

Open Letter from the International Community of Scholars and Experts

To the Administrative Court of Riga, the Supreme Court of Latvia, the European Court of Human Rights, and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Concerning Dr. Valeriy Engel's appeal against his inclusion in the "blacklist" of individuals banned from entering Latvia and in Defense of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression

We, the undersigned are representatives of academic and intellectual communities from various countries around the world. We wish to express our dismay over the persecution of Dr. Valeriy Engel, President of the European Centre for Democracy Development (Latvia), by the Latvian State Security Service (VDD), for supposedly writing as a Russian propagandist or an enemy of the Latvian state.

Dr. Engel is a recognized expert in the study of counter-terrorism and ethno-political conflict. He is a consultant to the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism and the author of numerous scholarly works on these subjects. He is currently being condemned for his professional views in the most extreme manner possible. The Latvian authorities have included him in its so-called "blacklist" of individuals banned from entering the country. This effectively prevents him from living in Latvia with his family, openly defending his reputation, and engaging in scholarly activities where he currently resides. in the country where he resided. Having reviewed the disingenuous extracts from the VDD letter sent to the court to justify its decision, along with Dr. Engel's clear responses, we believe that an injustice along with an attack on free speech are being perpetrated.

As scholars, we are accustomed to working with texts and arguments. However, we are shocked by the polemical and unfair quality of the criticisms undertaken against Dr. Engel. We are equally disturbed by the methods employed by the VDD, which fundamentally distort the actual context and meaning of the cited sources. Statements are removed from their broader context, qualifications and nuances are ignored, passages are selectively cited or omitted, arguments are misrepresented, meanings are manipulated, and conclusions are attributed to Dr. Engel that directly contradict his clearly expressed views and positions.

Here are some examples taken from the VDD letter:

- **Regarding the article "Associative Xenophobia in Europe: a New Old Trend" –** (<https://www.faiobserver.com/politics/associative-xenophobia-in-europe-a-new-old-trend/>). The VDD claims that the author "equates Russophobia and anti-Semitism." In reality, the article warns against the dangerous trend of transferring hatred of a state's actions to all members of a racial, religious, or ethnic community— a mechanism well-documented in the study of European anti-Semitism. For better or worse, Dr. Engel is here engaging in critical analysis not propaganda. Moreover, the article explicitly condemns the

falsification of elections in Russia and attempts to hold ordinary Russians responsible for Putin's actions. The VDD takes none of this into consideration.

- **Regarding the article “Why Is the West Now Lowering the Iron Curtain?”** – <https://www.faiobserver.com/world-news/why-is-the-west-now-lowering-the-iron-curtain/>. The VDD asserts that the author “condemned sanctions, calling them Russophobic.” In fact, the article criticizes **ineffective sanctions**, that in the author’s opinion, don’t impact Russia’s military potential, but instead harm ordinary Russians and lead them to rally around Putin. This can only be understood as purposeful misrepresentation of Dr. Engel by the VDD.
- **Regarding the article “This Is Why the Russian People Chose Imperialism for Survival”** – <https://www.faiobserver.com/russian-news/russia-news/this-is-why-the-russian-people-chose-imperialism-for-survival/>. The VDD claims that Dr. Engel “blames Western policy for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.” In fact, however, his article argues the opposite. It shows that Russia’s xenophobia, illiberal values, and imperialist ambitions inspired Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The VDD transforms what was a criticism of Russia into a criticism of the West. This appears as another purposeful distortion of the author’s views.
- **Regarding the “White Paper” on the Russia-Ukraine War** (https://acjcr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/White-Paper-Condensed-6_23_2025.pdf): The VDD claims that the document “states that the invasion was caused by discrimination against ethnic Russians in Europe and proposes leaving the occupied territories to Russia.”

