

COPENHAGEN

The enigma of Denmark's new-found europhilia

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In all the doom and gloom of the EU's constitutional crisis and enlargement fatigue a remarkable change has gone largely unnoticed – Denmark has come to Europe.

Alongside the Irish, Danish respondents to Eurobarometer polls are now breaking all national records when questioned about the benefits of EU membership. The Danish government is upbeat about the EU, as seen in its support for the constitutional treaty and the Berlin Declaration. The five main parties in the Danish parliament are now even calling for a debate on the merits of opting back into the country's four opt-outs to the Treaty on European Union. Some critics still argue, though, that not much has changed

in the state of Denmark, and that for all the party political enthusiasm, the real test will be in any future referenda.

The shifting tides of Denmark's relations with the rest of Europe may be found in several examples of Danish-isation. These include the increasing attention given to the successful and sustainable Nordic models of economic growth combined with supportive welfare and high levels of education. The Danish model of "flexicurity", reconciling flexibility for enterprise with high standards of social security for employees, is one such example. Similarly, the lead taken by the Danish in energy and environmental policy has been complemented, by imitations of Denmark's variable taxes on different packaging materials and its systematic reduction of pesticide use over the past 20 years. The recent Danish controversy over the way in which the Berlin Declaration was changed when crucial German terms such as "glück" were translated in Danish as "for the best" is also interesting.

Although Germany's happiness may have been "lost in translation", ultimately it is the Danish (and English) meaning of "for the better" that will be remembered as that will be the one most read.

More controversially, the Danish-isation of Europe has a more contentious side to it. France and the Netherlands could be said to have followed the Danish example of 1992 on the Maastricht Treaty when they voted against the constitution. And the eurosceptic positions of the Polish and Czech governments also seem to echo Danish "awkwardness" during the 1990s.

But what can explain the more positive change in Danish attitudes to Europe? First, the support that the Danish government received from EU member states, the Commission and much of the European media during the 2005-6 "cartoon crisis" appears to have made Danes more aware of the benefits of membership. Second, the warming of the Danish Socialist People's Party to the EU, particularly since

2003-4, appears to reflect both EU actions on green issues and the general opposition across Europe to the invasion of Iraq. Third, healthy economic growth and historically low unemployment in Denmark since 2003, spurred in part by closer relations across the Øresund bridge with southern Sweden, as well as the reviving eurozone economy, is undoubtedly a factor. The spread of new building projects in and around Copenhagen, as well as the tens of thousands of Danish and Swedish commuters crossing the Øresund every day, reflect these changing economic fortunes. Fourth, the extent to which Danish ideas on energy and the environment now seem to be mirrored in Brussels appears to have resonated with many Danes, as has the German EU presidency's emphasis on an international post-Kyoto agreement in the run-up to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in December 2009.

One more reason for changing attitudes may be the fact that Denmark now seems to have four

high-profile Danes working with or in the EU. As well as Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and EU Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fisher Boel, there are two very high-profile Danish MEPs: former Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, who is president of the Party of European Socialists, and Jens-Peter Bonde who chairs the Independence/Democracy group in the European Parliament. The presence of these four in the Danish media seems to have contributed to a greater sense of EU participation.

Care needs to be taken in understanding the changes in Denmark, as it may hold lessons for the rest of Europe. The idea that euroscepticism results from a lack of information about the EU is no explanation in the Danish case. Denmark's 35-year engagement with Europe has long been marked by extensive debate on the merits of European integration. A more convincing explanation of changing Danish attitudes might be the desire simply to get on with a "Europe of results" rather than

continuing divisive debates about membership. It may also be not so much that Danes have become more pro-European, but that other member states have become more questioning. Denmark may not have come to Europe, but Europe may be coming to Denmark. □

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HELSINKI **Finland's swing to the right confirms Nordic model of conservatism**

By Risto Penttilä,
Director of the Finnish Business and Policy Forum (EVA)

Northern Europe's current swing to the right saw Finland's centre-right political parties score a surprise victory in March at this year's parliamentary elections. The Social Democrats in the outgoing centre-left coalition government were the biggest losers, slipping into third place behind Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen's