



# Lone Dybkjærs tale ved The International University Conference

**Taler**

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for Radikale Venstre

**Dato**

6. juni 1997

**Sted**

København

I have been asked to make a keynote speech today about Why Denmark makes a difference in European environmental policy. This is a title I could imagine would make a lot of you think about the old proverb saying they (the Danes) do not hide their light under a bushel. I am saying: one should not hide ones light under a bushel if there is not enough room for it. Let see what you have to say afterwards.

The environmental issue has a tendency to divide people in 'optimists' and 'pessimists'. The optimists say that we are doing more than ever before, and rightly so. The pessimists are saying: but this is not enough - because growth in population and industrial development are bigger than ever before, and rightly so. What should we believe? Both are right - both tendencies exist. So the only thing we can do is to get down to the problems by being optimistic: People can make a difference if they so wish. We have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Aid. That brought out deep emotions in many of us, and also showed that "global society" is not a newly invented term. After the Second World War Western Europe was in a deep economic and social crisis. Fortunately, and thanks to our American friends who created the Marshall Plan, we were helped and brought along the way to where and what we are today: A European Union of some of the richest countries in the world.

The US had, in those days, a very big strategic interest in a strong Western Europe. And they still have. Their problem is, however, that they don't think we are willing to take responsibility. To a certain extent I agree. But I do think it is necessary for US to understand one thing: the EU will do it in its own way. US may for instance want the 'United States of Europe'. Denmark doesn't - in my opinion, of course. But Denmark has a strong interest in keeping the US in Europe. We do not want the Berlin-Paris axis. Therefore, Denmark is one of the US strongest allies, and we do take responsibility. We are ready, and we realise that the time for paying back has come. But we just want to do it in our own way. Like all children who grow up.

The US helped us - the Western European countries - in the 1950s. Now it is our turn to help Eastern Europe in reaching the same standard of living as we have - but in a different and less polluting way. For their sake and for ours. Let me - with the optimistic approach still in mind - just mention a few reasons - or a few scaring facts, if you like:

Greenhouse effect, desertification, ozone holes, extinction of plants and animal species and contamination of drinking water - just a handful of indicators of a global crisis.

The development of these problems into a global crisis can only be prevented through a joint effort by the entire global community - and only if the economically strongest powers and groupings are determined to do so, and to do so now. Not in ten years. However, we cannot force them to act. We rely on the democratic means available. But is democracy strong enough for solving these problems? It has to be! - and it certainly can be - if the political will exist. The UN Rio summit in 1992 was an example - the first truly global summit. In two weeks time we are going to New York to the follow-up summit of Rio.

Hopefully, we can take a further big step in the right direction, and perhaps most important of all, keep the process going.

And then to the question I was asked to address today: Can a little country like Denmark really contribute in the European (or global) process towards these goals? My answer is: absolutely yes! Denmark does not only have the capabilities for contributing a lot - also a huge self-interest in doing so. But of course we cannot work alone - we need allies.

The reason for my clear "yes" is that, even if we have made the same changes as other rich countries in Europe, we have tackled it in the Danish way. Over the past 25 years - since Denmark entered the European union in 1973 - Denmark has made a transition away from an industrial society with a large agricultural sector towards a service society. This shift has been accompanied by rapid growth in production and a consumption of resources which has put a severe pressure on our environment. However, our environmental policy has steadily expanded during this period, cutting across still more of the traditional boundaries.

Denmark's present-day environmental policy builds on a number of fundamental principles, such as a high level of conservation and protection, precaution on behalf of the environment, preventive measures, the "polluter pays"-principle, and public awareness and citizen involvement. These principles have also been adopted by the European Union, but the characteristic thing about the last 25 years is that Denmark always has been a little bit ahead together with one or two other countries - or, if you like, been one of the donkeys which has pulled the waggon ahead.

