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SMALL STATE REFERENDUM VOTING ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION:  
THE CASES OF DENMARK AND IRELAND

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## **Introduction**

One of the greatest stories in political science over the last fifty years has been the peaceful integration of European states, from the humble European Coal and Steel Community of 1952 to the increasingly influential European Union of 1992. This chain of integration, in the form of an increasingly supranational organisation, has always been one of trade-offs, the chief being the limited merging of individual state sovereignty in European supranational bodies in order to achieve common peace and prosperity. This story of diminished sovereignty through treaties of European integration does not merely play out in diplomatic negotiations but also in the popular consciousness as referendums become increasingly popular methods in Europe of approving international treaties and constitutional change. This paper asserts that some voters are keenly aware of these threats to their state's sovereignty, particularly in international affairs, and thus vote No in referendums on European integration.

It is in this context that a study of popular opinions and referendums on European integration proves useful. Some scholars have been critical of referendums as policy making tools, holding that voters are poorly informed and asked to vote on issues of low salience to them. However, the current consensus views referendums more favourably, as evidence has accumulated that disproves the critics. Referendum voters, perhaps more so than other voters, act based on the issues at hand in the election, rather than using it as a proxy to express their opinion of the government or politicians. Thus the logical focus of research into referendums on European integration is the issues that inform the voters' choices. There is a community of scholars that has taken up this task, often focusing on one referendum. Several survey studies have also been undertaken, either examining a country's referendum history or examining all the referendums on a particular European integration treaty. However, few have compared several countries' referendum voting over time (e.g. Tonra 2000). In order to answer whether certain concerns and responses are shared among member states, multiple countries must be examined. Examining multiple

referendums clarifies whether the convergence or divergence of voting influences are momentary or long-lasting.

### ***The Choice of Denmark and Ireland***

Denmark and Ireland are logical choices for analysis, as they are the two European Union member states that have had the most referendums on European integration, thanks to constitutional provisions requiring referendums in order to ratify treaties ceding sovereignty. As the two joined in the same accession round, the countries' voters have voted on many of the same treaties. Likewise, the two have somewhat similar international conditions as small states seeking to maximise the economic and political benefits from European integration while seeking to preserve their autonomy and prevent the dominance of the large member states. Both countries, as is common for many European small states, are understood to flirt with neutrality, or in the wording of some, are 'neutralist'. This neutralism is coupled with post-war foreign policy traditions of international engagement, specifically in multilateral organisations such as the United Nations and on issues such as development aid and disarmament. This tradition of 'progressive internationalism' is often applied to the Nordic countries and is sometimes also used in reference to Ireland (Keatinge 1984).

Despite these many commonalities, differences remain between the two countries' approaches to integration. Though both joined the EC at the same time to be closer to their primary trading partners, economic issues are different for the two countries, as Denmark has been one of the wealthier countries in Western Europe, while Ireland has been one of the poorest. Ireland's recent success, the miracle of the Celtic Tiger, can in many ways be directly attributed to EU membership and the aid received from the organisation. In addition Ireland chose to join the euro, while Denmark has opted to keep its own currency, the krone. Furthermore, their foreign policy traditions have noteworthy divergences. Despite common neutralist inclinations, Ireland has explicitly avoided defence alliances, while Denmark is a founding member of NATO. Finally,

despite strong ideological support for less developed countries, Ireland has been at best an average aid donor, while Denmark has been consistently the most generous per GDP, a fact perhaps explained by Ireland's relative poverty.

Acknowledging the many differences between the two countries, this paper seeks to show that the opposition to European integration *as presented in the treaties put forth before voters in referendums* has common origins in Denmark and Ireland. Because Danish scholarship and data sources are better developed than their Irish counterparts, more time is given to the Danish cases. However, every effort is made to balance the lines of analysis.

## **Literature Review**

For the purpose of this inquiry into the issues behind referendum voting several different lines of literature prove relevant. First there is the general theoretical literature on referendums, which mainly concerns itself with the questions of voter information and salience. Because referendums are at the same time very distinct in the issues considered and very similar in the mechanisms governing them, most literature tends to be focused either on one country or on all referendums in liberal democracies. Places that have many referendums, such as Switzerland, Italy, or the American state of California, are frequent objects of study. However, the growing popularity of referendums as a means to ratify treaties of European integration has meant that a body of literature has grown to address this trend. Again, the literature tends to be focused on single countries or single treaties. While economic issues are commonly discussed, including examining voting according to class interests (e.g. Scheve 2000), opposition on grounds of sovereignty are generally just given little examination. Thus in order to better understand such opposition, it is useful to consider the broader issue of popular attitudes towards international self-determination. As this paper suggests that No voters in Danish and Irish referendums fear a loss of their somewhat contrarian foreign policy traditions, the literature on Danish and Irish foreign policy traditions is also considered.

## ***General Literature on Referendums***

Hug (2002) describes referendums as passive or active, depending on whether they are initiated by the government or the opposition. The active type requires those opposed to the status quo or a future situation to act to bring the issue to vote, often by gaining a predetermined level of parliamentary support or of citizens' signatures demanding a vote. However, most referendums are initiated by the government, either through directly requesting one (a consultative referendum) or acting to the effect that a constitutional requirement for one is activated (a required referendum). Butler and Rahny note that most are consultative rather than mandatory, as governments often wish to gain popular approval for a controversial matter. At the same time, consultative referendums do give governments the greatest control, with citizen or opposition sponsored referendums—that is, initiatives—the least. Despite this, *de jure* consultative referendums are often *de facto* mandatory ones, as rare is the democratic government willing to ignore the opinion of the people. Both the experiences of Denmark and Ireland show that unfavourable results will often cause governments to seek another vote on the same issue, after making at least superficial changes concerning the perceived sources of opposition.

