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**Postfunctionalism and Discourse: The 2015 Danish
Referendum on Justice and Home Affairs**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the political and media discourse surrounds Denmark's 2015 referendum on the Justice and Home Affairs opt-out through the combined lens of postfunctionalist theory and critical discourse analysis. While the referendum formally was about the referendum, the broader debate concerned Denmark's Schengen membership, sovereignty, and identity. The deeply politicized debate highlighted the stakes at play in European integration and the driving forces of differentiated integration. Drawing on a comprehensive discursive dataset of parliamentary debates and media articles, this study identifies four dominant discourses in the public debate of: national identity, national sovereignty, functional pressures, and Euroscepticism. The findings display how political actors framed EU integration as either a rational necessity or a threat to national autonomy, with references to identity-based concerns proving highly salient in a context marked by the then ongoing refugee crisis. This thesis concludes that emotional and context driven narratives are key to understanding public resistance against EU integration and the broader dynamics of differentiated integration.

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1.0 Introduction

European integration has always carried political implications, but in recent decades, it has become increasingly shaped by domestic politicization. While functional pressures have pushed member states toward cooperation in areas such as justice, security, and the economy, deeper integration has faced growing resistance from domestic audiences. Postfunctionalist theory offers a strong framework for explaining this dynamic, arguing that politicization and identity limits the scope of the supranational authority, especially when integration infringes upon core policy areas such as asylum, security and sovereignty.

This tension between functional benefits of integration and identity-driven resistance raises an important question: Why do member states resist integration in areas where cooperation appears more practical or necessary? And more specifically how does this tension manifest within the political and public discourse during moments of contestation? This thesis addresses these questions through the lens of postfunctionalist theory and applies critical discourse analysis to examine how political actors frame integration efforts in the public debate.

To effectively explore this dynamic, the case of the 2015 referendum on Justice and Home Affairs in Denmark, in which voters rejected the Danish governments proposed legal changes that would be required for continued full participation in Europol. Despite the clear functional benefits of continuing Denmark's membership, Danish voters decided to preserve the country's opt-out and thus leaving Europol. This case provides an interesting opportunity to investigate how national identity, sovereignty and Euroscepticism were mobilized in the public debate, ultimately shaping the outcome of the referendum.

Analysing the parliamentary debate and the media discourse, this thesis demonstrates which discursive framings causes differentiated integration, and how political narratives and public emotions can surpass rationale and pragmatism in the public contestation. In doing so, this paper contributes to the research on politicization and identity in context of EU referendums, while offering new insights into how discourse operates as a reflection and driver of postfunctionalist dynamics. This thesis argues that discourses of national identity and sovereignty played a decisive role in shaping public resistance to further integration in the 2015 Danish JHA referendum. The study demonstrates how these discourses framed the opt-out not only as a legal mechanism, but as a defence of national identity.

1.1 Research question

How do political discourses of identity and sovereignty shape public resistance to European integration in the context of differentiated integration?

This research question allows me to utilize postfunctionalist theory to explore how identity and policy intersect and shape Denmark's relationship with Europol. The key to answering this research question will be through a critical discourse analysis to examine these dynamics and the meanings, narratives and identity constructions present in the public debate.

1.2 Structure of Paper

This paper will be divided into multiple chapters. The first chapter is the introduction of the goals of this thesis as well as the literature review. The second chapter is explaining and operationalizing postfunctionalist theory. The third chapter is my methodology, where critical discourse analysis is introduced as well as my discursive data and my analytical strategy. Chapter four presents the analysis, applying the theoretical and methodological frameworks to the empirical material. In the end this paper will contain a short chapter discussing my findings and my conclusions from these.

1.3 Literature Review

This literature review explores the existing research on Denmark's differentiated integration, through the lens of postfunctionalism. It engages with core dynamics of functional pressures, politicization, and identity-driven resistance in the context of European integration. It also contains a brief overview of works on the 2015 Danish referendum, highlighting how public discourse and political narratives shaped voter perceptions. The aim is to situate this thesis within the existing research while contributing to new understandings, particularly addressing the limited attention to discourse as a mechanism shaping integration efforts in the contemporary EU.

