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THE ROLE OF NGOs IN SECURITY POLICY – A DANISH PERSPECTIVE

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The Danish Atlantic Treaty Association was established on the initiative of the Danish Parliament in 1950, to inform and educate the Danish public on issues relating to the membership of NATO. As such, our organisation was established by the state, but it was meant to provide unbiased information to the Danish public in order to create a basis for well-informed decision making. In that respect, DATA was from the beginning a Non-Governmental Organisation – an NGO.

Our line of work entails that we represent the principle of **informal** education. Our activities support the formal educational system, in that we are able to provide up to date material and analysis and meet young people at eye level. These informal educational activities enjoy the freedoms and qualities of:

- the free choice of topics
- the free initiative
- the free choice of teachers
- free participation

These freedoms **at the same time** imply the **responsibility** to constantly secure our activities as **neutral, non-partisan, and objective**. I'll come back to this question in a moment.

Today, our thematic perspective includes **more than NATO**. Today we focus on international and security issues in general such as the transatlantic relationship, democratic development, and terrorism. We do this though, from the point of view that cooperation between Europe and North America is commendable and sensible.

The main reasons for the broader thematic perspective are one the one hand, that there is a stable public support for and knowledge of NATO in Denmark, one the other hand

there is also the fact, that NATO has increasingly become a political institution with broader objectives, such as democracy and counter-terrorism.

These developments imply that DATA now concentrates on a broad spectrum of themes and activities aimed at educating the Danish public, especially young people who, as you all know, are

the future leaders and decision makers. These activities include: Youth seminars and conferences, and a number of publications on issues such as NATO and other international organisations, and subjects related to the broader Middle East.

In relation to the overall question of this session: “Can a Non-Governmental Organisation provide objective information on NATO?”

My answer is “yes” – **but** of course there are significant limitations and pitfalls to be aware of:

These are especially important in relation to publications, where you need to present facts as objective as possible, and, if you’re aiming at facilitating debate, you need to present an issue from different perspectives. When it comes to seminars and conferences, the main task is to invite serious, well-read people representing – again – as many angles to the issue as possible. These are not always easy tasks, and objectivity can sometimes be more of a theoretic goal than a realistic principle. The **key point** here is that we always need to aim at presenting a broad spectrum of positions, and that we must never tell people what to think or say.

On the economical side, there are also a number of questions to keep in mind. As an NGO, you should to stay independent of any single economic interest, **not least state funding**. Otherwise, you might risk your status as an independent and respected actor. In a situation where there are one or more major sponsors, you need to guarantee the independence of the activity by making sure that the activity isn’t affected by the interests of the sponsor(s).

By now it is obvious to you that our organisation, and many of our sister organisations in Europe and North America alike, balance between our political aims, which to some

extent are defined by history, and a wish to provide unbiased education about euro-atlantic issues. We believe this is possible and we'll stay focused on this in the future, because there is a need to support the formal educational system with up to date materials on security policy. My colleague Troels Egeskov Sørensen will elaborate on how we try to integrate the newest technology in our work. Thank you.