Rourke, Hiskes, and Zirakzadeh (1992) note that referendums on foreign policy or international issues, despite sometimes impressive turnout numbers, appear to be of lower salience than other elections, particularly general elections. Since the Nineteenth Century such Swiss referendums have had relatively lower turnouts. Likewise Qvortrup (2002, 26) notes that 'a frequent use of referendums generally results in a drop in the turnout rate'. Accordingly Switzerland, California, and France all have turnout levels below 50%, though he also notes that both Denmark and Ireland have average referendum turnouts of 78.7%. Despite the generally low turnout numbers in places with frequent referendums, Qvortrup (2002) finds that turnout will spike on particularly important issues. From this observation he develops the notion of a 'civic reserve'—that is, a calculated engagement in politics on the part of citizens, weak when the issues are unimportant and

strong when they are important. This is supported by the fact that voters seem to be better informed in referendums than in general elections (Qvortrup 2002). Furthermore, voters learn throughout the campaigns as their related media consumption increases, though levels of interest are not similarly affected (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000). The fact that voters' levels of information are roughly equal in both uncontroversial, low turnout referendums and controversial, high turnout referendums suggests that voters take care to understand the issues at hand and voters reserve their participation for when they deem it most necessary (Qvortrup 2002).

### ***The Literature of European Integration Referendums***

Butler and Rahney note that Denmark and Ireland, together with France, are the only countries with constitutional requirements for referendums in certain situations. In contrast referendums on European integration are prohibited in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Portugal (Hug 2002, 3). For instance, despite having the right of initiative, Italian voters are not allowed to vote on international treaties. However, across Europe the use of referendums is becoming more popular, as seen in the 2004 accession round and the (failed) ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. As a result, European integration referendums have attracted more scholarly attention, particularly when voters defied expectations and chose No, such as in Denmark in 1992, Ireland in 2001, and France and the Netherlands in 2005.

Some wonder if voters use referendums as a proxy for a general election. Reif and Schmitt (1980) in their study of European Parliament elections described them as second-order national elections, finding that voters were not voting on European issues or politicians but rather using the elections to show their displeasure with the government. Several scholars have taken this concept and applied it to the other type of European election, integration referendums. For instance much of Mark Franklin's work has emphasised the relationship between voters' choices in integration referendums and partisan attitudes. An analysis of the all the Maastricht Treaty referendums finds that approval is a function of government support (Franklin, van der Eijk, and

Marsh 1995). Similarly, Schneider and Weitsman understand voters to be in a ‘punishment trap’, pulled between addressing the issue at hand and punishing the government, not knowing ‘if the integration project under consideration compensates for the government’s management of the economy’ (Schneider and Weitsman 1996, 586). Voters construct a multi-level game in which the state of the economy and party and opposition positions are all influences on voters’ choices. Schneider and Weitsman find that integration referendums are neither wholly domestic nor international, as issues from both spheres are present.

However, even if this second-order thesis is true in some cases, there are significant limitations. Gary, Marsh, and Sinnott (2005) find that domestic factors, such as dissatisfaction with the government, decreases in influence on referendum voting as the salience of the election increases. Pale Svensson has been quite critical of the second-order analysis (e.g. Svensson 2002) and has found evidence to the contrary in the Danish referendums, in which there appears to have always been very little party influence (Svensson 1996). Likewise Siune and Svensson (1993, 106) find that intense voter communication does not lead to increased obedience to the party line. Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) suggest a sort of middle ground, as they believe public opinion to be a function of both domestic and international economic and political conditions. Thus, while voters may not be choosing solely in consideration of the issues presented, they are also not treating referendums as ersatz general elections but rather considering the referendums and the issues presented in the context of the contemporary environment.

Rourke, Hiskes, and Zirakzadeh (1992) find that the general pattern of relatively lower turnout in referendums on international issues also to be true for European integration referendums. In 1972 Ireland and Norway voted on joining the EC, with Irish voters approving membership and the Norwegian ones declining. The Irish turnout of 70.9%, while the highest for an Irish referendum, was also four percent lower than the 1969 general election. Norwegian turnout was 79.2% of the voting population, though again lower than the 1965, 1969, and 1973 general



elections. In the same year French voters were asked to approve the enlargement of the EC. The referendum had both the highest abstention rate (39.5%) and spoiled ballot rate (7.1%) of any French election ever. The 1975 British referendum on continued EC membership had a 64.5% turnout, the lowest British turnout since World War II. Despite the general evidence that referendums have lower turnout rates, there are some contrary cases, such as the 90.4% turnout for the 1972 Danish referendum on EC membership, the highest turnout ever in Denmark ('Referendum of the 28 September 2000'). Overall the turnout rates for European integration referendums, while often quite high for referendums in general, are lower than general elections.

### ***Analyses of Danish and Irish Referendums***

The 1953 Danish constitution, ratified by referendum, allows for several types of referendums. First, members of the Folketing (Parliament) can request a referendum on previously approved legislation if they comprise at least a third of the Folketing.<sup>1</sup> Likewise any change to the minimum voting age requires approval through referendum. The relevant type of referendum for this paper is Article 20 of the constitution, which in cases of transferring sovereignty to an international institution requires the bill to be passed by a 5/6 supermajority of Parliament or by a simple majority. However, because the Nice Treaty was determined to not lead to an additional transfer of sovereignty, no referendum or supermajority was required and the treaty passed normally through the Folketing. All the Danish constitutional referendum provisions appear designed to encourage consensus and protect minorities by making it difficult to pass far-reaching legislation or treaties (Svensson 1996). However, while the thresholds to opposition appear to be low, making it difficult for the tyranny of the majority, all the referendums are decided by simple majority, meaning that referendums can prove to be a quite hegemonic tool.

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1 Article 42 is ostensibly a method of minority protection, enabling a parliamentary minority to halt discriminatory legislation (Svensson 1996). However, there are several flaws in such a referendum as minority protection. First, the one third threshold is quite high for a country where coalition governments and no one party has long held a simple majority of seats. Second, as the referendum is decided by a simple majority, even a 49% minority would fail to be protected in the event of a referendum.