A key debate in the literature concerns the nature of the opt-outs in the EU. Whether they represent rejecting European integration or a temporary roadblock in the continued deepening integration. Therefore, the concept of differentiated integration was introduced to understand this dynamic. Some scholars argue that opt-outs are a permanent divergence in policy making, while others argue that formal opt-outs are often accompanied by parallel agreements to ensure informal integration. This tension forms the conceptual backdrop for key contributions from scholars like Schimmelfennig, Migliorati, and others discussed below.

Postfunctionalist theory is central to this thesis, emphasizing the shift from elite-driven integration to identity-based resistance crucial for halting the deepening integration processes. The conflict between functional integration, institutional shortcomings and the identity-based politicization is emphasized in postfunctionalist theory. This theory is essential for my understanding of Danish historical resistance to EU integration and the work by Hooghe and Marks is crucial for my comprehension of postfunctionalist theory. To this extent the concepts of differential integration and the case of Denmark is crucial. Differential integration as outlined by Schimmelfenig et al. view this as a strategic tool used by EU policymakers to ensure that policies become adapted at large by member states. They also use the two concepts of vertical and horizontal integration to explain the differences between the levels of integration within the EU.

A fundamental work in creating the concept of differentiated integration is the article by Frank Schimmelfenig, Dirk Leuffen and Berthold Rittberger, *The European Union as a system of differentiated integration: interdependence, politicization and differentiation* (2015). In this article the authors outline the growing tendency of differentiated integration in the EU. They find differentiated integration to be a defining feature of the EU, since member states are constantly shaped by the dual forces of interdependence and politicization. Functional forces create interdependence and this in turn creates the need for broad cooperation on areas of security, law and economy, thus encouraging integration. Conversely, politicization constrains integration, because when EU policy encroaches on sensitive subjects like national autonomy and national identity, triggering domestic resistance in the member states limiting member state willingness to transfer power to supranational institutions. Schimmelfennig et al. conceptualize DI as the product of this tension, manifesting in two forms, vertical and horizontal. Vertical differentiation is when policy varies across sectors in the member states and horizontal differentiation is where integration differs among member states, often through opt-outs. Therefore, this article argues that differentiated integration is not an EU failure in unity, but instead an important strategic adaptation in the Union, enabling continued integration in the face of political adversity.

This article also provides a conceptual foundation for Migliorati's work, which further develops these ideas. Marta Migliorati's article, *Postfunctional Differentiation, Functional Reintegration: The Danish Case in Justice and Home Affairs* (2022), is an article that looks at the concept of differentiated integration and functional reintegration, a central idea in postfunctional EU studies. The article explains how EU member states are selective in their integration within the Union. Traditionally, this concept would assume that opt-outs create lasting divergence and increase

national autonomy. But, Migliorati challenges this notion, instead, she argues that while postfunctional pressures drive formal divergence, functional pressures push states back towards practical integration.

Using the case of Denmark and the opt-outs from the JHA, she argues that while Danish voters rejected deeper integration with the EU, functional pressures made Denmark closely align with the EU through informal and parallel agreements. This reflects Denmark's functional dependency on the EU, despite public pushbacks, functionally speaking, Denmark remains part of EU institutions such as Europol to maintain effective cooperation.

While Migliorati traces the institutional developments that allow Denmark to functionally reintegrate despite formal opt-outs, this thesis shifts the focus toward the discursive mechanisms underpinning such developments. Rather than emphasizing causal sequences at the policy level, I examine how political discourse constructs the meaning of sovereignty, cooperation, and differentiation in the Danish context.

Politicization also explained by Schimmelfenig et al. is another crucial concept for this paper. Politicization refers to the process through which EU-related issues become contested and publicly salient, turning previously technical matters into subjects of political debate. The focus with this is to explain why EU policymakers often seek to depoliticize sensitive issues, due to how politicization limits integration in postfunctionalist theory. This is especially true for areas of sovereignty, immigration and security where countries such as Denmark historically demonstrated strong resistance to deeper integration.

Discourse and identity are central analytical concepts in this thesis. Discourse analysis enables this thesis to examine the case of Denmark and its identity in the context of the EU. Discourse brings the underlying meanings of identity to the front and shapes not just opinion but what is legitimate and not legitimate political stances. These narratives of identity are often in a Danish context polarized with a European identity and the European identity as a threat to a Danish one. This framing is mirrored by Hooghe and Marks; "*Public responses to Europe are refracted through national institutions and patterns of discourse that reflect distinct historical trajectories.*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14). This thesis builds on these works by examining how discourse mediates the balance between functional reintegration and differentiation, particularly in the case of Denmark's cooperation with Europol.

