

European Integration vs. Sovereignty: Do Small Nation States Tend to Be More Eurosceptic? - Case Study of Denmark.

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Summary:

The paper analyses specific approach of Denmark as a pure example of a nation state to the processes of the European integration, based on the historical development and basic pillars of the Danish society, as the perception of the nation state, economic model of the welfare state, political system etc. The paper briefly describes political and public debates before the significant „European“ referendums and other milestones of the Danish EC/EU membership. Furthermore, it analyses Danish opt-outs of the Treaty of Maastricht, its consequences and future, especially of those concerning defence and EMU. The outcomes of the analysis are then compared and reflected to the approaches of the Czech Republic as a representative of another small nation state and East-European new EU member state, looking for possible parallels, same interests etc. It's true to say that especially the perception of the state and national identity within small states, as a consequence of the nation state concept, is one of the main common factors influencing its approach to the European integration quite significantly.

Keywords: nation state, European integration, euroscepticism, Denmark, opt-outs, EU

Introduction

Contemporary Denmark follows an active line of foreign policy based on priorities of increasing international security and stability, promoting the respect for democracy, human rights and good governance and ensuring the greatest possible economic progress and prosperity. All the pillars of its foreign policy act in direct symbiosis with the core values of Danish society built on democracy, high respect to human rights and the rule of law. It might seem as a natural result of long term development, however, it is true to say that such a foreign policy has not always been typical for Denmark and, moreover, even today it is not consistent in pursuing all its priorities, especially in relation to the European integration process. Why is Denmark so reluctant and how would its position within the EU and approach to European integration develop?

1. Basic pillars of the Danish foreign policy

Danish foreign policy after the second world war has been built on three main pillars: the United Nations, NATO and European integration. The UN have been a platform for promoting priorities of global responsibility principle, sustaining development and ecology, strengthening international law as a cornerstone of international relations and recently also for promoting the UN as the main global framework for fighting terrorism. Balanced military, humanitarian and civilian approach is the only possible recipe to face the new threats - Denmark's development assistance per capita is among the highest in the world and it has been one of the countries most active in deploying peacekeeping forces. In December 2006 Denmark ended its two-year term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, being a very active member in pushing ahead its priorities, especially in relation to fight against terrorism, i.e. chairmanship of the Security Council's Counter Terrorism Committee, conflict resolution, i.e. very active role in establishing UN Peacebuilding Commission, support of UN involvement in conflict resolution in Africa and strengthening of international law. On the other hand NATO has represented a main platform for defence and Denmark has always promoted alliance as being the main and only pillar of collective defence of the western world. Whereas being quite moderate and passive member before 1989, after the end of the Cold War Denmark took an active part in NATO's interventions, e.g. in Kosovo in 1999, and the international military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Finally, the third pillar, the European integration, has been always perceived mainly as a platform for economic cooperation. However, after the end of the Cold War the integration process clearly declared to have also significant political and defence ambitions which meant a

serous hit to the Danish foreign policy concept. Denmark proved its long-term reluctance to the process and its policy at this platform has been quite schizophrenic. It is true to say that Denmark has played quite a specific role in the European integration for almost thirty years, since its entering to European Communities in January 1973, and it has been a country traditionally reserved towards deeper integration.

2. History and formation of the nation state concept

The key to understand Danish attitude towards the European integration is determined by historical development and lies in the particular relationship which was established between the concept of the state, the concept of the nation and the concept of the People. In Denmark we can find „a unique constellation of a French state-nation which forged a very tight relationship between the state and the nation, coupled to a German cultural conceptualisation of the nation“¹, connected with phenomena of welfare state and egalitarianism. To understand how this „coctail“ was developed we should look back to history.

