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**EU: A challenge to Danish Policy and Politics –  
an attempt to pick up the gauntlet**

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# **EU: A challenge to Danish Polity and Politics – an attempt to pick up the gauntlet<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*Ever since Denmark became a member of the European Economic Cooperation (EEC) in 1973, the Danish EC/EU membership and the European integration-process have been issues for intense discussions, periodically stimulated by the several Danish referenda about EU matters. Due to EU membership, key institutions in the Danish political system have been put under a continuing pressure to adapt to a new political environment. This article will focus upon the adaptations of the Danish political institutions to Danish EU membership. Key institutions include the Parliament (the Folketing), the government, the state-bureaucracy and the political parties. Special emphasis will be put partly on questions concerning parliamentary control of the government in EU-matters and partly upon new orientations of the public debate within and outside the political parties. A significant trend is that the distinction between domestic and foreign policy is getting still more blurred, which only partly is reflected in the Danish EU-decision making procedures. Finally a model for a new parliamentary strategy will be presented and discussed; a model which goes beyond the pure national scope and includes closer cooperation between the national parliaments within the EU-member states and the European Parliament.*

## **Introduction**

Despite the fact that the concept of a 'democratic deficit' is often used by academics, politicians and journalists alike when it comes to the institutions and decision-making of the EU, the problems referred to are not always clearly distinct.

This aspect finds expression in a series of partial continuous debates, dealing with different aspects of democracy and the relationship between democracy and European integration. The debates cover a wide range of issues, among others: the discussion about the conclusions to be drawn from the fact that a common European identity does not exist among European citizens, the discussion about the role of the European Parliament (EP), the discussion about the lack of interest regarding EU questions from the (general) public and the national politicians, and finally the discussion on how to deal with the role of the national parliaments in relation to a continual increase in the number of EU-legislative acts (Wessels & Katz, 1999:11), (Toulemon, 1998: 116), (Smidt, 1999:9).

In that perspective it can hardly be a surprise to anybody that the 15 EU countries, with different political systems, special national traditions and different historical experiences, regard, identify and evaluate the debates on democracy in a substantially different way.

Despite the various approaches and foci, it is nevertheless possible to find a general acknowledgement in the majority of the well-established literature that one of the greatest democratic challenges resulting from the integration process is the one faced by the national political systems – especially the national parliaments. As a point of departure, there is agreement on the fact that democracy presupposes an active role for the popularly elected parliaments, but disagreement still exists as to what extent parliamentary control should take place on a national or EU level (Wessels & Katz, 1999:4). In relation to the ongoing debate on institutional reforms and the European *finalité*, a couple of interesting but still not clarified questions could be identified for

the agenda of the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference. A concrete example is the central question to what extent:

“Lower thresholds affect the way in which national parliaments can exercise their ‘scrutiny reserve’ and may make new forms of association between national parliaments and the EP more important” (ICRI, 1999, background paper 4:xviii)

In Denmark, it is often referred to as ‘the turning of the domestic policy into foreign policy’ in connection with the overall development. The expression covers the fact that governmental ministers and officials, in co-operation with other EU institutions, are debating the factual aspects of an increasing number of political issues on an EU level; a development in which the traditionally legislative power – the Danish Parliament (the Folketing) – is being disregarded and finds it still more difficult to keep informed and control the Danish input to the European legislative process. This tendency reflects the traditional perception of EU-policy as foreign policy and thereby a governmental prerogative. The ability of the national parliaments to control the executive power is then put under a pressure that also poses a threat to the democratic legitimacy of the decision-making process. With the above-mentioned tendency, it is possible to view a reversed tendency known as ‘the turning of the foreign policy into domestic policy’. As a consequence of the EU-Agenda infiltrating traditional domestic politics, the Folketing has increasingly carved out a role for itself in Denmark’s positioning in day-to-day European legislation. This reversed tendency is, however, not problematic seen from a democratic point of view. That is why this article will not focus on that issue. On the contrary, the challenges to democracy originate from the above-mentioned ‘turning of domestic policy into foreign policy’.

This issue is relevant in all the member states, but on the basis of the different characteristics of the individual member states and their political systems, the obvious consequence of focusing on precisely that type of democratic issue, as expressed by Vivien A. Smidt, will be that:

“Each member state...has to find its own way of revitalising its democracy, rebalancing its institutions, and ensuring greater citizens’ access to national as well as EU decision-making.” (Smidt, 1997: 143)

The purpose of this paper is to identify how the European integration process and Denmark’s membership of the EEC/EU have challenged the Danish political system and the pace setting institutions, norms and values and to analyse how central players in the Danish political system have handled this challenge. First, we discuss the adaptation of the Danish Parliament to the development in the EU paying special attention to the role of the European Committee. Second, we will focus on the adaptation of the government in which we will scrutinise the interaction between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relevant government departments. Third, the political parties and their adaptation process will be discussed.

Finally, we will run through a number of proposals for further parliamentarization of the Danish EU decision-making process, which despite the controversial political consequences might comply with some of the democratic related concerns caused by the European integration process.

### **The adaptation of the Danish Parliament, (the Folketing)**

In 1972, a majority of the Danish electorate voted in favour of Danish EEC membership. To ensure a certain parliamentary control over the government, a new parliamentary committee was set up in

October 1972 with an obligation to notify motions for adoption of acts immediately applicable in Denmark (cf. law no. 447 of 11 October 1972).

The new committee was called Common Market Committee. The name indicated that EEC co-operation was seen as a dominantly market economic co-operation. The arguments of the 'Yes' campaign were that Danish Membership of the EEC was necessary, first and foremost to ensure access to vital export-markets. The thoughts of 'an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe' (cf. the preamble) and the federalist inspired ideas of a real political union, which were being discussed in some of the EEC countries, were practically non-existent in the Danish debate. However, with the continued deepening of the European integration process in the 80's and 90's it became clear that the EU was not only committed to economic co-operation but also a political project. This was confirmed in the Maastricht Treaty's explicit reference to 'political union'. In Denmark, this change was reflected in the decision to change the name of the Common Market Committee to the European Committee.

The special function of the European Committee is connected to its competence to approve the government's negotiating proposals before the meetings in the Council of Ministers. This established practice was introduced as a result of the Committee's report of 29 March 1973 in which it says:

"The government shall consult the EEC Committee of the Folketing in questions relating to EC policy of a major importance so that the regard for the influence of the Folketing as well as the freedom to negotiate are respected.

Prior to negotiations in the EC Council of Ministers on decisions of a wider scope, the Government submits an oral mandate for negotiation to the EEC Committee. If there is no majority against the mandate, the Government negotiates on this basis".

The above formulation regarding the negotiating proposals is important in order to understand how the European Committee control mechanism works. The point of departure is that the government produces a negotiating proposal, which is presented orally in the European Committee. If the negotiating proposal is rejected, the government will have to present a new negotiating proposal, which can obtain approval in the European Committee, either at the very same meeting or as soon as possible after the meeting.

The control is strengthened by the fact that the Danish government rarely has a majority in the Danish Parliament. Therefore, the government is dependent on support from the opposition and cannot push its proposal through without the opposition's consent. Formally, an approval presupposes that there is no majority against the negotiating proposal and as such it reflects a kind of negative parliamentarism, differing from the reading of the national bills, where a majority vote is crucial before passing the bill. In reality, the relevant minister will often have cleared out any controversies in advance, thereby securing the support of key opposition parties. Besides these fundamental conditions, the development within the EU has left its mark on the European Committee's working conditions and has challenged its role as a controlling body within Danish EU politics.

