



Report: The International Transform conference in Copenhagen, Saturday, 11 March 2023:

“Climate change - collateral damage of military spending”

This the 11th International Transform conference in Copenhagen was held at a time with continuing huge focus on the war in Ukraine, on increased arms assistance to Ukraine from many Western countries, and with the main priorities of the West – the US, the EU and many EU countries in particular - to step up militarization and arms spending.

Even more now, with a marked increase in extreme weather conditions - climate change is here for good - climate warming seems not to be a primary political concern in the EU/Europe compared to the concern to increase rearmament. This at the same time as the dire consequences of war and increased military spending with rising CO2 emissions will precisely boost climate warming. This is a neglected issue, which is why we chose for this conference to take a closer look at this issue.

We also continued the debate on degrowth at the Transform conference this year in one of the parallel sessions in the afternoon. This was a priority after a highly successful event in November 2022 on degrowth, a follow-up public meeting of the international Transform conference in March last year. We organized the event in a cooperation with the Danish *Global Aktion* and managed to have the physical presence of well-renowned speakers and attracted a huge audience. WE consider as well the evolvement of this debate vital for an understanding of the difficulties to perform the green transformation of our societies.

This year's conference was a hybrid conference like last year's with the advantage to be able to include participants from outside Copenhagen and Denmark and to boost the debate with physical and active participants. But the Zoom participation tends

to reduce the number of physical participants. And the fact that over half of the speakers – unlike at last year’s conference – spoke online, contributed to make the debate less lively. Likewise, very few speakers contributed with power-point presentations and sent their speeches after the conference. We kept the organizational division in three sessions (two parallel sessions in the afternoon), which was particularly difficult with a hybrid construction and fewer participants than previously. We have already discussed how we can modify our future conferences to overcome some of the difficulties, one is to avoid parallel sessions.

We had a number of technical difficulties with the Zoom, which would have been hard to overcome without the good assistance from transform!europe in the conference (Katerina Anastasiou was one of the speakers as well). But this caused an unfortunate delay of the start of the conference.

We had as usual a close cooperation with a couple of Danish environmental organizations (Global Aktion and NOAH – Friends of the Earth), which we will make a priority also in the future. They share our radical views of how to combat climate change: that the need for system change is central to understanding the insufficiency of present policies focusing on reform of the system and greenwashing, and not on systemic change.

The conference - content

As stated above the main topics of the conference were the effects of militarization and war on climate change and developing further the discussion on the issue of degrowth.

Keynote speakers in Session 1 in the morning were **Jeremy Scahill** (online), USA, who is a co-founder of *The Intercept*, and **Kuupik Kleist**, President ICC Greenland, who both dealt with the unfolding intensification of global power relations and included a concern about the role of the Arctic area – again as a player in a new cold war era. Session 2 in the afternoon dealt with the EU’s role and increase in military spending: **Marc Botenga** (*online*), Workers’ Party of Belgium, and MEP, and **Niamh Aine Ni Bhriain**, Ireland - Transnational Institute, contributed with their information and views. Session 3 – both speakers online: **Andrea Vetter**, Germany, and **Luis González Reyes**, Spain, focused on different aspects of degrowth. **Katerina Anastasiou** - transform!europe – who was supposed to speak in Session 2 - moved herself to the end of the programme to introduce the final conclusion and round-up discussion.

As previously, the introduction to the programme of the conference outlined the basic concerns of the conference:

“It is striking how little the climate crisis weighs in the political priorities of today’s governments and politicians - compared to their fast and resolute actions around Covid 19 in the spring of 2020, and likewise the speedy decision-making after Putin’s attack on Ukraine with huge sums of money allocated to military spending. The most radical “green” step, affecting climate change and green transformation, was the decision to cut importation of gas from Russia. But then this was closely related to the sanctioning of Russia and besides it led to an increase in the production of gas and coal in Europe, as well as an EU decision to promote nuclear power and natural gas as “green” energy.

Can the climate movement address and impact on this and postpone a climate collapse? How to change the priorities of governments and politicians? Militarization and rearmament have been made such a huge priority in most Western/NATO countries that it is practically destroying the effort to cut CO2 and boost green transformation. The problem is not only that the huge increase in military spending undermines the spending on climate and welfare. Rearmament and militarization as such are some of the worst factors increasing CO2 emissions.

We aim to take a closer look at this dire situation and come up with an analysis of the consequences of war and militarization for the climate as part of the conference programme.

Increase in extreme weather conditions

The extreme weather conditions hitting Europe and other parts of the world have not decreased this year. On the contrary – they are now a reminder that climate change has come for good. In the coming climate conference, we will address the issue of the present and real state of global warming – what can people expect to be confronted and to cope with in their daily lives in the short-term. How is climate adaptation working? With a future of increased militarization and CO2, when will this further a climate collapse – or is it already happening?