The story begins in the 1750s, when the Danish absolutist state, the Whole-state, covered Denmark and Norway as well as duchies of Slesvig and Holstein. Those years were characterised by promoting sense of Danishness and the Nordic identity, being promoted especially with the aim to explain the difference between Whole-state and „Germany“, Norden being glorious and Germany inferior. The Slesvigian Wars (1814 – 1864) meant a devastation of the Whole-state. Firstly Denmark lost Norway and the pressure between „Germans“ and Danes was continuously growing, initiating debates over position of Slesvig and Holstein in the Whole-state. Finally, in 1864 Denmark loses both Holstein and Slesvig, not just being substantially reduced, but for the first time in its history having part of the Danish nation located within another state. Moreover, if we concern Swedish support during war, it meant also the end of Scandinavianism as a political project. As a consequence, strong nationalism became a mass phenomenon. It was connected mainly with Grundtvig, one of the most significant figures in the history of Denmark, and his conceptualisation of Danish nation, resembling the „Kulturation“ of Herder, where the central pillar is „Folket“, „the People“. After the First World War, the German question was reopened, the revision of border was based on plebiscite and Denmark became for the first time a nation-state. Moreover, the events since 1864 „led to the construction of the external idea of the state as

¹ Lene Hansen and Ole Waever. European Integration and National Identity: The challenge of the Nordic states (Routledge, London and New York 2002)

one of the anti-power politics², pursuing foreign policy based on negotiations and patience towards the great powers, as a good example we can take the occupation of Denmark in 1940 or its contemporary role in peacekeeping operations. Since 1920, „the Danish nation and the Danish state became closely knit together so that Denmark could be concerned as one of the few true nation-states of the world“³, „state“ being represented by social democratic Scandinavian welfare state formed by Social Democratic party, and national identity being built on „the People“ as the core of the nation.

3. Denmark vs. European Integration

Post-Second World War Western Europe was symbolised by unprecedented degree of institutionalisation, Denmark being founding member of NATO and the Council of Europe in 1949, but not participating in founding the European Coal and Steel Community, European Economic Community and Euroatom, the three organisations being basic stones of the European integration. Denmark was to large extent dependent on opinion of Britain, mainly due to the large agriculture exports from Denmark to Britain. As an alternative for free market framework, European Free Trade Association was established in 1959, moreover creating also a strong Nordic dimension as also Norway and Sweden were founding members. However, very soon Britain found out this alternative being insufficient, changed its mind and, followed by Denmark, Ireland and Norway, applied in July 1961 for EEC membership. However, de Gaul's France twice vetoed (1963, 1966) Britain's entry, which ment also withdrawing of application of Denmark, Ireland and Norway. Nevertheless, the discussion in Denmark in 60's was mainly about how to tackle potential choice between the British and the Nordic options, between the economic benefits of an EEC membership if Britain joins versus the loss of political independence entailed by membership. Finally, the Hague summit in 1969 opened door for enlargement and in 1973 Denmark decided to join European Communities after a referendum in 1972 with 63% in favour and 37% against. The yes – no division went to large extent along the traditional left – right division, Conservative and Liberal Parties being in favour, Radical Liberal Party and Social Democrats in favour with few „no“-minorities, and Socialist People's Party being against. The „yes“ side argued mostly by economic benefits, particularly the Common Agricultural Policy (i.e. still in 1997 Denmark received second biggest CAP subsidy per farm worker in the EU – 13700 USD⁴), and claimed that there is no reason to be scared of losing

² Lene Hansen and Ole Waever. European Integration and National Identity: The challenge of the Nordic states (Routledge, London and New York 2002)

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⁴ European Commission, www.euroscope.cz

political sovereignty as Europe would never fulfil the ambitions of some states to become a federation as there are so many different interests within the member countries. They believed in EU as an intergovernmental cooperation mainly in economic field. Another argument was gaining bigger influence in other parts of Europe and possible security benefits of cooperation replacing rivalry between powers in Europe. Moreover, „yes“ side believed in Norden cooperation within EU by establishing new Scandinavian pillar (although Norway after referendum did not finally enter) and in possibility of cooperation outside of EU frame. „No“ side argued mainly by losing political independence, which would sooner or later pose a threat to Danish welfare system, as Europe was following more capitalist-liberal economic way. Nevertheless, Denmark entered the EC and when the integration picked up speed in 1980's, Danes had become used to explain the integration as a project of grand, but unrealistic ambitions, so it is not needed to be concerned with it.