Among the most significant shifts with major importance for the national parliaments involvement in the EU policy-making was the passing of the Single European Act, 1986. First and foremost, the Single European Act introduced decision-making by qualified majority in the Council of Ministers. This rupture of the principle of unanimity meant that the European Committee's ability to block a decision via the Danish government's representative in the Council of Ministers disappeared on a wide range of issue-areas. Secondly, a major expansion of the scope of EEC policy areas took place with the decision to implement the Single European Act. The new treaty revived the idea of a new common market including free movement of goods, capital, services and

labour, which however, forced other issues affecting the common market on the EEC-agenda. These policy areas included, among others, environmental, industrial and social politics, which all had to be regulated to counteract unequal terms of competition (Friis, 1999, s. 5).

In the period from 1986 to 1992, a significant rise in the number of adopted acts took place due to the establishment of the common market. The widening and deepening of the EEC/EU has continued with the Treaty amendments in the 1990s, and the EU now deals with politically sensitive areas such as justice and home affairs and security and defence policy.

The question is how the Danish European Committee has chosen to manage the new challenges caused by the European integration process; challenges making demands not only on the European Committee's external relations – e.g. the government – but also on internal routines, including the demand for transparency.

### **The countermove of the European Committee**

As a countermove to the introduction of majority voting in the Council of Ministers – whereby the right to unilaterally block a decision has been eliminated - the European Committee has become even more involved in the elaboration of the negotiating proposal of the government. When decisions are to be taken by qualified majority the minister presents the negotiating proposal of the government and possible fall-back positions. The members of the European Committee then have the opportunity to discuss the negotiation strategy of the government, taking into account various negotiation scenarios. All things considered, this involvement of the European Committee can hardly be regarded as anything but a compensation for the loss of the ability to block a decision in the Council.

In parallel with the increasing amount of legislation flowing from the EU to the European Committee, the individual committee members have been exposed to an information overload, making it almost impossible to be up to date on every single detail in the new EU proposals and amendments. Furthermore, the EU proposals cover a wide range of areas and often have a rather technical nature which requires expert knowledge. This kind of expert knowledge, which does not exist in the European Committee, does however exist in the standing committees of the Danish Parliament to a certain extent. The latest reports from the European Committee suggest a close and formalised dialogue between the European Committee and the relevant standing committees when it comes to the decision-making process. The model aims at integrating the standing committees in the Danish EU decision-making process at an earlier stage, while the European Committee first and foremost deals with the cases when they have been put on the agenda in the Council of Ministers. However, so far, only very few of the standing committees have seized the opportunity to commit themselves actively to EU matters (Bjørn Einarsen, 2000). In this respect, the Committee on Environment- and Regional Planning differ from the majority of the standing committees since it has actually engaged in EU-environmental debates for many years and forwarded opinions and recommendations to the European Committee. However, it is still the privilege of the European Committee to make the final decision regarding the governments negotiating proposal and in that way secure a certain co-ordination and coherence in Denmark's official negotiating positions. Meanwhile, it cannot be ruled out that exactly this fact dampens the standing committee's involvement in the EU matters.

The arguments for a more active involvement of the standing committees in the national EU decision-making process can be explained as a natural consequence of the normalisation of EU politics, which is why it should be dealt with in the standing committees like the regular Danish bills. The involvement of the standing committees can be seen as a reorientation from the present, very defensively institutionalised Danish EU polity, in which great emphasis has been put on co-ordination, towards a more offensive attitude where special interests will play a

more pro-active role in the preparation of the Danish EU-policymaking (Mouritzen, 1997a, s. 101ff). In parallel with the attempt to re-consider the European Committee's relations to other actors involved in the decision-making process, the internal procedures of the Committee have also been subject to scrutiny, for instance emphasizing the demand for more transparency in EU matters.

Seen from a democratic perspective, the secretiveness of the European Committee is a special problem because the EU proposals generally are not being discussed at public consultations in the Parliament. The reason for the secretiveness of the European Committee is that the government cannot have its negotiation position and strategy revealed in public. A consequence of completely open meetings in the European Committee would be, that the government would cease to supply the Committee with essential information concerning its negotiating strategy. Obviously, there is a dilemma between, on the one hand, the democratic demands for transparency in the decision-making process and, on the other hand, the consideration for the negotiating position of the government. However, since 1992 and the Danish 'No' to the Maastricht Treaty, the European Committee and the Danish Parliament have paid more attention to how transparency in the Danish EU decision-making process can be increased. These considerations resulted in a report from the European Committee introducing new models on how transparency in EU matters can be increased without weakening the negotiating position of the government. These models include, e.g., public consultations on central issues within the EU (EMU, Eastern enlargement, Agenda 2000 and of course Transparency and openness in the EU) or additional open meetings in the European Committee with the aim of strengthening the political debate.

To sum up, it can be pointed out that both the European Committee and the standing committees of the Danish Parliament have been more actively involved in the Danish EU decision-making process, though there is still room for improvement. It is still the European Committee that decides on the negotiating proposals of the government, but the standing committees are informed of the matters within their competence, thereby giving them an opportunity to work out specific recommendations for the European Committee. So far, most of the standing committees have chosen not to invest much time and energy in EU matters where they do not have the final say.

## **The adaptation of the government and the central administration**

### **The decision-making process**

The active involvement of the European Committee takes place at a late stage in the Danish EU decision-making process. The central discussions and negotiations between ministries, other governmental institutions, interest groups, trade organisations and employers associations take place without any involvement of the European Committee. The negotiating proposals submitted by the government in the European Committee are often a result of an elaborate process of compromising a variety of antagonistic political and economic interests. An analysis of the decision-making process before the European Committee becomes involved is therefore a precondition for a comprehensive understanding.

On the administrative level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has traditionally had a central co-ordinating function. This function corresponds with the co-ordinating function of the European Committee on the political-parliamentary level, cf. the previous section. It is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that forwards the information from the government to the Parliament. In reality, the different proposals and answers are elaborated by the relevant departments, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as a gatekeeper in relation to Parliament.

The first step in dealing with a proposal from the EU Commission takes place in one of the so-called EC special committees (figure 1). The number of EC special committees has risen

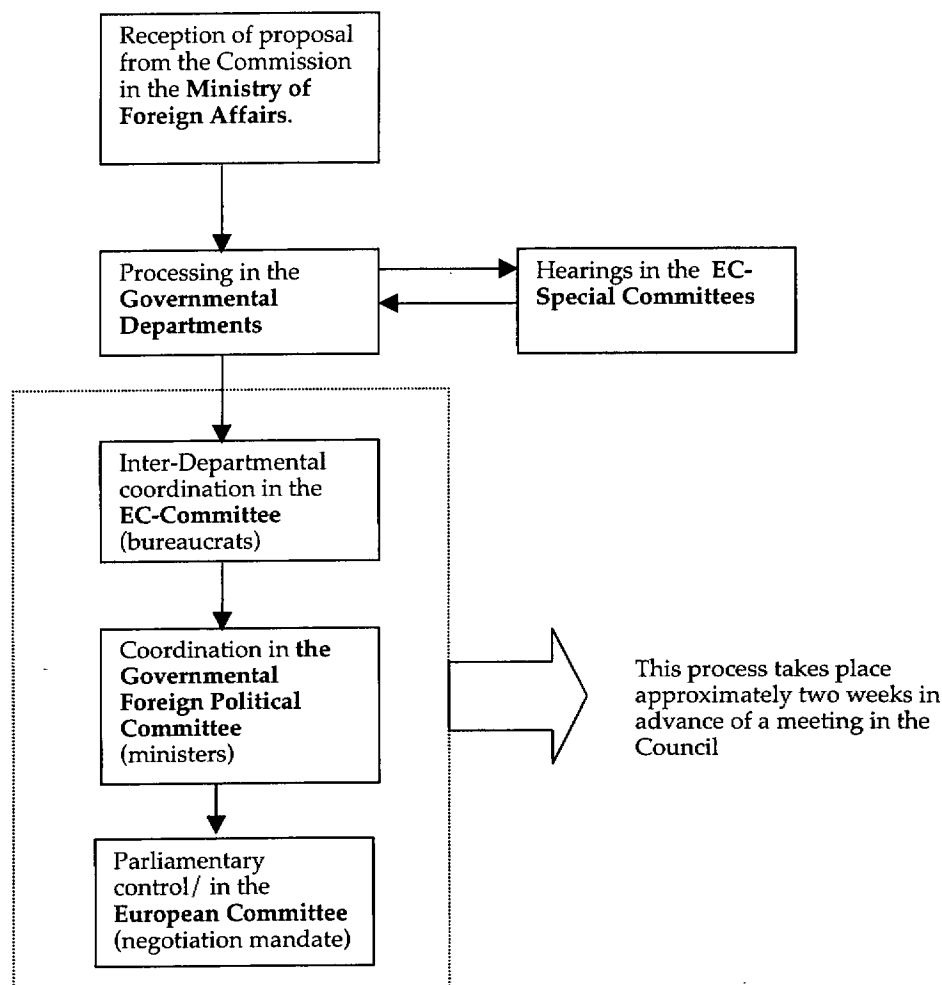
distinctively since 1972 from 19 to more than 30 today. These committees are headed by an official, head of division, from the responsible government department. Representatives from relevant governmental- and local governmental institutions participate in the meetings of the EC special committees. Over the past years, several EC special committees have extended the number of participants so they also include special trade organisations, interest groups and employers' associations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is represented in all EC special committees to ensure overall co-ordination. The high level of expert knowledge provides the EC special committees with a solid foundation regarding elaboration of the important first draft proposal for a Danish negotiation position.