We will take a look at the concrete plans and policies of the EU and national governments such as the EU Green Deal, the EU recovery plan from July 2020, the Climate Law (“Fit for 55”), the EU strategy for adaptation to climate change as well as the steps to confront the energy crisis due to the recent war.

As previously, we also wish to include a focus on combating the severe climate problems outside Europe and the responsibility of the global North in this regard.

Goal and results – the need for system change to combat climate change
We wish to continue the debate on how to combat climate change, and why the current policies and state of affairs in EU/Brussels, nationally and globally are insufficient. The need for system change is central in understanding the insufficiency of present policies focusing on reform of the system and not systemic change. The present EU focus on a strategy of adaptation to climate change displays the core of the problem. There is no real political determination to deliver on what is needed to avoid the climate collapse that can be expected within the next 5 – 10 years or earlier. The consequences for the climate of the increase in militarization of the Western societies are deliberately overlooked – there is very little or no climate accounting. Rather politicians acknowledge their poor performance in combating climate change and that there is nothing left to do now than to adapt to the consequences of global warming. Sometimes climate researchers even come under attack when warning about the dangerous rise in CO2 emissions.

During the past few years, our international Transform climate conferences have focused on the need for system change to combat climate change. We aim to continue to pursue and reinforce our arguments and work for system change. The neoliberal era – as we know it - is at an end, there are clear signs of economic crisis. Persistent political attempts to combine climate policies with neoliberalism and economic growth will fail, to the detriment of the climate and us all. System change is needed to combat climate change. It is vital for an understanding of the climate struggle that it is part of the class struggle. This is the core of our perspective to build political, economic, social, and ecological alternatives. The conference will also as previously offer a bid for more long-term versions of transformed societies: eco-socialism and eco-feminism and continue the debate on the role of degrowth.”

Besides Transform!Danmark and transform!europe, the conference was co-organized by Enhedslisten/the Red-Green Alliance, the Danish radical left party, as well as a number of left-wing and environmental organizations, including NOAH - Friends of the Earth, Global Aktion, Extinction Rebellion, the Green Youth Movement, and web-magazines Solidaritet and Kritisk Revy.

Session 1: Global considerations

Jeremy Scahill (*online*), – USA, co-founder of The Intercept and author of the books *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army* and *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield*. Title of contribution: ***“The War Party: From Bush to Obama and Trump to Biden, the doctrine of “American Exceptionalism” is undermining global security and threatening the planet.”***

Jeremy Scahill made the following introduction to his talk: “In the years since 9/11, the United States has experienced a series of unorthodox presidents. Barack Obama made history as the first African-American to win the White House, Donald Trump, a flamboyant and erratic businessman, defeated an establishment titan to take control, and Joe Biden—a career insider politician— is the oldest person ever to win the presidency. While there is a tendency to focus on the stark differences between these men and their policies, on some core matters there is little difference between their administrations. On national security policy, the U.S. has been on a steady, hypermilitarized arc for decades. Taken broadly, U.S. policy has been largely consistent on “national security” and “counterterrorism” matters from 9/11 to the present.

The Biden presidency is, perhaps more than any in recent history, a caretaker government, and on issues of counterterrorism, militarism, and national security, its constituency is the War Party. The bedrock principles of this bipartisan coalition revolve around a nonnegotiable set of understandings:

- The U.S. has the sovereign right to unilaterally impose its will on the world.
- The U.S. makes the rules of the international order but is not bound by them.
- The U.S. will use the iron fist of militarism to defend neoliberal economic policies and the usurping of natural resources.
- No national or international body is fit to stand in judgment of its actions or conduct.

What does it say about a country that manages to stay the imperial course through such a diverse succession of leaders as George W. Bush (and Dick Cheney), Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden?”

Kuupik Kleist, Greenland, President ICC Greenland (Inuit Circumpolar Conference); former Chairperson Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA) and MP (Danish Parliament and Greenland Parliament), former Prime Minister Greenland. Title of contribution: ***“Consequences of climate change in Greenland and increasing international conflict in the Arctic area” - Indigenous Arctic Peoples and the militarization of the Arctic.***

Kuupik Kleist explained in his introduction: “Before and since the 2nd world war, the Arctic area became the buffer zone between then the 2 superpowers of the world,

Russia and The United States. Meanwhile during the late 1980's and the technical development the USA left and closed most of its military bases in Greenland, actually the only base left is the Thule Air Base.

Jumping to today's situation, it seems that we are back to the cold war era, Greenland again in the middle, but also this time with slightly different players now that China's interest in playing a role in the Arctic has increased. For the Kingdom of Denmark, including Faroe Islands and Greenland, new challenges arise. From the US demand for Denmark to increase its military spending to Greenland and Faroe Islands practically and constitutionally having no influence on Danish defense policy and investments. "

- *Inspired by:*
- *Olsvig og Gad, "Grønland som udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk aktør", in Rahbek Clemmensen & Sørensen (eds.)*
- *Sara Olsvig: Ph.d.fellow at Ilisimatusarfik – The University of Greenland*
- *Ulrik Pram Gad: Senior Researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies*

Session 2: EU/Europe in a time of war and crisis: EU/European rearmament and "green" adaptation to sanctions against Russia and the effects on climate change. The response of left parties and the climate/environmental movement.

