danish Red-Green Alliance website](#)

**During the last conference of the Danish Red Green Alliance, which dealt notably with defence questions, the SAP (Danish section of the Fourth International) criticised the Alliance for "not having a defence policy radically different from that of the parliamentary mainstream" and therefore aligning yourselves with bourgeois parties. What do you have to say to this accusation?**

The conference approved a new defence and security policy that supports the provision of arms to Ukraine and the strengthening of territorial defence of Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands [3], whilst rejecting a general strengthening of military capabilities, an international arms race and granting military powers to the EU. This clearly distinguishes us from all other parties represented in parliament. Regarding the SAP, the group has mainly warned the Red-Green Alliance against any illusions about reforming NATO or the EU. These two organisations are composed of imperialist states pursuing their own interests, and any military strengthening will ultimately serve these interests rather than international solidarity or protection of democracy in countries such as Moldova and Georgia. I understand and respect this criticism, whilst emphasising that the SAP has always supported arming Ukraine and does not explicitly oppose investments in civil preparedness or better protection against hybrid warfare and cyber attacks.

### Further information

On the other hand, some members of the Red-Green Alliance proposed an alternative declaration that rejected without distinction any type of investment linked to the idea of territorial defence, whilst de facto abandoning Ukraine and warning against "choosing sides" in a war that is "equally" a proxy war. I am pleased that this declaration was rejected.

### **Denmark's armed forces are unusual. There is a non-commissioned officers' union which is a member of the workers' confederation LO. What do you think of the functioning and organisation of the Danish army?**

In all Nordic countries and in the Netherlands, soldiers and officers have trade unions with collective bargaining rights and elected representatives. The unions are integrated into the labour market system, but their role consists of representing subordinates as employees, which differs from the democratic popular control over armed forces envisaged by the Red-Green Alliance.

Historically, relations between the Danish left and the main military union HKKF (Union of Soldiers and Corporals) have alternated between cooperation and tensions. In the 1970s, the so-called "red soldiers" movement among conscripts challenged military hierarchies, NATO and Danish defence policy, demanding better conditions and more democratic influence. The HKKF, which represents professional soldiers, adopted a more moderate and loyal position, which some members of the left judged too close to the system, even though collaboration was established on practical questions such as housing and working hours. Today, the HKKF functions as a traditional trade union focused on wages and working conditions. It should be noted that in 2018, its president was the chief negotiator for 180,000 civil servants on the brink of a general strike. Danish soldiers join demonstrations in uniform and support social media campaigns, notably through posts by personnel deployed in Afghanistan brandishing solidarity slogans.

### **From this point of view, following your recent trips to Ukraine, what can you tell us about the Ukrainian army? Both in terms of its social composition (essentially working class) and its functioning, the Ukrainian army is surprising. We know that there exists within it, for example, an LGBTQ military union or that unionised workers in uniform are in permanent contact with the trade unions of which they are members.**

As part of a Red-Green Alliance delegation, I met several progressive civil society organisations and trade unions in Ukraine that all demonstrated strong commitment in favour of the defence effort and army performance. This included general and targeted support for soldiers, specific groups and units, as well as veterans. From a left perspective, I find the Solidarity Collectives particularly remarkable because they channel direct aid to anti-fascists, trade unionists and eco-activists on the front, with support from a vast international grassroots network.

Beyond their humanitarian efforts, they also participate in artisanal drone production which has clearly become an

important element of international solidarity efforts. [Further information](#). These forms of civilian and military interactions are very different from the situation in countries like Denmark, but they are of course entirely understandable whilst missiles continue to rain down on Ukrainian homes, farms and cities.

Fundamentally, this reflects the fact that Ukraine's defence clearly does not rest solely on a permanent army composed of professionals and conscripts, but on a popular war effort, with the army being composed of ordinary workers, trade unionists, students, LGBTQ people and volunteers who fight for their communities. As a result, there exists an extraordinary degree of interaction between civilians and the military, with activist networks and non-profit organisations providing everything from medical supplies to home-built drones.

The mainstream media tends to highlight sophisticated Western weapons and financial aid worth several billion dollars. However, what often goes unnoticed are the popular fundraising campaigns and self-organised production networks that support Ukrainian resistance daily. At the same time, soldiers still do not benefit from essential rights, even in wartime. There are no transparent rules regarding rest, demobilisation or rehabilitation, and official trade union organisations are prohibited. However, new initiatives have emerged to fill this gap. Initiatives such as the LGBTQ Military Union of Ukraine or the "Invisible Battalion" (which focuses on women in war) have gained prominence, whilst the progressive organisation Sotsialnyi Rukh has set up its own helpline and provides free legal aid to soldiers, veterans and their families.

[More information](#)

### **Do other left parties in Scandinavia and Northern Europe more or less share your positions? How do you collaborate or envisage collaborating?**

The Red-Green Alliance collaborates closely with left parties in the region – the Swedish Vänsterpartiet, Norwegian Rødt and the Finnish Left Alliance, as well as with movements in Iceland and the Baltic countries [4]. We do not always agree on all tactical questions, but we all recognise that solidarity with Ukraine is indispensable and that we must redefine left security policy for a new era. Our objective is to build a Nordic and European network that links support for Ukraine to a broader, socialist, feminist and ecological vision of security, beyond militarism.

27 August 2025

*Interview conducted by Michel Lanson and Patrick Le Tréhondat for the [Bastille Network \(France\)](#). Translated for [ESSF](#) by Adam Novak.*

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[1] The Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD) is a Danish organisation that provides support for democratic development and party cooperation internationally

[2] Kryvyi Rih is a major industrial city in central Ukraine, known for its iron ore mining and steel production

[3] Greenland and the Faroe Islands are autonomous territories within the Kingdom of Denmark

[4] The Baltic countries - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania - gained independence from Soviet rule in 1991 and joined NATO and the EU in 2004