The next step of the decision-making process is the EC committee, a committee of government officials with representatives from the 10 to 12 government departments which are most affected by the co-operation in EU. Representatives from the other ministries can be convened on an ad hoc basis.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs chairs the meetings and the secretariat. On the agenda of the EC committee are the cases to be dealt with on the meetings of the Council of the Ministers in the forthcoming week. At this level the ministries' representatives inform each other on previous and forthcoming meetings in the Council, the Danish position and the Danish recommendations are approved and possible disagreements between the ministries and/or between the EC special committees are normally settled. Meetings in the EC committee are usually held on Tuesdays. On Thursdays, the Governmental Foreign Political Committee (GFP), consisting of the ministries being most affected by EU matters follows up on the EC committee meetings. At GFP, the possible political issues that have not been solved at the EC committee are handled. Actually, the GFP does not meet every week as the matters are often handled through a so-called 'written procedure'. The matters in question are afterwards ready for procedure at the European Committee, as mentioned earlier.

Running parallel to the formal decision-making process, an informal process on both the administrative as well as the political level takes place. It is not unusual that ministers seek informal contact with the leaders of one or several opposition parties to test the water and to possibly secure support for the views of the government in controversial matters.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Danish EU Decision-making procedure



**The balance between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the governmental departments**

While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in charge of the final co-ordination, the relevant governmental departments have the responsibility of gathering answers from consultations and to handle the actual case administration. The relevant governmental departments are, of course, not all involved in EU matters to the same extent. However, it is obvious that, following the broadening of the EU agenda in general, EU matters do take up more time in the national departments. While in 1973 40 sections in 15 out of 19 relevant government departments were working with EU matters, 77 sections in 17 out 20 relevant departments worked with EU matters in 1995 (Dosenrode in Hanf and Soetendorp, 1998, s. 53).

Hence, several governmental departments have developed a still greater expert knowledge within their field, and their willingness to conform to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has lessened. A widespread opinion is that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should keep co-ordinating and not interfere too much with the substance (Thaarup et. al. 1996, s. 41). The independent profile of the relevant governmental departments is an indication of the fact that EU politics is, to a great extent, perceived as domestic politics.



The balancing of foreign ministerial coordination and departmental room for manoeuvre to some extent corresponds to the balance which has to be found between the European Committee and the standing committees at the parliamentary level.

As we have shown, the Danish EU decision-making process puts great emphasis on co-ordination and coherence within EU policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for the overall co-ordination and the Ministry is represented at each level in the formal decision-making process. This is done in accordance with the commonly held perception that Danish interests are better served speaking with one voice when it comes to negotiations in the EU-system. This strategy has been described by Mouritzen as defensive, characterised by over-emphasizing internal co-ordination and down-playing an offensive pursuit of sectoral interests. However, this defensive strategy has been subject to an even greater pressure due to the process towards normalisation of EU politics (Mouritzen, 1997b).

### **One or several Danish positions?**

According to Hans Mouritzen there exist two diametrically opposed lines of national strategy vis-à-vis the EU: a defensive one and an offensive one, each with its own reasonable justification (Mouritzen, 1997, pp. 101).

The defensive strategy stresses the necessity of mobilizing self-control in the face of the EU-challenge to national autonomy. Put briefly, self-control means simply a unit's control over itself; it is improved through the reduction of a subunit's autonomy, typically entailing infringements on the unit's democratic character (Mouritzen, 1997, p. 5). Mobilization of national self-control implies a high level of consultation among national subunits (including governmental departments, political parties, interest organisations etc.) and a high responsibility upon the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make sure that the governmental representatives speak with one well coordinated voice in Brussels. It has to be avoided that national subunits are played off against each other since it would harm the national interest. The 'democratic deficit' involved in a certain amount of secrecy and the restraining of parliamentary control and debate is a price considered well worth paying.

The offensive line of thought, by contrast, argues that national self-control is already undermined by the EU to such an extent that it is hopeless and a waste of time and resources to try to do something about it. Instead, resources should be used offensively to exploit the low EU self control. Trying to speak with one voice is not only hypocritical, since national sub-interests in relation to the EU are so divergent, but it will also tend to inhibit offensive initiatives (Mouritzen, 1997, p. 102). On the institutional level, EU-policies therefore should be included in the framework of the well known national decision-making procedures characterised, by among other elements, a high level of involvement of the Parliament and its subcommittees.

An overview of the offensive and the defensive strategy is presented in table no. 1.

Table 1

Two national strategies as a response to the Challenge: Europeanization

	Defensive strategy	Offensive strategy
Rules of procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High level of national self-control</li> <li>• High level of internal consultation and coordination</li> <li>• Relatively closed decision making procedure</li> <li>• Low level of parliamentary control</li> <li>• Consensus among domestic actors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National self-control is undermined by the EU</li> <li>• Offensive use of resources to exploit the low EU self-control</li> <li>• Coordination is waste of time and resources</li> <li>• Direct access of national sub-interests into the EU-arena</li> <li>• Conflict-ridden, due to many divergent national interests</li> </ul>
Institutional balances	<p><u>Parliamentary level:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relatively strong Europe-Committee</li> <li>• Relatively weak sub-committee's</li> </ul> <p><u>Governmental level:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relatively strong Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> <li>• Relatively weak governmental departments</li> </ul>	<p><u>Parliamentary level:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of a European Committee</li> <li>• Strong sub-committees</li> </ul> <p><u>Governmental level:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A relatively weak Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> <li>• Relatively strong governmental departments</li> </ul>
General tendencies (summary)	"Turning of domestic policy into foreign policy"	"Turning of foreign policy into domestic policy"

An offensive strategy might be seen as a showdown with the traditional defensive strategy and its idea of one single national interest. The traditional perception that Denmark, being a small country, will be better off speaking with one single voice is, however, not necessarily rewarded in the EU system, which is characterised by a low degree of self-control. The low degree of self-control within the EU is closely connected with the fact that the EU cannot be seen as a 'unitary actor' controlling the coherence of the policy of the member states. However, the EU is much less structured, with room for various conflicting interests and alliances (Mouritzen, 1997b). Furthermore, it cannot be denied that there really are different and at times contradictory interests involved within the individual member states. Why not confront these interests on the European arena instead of using a lot of political and administrative resources on a watered down national position? In comparing Denmark with other EU member states, Niels Ersbøll, former general secretary to the Council of Ministers, evaluates that the Danish system leaves the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with an extra workload. At the same time, he concludes,

*"nothing indicates that lack of co-ordination from ministries of foreign affairs creates problems for the work in Brussels<sup>2</sup>".*

So there is a good reason for questioning the superiority of the defensive strategy. Finally, Ersbøll state that actual practise has already proven that the relevant governmental departments have become independent participants of the council work (Ersbøll, 1995 s. 79-80).