However, with the end of Cold War and new enthusiasm about the integration of Europe comes Maastricht Treaty, establishing pillars of new political, defence and justice cooperation, meaning a serious hit for Denmark and the previous „yes“ side arguments. There was a new referendum and new hard struggle between „yes“ and „no“ side coming. This time the „yes“ side was advocated by the centre parties from Social Democrats on the left, to the liberal party on the right, the „no“ arguments were presented by the most right wing party Party of Progress, and, traditionally, by left-wing Social People's Party, and, moreover, by two social movements. In comparison to the „no“ and „yes“ sides in 1970's, the first one was divided into a left-wing and a right-wing „no“.

The „yes“ side argued that „the nation state will continue to be the decisive stone in the European construction, one should see the European Union not as way to dispose of the nation – states, but as a framework for their closer cooperation“⁵. It is true to say that the „yes“ side was not that consistent as in the past, for example concerning the issue of common European Security and Defence Policy, however, it was finally able to reach broad „yes“ consensus, 130 members of Folketinget approving the treaty and just 25 being against, reflecting that „yes“ was recommended by almost entire political and economic establishment. Another argument in favour of Maastricht Treaty was that EU through stronger cooperation might better compete economically with the U.S. and Japan. Concerning the issue of Norden alternative there was a broad consensus that the situation had changed and the only Nordic perspective was now the one inside the EC“⁶.

⁵ Niels Helveg Petersen, Folketingstidende, 1992

⁶ Karl Hjortnaes, Folketinget, 1992

The „no“ side argued by „old“ arguments of danger of losing political independence and the Danish nation-state identification in federal Europe, interpreting future Europe as another state, moreover nation-state, where Danish nation dissolves. Moreover, they argued with massive influx of immigrants, refused the common European Security and Defence Policy and Western European Union as a pillar of European security, and stressed the importance of Nordic alternative outside the EU arguing by more and more sceptical opinion polls in Sweden and Finland related to their potential EU membership. The public debate on Maastricht Treaty was quite violent, accompanied by protests and firing on the street (in 1993, for the first time since the end of WWII). The referendum in 1992 ended with 49,3% in favour and 50,7% voting against. The answer to the referendum was the Edinburgh Agreement, including 4 opt-outs for Denmark, still valid today. The first one is partly exemption from union citizenship, secondly, Denmark would not participate in the third phase of the EMU, third, quite unclear exemption, is in area of justice and police affairs, fourth, probably the most significant exemption states has stated that Denmark would not take part in the common defence policy nor WEU. The Edinburgh Agreement was approved by 56,7% majority. The debates over the Amsterdam Treaty in May 1998 and the EMU in September 2000 have continued along the same positions outlined in 1992-93. The debate over Amsterdam was quite short and 55,1% approval relatively secure by Danish standards. On contrary, the discussion over the EMU became a „thriller“, polls showing substantial support for „yes“ side long before, however in last months the opinion was changing, and, finally, „no“ side „won“ in the referendum by 53,2%. It is true to say, that most objectives Denmark have had against the treaties are to large extent just outcome of „romantic nationalism“. In case of „citizenship“ – the expression is the problem, not the content, in case of EMU, it is more or less just question of sustaining own currency and having traditional coins with queen as the DKK is fixed to Euro and the monetary policy closely coordinated with the Eurozone anyway – Denmark being a member of ERM II mechanism. The exemption in the area of justice and police affairs has been rather unclear with not that significant importance. Regarding Denmark not participating in WEU and ESDP, if we concern Danish tradition in peace-making and peace-keeping operations, it is hardly understandable, why Denmark missed in WEU, which focused on that type of operations, and even more absurd was the necessity to withdraw reputable Danish troops from Balcan missions after they had been taken under EU flag, although all other European countries left their troops in the area. This caused a feeling of indignation among the majority of Danish population and, as a result, for the first time helped it to realise the consequences and limits of the Danish opt-outs.