To uncover how these identity narratives are constructed and politicized, this thesis applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the framework developed by Norman Fairclough in his book *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2010). This book is a collection of Fairclough and other's articles on discourse analysis. Fairclough himself is a pioneer within CDA and has hugely influenced the development of CDA, his work on connecting power structures and ideology to discourse, is central to this thesis. CDA is also well established within EU studies, for example as used in the 2024 article *Rebalance power and strengthen farmers' position in the EU food system? A CDA of the Farm to Fork Strategy* by Omar Aziz and Martin Hvarregaard Thorsøe, where they used CDA to understand how certain discourses in the Farm to Fork strategy are emphasised while others are overlooked. Therefore, the usage of CDA in this paper will like Aziz and Thorsøe, use CDA as framework to understand how power structures, identity and discourse interacts to create powerful narratives. While Fairclough's concepts will be expanded later in the methodology chapter, its inclusion in this thesis is grounded in its compatibility with postfunctionalism and its proven capacity to uncover power structures within political contestation.

1.3.1 Research on the 2015 JHA Referendum in Denmark

Several researchers have engaged with the 2015 Danish Justice and Home Affairs referendum and made contributions to what they believe influenced the results of the referendum. After the result of the 2015 referendum was clear Catharina Sørensen, then vice-director in the think-tank Europa, wrote a commentary on the result. In this she commented on the belief that Danish voters rejected the referendum due to the public's belief that "*national sovereignty and European cooperation is a zero-sum game*" (Sørensen, 2015). Sørensen goes on to state that the refugee crisis was an unexpected factor that made Danish voters change their minds on European cooperation and the government's efforts to appease voters was never trusted by the public. Another central argument in this commentary is the two separate languages deployed by the two sides also impacted the results. The no side focused on the emotional discussion about sovereignty while the yes side focused on the technical benefits of cooperating. She ends the commentary with the statement that Danish voters were in effect generally positive towards the EU and had high support for membership, but the referendum activated latent discussion about national sovereignty.

Another point of entry to this case, is the chapter by Derek Beach in the book *The Shifting Will of the People: The Case of EU Referendums* (2021). In this chapter Beach uses two cases of

Danish voters rejecting a referendum on EU integration, the 1992 Maastricht treaty and the 2015 Justice and Home Affairs referendums. Beach discusses the differing factors involved in rejecting these referendums. In 1992 Beach finds that the issue of national sovereignty was the most important factor in rejecting the referendum but also that the disjointed effort from the yes-side made the yes-side lose the public confidence in what the Maastricht treaty would mean for Danish sovereignty. He also contends the argument that this referendum was impacted by second order factors, which means that voters did not vote on the treaty but instead it was to reject the government ambitions. Beach instead finds that Danish voters were favourable to then Prime Minister Schlüter's government and his government's popularity rose in the following year. Therefore, Beach insists on the referendum being too divisive with the Danish public and thus it rejected it, fearing the loss of national sovereignty by voting yes.

This leads to Beach second part about the 2015 referendum. Beach's findings are that in this referendum general apathy towards the EU and voters affiliated with the large Eurosceptic parties was the largest influences on the referendum's result. But he also highlights that a general dissatisfaction with Løkke's government also impacted voters in the referendum. As such Beach finds a connection between second order factors and the 2015 referendum, but the largest vote influencing factor was distrust in the EU and voter affiliation, this fits well with this paper, as the discourse and identity then becomes important to delve deeper into how these forces become visible through discursive moments.

2.0 Theory

This chapter clarifies and operationalizes postfunctionalist theory, with a focus on the concepts of politicization, identity, and differentiated integration. It examines how politicization has influenced Danish discourse and shaped the framing of Denmark's position within the EU, highlighting the key discursive moments that emerged through public contestation.