Changed administrative procedures – due to the transition from a defensive to an offensive strategy – might even have a positive political ‘spill-over’. The offensive strategy is more in line with the perception of EU-policy as just another layer dealing with the same political substance known from the domestic arena. This provides the opportunity for a completely different understanding of - and public debate on - EU matters. Consequently, EU sympathisers as well as EU-sceptics would be forced out of their trenches to discuss substance and content instead of maintaining focus on the question of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the EU. This line of thought will be elaborated further in the concluding part of the article concerning the perspectives for a future strategy of parliamentarization.

### **The adaptation of the political parties**

The adaptation of the political parties to Danish EU membership and the following debate can, in general, be divided into two processes.

The first process has to do with the ‘official political rules of the game’ and naturally follows the ongoing adaptation taking place in the Danish Parliament and the European Parliament (EP), respectively (polity). The other process has to do with the adaptation of the parties to the new European dimension in Danish politics.

Regarding the first process, the Danish Parliament has undoubtedly been the most important forum. Ever since the foundation of the Common Market Committee in 1972 – just before Denmark officially entered the EC – the parties have here had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with specific EU directives and more importantly with EU matters of principle.

Regarding the parties’ relation to the EP, the most significant change in the rules of the game was the decision on direct universal suffrage. This decision meant that the parties of the Danish Parliament and the the People’s Movement against the EU should decide whether they wanted to nominate candidates for the first direct election to the EP in 1979. This weighing included ideological-political considerations as well as practical ressource-oriented considerations. First of all is the normative consideration whether ”it is right” to nominate candidates for a political body, the *raison d’être* and/or necessity of which one is fundamentally against. Secondly is the question of whether it would be worth the effort to spend time and energy on nominating candidates to a body with relatively limited influence and a very low political profile in the domestic debate.

The other process implies that the parties and the voters, besides the usual well known political questions, must also take into consideration new and complex issues such as the questions on, e.g., distribution of competencies between the national and European level and the character and degree of Denmark’s participation in the European integration process.

It is hardly surprising then, that the new dimension has caused several adjustment difficulties, especially among the parties in which the leadership of the party and its electorate were and still are divided on the questions mentioned above.

As an analytical point of departure, the political parties are confronted with a set of strategic choices. They can either pursue a defensive strategy or an offensive strategy towards Europeanization, or they can try to mix the two in an attempt to balance their political profile and electoral support with consideration to actually influencing EU policy formulation.

Table 2

Defensive and offensive party strategies as a response to the Challenge: Europeanization

	Defensive strategy	Offensive strategy
Political conviction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally EU-sceptic</li> <li>• Denmark should withdraw from the EU</li> <li>• Denmark should not participate in certain core policy areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally EU-positive</li> <li>• Denmark should continue as a member of the EU</li> <li>• Denmark should participate fully and seek maximum influence</li> </ul>
Organisational balances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nomination of backbenchers for EP-elections</li> <li>• Low priority to EP-elections in terms of campaign funds etc.</li> <li>• MEP's not members of key party organ</li> <li>• Limited and informal contacts between MEP's (party groups) and MP's (national party).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nomination of top party figures for EP-elections</li> <li>• High priority to EP-elections in terms of campaign funds etc.</li> <li>• MEP's member's of key party organs</li> <li>• Intense and formalised contacts between MEP's (party group) and MP's (national party).</li> </ul>

When trying to mix defensive and offensive elements, it is of course possible to be politically defensive and organisationally offensive and vice versa, just as well as you can pick and choose individual elements of your preferred organisational and political strategy and leave others aside.

The ambition of the following section is to analyse how these new practical framework conditions on the one hand and the appearance of a new political dimension in Danish politics on the other have had a decisive influence on the parties' practical resource-oriented and ideological-political cost-benefit analysis during the past 28 years.

### **The adaptation of the parties to the new practical settings and conditions**

#### *Resources*

The decision to introduce direct election to the EP had a significant importance for the priorities of resources. Especially for the small parties with limited resources, the expenses for a large-scale campaign for the EP election could be a barrier to actual representation in this body. Despite the fact that the economic situation of the parties has improved due to increased government grants it is still necessary for the small parties to concentrate on key elections which provide mandates/seats, give the party an opportunity to present its programme and pays in the kitty. All other things being equal, the priority will be national elections, but also local elections, for the county and municipality often rank higher than elections to the EP. This tendency is, of course, enhanced if the elections are held shortly after each other, strengthening the need for economic prioritisation of limited campaign

funds. The ‘institutionalisation’ of public referenda on important EU-matters further aggravates this problematic choice. The individual party’s economic benefit from a seat in the EP depends on the agreements existing between that party and its the Member of the European Parliament (MEP). A seat/mandate in EP can be a rather important source of income. For the EU-sceptic movements, this has, paradoxically, been the largest individual source of income. Nonetheless, it is a considerable economic gamble for the small parties to run for a seat in the EP since the risk of not getting a candidate elected is presumably large.

#### *Influence and information*

All other things being equal, representation in the EP has gained importance in tandem with the increase of competencies/powers of the EP and the fact that the EP has become co-legislator in the majority of EU legislation. However, there are still ‘black holes’ in the EP legislative competencies which mean that membership of the Danish Parliament is much more attractive and prestigious than membership of the EP. These ‘black holes’ are related to such central EU policies as the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the majority of Economic Policy and legislation within Justice and Home Affairs and Schengen (Friis, 1999:4).

The fact that a party is represented in the EP can, however, function as a source of information despite the limited possibility to influence a number of EU core policy areas. This channel of information can contribute to the party in question having its finger on the pulse in relation to important party issues affected by EU-legislation and/or potential conflicts between domestic political priorities and EU initiatives in the pipeline.

This potential side effect of the representation in the EP is, of course, larger for the opposition parties and the movements not represented in the Danish Parliament, since the governing parties have ministers officially representing Denmark in the Council and thereby by implication already have regular and direct access to the European political agenda. Whether the members of the EP are actually involved and consulted regarding questions within the EU so that the potential of ‘information-benefit’ is actually ‘cashed in’, is, however, often a question of personal relations. The co-operation and exchange of views between the MEP’s and the mother party is rarely formalised and institutionalised.

#### *Image creation*

Despite the fact that when all is said and done there is a considerable overlap between the policy areas dealt with in the Danish Parliament and in the EP, there is, however, a distinct difference between the high status of the members of the European Committee and the low status of the MEP’s. The MEP’s - with a few exceptions - are often political backbenchers, whereas the members of the European Committee are almost always prominent members of the parties and potential candidates for high positions in the cabinet. This undoubtedly contributes to the limited interest of the media and public in the EP activities. Even though there has been increased media coverage, the public and media interest have not increased *pari passu* with the political influence of the EP.

All parties would like to be visible, but to the ordinary members of the Danish Parliament, the EP is seen as a dead end in terms of career and as far away from day-to-day politics. To an ambitious politician, be it a budding party leader, minister or even prime minister, the costs when changing the title from MP to MEP by far outweigh the benefits. Pushing it to extremes, it is possible to argue for the importance of the so-called “out of sight, out of mind – logic”<sup>3</sup>. This tendency clashes with the tendency in almost all other EU countries, where being a Member of the European Parliament is seen as a career move and a period in the EP has often been a step towards a seat in the cabinet or an appointment to EU commissioner (Friis, 1999:22).