- 1) To begin with, the “White Paper” was not authored by Dr. Engel; it is a collaborative effort undertaken by 25 scholars.
- 2) The document also clearly identifies **Russian imperialism** as the principal cause of the war. As for concessions by Ukraine, and endorsement of NATO not expanding, these were clearly discussed **merely as possible options** to initiate negotiations.
- 3) What the VDD presents as the pro-Kremlin character of the White Paper is actually the presentation of what is **an ongoing** academic debate on ways to end the war.

It is possible to disagree with the arguments and claims made by Dr. Engel. But he has made plausible suggestions and criticisms—and punishing him for expressing them in public is a violation both of academic freedom and freedom of speech. These are pillars of a democratic society, enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. They are clear about the right not only to express “acceptable” points of view, but to criticize official policy and state conduct.

As an EU member, Latvia has committed to upholding these principles. Yet the actions taken against Dr. Engel amount to the effective censorship and punishment of a scholar because his analysis allegedly does not conform to an officially preferred narrative, a characterization that is itself inaccurate and unsupported by the actual content of his work. If publishing an article on the ineffectiveness of certain sanctions or on the psychological causes of Russian imperialism can lead to Dr. Engel being labeled a “threat to national security” then this imperils free inquiry and free speech.

Moreover, reprisals against a UN consultant are completely unacceptable and an insult to the most important of all international bodies. An expert report submitted to a UN judicial body becomes part of the international search for justice. Persecuting an expert for his conclusions, which, it turned out, coincided with the court’s ruling, constitutes a violation of states’ obligations to cooperate with UN mechanisms and represents a form of intimidation of independent researchers. That is especially the case since Dr. Engel has served as an expert for the International Court of Justice –ironically, in the case brought by Ukraine against Russia. We the undersigned trust that the VDD will take this open letter seriously and overturn the decision that places Dr, Valery Engel, a highly respected scholar, on a “blacklist” that have terrible consequences for his work, his reputation, and his family.

List of signatories

1. **Dr. Manisha Desai**, Professor, Executive Director of The Center for Changing Systems of Power, Empowerment Charitable Trust Endowed Professor in Global Citizenship, Senior Research Associate (USA), United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, email: manisha.desai@stonybrook.edu
2. **Dr. John Feffer**, Director, Foreign Policy In Focus, Institute for Policy Studies (USA), email: johnfeffer@gmail.com
3. **Dr. Stephen Eric Bronner**, Board of Governors Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University of New Jersey, Chair of Independent Experts Peace Initiatives (IEPI), President of the American Council for Justice and Conflict Resolution, email: bronnerse@gmail.com
4. **Dr. Igor Kotler**, Director of the Museum of Human Rights, Liberty and Tolerance, New York (USA), email: igor.kotler@gmail.com
5. **Dr. Andrew Woolford**, Former President of the International Association of Genocide Scholars, Professor of Sociology and Criminology, University of Manitoba (Canada), email: Andrew.Woolford@umanitoba.ca
6. **Dr. Manfred B. Steger**, Professor and Department Chair, Department of Sociology, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa (USA), email: manfred@hawaii.edu
7. **Dr. Daniel Feierstein**, Director of the Center for Genocide Studies, National University of Tres de Febrero, Chief Researcher (Argentina), email: dfeierstein@untref.edu.ar
8. **Mr. Thierry Valle**, President, of the Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP Freedom of Conscience) (France), email: capfra2@yahoo.fr

9. **Dr. James E. Jennings**, President of the Association “Conscience International President”, Director, US Academics for Peace (USA), email: conscience@earthlink.net
10. **Dr. David Abraham**, Professor of law; University of Miami (USA), email: dabraham@law.miami.edu
11. **Mr. Hans Noot**, Director of Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief (Belgium), email: NootJDT@gmail.com
12. **Dr. Rubin Zemon**, Director of the Center for Advanced Researches, Skopje (North Macedonia), email: contact@ceadvre.eu
13. **Dr. Anna Castriota**, Human Rights Researcher (UK), email: annacastriota66@gmail.com
14. **Dr. Michael Forman**, Assoc. Professor of Political Theory and Human Rights, Department of Social Science, University of Washington, Tacoma (USA), email: forman@uw.edu