

## It's not you, it's me?

**A case for DiEM25's nuanced support of Julian Assange, and in the spirit of friendship, a call for criticism where it is due.**

When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?  
(John Maynard Keynes)

*It is necessary to respond to the statement put out by Yanis Varoufakis on the DiEM25 forum on the 22nd February 2017<sup>1</sup>, regarding DiEM25's statement of support for Julian Assange following rejection of his bid for freedom. Interestingly - but we hope unsurprisingly - we are in full agreement with the process outlined by Yanis as to decide our next steps. Two cases regarding our statement of support, followed by an all-member vote, is the right, and democratic way, to proceed. The argument made that 'we cannot discuss Assange's conduct and status in DiEM25 until he is free' is a way to shut down debate and ignore his flaws.*

*Since the start of DiEM25 as a movement, there have been people who have objected to the presence of Julian Assange, and those who thought it wise to bring it up at a higher level were met with incredulity and condescension, being told to 'get on with real work', or 'if you don't like it, leave'. This approach by a few DiEMers has led to multiple activists leaving the movement, and we can all agree this is a loss for us all. We hope that this will not be met with the same response, and that those with concerns will be engaged with rather than dismissed as being disloyal or 'not getting on with real work'. With regards to the anti-Assange petition that was issued in December, those of us who published it apologise for the poorly written and badly timed effort to raise an issue which required far more thought. We hope that those who oppose the contents of this document will not fall into the same trap as we did: to have spoken rashly with generalisation and in extremes. This debate requires principled thought and arguments supported by evidence, and we should expect nothing less of each other. We envision this debate to work as a platform for future disagreements within DiEM25 itself - a system of arbitration is urgently needed (as proposed by the Greek NC).*

*At the end of the day, we will accept the verdict of the membership, and even before this was written, we accept that we are in a minority of opinion. As democrats, and as DiEMers, the good of the movement comes first, and this drives both our determination to write this document, as well as accept the outcome of the debate. That, we will do unconditionally.*

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.diem25.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=35&p=34121&sid=f675cdf5b1bedafcd16b1dc030ed8d19#p34121>

*We summarise our intentions as follows:*

- *We support a statement in support of Julian Assange's freedom from arbitrary detention without trial.*
- *In the same statement, we believe that DiEM25 should exercise its critical faculties and raise our blatant political differences with Assange. This only strengthens our statement of support for his freedom.*
- *As a result of this democratic process, **Assange's place on the movement's Advisory Panel should be placed under review as someone who has been accused of 'violat[ing] the spirit of the manifesto.'** As someone who has helped 'curate' the movement's thought, he should be held to the same standards that all members - who themselves have 'curated', formed and shaped the movement's thought - are held. Until this review is over, we do not call for his expulsion, since this would deny Assange an opportunity to make amends, should his place in DiEM25 be of concern to him.<sup>2</sup>*
- *The assertion that Yanis made is black and white. The case of DiEM25 and Assange is not black and white. We are able to support and call for the freedom of someone **without** agreeing with their politics, and accepting that their politics are incompatible with ours. For example, someone may call for the freedom of jailed former Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi, but might not agree with the politics of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. The idea that if we remove him from the AP it means we do not support the battle for his freedom and for his life is untrue. DiEM25 is not here to be uncritical of its friends: it can do both, and can show it is flexible when things change. Dogma and unconditional support for anyone or anything is the death of any movement.*

*However, before we outline our case against our movement's support for Assange, a quick note may serve useful: election by slate, as used in the first elections of the CC and AP are not, by any standard, democratic. The mandates of some APs - say Franco Berardi, or Jean-Michel Jarre - are not tied with the mandate of Etienne Balibar, or, indeed, Julian Assange. Assuming that a vote in favour of a slate is a vote in favour of every member of that slate without exception seems optimistic and unrealistic. This is particularly relevant since following the initial election of APs all following candidates for the AP have been ratified by the VC on an individual basis, effectively rendering the initial Advisors' mandates unequal and therefore invalid. This, however, is besides the point, and another debate about our internal democracy. Of course, as Yanis outlines, it would be indeed a violation of comradely behaviour to imply all this was the fruit of malicious design, rather than oversight, for example.*

*Our case is, for those interested, outlined below. We do not pretend this will change minds that are set in stone, but merely demonstrate that there is a difference of opinion in the movement, and it is the existence of this difference which should be respected in any statement under our banner.*

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<sup>2</sup> N.B. Regardless, it would be constitutionally impossible to call for the expulsion of someone who is not even a registered member of the movement.