4. Denmark as a member state

Let's look how we would evaluate Denmark as a member country of the European Union. If we look at the key economic goal of the EU - completing the Single Market – Denmark has been one of the best countries in implementation of EU law. If we look at more „political“ level, it is true to say that Denmark have always strongly supported the enlargement of the EU, also being quite active and playing an important role. In Copenhagen 1993, while Danish presidency, accession criteria were formulated, and in Copenhagen in December 2002, the negotiations with 10 countries were symbolically finished, although being extremely difficult. It is true to say that Denmark and its prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, putting the closing of negotiations as an absolute priority in its presidency, did an excellent job. It is, undoubtedly, in Denmark's interest to welcome new countries in the European Union, as those countries belong to the smaller ones, moving Denmark up the ladder and having more partners to share common interests with. On the other hand, Denmark is still quite „protective“ towards its home industries, as an example we can take state aid. It is one of three countries of the EU, where the state aid increased, whereas in other countries we can observe significant decrease. Another area of Danish traditional focus is environment, also European Environmental Agency is seated in Copenhagen. The EU legislation allows to member countries to keep higher standards, limits and restrictions in the area of environment than those formulated by the EU and this exception is often used by Scandinavian countries, however, very often we find contradiction between environmental and competition concern. One of the famous cases between Denmark and the European Commission was Can Ban, when Denmark finally withdrawn and since summer 2002 it is possible to buy drinks in cans on Danish market as well. Furthermore, Denmark is, of course, quite protective towards its welfare state, however, its unsustainability is clear and a reform unavoidable anyway. Especially the process of harmonisation of taxes might be a quite difficult issue for Denmark, although any tax reform was excluded from undergoing referendum by Danish government.

It is true to say that today both political establishment and already also most of electorate realise the necessity to get rid of all the opt-outs as they have proven to be rather counterproductive. Not just to Danish active foreign policy but also to its core values when Denmark cannot influence the policies by which it is determined. They have realised that European integration has not just economic but also strong political dimension which complies with and sometimes even enforces Danish core values and foreign policy priorities and has not proved to be a threat to the Danish nation state. However, the government has considered to be fair to wait what will be further development within the European Union itself, i.e. the future of constitutional treaty, resp.

reform treaty, before Danes will decide about their closer incorporation to Europe. It's true to say that the Lisbon treaty have been already ratified by Danish parliament and even previous draft of constitutional treaty which was supposed to undergo referendum proved to have sufficient support of public in polls.

5. Nation State vs. the European Integration Process: Case of the Czech Republic

The main focus of the paper is given to Denmark as one of the purest examples of nation state in the world and at the same time „old“ member of the European integration process, i.e. with experience of membership. It might be certainly interesting to compare its specific attitude to the European integration process with another nation state, i.e. a „new“ member of the European union. Due to certain similarities I have chosen the Czech Republic and will try to briefly characterise formation of Czech nation state and its attitude to the European integration process.

The Czech Republic as political state belongs to the youngest ones in Europe. Although components of Czech national iconography extend back centuries, with reference to the Hussites, the scientist Komenský, Czech King Karel IV who served as Holy Roman Emperor, the national revival process etc., development of the modern Czech nation, i.e. nation state, was, ironically, not possible until 1993. It is true to say that preconditions for creating quite a pure nation state date back to the post WWII development, i.e. post-war frontier adjustment and especially mass expulsion. As a result, the Czech lands of Czechoslovakia, multi-ethnic until roughly 1950, became nearly homogenous. Moreover, today no significant Czech diaspora exists in the region.

One of the key features in formation of national identity in the Czech Republic after 1993 was the slogan „Back to Europe“ or „return to Europe“. On an economic and historical level the Czech nation believes that it is not conforming to but re-adopting practices and values not only that it shares but to which it historically contributed.

The Czech Republic as an EU candidate country have worked hard to complete accession chapters as soon as possible. It is true to say that the EU membership was perceived not just as a membership in a sort of organisation, but as a membership of „Europe“ as an expression of ideology, i.e. giving identity, goals and both geopolitical and socio-economic orientation. As a result, the strong values attached to „Europe“ by Czech politicians and part of the public have paradoxically caused a clash between those ideals and the realities of accession leading to emerging euroscepticism among part of population and political establishment.

Another factor strongly influencing the approach of public to the European integration process especially within the „new“ member states are leading politicians. Whereas former Czech Prime Minister Zeman and former President Havel strongly promoted the sense of membership of Europe, contemporary Prime Minister Topolánek and President Klaus are rather reserved or even eurosceptic in European measures. Klaus's exaggerated comparison of rule from Brussels to that of communist-era Moscow gives a true evidence. The key to understand their approach is in conservative perception of nation state and state sovereignty, behind that is probably also a threat of weakening their power. Moreover, the politicians in „new“ member states tend to influence public opinion on European issues much more than in „old“ member states having longer experience of membership.

