



## The reinforced Danish EU debate about the future of the EU

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Denmark has a strong tradition of debating EU questions. In 2018 the Danish Government decided to reinforce the debate on the EU in order to ensure the best possible foundation for representing the views of the Danish public when debating the future of the EU with other Member States.

The Government facilitated the reinforced EU debate in close cooperation with the Danish Parliament and civil society organisations. Throughout the year, the Danish Parliament held four dialogue meetings and one citizens' consultation concerning specific aspects of the EU and the future of the EU. The activities of the civil society organisations have been reinforced through a 1 mil. DKK extra grant for organising debates throughout the country.<sup>1</sup> The debates took place in all parts of Denmark. Interested citizens, politicians, ministers, and business leaders were represented.

Great efforts were put into ensuring that the EU debate would take place across the entire country, and that all Danish citizens were given the opportunity to take part in the debate. However, it should be underlined that the outcome of the debate, as summarised by this paper, does not provide an exact or representative overview of the public opinion among the Danish population as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the debate has provided a useful impression of the different views that are put forward when Danes discuss EU matters.

The debate was characterized by a large diversity of opinions and views. Yet, the debates have shown that there were some general views that many Danes agreed on:

- Firstly, it is clear that the EU does not provide the answer to all questions. However, the EU does provide an answer to many questions. The EU should focus on the largest and most important issues where common solutions are most effective, and where the Member States could not have addressed the challenges as well or better themselves. In other words, Danes support EU solutions on substantial issues, where solutions can only be found by working together and where cooperating within the EU adds value, such as, climate change, migration, and terrorism.
- Secondly, differences and diversity amongst Member States must be taken into consideration. The EU can rightly be seen as one community. However, this community consists of 28 Member States with different traditions and histories. Generally, Danes recognise the need for EU cooperation in many areas; yet, the Danish way of doing things is also highly appreciated, particularly in areas with strong Danish cultural and political traditions such as the Danish Social Model.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about the five organizations and their activities, as a part of the reinforced EU debate, can be found here:

- Den Danske Europabevægelse: <https://europabevaegelsen.dk/>
- DEO-Oplysningsforbundet Demokrati i Europa: <http://deo.dk/>
- Europa NU: <https://fuaa.dk/om-folkeuniversitetet/foreningen-europa-nu/>
- Fagbevægelsen mod Unionen FMU: <https://eufagligt.dk/>
- Nyt Europa. <http://nyteuropa.dk/>

<sup>2</sup> This report is based on more than 100 debates held in Denmark, such as: 1) debates that the five civil society organizations have held; 2) The Parliament has held citizens' dialogues or citizens' hearings; 3) Ministers have participated in debates; and 4) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has had the opportunity to observe debates.

- Thirdly, it is essential to make information regarding the EU available for the public. There is a general need for more knowledge about EU policies and enhanced insight into the practical functioning of the EU. In addition, sharing information on EU success stories is crucial. However, in areas where the EU is challenged, transparency is equally necessary.
- Fourthly, Brexit has very clearly influenced the Danish EU debate. In particular, Brexit has been a powerful reminder of the many advantages associated with the EU membership. Prior to Brexit, most Danes took for granted the advantages of EU membership. Brexit has underlined these advantages. Especially the advantages of the Single Market for Danish companies, and the numerous jobs in Denmark attached to the Single Market, are appreciated. The impression is that a large majority of the Danes are positive about the Danish EU membership. This conclusion is also supported by the latest surveys in Denmark.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Single Market**

In 2018, the Single Market celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During the debates, the Single Market was one of the main areas of interest. The British decision to leave the EU and the associated consequences for businesses' of inter alia, customs control, divergent standards and bigger bureaucratic burdens have increased the awareness of the benefits of the Single Market.

The free movement of labour has been debated extensively. Particularly, the right for Danish workers to move freely within the EU and the Danish companies' access to foreign labour stood out as clear advantages. Others focused on the challenges that free movement of labour causes for Danish workers. The issues of potential unfair competition regarding wages and working conditions were brought forward, with the transportation sector including foreign truck drivers were highlighted as an example.

### **Welfare benefits**

Considerable scepticism as regards EU workers' rights (particularly the right to receive child benefit) has been expressed. Also, the level of EU legislation within the social policy area was up for discussion, including earmarking paternity leave for men. Many participants wanted the Danish welfare system and the Danish Social Model to be protected. Nevertheless, other participants argued in favour of only having one set of rules in the social area. The main argument amongst the latter was that common rules were a natural result of the Single Market, and that Member States must therefore accept common rules on issues such as paternity leave.

### **Free Trade Agreements**

During the debates, Free Trade Agreements were often seen as a big asset for Denmark. However, participants requested answers regarding the EU's take on social questions, labour rights and environmental in connection with the Free Trade Agreements. Many participants also expressed a need for the EU to contribute to and invest in the construction and development of the African continent, especially through free trade. As such, the removal of trade barriers between the EU and Africa was seen as a way of reaching the aim of creating jobs and growth in Africa.