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What is a 'violation of comradely behaviour', is the notion that a *cause célèbre* somehow outweighs the work of grassroots members across the continent and around the globe. This point preempts any accusation of grassroots members lacking admiration or respect for the work of WikiLeaks or Assange. Before any misunderstandings arise, **we categorically accept and support the release of Julian Assange from arbitrary detention**, as has been urged by the United Nations. WikiLeaks' work has been, and is, invaluable in all of our fights for democracy. What this does not include, however, is assuming DiEM25 must be Assange's personal unconditional cheerleader, refusing to accept criticism and bad practice.

Our issues with Assange rest on one factor: actions which have 'violated the principles of the Manifesto' and 'violated the spirit of the Manifesto.' The keywords, here, are 'principles' and 'spirit.' As the late Christopher Hitchens would have remarked, what can be asserted (paradoxically!) as 'idle characterisation' without evidence can be dismissed without evidence. As reported by those close to him, such as the journalist Laura Poitras, who spent many years in his company producing the film *Risk*, Assange has often made remarks that appear misogynistic (the intention we shall never know). Poitras has also made the claim that the more time she spent with Assange, the more critical she became - indeed, Assange reportedly was against the releasing of *Risk*, which raises the question, what does Assange have to hide? Unless he has made comments which compromise his safety and his legal status (which he did not), he should have nothing to hide. This is the first issue we would like to address. DiEM25 is a feminist organisation. Anyone who denies this has serious questions to answer to their fellow DiEMers - Julian Assange has now made several, not one, comments that **can be interpreted** as carrying an anti-feminist or misogynistic message. These are not mere 'idle characterisations.' For example, this tweet dating to 21st October 2017: 'Women, I will let you in on a male secret. Men know that constantly self-proclaiming male 'feminists' are often predatory sleaze bags. They are intensely disliked by other men because of their manipulative qualities and not, in general, because they are viewed to be sex traitors.'<sup>3</sup> For those who might want (or rather, need) an explanation of what precisely is wrong with this tweet, it is a sweeping generalisation that discredits and condemns an entire group of male feminists and their work. The use of the word 'often' does not make this tweet any more palatable: 'often' means 'frequently', and thus denotes a majority or a common occurrence within a certain group. Unless Julian Assange has a sociological study to prove his claims, *these* are idle characterisations. Statements such as these should be throttled by questioning in a progressive movement that is avowedly feminist, indeed full of male feminists. Dismissing comrades as 'predatory sleazebags' is no conduct to be encouraged, particularly whilst we are on the subject of 'comradely behaviour.'

Aside from his tweets, he has also been reported to have made the comment that the sexual assault charges were part of a 'mad feminist conspiracy' and that 'thoroughly tawdry radical feminist political positioning thing'<sup>4</sup>, as well as making the comment that 'She started a *lesbian* nightclub in

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/julianassange/status/940508676246441984?lang=en>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2017/july/1498831200/robert-manne/politics-gets-personal>