The core of postfunctional theory differs from the two other primary EU integration theories of liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism. Postfunctionalist theory focuses on the forces of domestic politicization, identity and public opinion in relation to European integration. While the earlier theories looked at elite driven integration and realist interpretations of why member states surrender power to the EU, postfunctionalist examine why countries struggle to integrate (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). Hooghe and Marks argue that before mass media and

social media, the elites were largely able to push for integration and transferring sovereignty without public interference. However, with the rise of mass and social media, the public has gained greater access to critical voices and become more involved in the integration process, limiting the autonomy and power of the elites (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14).

Postfunctionalist theory argues that when EU policies target core state powers, public backlash becomes a key obstacle to further integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 13). Thus, connecting EU policymaking to domestic political conflicts, as this becomes one of many policy areas where domestic debates can be fought. As such, the theory views domestic political debates as a constant force in reshaping the EU. Postfunctionalist especially focuses on the concept of identity in shaping EU integration, this view is impacted by the nature of governance.

Governance is perceived in postfunctionalist theory as having two key functions, to give collective benefits by coordinating activities, but also to express the community's opinions. The latter becomes problematic in the context of surrendering authority, as the communities are often unwilling to surrender decision making process to external actors. While postfunctionalist theory views the demands for integration and the solutions that intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalist theory put forward as legitimate, the outcome of these desires and needs is challenged. Postfunctional theory says that every EU integration effort is shaped by domestic political conflict. That is the final decisive force in the trajectory of European integration. The forces creating the need for more integration due to legislative mismatches or existing faults in the structure, does not decide the outcome, it is the level of politicization and the level of discourse in the communities (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2).

This is also one of the differences between neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism, while *“neofunctionalists believed that politicization would lead national governments towards further integration”* (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 6), driven by growing public support for centralization and the perceived welfare benefits of EU membership. This broad-based support was expected to increase governments' willingness to transfer authority to EU institutions. In contrast, postfunctionalism challenges this view by identifying politicization as a key obstacle to integration. Thus, postfunctionalist also go into new territory and engages more critical with the EU as a supranational union shaped by contestation rather than consensus. (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 6).

Another point where postfunctionalist divide themselves for earlier theories is through focusing on the EU as an important policy area for the public. Earlier theories proposed that the

public had a superficial relationship with the EU, viewing integration as a low importance issue. Hence, the belief that EU policymaking was largely considered isolated from domestic politicization. Postfunctionalist theory challenges the assumptions by highlighting how multiple attempts at a more centralized Europe have failed due to domestic competition and widespread public scepticism towards the EU. Therefore, postfunctionalist theory posits that the EU is a highly salient policy area for the domestic political arena that is emotionally charged, thus carrying the effects of politicization into effect (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 7).

Politicization occurs where key decisions are made within the domestic arenas, making the political context in which these debates unfold especially significant. This arena ranges from mass politics such as public opinions and referendums to interest group policies. It functions both as a cause and a consequence in the politicization process. The process of politicization begins with a functional mismatch which creates the reform impetus, triggering issue creation in the national parties as they respond to public opinion and interest group pressures. Political parties may attempt to control which arena this issue enters but are often constrained to the formal rules for example demanding referendums. The arena chosen after this then impacts the conflict of identity or distribution (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 8).

The growing influence of politicization on European integration is largely a result of elites losing their monopoly over the integration narrative. This has meant that Eurosceptic forces gained an increased access to the debate, thus increasingly shaping the public discourse. In relation to this, the early years of EU integration was led behind closed doors by government leaders, interest groups and EU officials. However with the increased presence of Eurosceptic actors in the public, major EU decisions now require national and party leaders to anticipate public opinion, both to secure legitimacy and to use EU issues strategically in domestic political competition. (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 9).

Postfunctionalist theory emphasises identity as the central force driving politicization in the EU. It argues that for the public, identity is the most salient concept, thus driving the debate. Therefore, identity is a factor that elites cannot ignore; the stronger an individual's attachment to an ingroup, the less likely they are to support a political jurisdiction that includes outgroups. This clash underlines the significance of politicization in EU integration. While national identities have remained relatively stable, the EU has expanded significantly in both scope and depth of integration. As a result, tensions between political elites and the public have intensified. In earlier

decades, such as the 1970s, the European project was largely peripheral to the average voter. However, major developments like the Maastricht Treaty, the introduction of the Euro, and the Schengen Agreement have brought EU integration into direct contact with core aspects of national sovereignty and identity. As a result, continued integration has increasingly been perceived as a threat to national identity, fuelling escalated public resistance and identity-based conflict. Hooghe and Marks as such understand identity as constructed and therefore affects public opinion. (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 12). As such the definition of identity being constructed politically is important for linking postfunctionalism with CDA. If identity is politically constructed, as postfunctionalism suggests, then discourse becomes a crucial site for examining how identity is shaped and mobilized.