Not surprisingly, the conclusion is that the parties fail to take advantage of all the opportunities potentially flowing from representation in the EP. The fact that there is a wide gap between the most and the least visible and active MEP's blurs the intention of the EP's attempt to present itself as a parliamentary body to be taken seriously by the public. Even though the EU sceptical movements can be compared with small parties when it comes to resources, their priorities are substantially different, since for them the European Parliament has top priority. To these movements, European integration is the very political *raison d'être*. For that reason and due to lack of alternatives, such as the representation in the Danish Parliament, the EP is regarded as a vital political and, as indicated above, economic platform. Therefore, modest economic resources are concentrated on election campaigns for the European Parliament and referenda. For the same reason, the two movements, unlike the regular parties, nominate their strongest candidates for the European Parliament elections, thereby achieving considerably increased visibility in the domestic debate.

### **The new European Dimension in Danish Politics and the adaptation of the Danish Parties**

The appearance of a completely new dimension in Danish Politics has had far-reaching and very different consequences for the political parties in Denmark. The adaptation of the parties to this new dimension can be explained with reference to a number of interdependent factors, which cannot all be dealt with thorough in a paper of this kind. However, some central issues are worth noticing and analysing. Beginning with, on the one hand, the considerable, political and economic dependence on other EU countries and, on the other hand, the widespread scepticism among the electorate regarding further integration, the political parties are in a fundamental dilemma. They can either work for integration, participation and influence-seeking or try to comply with the widespread scepticism. To achieve both at the same time is impossible. The point is that not all parties are affected in the same way by this dilemma. The importance of the dilemma for the individual parties is partly dependent on party behaviour – is the party influence-seeking (a possible government party with the opportunity of holding government responsibility), or does the party focus more on symbolic positioning, and partly on party electorate – are they predominantly 'for- or against' more integration. The combination of the two variables provides the following categories (Haahr in Branner & Kelstrup, 2000, s. 314).

Table 3:  
Party Behaviour and Party Voting Support in Relation to International Integration.

<i>Party Voting Support</i>	<i>Party Behaviour</i>	
	<b>Influence-Seeking</b>	<b>Symbolic Positioning</b>
<b>Voting Support in favour of Supranationality</b>	Harmonious pro-integration policy involvement	Symbolic pro-integration position
<b>Voting Support Against Supranationality</b>	"Bridging the impossible gap" – the vulnerable parties	Symbolic anti-integration position

Haahr in Kelstrup and Branner (2000), p. 311

The appearance of the new European dimension is as a point of departure, unproblematic for the parties, which are either positioning themselves symbolically and/or whose voting support favours a continuous development of a binding European co-operation. On the other hand, influence-seeking parties with a EU-sceptical voting support are caught in the above-mentioned dilemma. The same

applies, of course, to parties which, either due to changes in the electorate's perception or due to the wish of the party leadership for more political influence, are moving towards the lower left hand of the table. The central issue is, of course, where the individual parties are positioned, which parties can be regarded as moving and what possibilities/problems these movements/positions are causing. A few central tendencies deserve attention.

Among those parties supporting the idea of further integration there is no party predominantly positioning itself symbolically. Therefore, focus is concentrated on the influence-seeking parties with voting support predominantly in favour of further integration. Despite the overall agreement between party leadership and voting support in this particular group, there is, however, in each party different perceptions as to how much further integration should proceed, and the categorisation therefore can not have more short term validity in a dynamic polity like the EU.

The parties having a predominantly EU-sceptical voting support to further integration can be divided into two categories: those seeking influence and those predominantly positioning themselves symbolically. For the parties focusing on the symbolic positioning, the dilemma between the wish for influence and their electorate's preferences does of course not materialize. The parties in this category are often found on the extreme wings in the traditional political landscape - the Danish People's Party and the former members of the Progress Party (now Freedom 2000) on the right wing and Socialistic People's Party (SF) and the Red-green Alliance on the left wing. As indicated in table 4, it can be questioned whether the Christian People's Party can be placed in this category. However, for this party, it is in any case a matter of minor importance, as the EU-question does not belong to the crux of the party, and their electorate is less likely to leave the party on the basis of disagreement on this question. (The dilemma will, of course, only materialize if the electorate find that the matter is of vital importance.)

From an analytical as well as a political point of view, the party SF - which historically has belonged to the most EU-sceptical parties - deserves specific attention. In the period from the end of the 80's to the mid 90's, a large part of the party group tried to push through a more influence-seeking strategy, and in the debate leading to the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, to which the party recommended a 'no', one of the arguments was that the treaty was not good enough, eg. further policy areas, for instance environment, had to be added. This strategy failed when the Danish 'No' did not lead to a renegotiation of the entire treaty. In the subsequent attempt to create an alternative basis for Denmark's continuing participation in the EU, the leadership of the party did, however, play a decisive and constructive role. Thus, SF was indirectly author of large parts of the proposal "Denmark in Europe", which became the official Danish proposal for the Edinburgh summit and resulted in the so-called 'four opt-outs' confirmed by a 'Yes' in the following Danish referendum in 1993.

The leadership was punished severely for playing this constructive role by their traditionally EU-sceptical electorate. Consequently, 80 per cent of the SF electorate voted against the party leadership's recommendation of a 'Yes' to Edinburgh and, at the 1994-national election, the extreme left wing was (re)opened with the entry of the hardline anti-EU party, the Red-Green Alliance.

The reaction of the party chairman was a return to a more sceptical and less compromising influence-seeking position, trying to oblige the majority of SF's voters and to avoid further split or disruption of the party. The price for this manoeuvre has been high. The decision of the party leadership majority to recommend a 'No' to the Amsterdam Treaty led to open split in the party as some of the skilled and most influence-seeking profiles felt deceived and in opposition to the official party line. The influence-seeking minority has, with few exceptions, been purged or has left the party without solving the fundamental question of the party's EU line. To the party SF, with its EU sceptical voting support, the attempt to obtain influence has resulted in the party ending

up in the middle of the above mentioned dilemma. To this day, this disagreement results in bitter internal fighting and conflicting political signals from prominent members of the party.

In the last category you find the parties which, on the one hand, are convinced of the need for European solutions and therefore want influence on the formulation of policies at this level which only active participation can ensure, but, on the other hand, which have to acknowledge that their voting supporters do not fully share this perception. This category is analytically and politically the most interesting.

Table 4: The Vulnerability of Danish Political Parties Concerning European Integration

	<i>Party Behaviour</i>	
<i>Party Voting Support</i>	<b>Influence-Seeking</b>	<b>Symbolic Positioning</b>
<b>Voting Support predominantly in favour of supranationality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservatives</li> <li>• Liberals</li> <li>• Centre Democrats</li> <li>• Social Liberals (1992?-)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None (in Denmark)</li> </ul>
<b>Voting Support highly divided on or predominantly sceptical towards supranationality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Democrats</li> <li>• Social Liberals (-1992?)</li> <li>• Socialist People's Party (ca. 1989-1996)</li> <li>• Christian People's Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red-Green Alliance</li> <li>• Socialist People's Party (before 1989 and after 1997)</li> <li>• Progress Party/ Freedom 2000</li> <li>• Danish People's Party</li> <li>• Christian People's party (after 2000?)</li> </ul>

To the Social Democratic party, having held government responsibility during most of the period of Danish EU membership, the dilemma has been problematic ever since accession in 1973. Due to the integration fatigue in the period from the accession to the mid 80's, it was possible to prevent a deepening of the gap between the sceptical voters and a Euro-enthusiastic political elite. This all changed when the integration process took off in the second half of the 80's. After a decision to vote 'No' to the Single European Act in 1986 when it was presented in Parliament – a decision motivated by a wish to intimidate the conservative-liberal government - the leadership of the Social Democratic party changed to a more pro-European and influence-seeking course, thereby bringing the party in conflict with large parts of its traditional voter support. The leadership's change of course was, among other things, motivated firstly by the wish to see a political superstructure on top of the successful establishment of the common market, and secondly by the radical changes in Eastern Europe, including the reopening of the German question and a urgent need for a common European solution to this challenge (Haahr in Branner & Kelstrup, 2000, s. 325).