Gothenburg<sup>5</sup>, as if the person being gay has a role to play in the situation he finds himself in. He was reprimanded by his lawyer, and simply dismissed his comment by saying he wouldn't say it 'in public'. If these are opinions he holds in private, and he dares not utter them in public, then perhaps something is wrong with these very opinions. When confronted with sexual assault allegations, they must always be taken seriously, regardless of who is implicated (as #MeToo has shown us). Another comment Assange has made also appears to suggest that cases being brought against high profile men are driven by some deadly scheme concocted by nondescript 'feminists', 'Money, influence, glamour for women helping women imprison men.' 'It may not be your type of feminism, but they don't care.'<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, comments made during the release of Poitras' film *Risk* are similarly shocking, with what could be interpreted as censorship - a claim that is worrying when it is concerning the very organisation that has exposed government censorship and spying over many years. Assange responded to Poitras with, "the film is a threat to his freedom and he is forced to treat it accordingly."<sup>7</sup> Poitras claims that Assange's lawyer ordered the editorial team to remove the scene in which he talks about the sexual assault claims and the women involved<sup>8</sup>. Again, **regardless** of anyone's opinion of the journalist in question (Poitras), video evidence speaks for itself. DiEM25 does not exist to be uncritical of its friends. In a similar vein, Assange tweeted a graph on 2nd September 2017 accompanied by: 'capitalism +atheism + feminism = sterility = migration. EU birthrate = 1.6. Replacement = 2.1. Merkel, May, Macron, Gentiloni all childless.'<sup>9</sup> This, once again, is a lazily constructed tweet that makes sweeping generalisations and straw men arguments - suggesting that having childless premiers is somehow (1) a bad thing, and (2) a symptom of capitalism, feminism, atheism and migration. 2016 Conservative leadership candidate Andrea Leadsom made a similar comment on Theresa May, saying that because she is childless she 'has no stake in society.' We doubt Assange wants to be in the company of Mrs. Leadsom.

Now, alongside allegations of misogyny, there have been also allegations of anti-semitism. Allegations of anti-semitism **must and will not be taken lightly**, and so we will not bandy these allegations around as if we have objective proof. However, it is alarming that Twitter direct messages were sent from the 'Wikileaks' account @WikiLeaks, as well as Tweets with content that, with or without context, could be described anti-semitic. According to a recent *The Intercept* piece on Assange and the tweets sent, these tweets included comments such as: 'Tribalist Symbol for establishment climbers? Most of our critics have 3 (((brackets around their names))) & have black-rim glasses. Bizarre<sup>10</sup>. The three brackets (known as 'Echoes') refer to an attempt by neo-Nazis and white supremacists to identify and harass Jews online by marking them out with this symbol<sup>11</sup>. It has since been reclaimed by Jews and many expressing solidarity with Jews online, with many writing their names in between the three brackets.

<sup>5</sup>[https://www.buzzfeed.com/alisonwillmore/risk-review-laura-poitras-julian-assange?utm\\_term=.gx5yk2ena#.pbDvPVY7e](https://www.buzzfeed.com/alisonwillmore/risk-review-laura-poitras-julian-assange?utm_term=.gx5yk2ena#.pbDvPVY7e)

<sup>6</sup><https://theintercept.com/2018/02/14/julian-assange-wikileaks-election-clinton-trump/>

<sup>7</sup>[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/05/05/laura-poitras-wanted-to-make-a-film-about-wikileaks-then-she-got-pulled-into-the-story/?utm\\_term=.c03465f164a5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/05/05/laura-poitras-wanted-to-make-a-film-about-wikileaks-then-she-got-pulled-into-the-story/?utm_term=.c03465f164a5)

<sup>8</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jun/29/laura-poitras-wikileaks-film-risk-julian-assange>

<sup>9</sup><https://twitter.com/julianassange/status/904006478616551425>

<sup>10</sup><https://theintercept.com/2018/02/14/julian-assange-wikileaks-election-clinton-trump/>

<sup>11</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/technology/shortcuts/2016/jun/12/echoes-beating-the-far-right-two-triple-brackets-at-a-time>

Regardless of whether this is a ‘smear campaign’, or if the journalists Micah Lee and Cora Currier are biased in their piece, the screenshots are there for everyone to see and make a judgement. Indeed, we accept that those messages **may not have been sent** by Assange himself, and by another Wikileaks staffer - if this is the case, then perhaps we should re-evaluate our opinion of certain elements within Wikileaks. In the same article, there are screenshots of other comments that appear anti-semitic in nature made on 26th July 2017. Referring to journalist Raphael Satter, ‘He’s always been a rat’, reads one message, followed by, ‘but he’s Jewish and engaged with the ((( ))) issue’<sup>12</sup>. Whether this is anti-semitic or not is up for debate, but nonetheless, it is worrying and alarming that tweets and direct messages with this content are sent or even conceived in the first place. Referring back to Hitchens’ razor, it is perfectly possible that it is a WikiLeaks staffer at fault in this situation, and should that be the case, then this does not concern Assange (unless, of course, he was conscious of this happening on his organisation’s account and took no action).