Denmark is, as you know, smaller than Massachusetts and have less inhabitants than Moscow. But coming from a small country does give a global perspective. Our economy and our environment are totally dependent on the rest of the world. We know that we cannot live if we cannot export our goods - and we know that we cannot breathe if our neighbouring countries are exporting their waste to us, whether it is through the air, the sea or by land. So when the environmental problems become more transnational and cross borders - as they do to an ever-increasing extent - Denmark is the first country to search for international solutions.

But whatever Denmark chooses to do, it is evident that an isolated Danish initiative will have nothing but a minor impact on the global situation - or even more importantly - on our own. Denmark can - despite a relatively strong economy - not benefit from its weight when it comes to enforcing political viewpoints through in international settings - like for instance US, Russia or Germany in Europe. So what kind of difference can Denmark make in the European environmental policy?

We can use the power of the example. Denmark can be a frontrunner, by showing the strong economic powers as well as the less developed countries how a country can benefit from being concerned about the environment - not only in terms of health and welfare, but also economically. Generally speaking we can provide the setting for a pilot project involving a new lifestyle that combines modern industrial production and welfare with ecological responsibility.

Denmark is - just to mention an example - number one within the European

Union when it comes to implementing environmental regulations in due time.

But Denmark is more than just a humble frontrunner. Denmark is also a pressure-country. The most evident example has been the Intergovernmental Conference which is now just about to finish. Here Denmark has really managed to put environment and employment on the agenda - and not in the third or fourth row, but in the first - and as a parallel subject to common foreign and security policy. Denmark has been the donkey pulling the waggon in the direction wanted by the European citizens.

But how come that Denmark - with 5 million inhabitants - is able to influence the European environmental policy-waggon so much as we have actually done? The reason is not so difficult to find. In fact it is quite clear - it is a strategic choice: The Danish pressure for a better environment is found at almost every level of the EU decision-making:

In the Council we have our Minister for Environment and Energy, Svend Auken, who is well-known not only in Europe but also within in the United Nations (UNEP) for his skills in reaching agreements and compromises.

The Commissioner for Environment, Ritt Bjerregaard, is Danish and that of course gives special conditions since she also brought her Danish luggage . She works not only in the field of environment, but especially for integrating environment into other policy areas.

In the European-Parliament we have several Danish members in the Committee for Environment, and just until recently we even had two Danish vice-presidents of the committee.

And we have, of course, our Danish parliamentarians, not only active on the national level, but also participating in international parliamentary work or in internationale organisations for the environment, as for instance GLOBE.

But there is one more level. A level which is perhaps the most important and characteristic about the Danish environmental policy. That is the level of the people. Also here Denmark has a good ability to co-operate with other European countries and influence the state of the environment.

Denmark has a long tradition for involving the population in the preparation of legislation as well as in the enforcement of environmental policies. Focus has for a long time been directed at imparting information that reinforces people's commitment to the environmental problems - whether locally, nationally or globally, and Danes are becoming increasingly skilful at heeding nature and the environment in their daily lives. And it becomes more and more necessary. But again: we need allies - we cannot do it alone, governments cannot do it alone and even the EU cannot do it alone. The WTO-meeting in Singapore was a clear example - or to put it in different way - simply a catastrophe. Absolutely no real environmental rules were put forward to regulate the international trade relations - and here US was no ally.

If we cannot regulate the global liberalised economy sufficiently - and at the present time that seems to be very difficult even at a European level - we have to invent new policy tools. And whose choice has more weight than the choice of the people (the consumer) in the liberalised world of today? We call it "The political consumer". And to be honest: I don't think I exaggerate when I say that a Dane is one of the most "green" political consumers you will ever meet. Here we definitely have a lot to teach other European countries - governments as well as citizens. And then to one of the most discussed subjects of the environmental debate in Denmark: Can Denmark really afford to be a frontrunner and a pressure country - or as some put it: to be "the top boy" of the European class while others keep on waiting with regard to for instance the implementation or ratification of the EU environmental agreements?

The first answer to this question is the contra-question: Can we afford not to?