The Irish constitution of 1948 requires referendums to be held on any constitutional amendments, and ceding sovereignty to an international institution requires modifications of the constitution and thus a referendum. The *Crotty v. An Taoiseach* Supreme Court decision requires referendums on all European integration treaties (Gilland 1999), preventing the government from arguing that sovereignty is not being ceding or was already approved by the 1972 referendum on EC membership and so no constitutional amendment is needed. This court case comes out of a government attempt to do just that with the Single European Act in 1986 and is in contrast with Denmark, where the constitutional necessity for a referendum is still considered individually for each treaty. For instance, the Nice Treaty in Denmark was approved by the Folketing, as it was not seen as an additional transfer of sovereignty.

The referendum situation in Ireland significantly changed in 1997 with two court decisions, the first requiring the state to be neutral in campaigns and the second requiring the state broadcaster, RTE, to give equal airtime to the competing sides (Gilland 1999). The first decision led to the establishment of the Referendum Commission to distribute impartial information about referendums, with the government only able to campaign for referendums using party, rather than state, funds. The RTE decision meant that the previous method of appointing airtime to parties by the proportion of the seats they hold in the Dáil was dropped, and equal airtime must be given to pro and con sides. This was a significant decision because all the main parties in the Dáil are pro-integration and had thus dominated the airwaves. In contrast, no such explicit limitations of the government's ability to campaign exists in Denmark, though it is understood that both sides should be presented fairly (Siune 1987).

The general assumption that European integration referendums are second-order elections does not appear to hold in the Danish and Irish cases. While Garry, Marsh, and Sinnott (2005, 211) find that both support for European integration and support for the government affected the likelihood of a Yes vote, 'issues are stronger predictors of vote choice than are second-order

effects'. Schneider and Weitsman (1996) suggest, unsurprisingly, that voters are less likely to follow a party line when the party is split on a referendum. Incidences of split parties could explain the fact that Danish voters rate party positions very low on their referendum voting influences. However, this appears to be exclusive to the 1992 Danish Maastricht referendum. The high levels of deviance from party positions despite clear party stances on the referendums at hand suggest that political parties are not influential in people's voting choices, regardless of the strength of the parties' convictions (Siune and Svensson 1993). At least part of this divide between voters and the parties they traditionally support is due to the fact that there appears to be a potent divide in both Ireland and Denmark between the vastly pro-European political elites and the more sceptical publics (Svensson 1996, 43).

## **Danish and Irish Foreign Policy Traditions**

Ideas play a vital role in foreign policy (e.g. Goldstein and Keohane 1993), and despite the many supranational elements of the European Union system, significant steps in integration are taken through *international treaties*. Likewise the EU has significant influence upon the nature and conduct of a state's foreign relations. As such the negotiation and approval of integration treaties taps into national foreign policy traditions, both within the governments and among the populations which are asked to approve the treaties.

### ***Neutrality***

Both Denmark and Ireland are small states and thus have common concerns and responses, fearing larger powers and their wars and seeking international agreements where they may constrain the great powers and deal with them as equals (Wivel 2005). While Denmark does not have an experience of foreign domination comparable to Ireland's, its defeats at the hand of German powers have contributed to a subsequent fear of German domination, just as Ireland has sought to avoid British influence since independence. Both historically saw neutrality as key to

independence, but differing experiences in World War II lead to diverting paths in the post-war period. While Ireland had been able to avoid attacks and involvement in another ‘British war’ (Sharp 1990), Denmark was conquered by Nazi Germany. Thus the earlier, isolationist stances towards security were rejected, and Denmark was a founding member of NATO. However, Denmark has not abandoned its neutralist tendencies and does not pursue as Atlanticist a policy as the Netherlands, for example. This ambivalence was most visible in the 1980s with Denmark’s ‘footnote policy’, in which Danish objections to NATO declarations were routinely inserted into documents in the form of footnotes (Holbraad 1991).

Ireland’s history of British domination has made it particularly supportive of decolonialisation. One colonial experience was the involuntary involvement in British imperial conflicts. While few Irish nationalists actively opposed British war efforts,<sup>2</sup> the common desire to not participate in British wars continued past independence, particularly during the era of the Irish Free State (Raymond 1983-1984).<sup>3</sup> However Irish neutrality is chiefly based on the partition of the island and the belief that Ireland cannot enter into security arrangements as long as part of its territory is under foreign control. This recognises that a security arrangement threatening to Britain would only hinder unification, while one amendable to Britain, and thus probably including Britain, would be an acknowledgement of the *status quo*. That Irish neutrality is pragmatic, or not permanent, is supported by the many murmurs by Irish politicians that reunification would lead Ireland to review the policy, for instance as seen in the 1980 Haughey-Thatcher talks (Keatinge 1984). Sharp goes so far as to see four competing conceptions of neutrality in Ireland: as a moral basis, as a precondition of independence, as a contribution to national military security, and as a consequence of partition (Sharp 1990). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that neutrality has become a defining element of Ireland’s self-image, as shown by the uneasiness of many Irish with talk that

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2 Some radicals did fight for the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War, while others hoped for a German victory in World War I.

3 Prior to the 1938 return of Treaty Ports Irish neutrality was seen as improbable, if not impossible, as attacks on and from the British sovereign bases would spill over to affect Ireland.

suggests losing neutrality, even for the prospect of unification.

Ireland's entrance into the EC in 1972 was seen as a way to gain greater independence from Britain, particularly by reducing the British domination of Irish trade (Hay and Smith 2005). If Ireland has wholeheartedly embraced international institutions as a way to assert its sovereignty, Denmark has been more sceptical. EC membership was somewhat more contentious, partially because the EC was not seen as providing an assurance of sovereignty, which militarily was already provided by NATO, and because membership also meant that Denmark became closer to Germany. Ireland, on the other hand, was already so close to the United Kingdom that the EC, never dramatically embraced in the UK, would serve to separate Ireland and the UK. The small state concern of jealously guarding its independence can also help to explain the relative levels of support for different institutions, with the EU being a (somewhat) supranational institution while the UN is an international one.