6. Danish Case vs. Czech Case

Both Denmark and the Czech Republic are one of the purest examples on nation states in Europe. It is hardly possible to compare approach of those two states to the European integration process as there are many differences in the formation of their nation states and, most significantly, the Czech Republic as a „new“ member misses an important variable: the experience of membership. As a result, the approach to the European integration process is not defined to that extent by public in form of bottom up process as in Denmark, however, so far more as a result of political influence. Another important difference is the purpose of entering the integration process – for Denmark the main and only reason was just economic cooperation, however, for the Czech Republic it symbolised „return“ to Europe with its ideology and values.

Although the history and formation of the nation state concept in both countries as well as reason of entering the European integration has been quite different, it has proved in both cases that nation states tend to be eurosceptic. It is caused by their perception of nation state concept. However, the example of Denmark is an evidence that eurosceptic approach is not a constant variable and changes along with the variable of experience of membership.

It is true to say that there were two main streams arising in 90's in Denmark: the discussion has been held between the concepts of „Europe of Regions“, in Denmark represented by Lars Hedegaard, versus „Federal Europe“, represented by „Club of Federalists“, which included intellectuals from both „yes“ and „no“ side, for example university professor Christen Sorensen.

However, recent and contemporary development in the EU has showed the concept of pure European federation to be irrelevant, at least in short and middle term horizon. Nevertheless, it has been a common mistake in the public discussions, also in Denmark, to use „federation“ as a synonymum for „state“, especially concerning attributes like strong degree of centralisation, as being understood in nation-states like Denmark. There are different possible forms of federation, also the concept of „Europe of Regions“ might be understood as a specific form of federation. Actually, it would not be a threat but, on contrary, a significant benefit and challenge for smaller states. Europe according to this concept would be politically organised as a network of different levels: regional, national, European and global. It would mean that there would be no big and small players, but regions of approximately the same size, small countries creating for example one region as a whole, bigger ones divided into more regions, which even today have strong regional identities, even cross-border ones, and movements like for example Bavaria, Scotland, Silesia or Catalonia. It would make today's smaller „states“ like Denmark or the Czech Republic to become relatively more powerful and adopt stronger role in Europe, like for example Denmark used to have until the mid of the nineteenth century.

But it has one precondition, being very difficult to be understood in Denmark, but not just there, also in other EU member nation-states, including the Czech Republic. In this point it is relevant to return back to the beginning of the paper to strong state-nation connection. The Europe of Regions presumes splitting of this connection, „state“ being represented by Europe as a whole, and „nation“ by region, in case of smaller countries by today's „nation-state“. But as I tried to explain on case of Denmark, the long historical development determines and explains reserved position of many countries towards the process of European integration and its deepening, especially among nation-states. It is not necessary to mention that even the contemporary model of the EU is constructed not on proportionality and rule of big countries, but on a sort of „positive discrimination“ of small ones, both formally and informally. For example, while negotiating in Working Groups of the Council of the EU, the same number of people represents every country and no one thinks or calculates that Luxembourg has much less votes than Germany, they are discussing the arguments of any member in the same way and try to reach some consensus or agreement – and this is quite common for all levels of negotiation and decision making procedures within the EU. It clearly illustrates the real comparative strength of small states in the EU and makes many of the common EU-reserved arguments used by public (and sometimes also by the political establishment) in those states to be irrelevant.

Conclusion

To sum it up, I tried to describe, analyse and explain Danish rather unique and reserved approach to the European integration and its role in this process. It might help to understand similar approach of the Czech Republic and many other nation-states. The key to explain that is in understanding of the concept of nation-state, its preconditions and historical development. Due to the nature of the public understanding of nation-state within those states it is difficult to imagine the split of concepts of nation and state on two different levels. However, in my opinion it is just a question of time and development to realise that the identity as such should be understood as multilevel and national identity as such can exist even if it is not connected with all attributes of the state sovereignty as it is commonly understood in not nation-state countries. Although the history and formation of the nation state concept in various countries as well as reason of entering the European integration might be quite different, it has proved that nation states tend to be eurosceptic. However, the example of Denmark is an evidence that eurosceptic approach is not a constant variable and changes along with the variable of experience of membership.

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