

PAPER

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RECORD NUMBERS BACK DANISH EU MEMBERSHIP¹

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SUMMARY: According to a new survey from Parliament's Eurobarometer, a record 76 percent of Danes think that the EU is a "good thing". This is the highest proportion measured in Denmark since 1974 when Eurobarometer began to pose this question. In the latest survey only seven percent indicated that the EU is a "bad thing".

A record number of Danes (84 percent) also experience EU membership as an advantage for Denmark – a question Eurobarometer has asked since 1983. 80 percent of the Danes believe that their vote counts in the EU. This result matches the proportion measured in the autumn survey and demonstrates the highest level of agreement when Danes have been asked this question. The numbers clearly state that support for Danish membership of the EU is significant and stable.

Danish euroscepticism has been sovereignty-based for decades, and there is nothing in the survey that points to this scepticism becoming less pronounced. On the contrary, the numbers show that the Danes are still among the EU-28 citizens who are least supportive of giving more power to the European Parliament, a so-called supranational institution.

¹ This paper is an in-house translation done by Louise Pierrel Mikkelsen of the Danish original article: <http://thinkeuropa.dk/vaerdier/rekordhoej-opbakning-til-dansk-eu-medlemskab>. Thanks to Rachel Payne for proof reading.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

- The Danes' support for EU membership has never been greater. 76 percent believe membership is a "good thing", while just 7 percent see it as a "bad thing". This is indicated in the European Parliament's new Eurobarometer survey, which has just been published.
- It is the most EU-positive survey conducted since Denmark joined the EU.
- Record numbers of Danes also experience the EU as an advantage for Denmark, with 84 percent considering the EU as an "advantage", compared to 8 percent who do not.
- The survey states that Danish support for EU membership is stable and high. The Danes' support is high both in absolute terms and in comparison with the EU-28 average.
- In general, support for the EU is increasing in member countries. Thus, the poll confirms the trend that started in 2016 immediately after the British referendum on leaving the EU.
- However, the poll does not bring new knowledge about the aspect of EU attitudes that deals with sovereignty. In Denmark, sovereignty-based scepticism has traditionally been strong and decisive in Danish referendums.
- Indirectly, the survey suggests that Danish sovereignty-based scepticism is still high. When answering the question of whether the role of the supra-national European Parliament should be strengthened in the future, the Danes are far more sceptical than the EU average.

The European Parliament has just published its large, biannual survey on Europeans' attitudes toward the EU.² This May's survey comes one year before the elections in 2019 and confirms the upward trend of support for the EU that, started in the member countries shortly after Britain's decision to leave in 2016, is continuing. Europeans' overall support for the EU is increasing on almost all indicators.

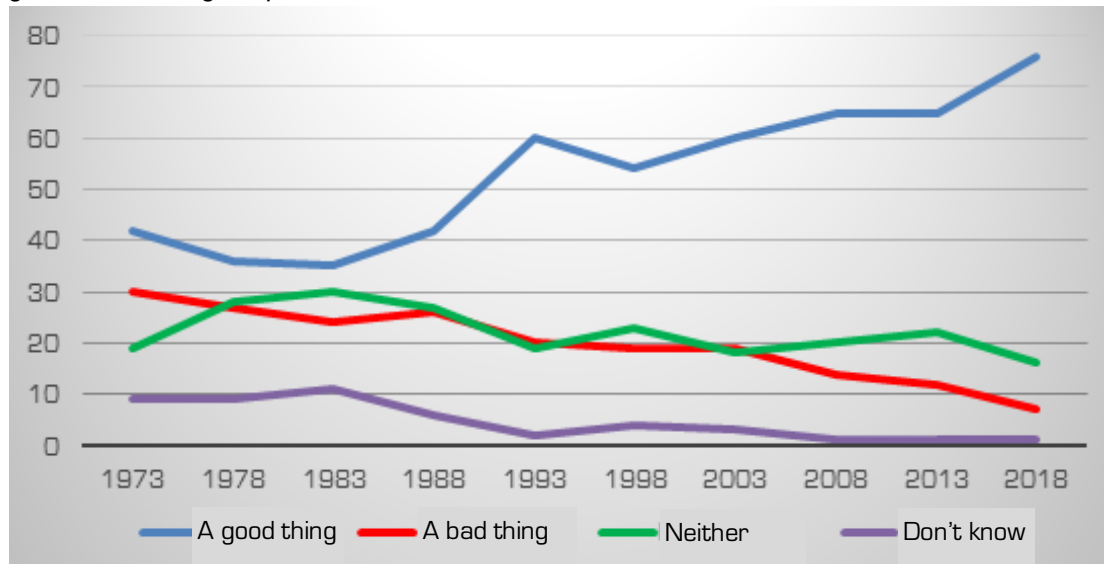
Large Danish majority: EU membership is a "good thing"

The new poll presents a picture of the Danish population as being very positive towards the EU cooperation: Danish support of being a member of the EU has in fact never been higher.