### ***International Engagement***

Both Ireland and Denmark have been very active in international institutions, such as the United Nations and even the League of Nations previously. While Irish nationalist involvement in the League was a way to gain international legitimacy for the Irish Free State's claim of full independence from Britain (Sharp 1990), support for the institutions' missions has also been a significant factor in Irish participation. This ethical or moral component has only become more pronounced in both countries over time. Ireland and Denmark are often categorised as progressive internationalists, for both countries are committed to the international system while advocating progressive policies in their relations with other countries, particularly the less well off (Keatinge 1984). Ireland's 1955 entrance into the United Nations was accompanied by a declaration of principles which states Ireland would pursue 'a commitment to uphold the UN charter; the maintenance of a position of independence from the major blocs in the UN; and the characterisation of Ireland as a country whose values were both Christian and Western' (Sharp 1990, 8). The next

decade or so saw Ireland particularly active in the UN, and its engagement has continued to this day with such things as campaigns related to decolonialisation, disarmament, and development aid. Ireland also has a long history of participation in UN peacekeeping. While not to the same extent, Danish public opinion has also been coloured by significant opposition to nuclear rivalry and great power politics, particularly in the 1980s (Holbraad 1991).

However, there has been some gap between Irish rhetoric and reality. For instance, Ireland did not meet its UN commitments for foreign aid until the 1980s (Holmes, Rees, and Whelan 1993). Much of this failure can be attributed to the relative poverty of Ireland, whose individual GDP has passed the EU average only in the last decade (*Eurostat Yearbook 2005*). This is in contrast to the more prosperous Denmark, which is the largest international aid donor by proportion of GDP (Larsen 2005). As consistent with its desire to remain autonomous, Denmark remains very resistant to participating in EU development funds, preferring instead to work bilaterally or through the UN. In fact, roughly half of Danish development aid is bilateral, while 10% goes through the EU and 43% through the UN (Larsen 2005).

The Danish reluctance to lose its independent voice in development work to the EU-wide effort suggests the desire to maintain sovereignty, as mentioned above, and a belief that the sovereign state can be a tool for good in the world (Lawler 1997). Hedetof (2003, 286) notes that Danish identity is characterised by both a ‘strong symbolic-affective attachment to the idea of a separate, sovereign, territorially bounded national uniqueness, and by a pronounced feature of pragmatism in dealing with the outside world’. Such an approach is not unique to Denmark and is generally seen as shared with the other Scandinavian countries (Larsen 2005). Putting this Scandinavian, ‘humane’, ‘progressive’ internationalism more broadly allows one to include both Ireland and the Netherlands (Keatinge 1984). One school of foreign policy analysis, popular in Denmark, is called adaptation theory and proposes that a state’s foreign policy can be predicted based upon ‘influence capacity’ and ‘stress sensitivity’—that is, its ability to influence other states

and the extent it is influenced by them. The most common response to these two inputs is that of balancing, when both inputs are high (Larsen 2005). As such, states, particularly small ones, seek to both actively engage with other states so as to achieve their objectives and enter into agreements, such as organisations of international cooperation, to reduce threats and bind the strongest actors to mutually acceptable outcomes.

One reason then that European integration would be opposed, while participation in the United Nations or other international institutions is not, is that there is the real potential for large states to dominate. While the Security Council surely holds extraordinary sway at the UN, it exists mainly as a conservative restriction on international change, while the fear exists that a *directoire* of large states in the EU could pursue progressive policies regardless of the wishes of small states such as Denmark (Wivel 2005). At the same time, Wivel notes that the EU has many of the characteristics of the ideal forum for small states such as Denmark and Ireland, thanks to its embrace of soft power and concern with the stability of all of Europe, meaning that ‘neutral and semi-neutral small powers’ do not need to forfeit important policy traditions. Likewise the EU magnifies small states’ voices and provides them with a broader international outlook (Tonra 2000).

There is significant popular support for neutrality and progressive international politics in both countries beyond that of the political elites, a divergence shown in the occasional talk among Irish elites of the negotiability of Irish neutrality and in the short-lived Danish policy of active internationalism (Holm 2002). For instance, when questioned about neutrality, at least two thirds of respondents in every Irish opinion poll wishes to keep the policy. Those most willing to consider defence cooperation are also most supportive of European integration (Marsh 1992).

While neutrality and progressive internationalism need not go completely together, the two policies appear complementary, as a common rejection of a foreign policy of power and self-interest. Ireland and Denmark, not surprisingly, find themselves lumped together with Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Austria as progressive internationalist countries (Keatinge 1984). Most of the

countries are explicitly neutral, and all are strong supporters of multilateral institutions. This suggests that the analysis of Denmark and Ireland may prove applicable to the other countries.

## **Hypothesis**

It is thus possible to suggest a theory for Danish and Irish integration referendum voting. Accepting that people vote in referendums based upon the issues at hand and that they prefer the status quo over a bad treaty (Hug 2002), it then follows that No voters reject the treaties they are asked to consider because they consider them to be unacceptable, requiring them to lose more than they gain. As discussed before, neutrality and progressive internationalism are established and popular traditions in both countries. Therefore treaties understood to threaten these traditions are understood to be bad treaties and are thus rejected. The changing levels of opposition is explained by the changing content of European integration: the European system being agreed to in the 1972 Accession Treaties was very different to that found in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, for example. Over this time many of the goals of economic integration had been met, such as the establishment of the Single Market, and the EU has been increasingly focused on political issues, such as foreign policy and security cooperation. Thus, while the reasons for No voting are not expected to change noticeably over time, the No vote's proportion of the total vote should not be as stable. Put together this suggests a more nuanced view of popular opinion related to European integration: people are not simply for or against integration, but rather their aggregate opinions are conditional on the issues at hand, even though the reasons for support and opposition are essentially constant. This situation is not one of a 'permissive consensus' for European integration but rather of qualified support.

