

**Jeppe Kofod – speech delivered in connection with president Zelenskyy’s speech to the Danish people – 4 May 2022**

*Check against delivery*

82 years ago, in the gloom and darkness of the night, the attack on Denmark began.

At around 04:15 in the morning, the first soldiers crossed the Danish border at Padborg and Kruså.

Denmark was now occupied. By a foreign power. There was a war in Europe and this war had now come to Denmark.

Denmark was about to experience the "five evil years".

It was also in the darkness of the night - on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February this year - that Putin appeared on Russian state television and announced that his attack on Ukraine had begun.

Missiles, bombs, fighter jets, warships, tanks. All of these were launched into action when the world's largest country invaded Ukraine.

These were, in fact, the forces of darkness that Putin unleashed in this cold and dark night in February.

Putin believed he could quickly break the Ukrainian people’s resistance and will to fight back.

Putin thought he could isolate Ukraine. That the countries of Europe would just watch as he overran our Ukrainian friends.

Putin was wrong. Every single day since that dark night, the Ukrainian people have shown that he was wrong.

And we will also show this here - all of us gathered here tonight - in Aarhus, in Copenhagen and at home in front of the TV screens.

Tonight we light candles because we forsake the darkness and the dark forces that are trying to change Europe's borders with violence and war.

Tonight we are united because we believe in unity and solidarity. Because we will not let the forces of darkness divide us.

Let every torch we light tonight and every candle in our windows be a reminder to Putin:

The Ukrainian people cannot be defeated. Ukraine's culture, history and national identity cannot be eradicated.

Ukraine does not stand alone. We stand with Ukraine. We stand for peace, freedom and self-determination. We stand for unity and solidarity.

And let every single candle be a heartfelt greeting to the Ukrainian people from Denmark.

For the candles we light tonight are the light of hope. The light of the future. The light of friendship.

The Ukrainian people must know that Denmark and the Danes stand steadfast by your side.

We feel with you. We see the injustice being done to you and your country. And we want to help. In every way we can.

We feel a special bond with the Ukrainian people. A bond that has probably never been stronger than it is right now.

It is also a historical bond that dates back to Viking times. And it is a bond that is also appreciated in Ukraine.

Let me quote the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, my good friend Dmytro Kuleba:

“The Vikings represent a common historical heritage for both Ukraine and Denmark. Today, Ukrainians are fighting like Vikings on the battlefield against the Russian invasion forces, while Danes are fighting like Vikings for Ukraine in the EU and bilaterally.”

This is something us Danes can rightly be proud of. But these words also represent a commitment we must live up to.

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As long as the Ukrainians' struggle for their freedom lasts – so does our duty to help.

We must continue to support Ukraine. With weapons, with emergency relief aid, with financial support and with rebuilding their cities.

And we must continue to raise the price for Putin's Russia, for their cold-blooded attack on a free European country.

Denmark will continue to take the lead in the EU and internationally for the toughest possible international sanctions against Russia.

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Yesterday I myself came home from a trip to Ukraine. Here I saw with my own eyes the devastation inflicted by Russia's war.

In Irpin - a suburb of Kyiv - the devastation was almost total.

A 9-storey residential property had been hit by rocket attacks. Another was burned out after mortar attack.

A 6-story building was totally destroyed after a missile attack. There were small detached houses that were dilapidated after tank attacks.

These are the results of a contempt for human life, which is almost impossible to describe.

To sit in a tank. To deliberately aim the cannon barrel at a residential property. And to pull the trigger. This is pure evil.

A local mayor accompanied us on our walk in Irpin. While the mayor was talking about the huge cleanup work, a few locals were already underway.

They wanted their normal lives back. They wanted to remove the scars the Russians had left behind.

I promised him that he could count on Denmark's continued support. And so can the whole of Ukraine.

On Monday, we raised the Danish flag in Kyiv alongside the Ukrainian flag when Denmark, as the first Nordic country, reopened its embassy.

It was very emotional for me to be able to hoist the Danish flag, that we call Dannebrog, in Kyiv. Together with our ambassador and our Ukrainian local staff.

This was a symbolic gesture - but with very practical implications. Through our embassy, Denmark is - quite physically - present during the Ukrainians' reconstruction efforts.

And we will take on a very special responsibility in this reconstruction.

The time for reconstruction is coming, but we are getting ready now. On the same day I was in Kyiv, we started preparing to send construction machinery from Denmark to Ukraine.

Construction machines that can be used to clean up the Russians' destruction. To build a new and bright future for Ukraine.

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I also had the honor of meeting with President Zelenskyy while I was in Ukraine. We had a lot to talk about.

Further help from Denmark – it is coming. More sanctions against Russia – we will fight for them.

But we also talked about tonight. How he looked forward to speaking to the Danish people on our liberation day.

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For tonight, the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, we mark 77 years since the German troops surrendered and Denmark was once again a free country.

The blackout curtains were torn down from the windows and used to light bonfires in the streets.

Tonight reminds us that even the darkest times come to an end. 77 years ago, Danes could rejoice and celebrate our regained freedom.

I believe with all my heart that the day will come when our Ukrainian friends will feel the same happiness.

That there will come a day when they can take down the blackout curtains and remove the protective sandbags from their national monuments.

That there will come a day when they can look each other in the eyes and say "we are free".

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Ukraine must know that when that day comes, we Danes will rejoice with you. And we will stand by your side.

Tonight we light candles for freedom and for unity. To commemorate those who fell victim to the violence of supremacy.

To honor those who gave their lives for the cause of freedom and in the fight against darkness.

We must never take our freedom for granted. Freedom is not free. It must be won and defended again and again.

As Ukraine fights against the darkness, they also fight for us and for our values.

Each generation has its test. Its ordeal. This one is ours.

The world must not fail the Ukrainians. Denmark will not fail the Ukrainians.