

Denmark at the Heart of Europe?

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DENMARK AT THE HEART OF EUROPE?

In many respects Denmark is somewhere near the heart of Europe, but as the 2008 Danish opt-out investigation found, this position is increasingly being questioned. To help counter this, DIIS's EU unit aims to contribute to Danish public and democratic debates through a new project on political contestation in the European Parliament.



While Copenhagen may be 5 degrees north and 3 degrees east of Gelnhausen-Meerholz (Germany), the geographical centre of Europe, in many respects Denmark is at the heart of Europe. Temporally, Denmark is neither a 'founding' member state, nor a 'new' member state; it is somewhere in the middle in European integration history. Demographically, a population of 5.4 million means that Denmark is neither a 'larger' member state, nor a 'micro' member state. Socially, Denmark is somewhere between Nordic austerity and an easy-going Mediterranean type of lifestyle. Politically, Denmark's Cold War experiences are shared with 'old' Western Europe, while its post-Cold War aspirations are shared with 'new' eastern Europe. Thus temporally, demographically, socially and politically, Denmark is somewhere in the middle of the European Union (EU), that is, somewhere near the heart of Europe.

As a small, open country somewhere near the heart of Europe, Denmark is deeply implicated in the processes of globalization which so define our era. The Danish economy has been transformed by globalization over the past two decades. Trade in goods and services is now over 80% of gross domestic product, with approximately 44% of trade being with the Eurozone (and 27% of trade with the rest of the EU). Globalization involves a transformation in the size, ease and technologies of human interconnectivity. In this respect, global container shipping firms such as Mærsk, low-cost airlines such as Cimber Sterling and internet telephony providers such as Skype all reflect how Denmark contributes to such global interconnectivity. At the same time, globalization also

has its dark sides, for example, facilitating predatory capitalism, international criminality and human trafficking, and contributing to global warming. It is in this context of globalization and EU membership that Denmark's relations with the rest of the world must be understood. When tackling global problems, it is the EU to which its members turn for the collective capacity to respond to these challenges.

Whilst globalization has been accelerating, the position of Denmark somewhere near the heart of the Europe has been increasingly called into question by the growth of the Danish opt-outs from the Treaty on European Union. In the autumn of 2007, the European Committee of the Danish Parliament commissioned DIIS to investigate the developments and consequences of the Danish opt-outs from the 3rd stage of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU); Security and Defence Policy (SDP); Justice and Home Affairs (JHA); and the declaration on union citizenship. Led by DIIS's EU unit, the Danish Opt Out Investigation (DOOI) used a multi-method approach based on analysing four sources of evidence (secondary literature, public legal documents, 'on record' written/oral evidence, and 'off-the-record' evidence), as well as engaging in comparative analysis with other member states (especially Sweden, Finland, Ireland, and the UK).

Very early, it became clear that there was little secondary literature on the Danish opt-outs, and few scholars researching the topic. As the research progressed, it also became clear that there is not much documented evidence regarding the opt-outs, although this is not surprising, given that the DOOI was looking for evidence regarding Denmark's absence from policy and politics. Ultimately, the DOOI found itself at the 'cutting edge' of investigative research, working with a mixture of empirical material, including standard social-science techniques of interview triangulation and verification interviews. To ensure the quality of the analysis, the DOOI incorporated two rounds of peer review using scholars and experts in the policy fields. By the end of the investigation a number of worrying developments

EU'S INTERNAL DYNAMICS

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EU NETWORKS

The EU unit actively participated in seven international policy research networks during 2008, namely the Dansk Selskab for Europaforskning – DSE (the European Community Studies Association – Denmark, ECSA-DK); the Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA); the European Policy Institutes Network (EPIN); the ‘Think Global – Act European’ (TGAE) think-tank initiative; the EU Framework Programme 6 Network of Excellence ‘EU-Consent’; and the ‘EU and Social Dimension of Globalisation’ international network.

The latest initiative for the EU unit is the ‘Nordic-EU Cooperation’ network, aimed at improving international research cooperation. It involves the three other Nordic research institutions, namely the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUIP); the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA); the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI); and the Icelandic Institute of International Affairs – the Centre for Small State Studies, as well as the Swedish National Defence College (SNDC).

Ian Manners

over the past sixteen years appeared to be hollowing out the claim of Denmark being at the heart of Europe.

While the world and the EU has changed dramatically over the past sixteen years, with wars in Yugoslavia, global terrorist attacks, changing patterns of migration and demography, global financial problems, and a more than doubling of the number of member states, the opt-outs have remained in place. In this period, EU member states have attempted to respond to European and global challenges by strengthening security and defence policy, expanding judicial cooperation and increasing the coordination of economic and financial policy. By 2008 Denmark had largely excluded itself from active influence and full participation in three of the EU’s four main objectives. Equally worrying was the impact the opt-outs were having on Denmark’s position in the EU, with evidence suggesting that issues such as treaty negotiations, chairing the EU presidency, achieving administrative positions and overall perceptions were all negatively affected by the opt-outs. The DOOI and report leads to the conclusion that although Denmark maybe somewhere near the heart of Europe, it appears to have become a hollow heart.

The hollowing out of the Danish-EU relationship is not only due to the opt-outs, but also to the relative lack of research capacity on EU issues, which leaves public and democratic debates relatively under-informed. The DOOI illustrated the extent to which there is a relative lack of scholarship in the three crucial policy areas of EMU, SDP and JHA, as well as Denmark’s overall relationship with the EU. Similarly, there is relatively little Danish research on the EU’s external relations, in particular enlargement policy, multilateral diplomacy and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). More problematic for Danish democracy is the relative lack of expertise and scholarship on the European Parliament and questions of improving democratic accountability in EU legislative processes. Again, this could be seen during the DOOI, where there was very little scholarship on the way in which the promotion of inter-governmentalism in the EU is contributing to a lack of democratic accountability in

areas such as CFSP/SDP, as well as police and judicial cooperation. This relative lack of research capacity runs the risk of leaving public and democratic debates devoid of informed content, something that a Danish centre of EU expertise and well-resourced network of EU experts could help to fill. The much shorter Swedish experience of EU membership has some examples here, with the well-resourced Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS) and Swedish Networks for European Research in political science (SNES), economics (SNEE) and law (NEF) helping to create a critical mass of international policy research for wider public and democratic debates.

The EU unit has endeavoured to enrich Danish-EU debates over the past two years. Its current research focus is on improving Danish and international research on changing political contestation in the European Parliament. The research places an emphasis on understanding the extent to which Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from old and new member states, in particular Denmark, contest European issues along party-political lines, national-political lines, or perhaps emerging new lines of political contestation. The focus for the coming years is on the 7th European Parliament and compares the behaviour of differing national MEPs with that of national public opinion, national party agendas, and EP party groups’ agendas. As Denmark’s relations with the rest of the world cannot be understood outside the context of EU membership, the EU unit contributes to international policy research such as the EP contestation project, which aims to improve public and democratic debates and thus help return Denmark somewhere closer to the heart of Europe.

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