In summary, analysis of Irish and Danish opinion polls is expected to reveal a strong association between fears about losing neutrality and foreign policy autonomy and No voting. The strength of this association is expected to be roughly equal for all of each country's referendums and still quite comparable between Denmark and Ireland, accepting that different histories mean



there will be some difference between the two countries. However, if the strength of association is roughly constant, the proportion of No votes to all votes is expected to roughly increase over time, from Accession to the Single European Act to the Maastricht Treaty, then decreasing for the Amsterdam Treaty, and then increasing again. Those treaties on which there were two referendums—the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark and the Nice Treaty in Ireland—are expected to show the strength of the association to be constant, yet a decrease in the proportion of No voters, due to voters' concerns being addressed in the Edinburgh Agreement and the Nice Treaty 'as contemporarily understood', respectively.

## **Methodology**

Danish and Irish referendum voting will be analysed by using opinion surveys covering both voting preferences and political attitudes. Individual surveys, covering one referendum in one country, are used. Because of this there are variations in the questions asked and the way answers are reported, meaning that the surveys cannot be easily directly compared. However, extraneous or similar responses are ignored or combined, creating dummy variables in which the respondents either express a desire for continued international autonomy or do not. Thus the referendum models created are similar, with one independent variable reflecting this attitude and one dependent variable reflecting the respondent's vote in the relevant referendum. While the Eurobarometer surveys would appear to be more useful, as the same questions are asked across the EU—including Denmark and Ireland—its questions are generally poorly suited to investigating specific attitudes at play in referendum voting.

Another problem is the fact that Denmark and Ireland have held slightly different referendums. For instance, Denmark held two referendums on the Maastricht Treaty, as voters rejected it the first time, while Ireland only held one. Likewise Ireland held two referendums on the Nice Treaty, for the same reasons as Denmark with the Maastricht Treaty, while Denmark did not even have one, having determined that no additional sovereignty was being given up. Denmark held

a referendum in 2000 on membership in the euro, while in Ireland there was not seen to be the need for an additional referendum to address participation.

Finally, the surveys vary in quality and availability. While very detailed surveys for scholars have been held after each Danish referendum, most of the Irish surveys were commissioned by newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, older Irish referendum surveys are unavailable, if not lost. The Irish surveys used for statistical analysis cover the Amsterdam, and Nice Treaties. References to others' analyses of all the referendums are used to reference other surveys and give breadth to the Irish picture. This somewhat weakens the analysis of Irish public opinion, as it is only possible to create a regression model three referendums. However, it is hoped that the unanimity of the different sources will serve to provide a convincing case that Irish No voting is quite similar to that in Denmark.

## Results

The models produced are mixed at best. In many cases, despite the relative popularity of neutralist and sovereigntist explanations for opposition to the treaty at hand, the regression models failed to show a strong association between these attitudes and No voting.<sup>5</sup> First the Danish referendums will be considered. In the 1972 Accession referendum, despite the attitudes being common among No voters (259 of 586 said EC membership would mean less political autonomy), Yes voters also conceded that the EC would limit Danish autonomy (203 out of 1085). Thus the regression model is quite weak.<sup>6</sup> This somewhat mixed message seems to play out in the following referendums. The 1986 referendum on the Single European Act provides good support for this paper's thesis, as the regression model shows a noteworthy association between believing the SEA involves a loss of sovereignty and No voting.<sup>7</sup> However, the standard error of the independent

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4 That is not to say that any of the Irish surveys were poorly done. All were carried out by professional public opinion companies, just as in Denmark. However, the surveys are much shorter.

5 Appendix 2 contains tables of the regression models.

6  $R^2$  is .095.

7  $R^2$  is .585.

variable is very large. When just examining the extreme responses (“Significant limitation” and “No limitation”) the association is even more striking.<sup>8</sup> The model is stronger in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty referendum, suggesting that if the desire to maintain international autonomy is not correlated with No voting in early referendums, it is by this time.<sup>9</sup> The 1993 Maastricht referendum does not show a strong association between opposition to a common foreign policy and No voting,<sup>10</sup> nor to a common defence policy.<sup>11</sup> However, every No voter cited not wishing to cooperate on foreign policy as the primary reason for their vote. There is the regression model for the Amsterdam referendum gives little to support this.<sup>12</sup> With the 2000 referendum on participating in the euro, opposition to defence cooperation shows a moderately strong association with No voting.<sup>13</sup> Agreement with the statement ‘Participation in the EURO would lead to a significant reduction to our national sovereignty’ also correlates relatively well with No voting.<sup>14</sup> In both cases, restricting the model to those who claim to have decided how to vote ‘long before the referendum was announced’ leads to stronger measures of association.<sup>15</sup> The similarity of opinions in this referendum with the other Danish ones suggests that the fact that this referendum did not involve approval of a *treaty* of European integration was irrelevant. However, because No vote did not preclude the EU-wide adoption of a treaty there was little pressure to have a second referendum, in contrast to the Danish 1992 and Irish 2001 Noes.

In the Irish referendums a similar dynamic seems to be present. In the 1998 Amsterdam referendum there is a decent association between believing the treaty will weaken Ireland’s neutrality and voting No.<sup>16</sup> The model is weaker when using a question about weakening ‘national

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8 R<sup>2</sup> is .777.

9 R<sup>2</sup> is .445.

10 R<sup>2</sup> is .194.

11 R<sup>2</sup> is .139.

12 R<sup>2</sup> is .100.

13 R<sup>2</sup> is .341.

14 R<sup>2</sup> is .365.

15 R<sup>2</sup> is .501 and .309 respectively.

16 R<sup>2</sup> is .337.

identity/sovereignty',<sup>17</sup> while a model with both questions is rather strong.<sup>18</sup> In both cases the standard errors of the independent variables in the simple models are very high. There is essentially no association between the desire to keep neutrality and No voting in a survey before the 2001 Nice Treaty referendum.<sup>19</sup> This is because support for neutrality is so strong among all voters, both Yes and No voters wishing for Ireland's policy of neutrality to continue at rates of over 75%. Two surveys before the second, 2002 Nice Treaty referendum do not provide much better support for the hypothesis. In the September survey there is a slight association between believing the treaty will undermine Irish neutrality and No voting,<sup>20</sup> while in the October one there is essentially no association between citing the loss of neutrality as a factor influencing voting.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of Denmark, there appears to be support for the hypothesis, with moderate associations existing between opposition to losing sovereignty and No voting. Particularly noteworthy is the 1993 Maastricht referendum, in which one of the few questions in any survey specifically about foreign policy independence shows a perfect association with voting. However, there is little good evidence in the Irish case. One explanation for the lack of association between loss of sovereignty and voting may be that most of the questions ask about whether sovereignty will be lost, rather than whether the loss of sovereignty will influence the respondent's vote, showing that supporters will also acknowledge the lost sovereignty, but accept it. However, this explanation does not seem to hold much water, as the Irish October 2002 survey which has the latter wording actually has a *worse* association between the two variables than the September survey that does not.