Political entrepreneurs have capitalized on the tension between national sovereignty and supranational integration, using it to mobilize support. As European issues have become increasingly politicized in domestic debates, the exclusiveness of one's national identity impacts their views and become more likely to adopt Eurosceptic positions, particularly when political discourse frames national pride as incompatible with further EU integration. This also implies that individuals with more inclusive national identities are less influenced by the presence or strength of right-leaning parties (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 10-13).

Key to this notion is that the public is increasingly more reliant on national medias to interpret European affairs compared to the elites. This divide makes the public much more likely to frame the national vs. the EU through domestic lenses. As a result of this, European politics have evolved into a multi-level game, deeply intertwined with national political arenas. The EU is no longer isolated from domestic political struggles and domestic policies are no longer isolated from EU decisions. This interdependence has changed perceptions and framing making consensus across member states more difficult (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14).

As introduced earlier, differentiated integration is crucial for understanding contemporary EU dynamics. It refers to the EU's approach of allowing member states varying degrees of participation in policy areas. Differentiated integration arises directly from politicization and identity-driven resistance, as member states negotiate opt-outs or special arrangements when integration conflicts with national identities or sovereignty concerns. Denmark's multiples opt-outs, especially in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), vividly illustrate how identity-based politicization shapes real-world EU integration outcomes. As Migliorati points out, opting out is often a relatively low-cost strategy, particularly in treaty reforms (Migliorati, 2022, p. 1115). States like Denmark are

primarily motivated by national autonomy, and since they do not depend on the ‘club good’ of full membership, they avoid significant externalities (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2020, p. 41). Moreover, opt-outs can be politically rewarding domestically, as they preserve national sovereignty while boosting the perception of democratic legitimacy in EU decision-making.

Taking all this together, postfunctionalist pathing from a political issue to differentiated integration begins when proposals for deeper EU integration emerge. Typically, this process involves a group of integration-friendly insiders who support transferring competences to the EU level, and a group of Eurosceptic outsiders who prefer to maintain the status quo. Whether integration proceeds uniformly or becomes differentiated depends on the strength of the outsiders and the institutional setting in which the conflict plays out.

When integration proposals remain within closed elite arenas, insiders are often able to push through uniform integration. However, if the issue enters the public arena, politicization tends to rise. In these contexts, Eurosceptic outsiders can mobilize identity and sovereignty concerns to appeal to the public, who are generally more protective of national autonomy than political elites.

This politicization constrains the insiders, especially when national referendums or strong parliamentary opposition empower the outsiders. The resulting mismatch between the demand for integration and the political feasibility of achieving it leads to differentiated integration as a strategic compromise. Rather than abandoning integration altogether, insiders accept opt-outs or flexible arrangements to accommodate resistant member states (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, *Theory: The Choice for Differentiated Europe*, 2020, pp. 32-34).

2.1 Operationalization of Postfunctionalism

In this part this framework will be operationalized in the context of the Danish case, showing how these dynamics played out in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2015 Europol referendum. To this end my data will be discursive, since these sources are well suited to revealing how political actors construct national identity and frame integration in the Danish context.

In this case, politicization is expected to manifest in framing of Europol and the EU at large as a threat to Danish sovereignty. The political arena was predetermined since a change in Danish opt-outs requires being approved via referendum. This constraint reduces the elite’s control to dictate the outcome of this referendum. Therefore, Eurosceptic parties in Denmark will be able to create a narrative around this perceived threat and becomes publicly salient and divisive in the

public opinion. Identity thus also becomes crucial for comprehending Danish scepticism. This concept roots itself in a unique Danish identity and history, which is incompatible with the larger EU regulatory framework. Therefore, appeals to Danishness and national values are expected to resonate strongly with voters, particularly when framed as being under threat from supranational control.