To ease the dilemma and avoid the destiny of SF, the leadership of the Social Democratic party has traditionally used a defensive strategy, focusing mainly on economic aspects of European cooperation, towards which the voters are generally positive, and downplaying the political aspects, to which there is a massive opposition within the party.

Only recently did the leadership of the Social Democratic party try an offensive strategy in relation to the political aspects of the integration process. This new tendency was expressed explicitly in the attempt to launch the Amsterdam Treaty and EU as a "social democratic



project.” The strategy must, as a whole, be considered a limited success. The party and its leadership are not decisively split on the EU issue, and the dilemma is not of a life-threatening proportion, but as was shown in last years EURO-referendum, it is difficult to get a ‘go ahead’ from their electorate regarding further Danish participation in the integration process. Due to the Danish tradition of referenda and the Constitution’s decisions regarding pooling of sovereignty, the scepticism has a very direct influence on the Social Democratic EU-campaign strategies. The Social Democratic voters’ lack of confidence put certain restrictions on any attempt to conduct an offensive party strategy<sup>4</sup>. Whether the party leadership will succeed in convincing its electorate of the political benefits of full participation remains to be seen. The answer to this question will decisively frame any future government’s room for manoeuvre in trying to handle the Danish membership of the EU.

On the surface, there are several similarities between the Social Liberals’ and the Social Democrats’ situation, and the two parties have, to some extent, had the same approach to the developing European polity and shared perceptions of EU-politics.

However, the dilemma is less critical for the Social Liberals due to the fact that the party has fewer committed voters, fewer EU sceptics among the committed voters and is in a strategic position in relation to the electorate as such. This position makes the party more mobile and it can, to a certain extent, permit itself to move both to the right and to the left, and push, e.g., EU sceptical left wing voters away, because the loss tends to be compensated by an influx of new EU positive right wing voters. Besides, the Social Liberal voters share, to a much greater extent, the opinion of the party leadership, seeing the EU as a possibility for political influence.

Due to the larger room for manoeuvre, the Social Liberal Party has had the possibility to pursue a more offensive strategy, also including the political aspects of integration. There are many indications that the party is beginning to harmonise the voter’s preferences with the influence-seeking profile of the leadership, in that way eliminating the premises constituting the political dilemma. Before the referendum on the Euro, opinion polls showed that the Social Liberal party was the ‘yes’-party most in agreement with its voters.

### **Thoughts on a future strategy for parliamentarization**

In the final part of the article, the scope and character of relations between units in the national political system and units in the EP will be discussed. The point of departure for the discussion are three graphic models presenting the current situation, the situation during a double offensive strategy, and finally, a compromise model, assumed to be the most realistic future model in a two-tiered governance system. In our analysis, a distinction will be made between the offensive and defensive priorities which we have dealt with previously. The defensive strategy is defined as a strategy prioritising a high degree of national self-control and coordination – often managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The offensive strategy is characterised by less central coordination and more political manoeuvrability for the individual government departments and other sectoral interests of a member country. The argument for abandoning the defensive strategy is based on the assumption that the possibilities of exercising national self-control have already been undermined by the EU, whence it will be far more useful to spend the limited resources on an offensive pursuit of interests. The article is rounded off with some concluding remarks on the consequences of Europeanization for the central Danish political institutions and for the political debate in Denmark.

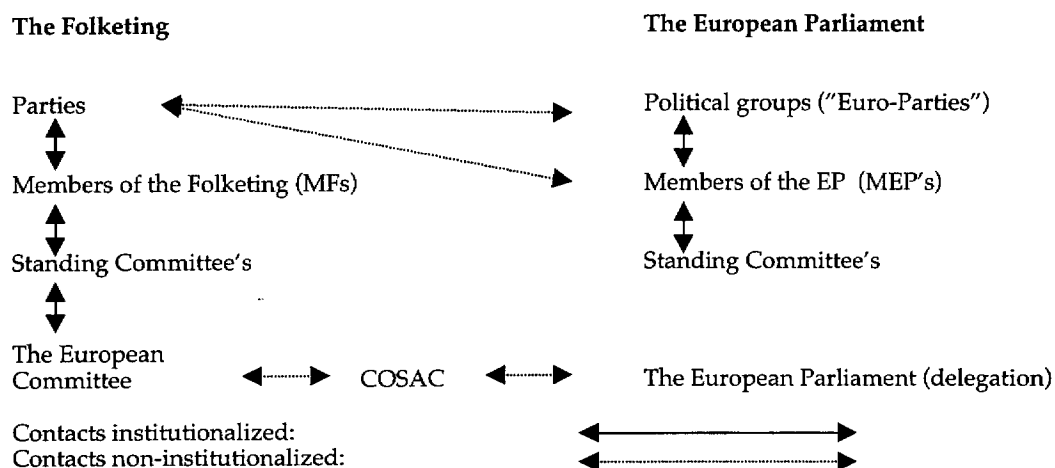
#### *Parties and politicians*

The relations between the Danish parties and the political groups in the EP have been influenced by the fact that the EP, in the words of former EU commissioner, Ritt Bjerregaard, is still not seen as

“a real Parliament”. This is, of course, in comparison with the legislative power and political prestige normally associated with national parliaments. As mentioned earlier, this attitude also affects the relation between the individual MEP’s and their national mother party. This has, as already pointed out, resulted in a situation where the EP is being regarded as a dead end when it comes to career opportunities in Danish politics, and, consequently, the loyalty of the MEP’s on the whole is with the national parties.

**Figure 2. Evaluation of status quo, i.e the composition of components in Denmark**  
Present situation

	Institutional	Non-institutional
Defensive	X	X
Offensive		



As can be seen from figure 2, the relations among the parties, the political groups in the EP and the MEP’s are of a somewhat fickle character. The commitment of the Danish parties in the political battle of the EP is rather limited, a little short of indifference. Besides the voters’ lack of identification with the EP, at least four reasons for the lack of interests could be highlighted. Firstly, is the fact that the EP, despite a significant increase in competencies, only allows for participation in a quantitatively and qualitatively limited part of the EU’s executive and legislative powers, a limitation in contradiction with key principles of the traditional representative democracy. As Thomassen and Schmitt put it:

“Despite the increased – and perhaps underestimated – powers of the European Parliament, it does not form and control a European government, for the simple reason that there is no such thing as a European government, let alone a *responsible* government” (Thomassen and Schmitt in Katz and Wessels, 1999:122).

Secondly is, the ‘peace agreement’, which until the 1999-EP referendum existed between the two major political groups in the EP, and, by that, the lack of a visible political-ideological struggle as known in the national political systems. Third, and closely interlinked to the above-mentioned, is the lack of media coverage and fourth, the confusing political mismatch between the political groups in the EP and the parties known from the Danish Parliament<sup>5</sup>. This is, for instance, illustrated by the fact that the junior partner in government, the Social Liberal Party, is a member of the same political group in the EP (ELDR) as the major opposition party (The Liberal Party).

