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by Jan Top Christensen
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COMMENTARY

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Denmark, which launched a revised strategy for tech diplomacy in February, will also launch a handful of new foreign policy strategies later this year.

While Canadian professors and think-tanks are still discussing whether it is worth conducting a review of the dated Canadian foreign policy strategy from 2004, Denmark's new initiatives in the coming months include a general foreign policy, a development policy and a strategy for the Arctic.

Recently, Danish foreign minister Jeppe Kofod, together with the new special ambassador for tech diplomacy, Anne Marie Engtoft Larsen, whose background includes experience at the World Economic Forum, introduced the revised [tech diplomacy strategy](#). Denmark was the first country to appoint an ambassador for tech diplomacy back in 2017. Since then, two other countries have been inspired to do the same, Australia and Estonia, and more probably will follow. The new Danish strategy is expected to be published shortly in English.

Four years ago, when Denmark appointed the first tech ambassador, the main argument for such an appointment was that the big international tech companies have greater influence on what is going on in the world than most countries where we traditionally post ambassadors. The first tech ambassador set up office in Silicon Valley in 2017, to be close to the big players in the tech sector, eager to start a more focused and intensive dialogue with companies like Google and Facebook. The new tech ambassador will have offices in Silicon Valley, Beijing and Copenhagen.

Tech Companies Should Support Democracy, Not Undermine It

At the recent launch of the revised strategy, Kofod, who is himself a keen user of Facebook and Twitter, said: “It is not a question about *whether* the tech industry should be regulated, but *how* ... The attack on the US Congress on 6 January, on-line radicalisation, propagation of dangerous conspiracy theories and misinformation have gone viral, and they are indicators of a tech development that has gone astray and been unregulated too long. It is important that new technology supports a democratic development instead of undermining it ...”

A recent survey¹ has shown that only 12 per cent of Danes agree with the statement that the tech companies live up to their social responsibility, i.e., responsible management of their collected data and a fair tax contribution.

Many Roles for the Tech Ambassador

The new tech ambassador will play six different roles:

¹ Strategy for Denmark's Tech Diplomacy - 2021-23



- Acting as the government's mouthpiece in a critical dialogue with the tech-industry;
- Advising Denmark on new technologies being developed abroad and introducing the tech companies to Danish foreign and security policies;
- Creating global alliances in multilateral forums with companies, business organizations and NGOs;
- Assisting in elevating Denmark's domestic technology debate to a higher level;
- Contributing to the development of new Danish policies for global challenges;
- Representing Denmark globally and promoting it as a digital front-runner, showcasing advanced Danish solutions and encouraging foreign tech investment in Denmark.

Priority Areas

The new tech diplomacy strategy for 2021-23 focuses on three priorities: democracy, security and responsible tech development. The strategy outlines objectives and specific targets to be reached for each priority in the next three years.

Responsible Tech Development

The tech companies should promote their part of the social contract. Denmark shall, in combination with other partners, take the lead to make sure that the algorithms and data-driven business models the companies use show respect for the individual and for society. When companies step outside acceptable norms, well-defined rules and regulations should get them back on track through international policy development. Denmark is a leader when it comes to digitization. With the most digitized public sector in Europe, Denmark should help show the way with concrete examples.

Democracy

This strategy will be based on democratic values and the protection of human rights. The EU has already taken an important step with the introduction of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations) to ensure protection of the individual's rights, but more must be done to protect people's private data. Denmark will work towards a well-defined and active EU tech foreign policy. Denmark will also contribute to closer transatlantic co-operation when it comes to development and use of new technologies. Denmark will contribute actively to the UN general secretary's roadmap for digital co-operation and support establishment of a UN tech envoy. Denmark will take the lead in defining updated guidelines and rules for the digital world. On the one hand, it is important to maintain a free and open internet. On the other hand, it is essential to protect the individual and our democratic societies. This process should take place in the closest possible dialogue with all interested parties, including the tech giants.



Security

Denmark will strive to ensure that the technology supports Denmark's safety and security. Particularly within the EU and NATO, Denmark will ensure that the security aspects of any new technology are well understood and dealt with. Many of the new technologies are dual-use and are part of critical infrastructure. It is important to have a dialogue with the tech industry on how to deal with cyber-threats and cyber-crime, and to delineate the division of labour between private companies and governments. It is also important to find ways to prevent new platforms from being used by other states for improper interference, or by private individuals to abuse children and youth.

A Tech Council Will Ensure Public Debate

To support the tech ambassador in her work, the Danish foreign ministry will establish a new tech council to advise and encourage the tech diplomacy work. A good number of Danish and international experts from the tech eco-system will constitute the council and also engage in a broader public debate. Within the ministry of foreign affairs, a network of relevant embassies and missions will be formed to advance Danish interests and views globally.

The new strategy will include Denmark's strengthened demands to business and strive for more responsibility on their part. The dialogue in Silicon Valley and elsewhere shall work to that end. At the launch, the minister stressed that "it is important that the limits for democratic debate are not defined by some individual tech-billionaires, who can just push the 'delete button' or 'block-button'."

Not surprisingly, Denmark's private sector and industry have welcomed the new strategy, emphasizing the world-wide promotion of Danish expertise in the tech sector.

The first Danish tech ambassador had to fight for access to the giant tech companies at the proper level. There is fresh optimism that today, these companies better understand their own interests in being part of the necessary regulations, rather than have regulations imposed upon them.

Internationally, political interest has picked up in recent years along with the determination to regulate the tech giants. Denmark's new tech ambassador therefore will find a much stronger sounding board when she travels around the world.

► About the Author

Jan Top Christensen is a retired Danish ambassador, a fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and an international consultant.

► Canadian Global Affairs Institute

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