² Europa-Parlamentets Eurobarometer, Democracy on the move, 23. Maj 2018, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/da/20180523PVL00117/Eurobarometer-2018-Democracy-on-the-Move>.

Figure 1. Record-high support for Danish EU membership

Do you think your country's membership of the EU is a good thing, a bad thing or neither a good or bad thing? in pct.



Source: Think Tank EUROPA based on the Eurobarometer's Interactive Search System (including 2008). 2013 and 2018: Eurobarometer of the European Parliament.

According to the new survey, 76 percent responded that EU membership is a "good thing", while seven percent answered that it is a "bad thing". This is eight percentage points higher than the previous peak of EU endorsement in Denmark. That was in 2007, when 68 percent selected the answer "a good thing" and 19 percent "a bad thing".

Since 1974, Eurobarometer has posed the question of whether EU membership is seen as a "good thing", a "bad thing" or "neither a good thing nor a bad thing". Until the end of the 1980s, the Danish response remained stable, with around 35 percent saying that membership was a "good thing" and just under 30 percent indicating that it was a "bad thing". In the 1990s there was a strong increase in support, perhaps inspired by events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The average backing over the next two decades reached about 55 percent, while the resistance rarely reached over 20 percent.³ The latest survey from the European Parliament has seen the support move a further step up.

³ Eurobarometer surveys were originally conducted by the European Commission, but since 2007 the European Parliament has conducted its own survey, and has "taken over" questions about attitudes toward membership, utility and democracy. For European Parliament Eurobarometer surveys see: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20171016PVL00116/Eurobarometer>. For the European Commission Eurobarometer survey, including a link to the interactive search system, Eurobarometer Interactive Search System, where trends can be tracked over time, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/General/index>. The question of membership reads: "Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the EU is ...?"

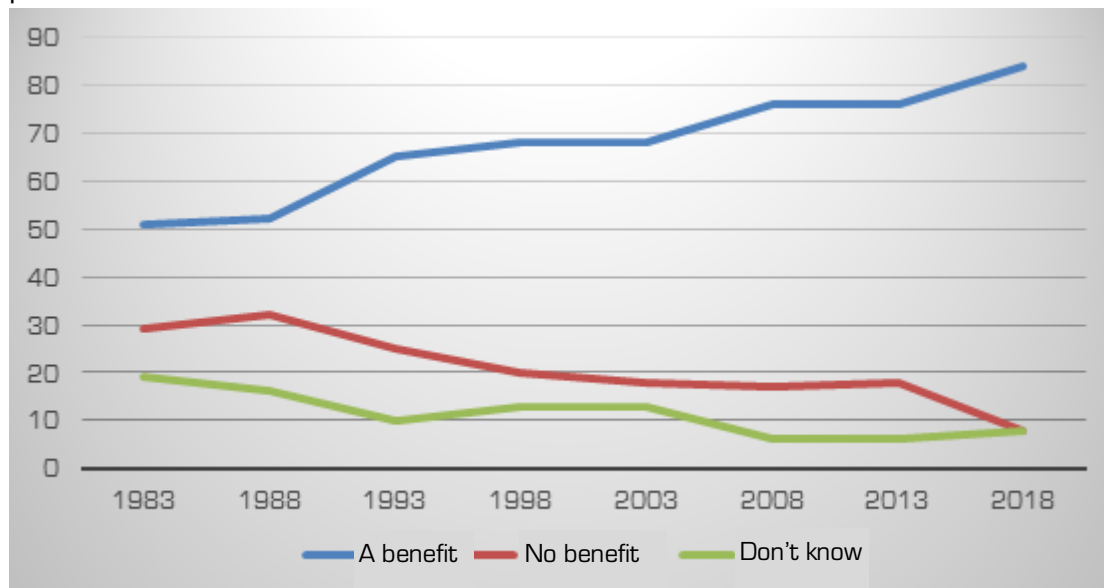
The Danes: Membership is an advantage

In addition to the basic question about attitudes towards membership, the Parliament's survey also asks about the citizens' experience of the EU's usefulness and democracy. These questions indicate whether it is economic or democracy-based Euroscepticism in the member countries.⁴