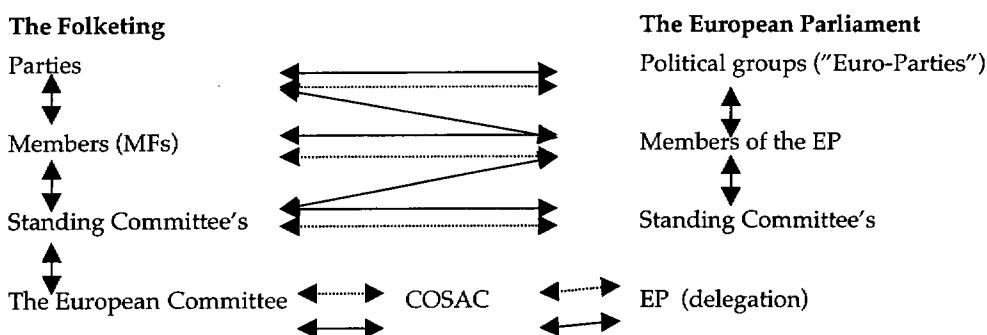
In addition, the relations between the national parties and the political groups in the EP are in most cases based on the MEP's. Since MEP's as such do not rank high in the party hierarchy and are not an integrated part of the party leadership, the communication and sharing of information depends on personal and informal relationships between individual MEP's and national key party figures. Consequently, there is no institutionalised offensive approach to political and institutional policy-issues.

In a double-offensive model, cf. figure 3, these relations will be intensified and developed in several ways. Pushing it to the extreme, it is possible to imagine that the relation between national parties and political groups in the EP will be formalised, institutionalised and turned upside down, so that the national parties will become subsidiary to a European mother party based in the EP<sup>6</sup>.

**Figure 3. Future options from a theoretical point of view**

	Institutional	Non-institutional
Defensive		
Offensive	X	X

The content of a double offensive strategy for parliamentarization.



In such a federally inspired top-down party structure, the MEPs' status would probably increase tremendously as they would be represented in the most powerful and prestigious parliamentary organ, and the contacts with the national parties/sub-units would reflect this new structure. It is also possible to imagine that the members of the Danish Parliament and the MEP's of the individual parties would gather either as 'equals' or – taking it a bit further – that national MP's would act as backing groups for individual MEP's, all in order to obtain the optimal and most coherent political influence. This would strengthen the overall parliamentary influence on the national as well as European level, probably tipping the institutional balance of power between the executive and the legislative in favour of the latter. This distinctive change in the power balance is, however, not politically feasible in the near future, due among others things to voters' lack of identification with the EU-institutions and the member states unwillingness to give up their control of the European agenda.

In the specific Danish case, such an institutional reorganisation would be complicated further due to the fact that 4 of the 16 Danish seats in the EP are occupied by representatives of political movements not represented in the Danish Parliament. For institutional and ideological reasons, these political movements can and will not be part of any formalised reorganisation, let alone intensification of the co-operation procedures between the Danish Parliament and the EP and between the national parties and the political groups in the EP.

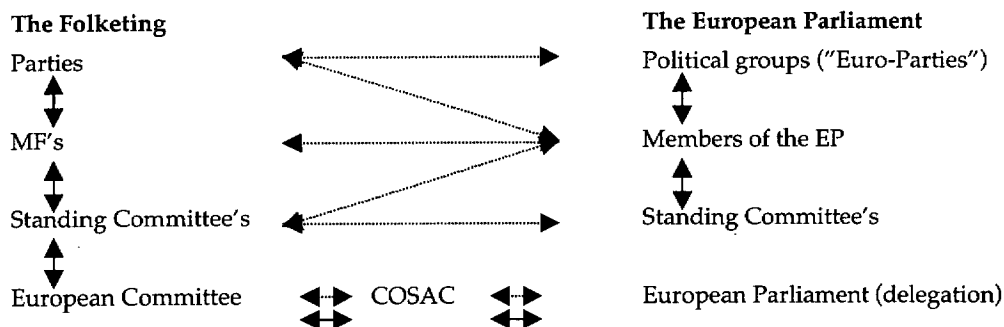
Furthermore, the EU sceptical point of view of the movements in question makes it impossible to obtain a political majority in favour of a formalised involvement of these movements.

As there are narrow political and institutional limits as to what extent the institutions and parties in reality can be re-organised, the focus is concentrated on the extent to which it is possible to utilise the two parliamentary forums more offensively when considering the existing institutional balance, the political interests and the party structure. Several possible improvements, all of which, cf. figure 4, tend to focus on minor administrative and/or informal changes within the existing frames, can be identified. In an amendment to the Code of Conduct of the Danish Parliament put forward by the European Committee, it is stressed that the Danish Parliament could benefit from strengthening informal relations with the EP. At the same time, the Committee emphasizes that this strengthening should take place within the individual parties,

“as the Danish MEP’s do not function as a Danish delegation to the Parliament, but have been given direct mandate from the voters” (cf. Statement from the European Committee as of 19 February 1999).

**Figure 4. Realistic compromise-model on short- and medium-termed sight**

	Institutional	Non-institutional
Defensive	X	
Offensive		X



As described in the introduction, the parties of the Danish Parliament do not use the competencies and knowledge obtained by their representatives in the EP systematically. In the few cases where such a systematic co-operation actually worked, for instance between MEP’s and members of the European Committee, the co-operation proved to be dependent on personal relations and did not manage to survive replacements in the EP or in the European Committee. Among the members of the European Committee, relations with party colleagues in the EP have contributed to a better preparation of the committee members, and some of the MEP’s have looked with envy upon colleagues from other parties who are obviously benefiting from such an extensive co-operation (interview). The possibilities of strengthening this kind of co-operation have been further complicated by the political decision to abolish the so-called double mandates<sup>7</sup>, a move which also had the negative side effect that a natural contact between the individual parties’ members of the Danish Parliament and the EP has been weakened and the exchange of information and knowledge complicated. A more systematic, though not necessarily strictly formalised, effort to bridge the two types of parliamentarians could be of benefit to both parties and, as a consequence, could strengthen parliamentary influence as such. A closer and more systematic involvement of the MEP’s in policy formulation of the mother party could modify or even upset the loss of status resulting from a decision to run for the EP instead of pursuing a national political career. Furthermore, if the MEP’s

were assigned a key-position (gate-keepers) in relation to more intense and upgraded contacts between the Danish parties and political groups of the EP, the European profile of the mother parties as well as the explicit anchoring in identifiable party structures of the political groups of the EP would benefit.

*The standing committees of the Danish Parliament and the European Parliament*

The contacts between the standing committees of the Danish Parliament and the standing committees of the EP are almost non-existent, for which reason there is only a dotted line between these groups, cf. figure 4. From a procedural point of view, the usefulness of a strengthened co-operation seems obvious, as the committees in the two parliaments deal with the same proposals for EU-legislation. It is most likely that the standing committees of the Danish Parliament would benefit from closer co-operation with the standing committees of the EP. First and foremost, the special committees of the Danish Parliament would obtain valuable information on new proposals from the European Commission at an earlier stage in the decision-making process. Secondly, they would get an interim knowledge of the EP attitude towards new proposals from the Commission. By those means, the standing committees would be technically better prepared and, as a consequence, better suited to filling their post as parliamentary watchdogs and sparring partners to the government. In return the standing committees of the EP would obtain better knowledge of the political views in the national parliaments. All together the EP and the Danish Parliament would be brought on more equal terms vis-à-vis the Council of Ministers and the Danish government respectively.

