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Policy towards EU Member States: the Role of the EU

An examination of the role of the EU in Danish foreign policy in the regional European setting can be approached in different ways. I choose to look at the bilateral relationships within the EU on the grounds that they have traditionally been crucial for national foreign policy in its regional context. Also, a study of bilateral policy within the EU will, as will be shown below, tell us quite a lot about the role of the different institutions in Danish policy within Europe.

The question asked about the role of bilateral Danish policy towards the other EU member states is whether such bilateral relations have any substantial character of their own or whether they are mainly directed towards action within the EU or, indeed, other international organisations. That bilateral policy is directed towards the EU rather than the bilateral relations per se does not, of course, mean that there could not be bilateral concerns. If a country has another country as a prominent (often security) concern, this may not be directly observed in an intense bilateral relationship. Rather, this may be expressed through the country taking an active interest in striking alliances and participating in international organisations with, around, or against the country in question. In the case of the Franco-German relationship, for example, the EU policy of the two countries could, at least in part, be interpreted as an answer to the concern about the state on the other side of the Rhine. Bilateral relations might thus in an important sense shape EU policy rather than the other way round. The starting point here, however, is the extent to which Danish policy towards EU bilateral relationships is shaped by EU membership or, indeed, membership of other international organisations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a small state such as Denmark may be expected to be more of a ‘receiver’ of EU policies and structures than a maker of these, which further
legitimates my focus here on the impact of the EU on Danish policy rather than the other way round.

The analysis in this chapter is different from the following empirical chapters in this book due to the nature of the subject. Thus it may, at first glance, appear not to fit in. But it is judged that an analysis of the EU area itself is worthwhile because it allows us to comment on what the predominant, traditional concern for small state foreign policy – the immediate environment – looks like in the context of the EU. As it does not make sense to talk about an EU policy towards the member states’ bilateral relationships, there will be no presentation of EU policy. Instead I will look at certain structural elements concerning the role of the EU for EU member states. For the same reason, there are no separate sections on the Danish level of activity and constitutive effects, although aspects of this are integrated in the sections on Denmark where this is relevant. The chapter will also take up some general issues in Danish foreign policy which are necessary to understand Danish policy in Europe, and the other foreign policy areas dealt with later in the book.

I. The EU

Few EU documents present explicit guidelines let alone rules for the general conduct of bilateral relations, although the 1993 Copenhagen criteria and subsequent EU policy towards the enlargement process contained the general principle of peaceful resolution of conflicts between states (Presidency, 1993). We can nevertheless point to some features of a fundamental intersubjective and institutional character which can be said to constitute a kind of EU framework also for the member states’ bilateral reactions. The identification of the following three features is based on the basic social constructivist assumptions of this book.

First, the EU is considered by its member states and institutional actors as a community of destiny which, at the most fundamental level, can be said to be held together by a common fear of the resurgence of conflicts from Europe’s past (Wæver, 1996, 2000). Although the character and strength of this intersubjective understanding vary considerably between member states and may for some only have developed after the Cold War, it can in some form be found in all member states including the Central and Eastern European ones (Friis, 2004). This is also the intersubjective base on which the EU is considered an anchor of European security and thus a pivot around which state relations revolve in Europe (Wæver, 2000), although NATO is also seen as crucial in this respect.