This concerns the future of the earth, our children and our grandchildren. And to be quite frank: Ranking as one of the most affluent industrialised countries - Denmark was in 1995 the richest country in the EU in terms of GDP per inhabitant - Denmark has a special duty to safeguard the Danish nature and environment and, on the top of this, to pave the way for other European countries to continue their development on a "green" road.

But won't we pay with a loss in competitiveness and will our employment situation not be victimised if we decide unilaterally and as pioneers to impose and implement new restrictions on production and on the exploitation of resources? My answer is - guess - NO! "Green jobs" is not only an idea but a fact in Denmark; we have the largest export of windmills in the world; and we have a lot of other examples on how the development of a Danish environmental

industry, high environmental standards and environmental aid has resulted in orders to Danish companies and thereby job opportunities. Take for instance Eastern-Europe. An enlargement of the EU is approaching. Denmark and the rest of the EU have a huge responsibility for ensuring that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic do not make the same mistakes as we did, which - if they do so - would bring the ecological crisis much closer. But we can turn this responsibility into a unique opportunity and to our advantage.

We received help 50 years ago. Now we are in a position to help others - and benefit from it ourselves. Talk about a win-win situation! Also here Denmark has showed its capability as a frontrunner. Since 1991 Denmark has spend 1.5 billion Danish Kroner on environmental aid to the East-European countries. 1.2 billion of these has been given to Danish and foreign companies with environmental projects. This has resulted in an absolute amount of 5 billion Danish Kroner of investments in the Eastern European countries in the period 1991-1996. So what does Denmark - except a lot of new jobs, which is a minor point of course - gain environmentally from these investments? Let me illustrate this with two examples:

a) Two projects in Polish power stations regarding limited application of sulphur. A contribution on 40 million Danish Kroner from the Danish Government resulted in a total investment of 1 billion and more importantly: a decrease of what equals more than 50% percent of the total Danish sulphur-emissions annually.

b) a contribution of 200 million Danish Kroner to waste-water treatment plants in the Baltic States has resulted in a total investment of approximately 1 billion Danish Kroner. The result: the establishment of 50 treatment plants which ensure complete biological treatment of the waste water from more than 2



million inhabitants.

The effects on the Danish environment of these two examples is of course difficult to measure in an exact way, but two things are clear: 1) the effects are considerable and positive; and 2) the environmental benefit from one Danish Krone spent in a country like Poland, where the use of green technology is less developed and widespread, is much bigger than the effect of 1 Danish Krone spent in Denmark.

To sum up: There is a huge environmental benefit from investing in green technology in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. A lot of Western European countries has not noticed this yet. But there is also an economical benefit. Thus, the financial contributions spent in the period 1991-1996 gave an increase in Danish export of minimum 2 billion Danish Kroner.

In other words: the market and the environment are not incompatible. The old traditional way of thinking is not going to be right, if we use the opportunities we have. So let us be optimistic: not only today, but also in the future.

And to all those of you who think I am too optimistic or celebrative I must say: Of course, some cost will be involved in the transition towards an environmentally friendly economy in the European Union, Eastern Europe as well as globally. High priority must be given to research investment and technological innovations are required. There are cost in all forms of restructuring.

But one thing is clear: Denmark should not and will not just wait for a divine power to emerge and solve the ecological crisis. I am quite sure that the word "Danish" will be widely known in large parts of the world, not only for the sweet bread you eat with your coffee, or the quality chairs you sit on, but also for a broader ecological and sustainable approach to production and consumption. Denmark should in other words - and I believe it will - continue to take the lead as an offensive frontrunner and a active pressure country.

Because a small Donkey can pull quite a lot - if it is really stubborn.

**Tags**

EU, Politisk tale, Radikale Venstre

**Relateret**

Lone Dybkjærs tale i Europa-Parlamentet  
14. januar 2004

Lone Dybkjærs tale til europæisk kvindekongres  
5. marts 2004

**URI**

<https://www.dansketaler.dk/tale/why-denmark-makes-a-difference-in-european-environmental-policy>