Another tweet sent by Assange’s account also rings alarm bells. On the 12th December 2017, Assange tweeted, ‘if Carole Cadwalladr can win a British Journalism Award then David Icke must be the hot favourite for 2018’<sup>13</sup>. This was in response to a series of articles written by acclaimed journalist Carole Cadwalladr, in which she analyses the Assange-Farage meeting as well as purported links to Cambridge Analytica and the Trump Campaign. Once again, regardless of whether the claim about Cambridge Analytica is indeed true, a tweet comparing and discrediting a journalist to Holocaust denier conspiracy theorist David Icke is just an impulsive comment that again, holds no place in a movement which champions reasoned debate. Indeed, even fellow hacker and champion for transparency Lauri Love commented, ‘uncalled for [to be honest]’<sup>14</sup>. We hold the Press to high standards. Cadwalladr is a ‘stellar’ journalist, doing much to expose the link between ‘Surveillance Capitalism and the far right’<sup>15</sup>. Respect for the press, even when reportage is disagreeable to you, is a prerequisite for legitimate criticism of the Press where it is due. As DiEM25 members we know how often it *really is due*.

Secondly, it is a simple question which affects the whole debate, and it is not a personal one. Whether Assange is a distasteful person to one person is irrelevant, as is whether he is a perfectly nice man to another. What *is* relevant is the importance of Assange to our movement. How has Assange contributed to DiEM25? Other than recording the odd message for DiEM25 assemblies, the only impact from Assange on our movement seems detrimental. In the depth of an emotionally, politically and economically-straining referendum period in the UK, Assange comes out on national broadcasters backing Brexit.<sup>16</sup> Assange received Nigel Farage in his abode at the Ecuadorian

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> <https://twitter.com/julianassange/status/940508676246441984>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Former AP member Aral Balkan (he, too, helped ‘curate’ our thought - particularly on the Seventh Pillar, yet was met with derision from the CC’s response to his resignation), made these remarks on Cadwalladr’s journalism here <https://ar.al/notes/farewell-not-goodbye/>. Surely our opinions on what constitutes ‘good journalism’ can’t differ too much? An example of Cadwalladr’s work can be found here for those unfamiliar: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/07/the-great-british-brexit-robbery-hijacked-democracy>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJnvr3uwaT8>

Embassy<sup>17</sup>, showing an inclination not reserved merely for a ‘journalist’ (as Farage claimed, yet without providing evidence of any interview, final piece or notes?) but of two with some affinity. The objections many DiEM25 members may have to meeting Farage do not have to be outlined. As Progressives around the world tried to rally against the greatest political victory of the Nationalist International (the election of President Trump), Assange helps engineer an anti-Clinton campaign<sup>18</sup> (against the only ‘hope’ of defeating Trump and his philo-fascist government) indeed even being suggested by the Commander-in-Chief’s son as Australian ambassador to the United States.<sup>19</sup> WikiLeaks declares itself a non-partisan organisation, then proceeds to back the GOP. By anyone’s standards, this is an issue of honesty and transparency, which, coincidentally, is DiEM25’s cup of tea. These are questions that should be asked, and that DiEM25 should be fearless in asking. This should not be dismissed as a ‘neoliberal plot’ (a catchphrase beginning to encompass anything we don’t care to define, or find disagreeable at skin-deep reaction).