The question on the utility of the EU has been asked since 1983. Here too the new survey shows the most positive Danish EU response ever; 84 percent of the Danes responded that EU membership is an advantage for Denmark versus just 8 percent who responded that it is a disadvantage. The highest proportion so far dates back to 2007, when it was 78 percent of Danes who experienced the EU as useful and 15 percent who did not.⁵

Figure 2: More Danes experience the EU as an advantage

All in all, do you believe that Denmark has benefited from its membership of the EU - or not? in pct.



Source: Eurobarometer Interactive Search System (up to and including 2008). 2013 and 2018: European Parliament Eurobarometer.

⁴ For an analysis of euroscepticism, see Catharina Sørensen (2007): Euroscepticism. A Conceptual Analysis, University of Copenhagen.

⁵ See Eurobarometer Interactive Search System (op-cit), questions: Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union? For recent years' responses to this question, see the European Parliament's Eurobarometer home page (Op cit).

The Danes feel heard in the EU

Since 2004, the Eurobarometer has also investigated whether Europeans feel that their voice is heard in Brussels – a question that can reflect attitudes towards democracy in the EU. In the May survey, 80 percent of Danes said they believed that their vote counts in the EU, which was the same proportion as in the autumn survey and the highest level of support ever measured in Denmark in response to this question.⁶ So far, the greatest impression among Danes of “being heard” was recorded in 2014 when 75 percent replied “yes” to this question, and 22 percent said “no”.

The Danish numbers reflect a high level of EU support in absolute terms, but are also high compared to the average among the 28 EU countries' populations. The numbers from the May survey show that the EU average of people who think membership is a “good thing” is 60 percent, and 12 percent think it's a “bad thing”. 67 percent experience the EU as useful and 23 percent do not. 48 percent find that their voice is heard in the EU versus 46 percent who do not. The Danes seem markedly more positive than the EU average in all of these areas.

Sovereignty-based scepticism

There are no questions in the survey that directly address the type of euroscepticism that deals with sovereignty. It is, however, precisely this type of scepticism that is particularly strong in Denmark, which was decisive for the three Danish EU referendums that resulted in a “no”⁷ vote.

In an exit poll from the last Danish referendum on the JHA opt-out in 2015, 68 percent of those who had voted “no” responded that their choice was due to a reluctance to lose more sovereignty to the EU.⁸ And as evidenced by the Think Tank EUROPA report “Suveræne Danmark (Supreme Denmark)” Danes' support for EU cooperation in specific policy areas is reduced by about 20 percentage points just by the word “Sovereignty” being mentioned.⁹

⁶ See Eurobarometer Interactive Search System (op-cit), questions: My voice counts in the European Union. For recent years' responses to this question, see the European Parliaments Eurobarometer pages (Op cit).

⁷ Danish sovereignty-based Euroscepticism is discussed in more detail in the report “Suveræne Danmark. Danskernes fortællinger om EU og suverænitet”, Tænk tanken EUROPA, 2017, <http://thinkeuropa.dk/vaerdier/suveraene-danmark>.

⁸ Gallupmåling: Derfor stemte vi nej, Berlingske Tidende, 5. december, <https://www.b.dk/content/item/294433>.

⁹ Se Suveræne Danmark (op.cit).

It is far from accurate to assume that a Dane who believes that EU membership “is good for Denmark”, that the EU brings economic benefits and that the EU is a democratic cooperation, also believes that Denmark should give more power to the EU. In Denmark, the great support for the EU over recent decades has also been coupled with great scepticism against actions perceived as giving away sovereignty.

The record Danish support for membership of the EU does not mean the Danes want the European Parliament to assume a stronger role either. In fact, the Danes are among those in the EU who least want to strengthen the Parliament. Only 28 percent of the Danes are in favour of this as opposed to 47 percent on average in the EU.

This may be because the Danes above all want an EU where national Ministers in the Council decide. Sovereignty-based euroscepticism is typically directed at the elements of EU cooperation that are perceived as interfering too much with the “Danish way of doing things”.

This is an assessment that is generally is made from case to case, such as when referendums are held, but it is often directed against “supranational” or “federal” EU issues. As such, people's attitudes towards the European Parliament, which is one of the cooperation’s state institutions, can be seen as an indirect signpost for sovereignty-based euroscepticism.