

THE MILITARIZATION OF THE BALTIC SEA REGION **Norway – Baltic region – ecology, non-violence and cooperation.**

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Allow me to congratulate Horst Leps on this landmark report, so scary, so timely and so important! Thanks to Oleg Bodrov for inviting me to participate in this deliberation on how to disarm and build a culture of peace in our region. Two words first on my country:

Norway is not a Baltic country. Yet the Baltic countries are our closest neighbours.

Norway does not have nuclear power plants. Yet the nuclear Baltic power plants are next door and a constant concern.

Norway had until recently two nuclear research plants and we are under the nuclear umbrella of NATO, with its first strike doctrine and decision to keep its nuclear arsenal as long as nuclear arms exist. The NATO membership has prevented our country from signing the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons, despite the great majority of Norwegians being in favour.

The militarization of the Baltic region, so well documented in the report, happens in parallel to the militarization of the neighbouring Arctic region.

The excessive militarization of the world, documented by SIPRI, the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, devouring 1914 billion dollars pr year for the military, corresponding to approximately 615 regular UN budgets, is totally unacceptable and does not answer to any of the challenges and threats of the day. The world is in the middle of a game-changing, worldwide pandemic exposing in dramatic ways the existing threats both to humanity and the planet: The climate and environmental crisis that needs our concerted and urgent action, the nuclear threat with a strengthening and modernization of arsenal and delivery systems even openly talking not only about deterrence but of “usable nukes”, and the growing inequalities allowing a tiny group of men to become excessively rich whilst hunger, poverty and misery is rampantly growing, with rising anger especially among the young who are left behind. We simply cannot allow this to continue. We need a paradigm shift, and quickly. The greatest challenge to the peace movement and peacefully and ecologically inclined people is to help develop alternatives that politicians can use to “build back better” in a post-covid-19 situation.

The actual situation should be revealing for many: The military is of no help, on the contrary: Economically, the military takes far too much resources that should be used for the wellbeing and welfare of people, for food, housing, education, health and culture. Ecologically, it has enormous bootprints, using oil, minerals, energy and other natural resources for military production, testing, keeping and fighting, on land, in the sea, air and space that the world need for civilian purposes. It is high time to understand that we cannot allow the military to be an exception to international climate agreements. Ethically, it creates fear through dangerous and false enemy images that hamper dialogue and cooperation and “justifies” the misuse of resources for military purposes. The old Latin dictate: Si vis pacem, para bellum/If you want peace, you have to prepare for war, is totally obsolete, instead we need a new kind of social contract benefitting both humanity and the planet.

We want neighbours as friends, not enemies! This was also the title of a Nordic peace- and cultural trip some of us made to Russia in 2018 hoping for renewed cooperation, getting us out of isolation and wrong perceptions of each other and perhaps even helping reduce the present tension. The tension between the West and Russia is one of the drivers behind the present militarization and arms’ race. The trip resulted indeed in establishing new partnerships and in a Russian-Nordic seminar in Oslo in February this year and with plans for continued contact. Seminar participants had open discussions on ways to continue with practical and strategic forward-looking initiatives and solution-oriented dialogues. Many echoed the words of the Mayor of the border city of Kirkenes that our security lies in the strengthening of people to people cooperation across borders.

Different alternatives were discussed of how we can contribute to changing attitudes in order to reverse the nuclear and space-arms race, reduce defence spending and get us out of the dominant growth oriented, militarized, confrontational and competitive patterns. In short, how can we build common security, human security, a culture of peace, and non-violence.

Among the concrete suggestions were to:

- strive for a non-militarized and nuclear free Arctic and Baltic Sea basin,
- continue the sharing of knowledge and ideas and get inspiration from each other's culture and art,
- work for the strengthening of civil society and democratic practices and seek ways of producing and consuming which ensures the well being of all and the integrity of the biosphere.
- establish permanent structures for peace, such as ministries and departments for peace.
- cherish and use the UN, diplomacy and multilateral cooperation,
- help implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate,
- maintain the Arctic Council non-militarized and operational,
- gather individual signatures and cities in support of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons,
- continue to warn against nuclear and other hazardous waste and make waste management safer.

It is vital to build trust between peoples, so let us revitalize the dream of a common European home, a common security with peace from Vancouver to Vladivostok. We do not want a new Cold War that will impoverish the people, instead we must move the money to be able to tackle the real security issues. Countries are not strong by their show-off of weapons, but by the caring they do for people and the planet.

We all may feel inadequate in the small things we do, but if we agree on a common vision, all our small achievements may grow into something bigger and more important.