The double offensive model, cf. figure 3, includes both formal (institutionalised) and informal (non-institutionalised) contacts between the committees of the Danish Parliament and the standing committees of the EP. The overall purpose with the extended contacts would be to exploit the knowledge- and information potential 'hidden' in the Danish Parliament and the EP to a maximum. Still, it should be underlined that the Danish Parliament and the EP will remain two independent entities rooted in their own constitutional and/or treaty based contexts. An increased level of contact and new co-operation relations will not necessarily result in harmonisation and co-ordination of views but will first and foremost be based on information, exchange of knowledge, consultation, etc. Included in the full-drawn arrow in figure 3 is, however, the potential over time for more systematic and institutionalised contacts to develop between the committees of the Danish Parliament and the committees of the EP. This might eventually lead to a better coordination of views so that the national parliaments and the EP can exert maximal pressure on national governments and the Council of Ministers respectively.

In some EU sceptic circles in Denmark there is a widespread fear that the EP with its increasing competencies is developing into a competitor to the national parliaments. We find this approach lacks an important dimension. Instead of the current reluctant approach, increased co-operation between the parliaments could lead to strengthened and more effective parliamentary control on both European and national levels. In this respect, Lykke Friis (Friis 1999, s. 16) has argued that the EP and the national parliaments need not be rivals in a zero-sum game in which more power to the EP automatically means less power to the national governments. Besides, EU-legislation is far too extensive and complex for the national parliaments to handle satisfactorily, writes Friis. This includes especially legislation passed in the implementing committees. Increased and improved co-operation between the national parliaments and the EP could, therefore, be considered as a precondition to a more effective parliamentary control of EU matters.

Institutionalised co-operation between the committees of the EP and the Danish Parliament depends to a significant extent on mutual trust and reasonable knowledge of each other's formal and informal working methods and decision-making procedures. This takes time to establish.

However, in the short term, a number of informal contacts could be established between the various committee chairmen, and on a longer term this basis could be developed into more institutionalised co-operation adapted to the needs of the individual committee, cf. figure 4. Obviously, MEP's with high-level political experience from national politics and national politicians with experience from European politics would facilitate any such initiatives. The increased level of information of the standing committees regarding EU matters is also going to strengthen their qualified positions on negotiating proposals from the government. This can be seen as part of the process of normalising of EU politics in line with an offensive strategy.

*The standing committees of the Danish Parliament vs. the MEP's*

Existing contacts between the standing committees of the Danish Parliament and the MEP's are extremely limited. The value of exchanging information and views between the standing committees of the Danish Parliament and the Danish MEP's is acknowledged in the latest report from the European Committee of the Danish Parliament. In this report, from early spring 1999, the European Committee opens up, inviting MEP's to take part in committee meetings in the Danish Parliament on certain conditions. In practice, these possibilities have not yet been used to any appreciable extent.

*COSAC*

Finally the relations between the European Committee and COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union) deserves attention. COSAC's biannual conferences can be described as a forum for debate and exchange of experiences and viewpoints between the European committees of the EU member countries. In addition, delegates from the EP, observers from the Council's general secretariat, the Commission and the EU application countries also participate in COSAC. COSAC is not a part of the EU decision-making process and has no authority to make binding decisions. However, with the Amsterdam Treaty, more focus has been put on the national parliaments (cf. the Amsterdam Treaty protocol on national parliaments in the EU), and in that respect COSAC might serve as a catalyst for increased attention on the political issues the national parliaments have to deal with. On the basis of the informal character of COSAC, it might prove to be a suitable forum for informal debate and discussion between the parliamentarians and thereby function as a source of inspiration regarding the question of how to increase parliamentary influence on both national and European levels.

## Conclusion

Among the most important Danish motives for joining the EC in 1973 was the wish to facilitate Danish export. The EC was regarded as a functional limited inter-governmental co-operational framework in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took care of the co-ordination, so that Denmark would speak with one single voice on the European arena. Since then, EU co-operation has widened significantly in range and scope. The Single European Act from 1986 introduced majority voting in the Council in certain policy areas, thereby eliminating individual member states' ability to block a decision. The Maastricht Treaty extended EU competencies to include policy areas traditionally reserved to national governments. These included sensitive policy areas considered to be at the core of national sovereignty such as the launching of a common foreign and security policy and increased co-operation on justice and home affairs. The development has made it increasingly difficult to uphold the traditional view that EU issues are to be considered as lying strictly within the foreign policy realm and dealt with according to foreign policy procedures. The attempt of the Danish Parliament to keep up with this development at the European level has led to an increased democratic push for integrating European politics into the national decision-making process, including, for instance, attempts to involve the standing committees more actively in the two-tiered legislation process. This has been described in the article as a process towards a normalisation of EU politics. The Danish political institutions, including the Folketing, the government, the administration and political parties, have during the last couple of years been in a phase of transition. In general, the institutions have had to relate to whether the predominantly defensive Danish EU strategy ought to be replaced by a more offensive sector oriented strategy.

We have argued that, due to the range and complexity of EU affairs and the democratic incentive to normalise EU politics, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has had to loosen its traditionally firm grip on EU politics and to leave the relevant government departments more room for manoeuvre. Pushing it a bit further, it could be argued that the standing committees of the Danish Parliament should decide on the negotiating proposals of the government. For the political parties, a full normalisation of EU politics with less co-ordination and more direct access to and contact with the EU would imply an upgrading of their committee members' knowledge on EU procedures and structures since working in a two-tiered governance system would constitute the new natural framework conditions in most policy areas. Instead of being dealt with separately by a small group of elite politicians within the parties, EU legislation would be presented and debated according to the political substance in question and would not be put forward as the result of a mystified, byzantine process taking place behind closed doors in far away Brussels.

Recognising the need as well the difficulties involved in familiarising the electorate with EU questions, a normalisation of EU politics along the offensive lines presented above might serve as a first step towards greater public understanding of European integration. If the citizens are to conceive the EU as a natural and practical forum for political problem-solving, it is necessary in political practice to abolish the perceived dichotomy between national and European politics and politics. This can only be done by showing in words and deeds on policy areas of relevance to the citizens, be it environment, labour market, social policy etc., that the national political system and the EU system function as complementary and not competitive sets of political institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been elaborated as part of DUPI's work with the Danish Power and Democracy Studies.

<sup>2</sup> "Intet tyder på, at fraværet af udenrigsministeriel "koordination" skaber problemer for arbejdet i Bruxelles." (Ersbøll, 1995, s. 79-80)

<sup>3</sup> Bearing the last EP-election in mind, the validity of this connection could, however, be discussed, since two of the leading parties did nominate candidates (two women) who were actually elected and just might have a great political career in front of them. Whether they will succeed in taking the step from the EP to a top position in national politics remains uncertain.

The principle of "out of sight, out of mind" has also been pointed out by Hans Mouritzen (1990) in a study of officials in international administrations. Placing an official in an international administration might in some cases be a way of hiding or removing a co-worker for certain reasons.

<sup>4</sup> Professor Nikolaj Petersen uses the terms "control capability" and "influence susceptibility" to describe the domestic parameters determining a party's room for manoeuvre in EU-politics. The point is that the Social Democratic Party, like other parties in the same category, exposes its relatively low ability to convince its own voters (low "control capability") concurrently with the political praxis and the decisions of the Constitution, resulting in an important dependence on the public opinion – here, focusing on their own voters – and by that a high "influence susceptibility" (Petersen, Nikolaj in Branner, Hans and Kelstrup, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> An in-depth study of the party structure in the European Parliament is to be found in Thomassen, Jacques and Schmitt, Herman: Partisan Structures in the European Parliament, in Wessel, Bernhard and Katz, Richard S. (eds.): *The European Parliament, The National Parliaments, and European Integration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1999, pp. 127-148.

<sup>6</sup> An interpretation and discussion of the existing party structure of the European Parliament is found in Thomassen and Schmitt in Katz and Wessel: Oxford 1999, 129.

<sup>7</sup> The abolishment of the so-called double-mandates was mainly a result of a popular criticism of the fact that members seated in the Danish Parliament as well as in the EP received double salary for doing only half the work. Consequently almost all parties decided to abandon this practice.