The speakers in this session - **Marc Botenga**, Workers' Party of Belgium, and **Niamh Aine Ni Bhriain**, Transnational Institute - focused on EU rearmament policies and the huge increase in EU/European defence/military spending. **Katarina Anastasiou** (transform!europe) postponed her talk till the last item on the agenda

Marc Botenga (*online*), Workers' Party of Belgium, MEP, THE LEFT in EP. Title of contribution: **"Avoiding a race to arms: reconsidering EU defence policy"**
 Introducing his speech: "Social and climate spending have come under pressure of an increasing desire to up military spending. The European Union has for many years now been looking at how to increase investment in the military industrial complex. Several programmes led to the establishment of the European Defence Fund. Russia's war against Ukraine reinforced this tendency. The objective is the fostering of a so-called competitive EU military industry. In addition, weapons and military material sent to Ukraine will most likely be replaced by additional purchases of military material. The Defence Industry Reinforcement through common procurement act is being adapted to open up to US companies. But an arms race is not the only option. Taken together, EU Member States spend a lot more on defence already than most countries in the world, including Russia. Rather than looking at blindly increasing spending, at the cost of social and climate expenditure, we need to be looking at how

to rationalize current spending and change our approach to defence and foreign policy. Better for the climate. Better for workers.”

Niamh Aine Ni Bhriain, Ireland - Transnational Institute, War and Pacification Programme. Title of contribution: *“Military in Europe on the rise but at what cost?”*

Niamh said in her introduction: “Our world has never been more militarised. Global military spending is at a record high of US \$2.1 trillion and governments worldwide are increasingly advocating militarism as an adequate and necessary response to tackle political, social, and economic challenges. Expressions of dissent, movement and migration, the climate crisis and health emergencies are being framed by our governments as threats to the stability of the nation-state. Public policy on issues that should be addressed as health or humanitarian concerns is instead being securitised and subsequently militarised to tackle the perceived threats. The latest example of this is with regard to climate where we see governments posing military ‘solutions’ to tackle the challenges of a warming planet. In this session we will look at how European policy has become more militarised over the past two decades, exposing who has reaped the massive financial benefits, while also recounting the deadly implications for those on the receiving end of such policies, in particular on those attempting to arrive at our shores. We will ask whether these policies have made us safer or heightened our sense of fear. Looking forward, we will ask ourselves how these militarised policies are likely to play out in an increasingly hostile and heated world and arguing that it is time to urgently shift course and de-militarise public policy.”

See Niamh Aine Ni Bhriain’s power-point presentation [European Militarism – At What Cost on the Transform!Danmark website:](https://www.transformdanmark.dk/)
<https://www.transformdanmark.dk/>

Session 3: The impact of economic growth on climate change and systemic alternatives. The role of degrowth – is there such a thing as sustainable green growth ? Follow-up debate from 2022.

Andrea Vetter (*online*), Germany – Transformation researcher, activist, journalist. Title of contribution: *“An ecofeminist perspective on degrowth”*

Andrea Vetter introduced her talk as follows: “The capitalist world system is a gendered and racified system. It will not be possible to overcome ecological crises without overcoming the profit oriented and growth driven structure of our economies. Therefore, we need to orient towards a degrowth society where the work of nature, women and queer people and colonized and racified people is not exploited. This would be a radical transformation that not only challenges our main institutions in

Europe and elsewhere but also the common imperial mode of living of the global middle classes. What can a solidarity mode of living look like, and how are gender roles, care relationships, working days and property rights shaped in such a degrowth society?”

Luis González Reyes (*online*), Spain - Ecologistas en acción.

Luis Reyes had the following introduction to his talk: “The green growth proposal is sustained under three premises: the development of renewable energies is capable of substituting all the benefits of fossil fuels, the dematerialization of the economy and technological development as the central solution to the challenges. The three premises have solid data that allow, at least, to question them. In addition, they imply entering situations of very high climatic risk. In contrast, degrowth proposals allow entering within the framework of climate security, while facing the energy, material and ecosystem crisis allowing a good life. These are measures that imply radical changes at an economic, political, and cultural level, but that are feasible.”

See Luis González Reyes’ power-point presentation [The role of degrowth – is there such a thing as sustainable green growth? on the Transform!Danmark website: https://www.transformdanmark.dk/](https://www.transformdanmark.dk/)

The conference programme, the recording of parts of the conference (the morning programme esp.), some of the speeches, and the power-point presentations from the conference can be viewed on the Transform!Danmark website: <https://www.transformdanmark.dk/>

The report of the conference, or parts of it, will be published by transform!europe: www.transform-network.net

Transform!Danmark
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