### **Migration**

While migration policy was a heavily discussed topic during debates, the national political context significantly influenced the discussions on the EU migration agenda. Discussions focussed on whether Den-

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<sup>3</sup> EUROBAROMETER 90.1 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/da/be-heard/eurobarometer/parlemeter-2018-taking-up-the-challenge>)

mark for humanitarian reasons, should welcome migrants arriving to Denmark the possibilities for integration of refugees and migrants in Denmark, and whether Denmark could do more to prevent the flow of irregular migrants and refugees to the EU.

Many participants focussed on the causes of irregular migration. Strengthened EU-Africa cooperation and increased EU investments in Africa were highlighted as ways of addressing migratory flows to Europe. In addition to addressing root causes to migration, participants expressed the need for strengthening control of the EU's external borders. While some participants viewed the temporary Danish border control as a positive measure that had contributed to decreasing the number of migrants arriving to Denmark, others criticized the Danish national border control for creating the impression of an inward-facing country.

### **Climate change**

Whereas opinions diverged amongst participants on most topics, almost unanimous views were found in the area of climate policy as the majority of participants saw a need for strong EU solutions to address climate change. Participants were in general positive about Denmark taking a leading role as regards climate policy. There was also a clear recognition that issues associated with climate change could not be solved at national level only. Therefore, the discussion centred upon whether EU solutions were sufficient or if global solutions were needed. Some suggested that high standards on climate actions were included as a condition in free trade agreements. Others suggested that similar pressure is put on Member States by making it possible for the EU to sanction countries financially in case of non-compliance with already agreed climate obligations.

### **Foreign, security and defence policy**

Many participants expressed the need for the EU to speak with a stronger voice globally. Participants also recognised that an EU speaking with one voice might gain more influence in the global policy arena. The latest developments in relation to Russia and China as well as the developments in the transatlantic relationship clearly had an impact on the debates. Participants questioned whether the EU should replace the cooperation with the US or whether the EU should reinforce and supplement transatlantic cooperation. Many participants preferred continued cooperation with the US despite of the current administration's stance towards the EU..

Regarding defence policy, many of the same issues applied and there was a general discussion on whether the EU should become stronger or if the EU should continue to rely on NATO and thus the US. Many participants did not see a need for the EU to replace NATO. However, many wanted the EU to complement NATO when needed. Participants in general acknowledged the need for Member States to cooperate in the fight against terrorism and other security challenges. In this regard, the Danish defence opt-out was seen as a disadvantage for Denmark. However, some participants expressed a preference for security and defence policy to be based solely on NATO rather than for the EU dimension on defence to be strengthened.

### **The fundamental values of the EU**

The situation concerning the fundamental values of the EU was discussed on a number of occasions. Participants in general viewed Member States' respect for fundamental values as essential for a well-functioning EU. Many expressed a general concern about some Member States' understanding of the rule of law and questioned why Member States, who were already part of the EU, did not comply with the fundamental values of the EU. Some participants however, argued that the EU should not interfere as the issue should be handled at national level. The focus in the debates was often on how and where the Member States' lack of compliance with the fundamental values could be resolved. Some participants

expressed concern that Member States with problems of this kind could “cover” for each other during discussions in the European Council. Many participants requested alternative solutions for putting pressure on the concerned countries, for example by reducing their financial support from the EU budget.

### **Economic policy**

Discussions regarding the economic area covered a host of issues and were at times rather technical and complicated. They also focussed on the question of the Banking Union, including possible Danish membership. Several participants considered Danish membership of the Banking Union beneficial and underlined a need for strengthened regulation of larger banks with activities across the EU, including in relation to the fight against anti money laundering. Others found that Denmark should not join the Banking Union because of substantial scepticism about contributing to the possibility of rescuing banks. Some participants were concerned as to whether the Banking Union would actually be capable of supervising large banks in a sufficiently independent way.

Regarding the EMU, the discussions focused primarily on the balance between the risk for marginalisation of Denmark and, on the other hand, the question of preserving Danish sovereignty. The question of digital taxation and the balance between taxation of digital companies versus the concern for unintended effects for Denmark and for Danish companies were also much debated.

### **EU’s multinational financial framework**

The debate on the EU budget were characterized by clear line of division. Some participants found it important to ensure an EU-budget that was large enough to have the capacity to handle the EU’s current challenges such as migration and climate changes. Others preferred an EU budget that would not be disproportionately increased and which focused on areas with clear EU added value. Many participants believed that the Danish contribution to the EU budget was suitable at the current level and that it should not be increased. Many participants expressed support for decreasing the funding for the agricultural and cohesion policies.

### **The Danish opt-outs**

During the debates, the Danish EU opt-outs were also an important topic. Some participants considered the Danish opt-outs an unwelcome limitation for the Danish EU membership. Others believed that the Danish opt-outs provided protection against an expansive EU and shielded formal Danish sovereignty. The Danish opt-out on defense and justice and home affairs were often mentioned as problematic, while the Euro opt-out was rarely a topic for discussion.