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Denmark

European union: for or against?

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Discussion in Denmark about the European Union generally tends to be a question about "for" or "against". Ultimately, this is about remaining or leaving the Union, but more frequently, the debate raises the question if the Union should have more or less power, i.e. should policy measures be decided at European at national level.

Voters' scepticism about the EU has been reflected in referendums on some of the country's opt-outs from the European Union. Since 1993, Denmark holds opt-outs from European Union policies in relation to security and defence, citizenship, police and justice, and the adoption of the euro .

Most recently, in 2015, a referendum was held on whether to convert Denmark's current full opt-out on home and justice matters into an opt-out with case-by-case opt-in. Despite support from all major parties, it was rejected by 53% of voters. Also, in 2000, voters rejected the adoption of the euro by 52%.

Voters have always been much more critical than the political parties about transfer of power to the European level. That is why the major establishment parties, basically supporting the European integration, are very hesitant to be too "EU-friendly" in order not to lose voters.

In Parliament, opposition to the policies of the European Union is notably represented by the radical left Red-Green Alliance (RGA) as well as the right xenophobic Danish Peoples Party (DPP). While the former underlines the Union's pro-capitalist policies in economic, environmental, labor, immigrant and consumerist areas, the latter bases its hostility to EU on nationalist grounds and is notably critical of "welfare tourism" (i.e. EU citizens residing in Denmark getting social benefits), immigration and border control. While DPP is ensuring a parliamentary majority to the right government, its position on EU may be the main obstacle for full government participation.

On the other side, the RGA holds up an internationalist vision against the Union. It states as a goal to leave EU and until now supported the Peoples Movement against EU in European elections. The Movement has one MEP who is also a member of the Red-Green Alliance. However, in the upcoming elections in June 2019, the Red-Green Alliance will present its own slate in an electoral alliance with the Movement. In June this year, the party launched a common platform for the European elections in May next year together with La France Insoumise, Podemos, Bloco de Esquerda, the Swedish Left Party and the Finnish left alliance Vasemmistoliitto.

Announcing the platform, the spokesperson of the Red-Green Alliance, Pernille Skipper, declared:

"We need a completely new direction for Europe. And we need a co-operation between the countries based upon democracy, solidarity and sustainability. We will achieve this only with a strong European and EU-critical left movement capable of delivering a response to the austerity of Merkel as well Macron and to the inhumane refugee policies of the right populists."

When millions of refugees came to Europe, "welcome committees" were set up in most Danish cities, providing legal and material support. These networks still exist but given the dramatic fall in the number of refugees arriving in Denmark, support activities have slowed down too. The political challenge is to stand up against the extremely merciless refugee policies adopted by the Danish government, even breaking international conventions. The refugee minister proudly announces on the front page of ministry webpage the number of tightening measures adopted since the government came to power in 2015 (now standing at 98). Most of these measures are supported by Social

Democracy, thus hoping to take back some voters from the Danish Peoples Party. The party even supported the government not to accommodate 500 UN-stipulated quota refugees (as all Danish governments did since 1989)

Of course, solutions to the refugee crisis have to be found at international and European levels. However, opponents to the current immigrant policy are on the defensive and tend to oppose specific measures rather than focus on overall European solutions.

Generally, public attention goes to national rather than European policies, not the least because next parliamentary elections must take place not later than June 2019.

However, EU regulation on posted workers (i.e. EU residents working abroad) has been an ongoing issue for many years. There have been many stories about people from Romania, Poland and Lithuania being paid miserably (or not being paid), sometimes even forced to slave-like conditions. Unions are also anxious that low wages are undermining the gains accomplished in collective agreement with the employers. That is why they campaigned for a new EU regulation ensuring posted workers the same wage as workers of the country where they are posted.

This campaign was supported by the European Trade Union Congress (ETUC) and managed to push the EU institutions to update the directive, thus ensuring real improvements and wage corresponding to the country where you work. Only the formal adoption by the Council of Ministers is missing. Still, the consequences in real life remain to be seen. The constitutional EU "freedoms of movement" - by capital and by workforce - may undermine the rights of workers. That is why ETUC and others are now demanding a social protocol attached to Treaty itself as a necessary guarantee for workers' conditions.

PS:

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