### ***Other Irish Referendums and Analyses***

Gilland (1999) finds that in the Irish Amsterdam referendum the No votes were chiefly motivated by the (perceived) lack of information, with 36% of all No voters citing this as their

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17 R<sup>2</sup> is .259.

18 R<sup>2</sup> is .518.

19 R<sup>2</sup> is .005.

20 R<sup>2</sup> is .223.

21 R<sup>2</sup> is .088.

primary reason for voting No. However, 34% gave the threat to neutrality as their primary reason, and 26% mentioned 'national identity/sovereignty', giving a cumulative total of 60%. While it is a stretch to see this as a clear affirmation of the hypothesis, especially since the third reason is so broad and includes more than just issues of political sovereignty, it appears fair to say that a desire to preserve independent Irish political action is present.

Sinnott (2001) performed an analysis of the first Nice Treaty, using the same survey, which gives some further, interesting results. While this referendum was the first No, the No vote as proportion of the total electorate was actually smaller than the high of 1998, though only somewhat. Its proportion of the total electorate has increased from 11.9 per cent in 1972 to 21 per cent in 1998. Put simply, while relatively high, the No voters were only in the majority in the first Nice Treaty election because so few potential Yes voters bothered to turn out. Of those who had voted Yes in the Amsterdam referendum, 53% abstained from voting in the Nice referendum, while only 36% of those who voted No did so. Likewise, while 41% of No voters made up their minds in the last week of the campaign, they also tended to have stronger convictions. The popularity of the lack of information explanation shows the success of the No campaign's slogan 'If you don't know, vote No'. In contrast, the second Nice Treaty showed a much stronger association between attitudes towards integration and voting (Gary, Marsh, and Sinnott 2005). At the same time the distributions of the issue variables did not change, suggesting the change in results is primarily a function of missing Yes voters voting in the second election.

## **Findings**

### ***Fluctuating Support***

The key question one must answer when analysing the Danish and Irish European integration referendums is why levels of support and opposition fluctuate significantly enough that referendums have been defeated in both countries. Having already dismissed the second-order

voting hypothesis, it holds that the voters vote based on issues. But how are they issue voters? A static interpretation would suggest that voters have long held beliefs that they express in referendums, such as a desire for European union or to protect national sovereignty. In this case there should be little variation in referendum results, with turnout the sole cause. A second interpretation is that voters evaluate each referendum independently and consider issues specific to each election. In this case the opposite of the first should happen, with noticeable fluctuations in the Yes and No populations as different treaties are put before the voters.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the reality seems to lie somewhere in the middle. While turnout is not normally the reason for variations in voting patterns—consider that while fewer people voted in the first Danish Maastricht referendum than the second (83.1% versus 86.5%), more people voted in the euro referendum (87.6%) than all Danish integration referendums but the accession one ('Referendum of the 28 September 2000')—it does appear to explain the first Irish Nice referendum, where many of the normal Yes voters stayed at home (Sinnott 2001). It is not fair to simply term the Danes 'short term' issue voters while the Irish are 'long term' issue voters. For instance, the proportion of the total population in Ireland that votes No has steadily increased. While there was a drop in the proportion of No voters in the first Nice referendum, showing that not only Yes voters failed to turnout, the absolute number of No voters actually increased in the second Nice referendum, though still below the high of Amsterdam (Sinnott 2001). Thus it may be fair to say that the voters in both countries are pragmatic, principled voters, holding long term values yet willing to consider each referendum on its relative merits.

### ***The Two Rejections***

It is useful to examine the Danish Maastricht referendums and the Irish Nice referendums in detail, as both were first rejected by voters, only to be approved in a following election after they had been encouraged to 'correct their mistake' (Siune and Svensson 1993, 102). The cynic may say that nothing substantial changed between the first and second elections, with

citizens simply accepting elite chastisement and direction in the second referendums (Hedetof 2003). However, this is an unfair assessment, as in both cases specific declarations were made by the national governments and the other EU partners so as to reassure voters that unwanted foreign and security policy would not be forced upon them. The Edinburgh Agreement gave Danish voters this reassurance, and they then approved the Maastricht Treaty in the second referendum. Proof that these concessions were not simply an elite publicity stunt is shown by the fact that they were incorporated into the Amsterdam Treaty (Branner and Kelstrup 2003), presumably after they had outlived their significance if one were to agree with the cynics.

Hedetof notes that the campaign for the 1992 Maastricht referendum was the first time that symbolic and pragmatic Danishness were both an issue. As such, voters were forced to confront a process of European integration that went beyond economic reasons. This was seen as a good thing by some, as the nation state was seen as old and destructive, and the EU was presented as a guarantor of peace. Opponents argued to the contrary, that the nation-state was a guarantor of peace. The sudden promotion of the antiquity of the nation-state and subsequent desirability of European integration clearly had little purchase with Danish voters, as they rejected the Maastricht treaty, many citing the desire to maintain international autonomy. Supporters of the treaty did not drop this line of argument in the run up to the second referendum on the treaty, but a shift did occur, from denigrating the nation-state to arguing the necessity of giving up some sovereignty. It appears that one reason for the Maastricht and Nice reversals was the shift in presentation, as the Yes campaigns emphasised the treaties as rational and legitimate trade-offs in the second referendums, rather than unmitigated gains.