National sovereignty is expected in this thesis to impact the way that Danish policymakers' frames EU integration. Eurosceptic actors are likely to frame this as a defence of Danish sovereignty, an act of resisting elite-driven integration and asserting Denmark's right to self-determination. In contrast, elites will frame this prioritization of national sovereignty as a short-sighted move that undermines Denmark's ability to cooperate on broader security challenges and cross-border crime. As such, national sovereignty is expected to be discursively constructed either as a national safeguard or as a barrier to effective European collaboration, depending on the actor's position in the debate.

The elite-public divide is a key aspect of postfunctionalist theory, and this thesis will examine how Danish parties and media construct this divide in the context of the referendum. This includes examining how the public's scepticism is shaped, how EU integration is communicated, and how actors attempt to frame the costs and benefits of remaining inside or outside Europol.

This leads to my expectations regarding utilizing this framework, which is that ideas of national sovereignty and the higher level of politicization impacts the Danish public's opinion of the referendum and that this has significantly impacted the Danish voter's opinion on the referendum. The findings are likely to show that identity-driven politicization played a key role in the referendum's failure.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter will be explaining my methodological considerations and rationale. I begin by justifying why the 2015 Danish referendum is important for understanding how postfunctionalist concepts appear in contemporary EU debates. This specific case is not merely unique but also filled with historical critiques of the EU that influenced Europol's institutional influence and relevance in Denmark. Following this, the historical backgrounds of Europol and Euroscepticism in Denmark will be outlined to contextualize the case, laying the groundwork for how these dynamics unfolded

in the discourse surrounding the 2015 referendum. After this, the methodological framework of Critical Discourse Analysis will be explained how it connects to both my theoretical lens and the specific features of this case. Consequently, I outline the data selection process, specifying the criteria for which texts are included, the timeframe examined, and how these choices align with the research question. Finally, the coding strategy will be explained to generate qualitative insights and conclude the chapter by reflecting on key limitations related to language and analytical scope.

3.1 Research Design & Rationale

This thesis will take a qualitative, discourse-based case study approach to examine Denmark's rejection of the 2015 referendum on Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). This approach is well suited to my paper's theoretical framework, which heavily emphasises the role of identity, politicization and political arenas in the shaping of EU integration. In this context, discourse is not only a methodological tool but the primary means through which I trace the mechanisms of politicization and the patterns that construct legitimate debates within public debate. Accordingly, this thesis applies CDA to explore these forces in a broader context of why and how Danish politicians and the Danish public discursively frame Denmark's relationship with the EU.

The choice of my methodology is guided by the research question: *How do political discourses of identity and sovereignty shape public resistance to European integration in the context of differentiated integration?* This question directs the study toward understanding how discursive constructions of national identity and sovereignty influence public opposition to EU integration, particularly in a case where formal opt-outs play a central role. While existing literature addresses the institutional, legal, or public opinion dimensions of Danish opt-outs, there is still a lack in the systematic engagement with discourse in how these constructs and shapes voters' perception of Europol.

Beyond this, my framework allows an examination of how political arenas shape public engagement with the EU, as well as how Danish institutional structures create spaces for politicization. Due to the constitutional limits any change to Danish opt-outs must go through the process of public referendums. This legal requirement determines the political arena in which integration is debated. Thus, Danish elites are forced through a process of having to legitimize changing the Danish relationship with the EU in a public setting, where they must contest with the Eurosceptic actors. This setup intensifies the elite–public divide, empowers Eurosceptic voices, and

directly influences the trajectory of Danish integration efforts. This framework sets the stage for the case study analysis, where these dynamics are explored through the lens of discourse.

3.2 Case Study Justification

This paper uses a case study approach to investigate the underlying mechanisms shaping Danish–EU relations. The case was chosen due to its close alignment with the theoretical framework of postfunctionalism, as well as the substantial availability of discursive data. Additionally, the time that has passed since the referendum allows analytical distance, allowing for a clearer assessment of its effects and its significance within Denmark’s long-standing tradition of Euroscepticism. This referendum also remains relevant to contemporary EU debates, particularly those concerning differentiated integration and national sovereignty. The referendum was triggered not by a new initiative, but by structural changes within Europol that required Denmark to renegotiate its opt-out. As such, this was not rejecting new EU policy but rather a withdrawal from an existing agreement. This dynamic makes the case especially valuable for examining how identity-driven politicization can override practical integration needs.