On a legal note, as democrats, and law-abiding citizens, we can agree that not respecting basic rules of the legal system reflect poorly on our movement. After agreeing to it with two guarantors, Assange failed to answer bail in England, which is a criminal offence. Does he expect his warrant to be dropped if he does not even answer bail? If Assange were fearing for his life by answering bail, and therefore uncertain of his innocence, such a move would be understandable. However, considering Assange is certain of his innocence, with the backing of the UN, his refusal to answer bail makes a mockery of ‘fair play.’<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Lauri Love, a whistleblower also facing threat of extradition, has answered bail for the period in which he has been charged. Although it is possible to raise a possible conflict of interest and, therefore, lack of independence in the British judiciary which dealt with the last Assange ruling, this is a grave charge not to be made lightly, and would discredit an entire judicial system which in many cases (Gina Miller’s Brexit case on a meaningful vote for example) has also gone in our movement’s favour. We cannot cherry-pick. Furthermore, Assange’s fear of Swedish extradition to the United States is unfounded. For an extradition from Sweden to be sanctioned, ‘the Swedish extradition process requires the approval of the nation’s Supreme Court; thus, the scenario that Assange was proposing—a geopolitical plot to use his sex-crimes case as a pretext to deliver him to the United States—would require at least three high justices to act as conspirators. If this were not reason enough for skepticism, under the rules governing European arrest warrants Sweden could not extradite Assange to the U.S. without British approval; in other words, shipping him to Stockholm would only *add* a layer of bureaucratic obstacles for Washington. In any event, Swedish law prohibits extraditions for “political crimes,” which include espionage, and for cases eligible for the death penalty.<sup>21</sup> More simply, Sweden has withdrawn its arrest warrant<sup>22</sup>, and had wanted to since 2013.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> When Farage exited the building and reporters asked him his business meeting Assange, Farage replied that he couldn’t remember. Farage denied he was a go-between for Assange and sources, despite a leak being announced minutes after his exit from the Embassy.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/apr/23/when-nigel-farage-met-julian-assange>

<sup>19</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2018/02/14/julian-assange-wikileaks-election-clinton-trump/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/14/julian-assange-australia-us-ambassador-wikileaks-urged-trump-jr>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.yanisvaroufakis.eu/2018/02/15/did-the-judge-who-refused-to-withdraw-julian-assanges-arrest-warrant-labour-under-a-gigantic-conflict-of-interest/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/21/julian-assange-a-man-without-a-country>

Yes, it is true, and the point has been made, that APs can and do differ on many opinions of policy and politics. This is undeniable, and one of the many strengths of our movement. Nevertheless, disagreements in attitude and ethic, rather than details on policy or economics, prove more problematic. They undermine our 'spirit' as a horizontal, humanist, liberal movement. We have to preserve DiEM25 as a movement for and by its members, just as we plan to fulfill our promise for a European constitution for and by we, the people. If DiEM25 cannot lead by example, what hope do we have? If we hold our opponents to high standards, then it would only be hypocrisy not to apply the same to ourselves, particularly those who 'curate' our thought. For example, when Jeroen Dijsselbloem, former Head of the Eurogroup claimed indebted Mediterranean EU member states wasted their money on 'drinks and women'<sup>24</sup>, we rightly hit back against a racist, and frankly ridiculous comment. If our own members, and those who filter, shape and influence our common thought are not held to the same standards we hold our opponents, what legitimacy do our criticisms and diagnoses of European crises have?

This debate, perhaps, is misjudged. We have made this about a personality, when personalities are precisely what our brand of politics should do differently and avoid. No signatory of this letter has met Assange. His personality is of no relevance: his politics and attitude are. As grassroots members who have invested hour after hour into DiEM25, a movement we see as Europe's only hope, we take it as an affront to both our passion and our commitment to the movement that Assange's membership of the AP is seen as sacrosanct, when in several countries his reputation and political stances are actively damaging DiEM25's progress. If we all accept that one member's contribution is as valid, and as necessary, and as vital as the next, then we accept that they should all be under the same scrutiny in honouring a manifesto which *we all* helped create. Therefore, any accusation against these signatories of being 'ridiculous', 'saboteurs' or whatever label are violations of comradely behaviour, which count just as much for us as for a big-name celebrity.

And so, should the problem at hand be with our misjudged moral code or our interpretation of 'the spirit of the manifesto', so be it. But it does not stop here. We are happy to accept that it is not you, Julian, but us. Either way, it ends in a loss for our movement: as an indictment of a manifesto that permits flaws without question for the sake of image and unconditional worship, or a loss of grassroots' confidence in collective ownership of our movement, and a loss of a movement itself, in exchange for a congregation and a choir.

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<sup>22</sup><https://theintercept.com/2017/05/19/sweden-withdraws-arrest-warrant-for-julian-assange-but-he-still-faces-serious-legal-jeopardy/>

<sup>23</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/feb/11/sweden-tried-to-drop-assange-extradition-in-2013-cps-emails-show>

<sup>24</sup><https://www.ft.com/content/2498740e-b911-3dbf-942d-ecce511a351e>