Likewise the conduct of the campaigns seems to matter: in both cases where voters voted No the campaigns were less than perfect. Siune and Svensson describe the campaign for approval of the first Danish Maastricht referendum as rather poor, while Gary, Marsh, and Sinnott (2005) attribute much of the second Irish Nice referendum's approval to a much better campaign. It

appears the improved campaign in the second Irish referendum is at least partially due to the maturation of the very new national debate about the bases of Irish membership. A consistent reason for opposition in Irish referendums is lack of information (Gilland 1999), despite the fact that referendum voters appear to be better informed than they claim (Sinnott 2001) and better than citizens in countries that do not hold referendums (Benz and Stutzer 2004). The increased levels of satisfaction at being well-informed reported for the second referendums show that referendums, especially successful campaigns, do inform voters and that voters value this information (Mendelsohn and Cutler 2000). Thus both the presentation and message of the Yes campaigns contributed to first the rejection and then the approval of the two treaties.

### ***Economic Considerations***

Economic performance seems to be a key component in fluctuations in No voting. Eichenberg and Dalton (1993, 529) believe relative economic performance explains the difference between the Danish SEA and first Maastricht referendum results, as the first election was held at a time of particularly strong consumer confidence, while the latter fell during an era of lower confidence and rising unemployment (Siune and Svensson 1993, 108; ‘National accounts and balance of payments’). However, the Danish euro referendum was held during a period of prosperity, with the most people employed ever, and still it failed. Thus, one cannot simply say that Danish voters support European integration when their economy is strong yet oppose it when the economy is weak. Likewise in 2001 Ireland had the least people unemployed (65,100, or 3.6%) of the years 1983 to 2004 (*Irish Statistical Yearbook 2005*).

Over this time period the Danish economy had also shifted, with it now driven primarily by domestic consumption rather than exports (‘National accounts and balance of payments’). At the same time Ireland’s economy has boomed, and in 1998 it surpassed the EU average for GDP per inhabitant, showing the greatest positive change—after Luxembourg—in relative GDP per person between the years 1996 and 2006 (*Eurostat Yearbook 2005*). In both cases, then, it appears that



further integration has less to offer Danish and Irish voters by the end of the millennium, as they are already quite wealthy. Thus, knowing that a rejection will not bring about the end of their EU membership (Branner and Kelstrup 2003), voters feel free to seek other things, namely protection of their international autonomy.

Furthermore, Marsh (1992, 23) notes, 'For those concerned about neutrality then, economics is a particularly important basis of support for European Union'. This evidence, from Irish opinion surveys in 1990 and 1991, shows that economic benefits are seen as a sort of *quid pro quo* for potential No voters, as they appear to be willing to cede sovereignty if the price is right. Thus it appears that many potential No voters can be bought, so to speak. This suggests both that neutrality is not an inviolate principle, as shown in the Irish case by Keatinge and Sharp and in the Danish case more generally, and that neutrality is a persistent concern. The loss of international autonomy always is a consideration for a significant portion of the Danish and Irish electorates but is only activated in some when there are few mitigating factors or the threat is greatest, as suggested by Qvortrup's civic reserve hypothesis. This conditional position explains the confusing results seen earlier, such as both Irish Yes and No voters were worried about maintaining neutrality in equally high numbers in the 2001 Nice referendum.

### ***Changing Attitudes***

Branner and Kelstrup (2003, 20) note that the debate in Denmark has shifted, from one about membership to one about 'the development of positive political authority within the EU'. This shift has not made European integration less controversial however. This can be seen by the fact that most of the recent No voters do not object to continued EU membership but rather to change, wishing to keep the status quo. At the same time, the end of the Cold War was seen as ushering in a new era of Danish foreign policy, an 'active internationalism' that embraces both sovereigntist and progressivist strands of Danish political thought and is able to act without the security limitations imposed by the threats of the Cold War (Larsen 2005, 69; Holm 2002). As such

Denmark seemed willing both to more forcefully engage in international affairs and to become more fully involved in European foreign and security cooperation. Marsh (1992) notes a similar movement towards international engagement in Ireland, with Irish neutrality being explicitly safeguarded in the Single European Act yet not mentioned in the Maastricht Treaty. Likewise Ireland became more active in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (Keatinge 1984).

However, if the last fifteen years saw the growing acceptance of EU membership and increased participation in European foreign policy cooperation, Denmark and Ireland also witnessed the appearance of No majorities in referendums. Denmark has now had two No votes, while the Irish, previously seen as model Europeans (Tonra 2000), rejected the Nice Treaty when it was first presented to them. While the two countries have not held referendums on European integration since the Danish euro referendum of 2000 and the Irish 2002 Maastricht referendum, there is no evidence of an upswing in support for further integration. Given the acceptance of EU membership, it would be foolish to suggest that current opposition is not predicated on the treaties put forward. As the current EU focus is on such things as ending the 'pillar' structure and expanding the Common Foreign and Security Policy, it to be expected that opposition remains.

Thus there appears to remain a basic belief in both countries in the desirability of preserving international autonomy. For instance, in Denmark the No to the euro referendum is seen by some as marking the end of an era of 'active internationalism' in Danish foreign policy (Holm 2002), capping a decade of foreign policy firsts. Thus there are two contradictory trends, one of growing foreign policy integration and another of growing opposition to such an idea. While it would be simplistic to place them chronologically one after the other, the No votes at the beginning of the third millennium seem to presage the end of a period of cooperation and the beginning of a period in which both countries seek to limit further integration and No results in referendums become increasingly probable.<sup>22</sup> At some point this can simply be explained by the fact that voters

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<sup>22</sup> In fact, this probably will ensure that fewer potentially objectionable treaties are put before the Danish and Irish electorates, meaning that the proportion of referendums passing will remain quite high.

appear to have been willing to give up some autonomy but now see additional treaties as a step too far.

### ***Differing Attitudes***

A disparity may exist between levels of Irish and Danish attitudes towards maintaining independent foreign policy traditions, though given the limited nature and number of the Irish opinion surveys used, it is hard to say so conclusively. One reason for the disparity could be the different ways in which EU membership is understood. While in both countries European integration has always been presented as an economic, not political, process in which there were few if any drawbacks, the Irish entrance into the EC was also presented as a way to cement or complete independence from the United Kingdom. As such, Ireland did not really have much sovereignty to lose through European integration, and thus the interesting situation was created in which the loss of sovereignty *de jure* can be seen as the gaining of sovereignty *de facto*. However there appears to be a conflict developing, as opposition to the integration treaties has progressively increased and the loss of neutrality is always a principle reason given for No voting. This suggests the *de facto* independence from the United Kingdom is no longer an object of concern, while the loss of sovereignty is. This is perhaps why it was the Nice Treaty, which significantly and most concretely increased European defence cooperation (Wivel 2005), that of all integration treaties was the one Irish voters found objectionable. However, turnout in 2001 Irish Nice referendum was very low (35.4%), meaning that it is difficult to show a dramatic shift in sentiment. While both the Irish and Danish accession referendums had the highest *referendum* turnout in each country, the turnout in Irish integration referendums has steadily declined, in contrast to the Danish ones, where at least 75% of the eligible population has participated in each referendum ('Referendum of the 28 September 2000'). Thus, it appears that European integration is an issue of much lower salience in Ireland than it is in Denmark.

## Conclusion

The story of European integration referendums is a complex one, with changing voting patterns and many issues. In these referendums voters confront myriad issues surrounding European integration, including questions of predicted economic costs and benefits and of the proper role of the nation-state. In such a situation no one thing can easily explain voting behaviour. However, Denmark and Ireland are two countries in which maintaining international autonomy is a continual concern. At face value this may seem to be an obvious statement, as preserving one's sovereignty has been a common concern of peoples from at least the origins of the nation-state. However, this statement is noteworthy, as European integration has been strongly supported, in a permissive consensus if not enthusiastically, by large majorities in most other EU member states. It is predicted that fears of losing this autonomy, either through foreign policy or defence cooperation, are the causes of Danish and Irish No voting. The regression models provide a mixed message, showing on one hand that such attitudes are important contributors to No voting but on the other hand that this is not the only explanation. Noteworthy is the fact that many Yes voters also hold these fears. Thus it is apparent that while commonly held, the prospect of losing international autonomy is a loss that can be mitigated for significant numbers of voters. The growing No proportion of the vote, in some cases now the majority, shows that though these fears are not new, as mitigating factors they have become less powerful. While such voting patterns may seem to be unique to these two countries, several factors suggest otherwise. Finland, which appears to have remained enthusiastic about European integration, provides a counter-example. However, countries such as Norway, Sweden, Austria, and now even the Netherlands share this Danish and Irish resistance towards integration. The loss of mitigating factors appears to be a wider trend, as shown by the French No vote in the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. While it is too early to tell, it may be that the Danish and Irish popular desire to retain international autonomy is just the harbinger of a general opposition to further European integration.

## Appendix 1 – Referendums

Referendum	Year	Yes Vote	No Vote	Turnout	Survey
Accession	1972	63.4%	36.6%	90.4%	DDA-0006
Single European Act	1986	56.2%	43.8%	75.4%	DDA-1192
Maastricht 1	1992	49.3%	50.7%	83.1%	DDA-1743
Maastricht 2	1993	56.7%	43.3%	86.5%	DDA-1784
Amsterdam	1998	55.1%	44.9%	76.2%	DDA-14504
Euro	2000	46.8%	53.2%	87.6%	DDA-4013

Table 1: Danish Integration Referendums (Source: 'Referendum of the 28 September 2000')

Referendum	Year	Yes Vote	No Vote	Turnout	Survey
Accession	1972	83.1%	16.9%	70.9%	(none)
Single European Act	1986	69.6%	30.4%	44.1%	(none)
Maastricht	1992	68.7%	31.3%	57.3%	(none)
Amsterdam	1998	60.4%	39.6%	56.2%	Lansdowne/RTE Prime Time Exit Poll 22 May 1998
Nice 1	2001	45.4%	54.6%	34.8%	IMS 376 / Flash Eurobarometer 108
Nice 2	2002	62.7%	37.3%	49.7%	Millward Brown IMS Nov. 2002

Table 2: Irish Integration Referendums (Source: 'Referendum Results 1937-2004')

## Appendix 2 – Regression Models

Referendum	Variable	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	X <sup>2</sup>	Negelkerke r <sup>2</sup>
Accession	Less political autonomy	1.236	.114	< .001	3.441	120.071	.095
Single European Act	Loss of sovereignty	21.844	4947.413	.996	3.07 * 10 <sup>9</sup>	129.812	.213
Maastricht 1	Common foreign policy	2.955	.214	< .001	3.186	254.850	.445
Maastricht 2	Common foreign policy	1.729	.164	< .001	5.636	126.109	.194
Maastricht 2	Common defence policy	1.466	.163	< .001	4.332	90.592	.139
Amsterdam	Sovereignty/national interest	21.683	6793.852	.997	3 * 10 <sup>9</sup>	64.997	.100
Euro	Defence cooperation	2.496	.184	< .001	12.132	235.068	.341
Euro	Less sovereignty	2.493	.163	< .001	12.100	283.468	.365

Table 3: Danish Regression Models

Referendum	Variable	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)	X <sup>2</sup>	Negelkerke r <sup>2</sup>
Amsterdam	Weakening neutrality	22.120	2253.910	.992	4.04 * 10 <sup>9</sup>	699.476	.337
Amsterdam	Weakening national identity/sovereignty	22.004	2578.38	.993	3.60 * 10 <sup>9</sup>	517.778	.259
Nice 1	More neutrality or more foreign and security cooperation	1.565	.244	< .001	4.782	43.640	.161
Nice 2	More neutrality or more foreign and security cooperation	1.351	.243	< .001	3.861	33.999	.090

Table 4: Irish Regression Models

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