This thesis therefore is a single-case study design, not to create universal understandings about all EU referendums or differentiated integration, but to analyse how identity and politicization impacted this unique setting through the discourse. While case studies are often defined as “*as an intensive study of single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger “class” of similar units.*” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342), this definition does not fully align with the purpose of this study. Rather than aiming for broad generalization, the goal here is to explore how general phenomena manifest within a specific case. (Gerring, 2004, p. 345). Thus, this study will treat the 2015 Justice and Home Affairs referendum as a bounded political moment through which larger concepts of Danish Euroscepticism and identity can be critically engaged.

3.3 Case Background

This section outlines the historical development of Europol and Denmark’s relationship with the European Union. This is important to CDA as the historical background impacts the discourse, helps construct identity and narratives in relation to the EU.

3.3.1 Historical Background of Europol

The origins of Europol can be traced back to the 70s and the increased risk of domestic terrorism, especially the 1972 Munich massacre, where Palestinian terrorists infiltrated the Olympic Games and killed 11 Israeli athletes and a German policeman. This tragedy then put into motion an idea of creating a continental framework for police cooperation to enhance security against attacks like this (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 28). This caused, the Ministers of Interior and Justice from what was then known as the European Community to create a police cooperation initiative called TREVI, named after the fountain in Rome, but also being an abbreviation for *Terrorism, Radicalism, Extremism, and Violence International* in 1975. It was created as an informal cooperation where police chiefs from EC member countries met in workgroups to make counter-terrorist efforts on a European level.

Slowly, during the 80s, TREVI was granted more powers to provide police training, exchange information, and combat organized crime. In 1985, TREVI was also tasked with fighting drug related crimes, and in 1987, at a meeting in Copenhagen, EC member states gave TREVI the power to send Drug Liaison Officers to major narcotics hotspots across the globe. To coordinate these efforts, the European Council decided in 1990 to create a common narcotics intelligence unit called the European Drugs Intelligence Unit (EDIU) to better harmonize these efforts.

This early success, coupled with the growing need for greater coordination on a European level as the EU moved closer to formation, led German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to call for the creation of a European FBI or a direct European police force. His proposal aimed to make Europol treaty-bound and grant it the authority to fight narcotics and organized crime (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 29). This suggestion should be seen as a reflection of its time, the fall of the Soviet Union and ongoing technological progress made European integration efforts more appealing among political elites. Additionally, the American FBI had demonstrated success with its large crime database, and Kohl saw it necessary to establish a similar European institution to manage crime-fighting efforts at a European level. Since organized and narcotics crimes often involve cross-border operations, there was a growing need and desire for European-wide cooperation to more effectively combat them (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 30).

This German-led initiative, however, was not without its critics. Many opposed the idea, arguing that it would result in a loss of sovereignty to Brussels. As a result, member states were unwilling to surrender full control over policing powers. Instead, a compromise was reached where

TREVI would continue its work, with a gradual increase in information-sharing and cooperation, allowing for the eventual transition into Europol if the system proved effective. The EDIU, working within the TREVI framework, was tasked with leading this initiative and was assigned a small budget of 16 million DKK to organize its operations (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 31).

A year later, in 1993, at a TREVI meeting in Copenhagen, the EDIU was renamed the Europol Drugs Unit, marking the first official step toward Europol's creation. This unit continued leading cooperation and information-sharing efforts across European police forces, and in 1997, after the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty, it was agreed that the Europol Drugs Unit would be renamed once more. From 1999 onward, it became officially known as the European Police Office (Europol) (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 31).

In 1999, at a meeting in Tampere, the member states agreed to establish a five-year framework to enhance police cooperation across Europe. This included the creation of a formal cooperation platform for European Police Chiefs, designed to improve operational unity within the Union. Additionally, a European Police Academy was established, and a team of prosecutors from member states was formed to coordinate investigations and prosecutions across borders. During this period, Europol was also granted operational powers, evolving beyond a mere coordinating agency into a more proactive law enforcement body (Hjortenberg & Stevnsborg, 2022, p. 33).

Over the years, Europol's powers have continuously expanded. What began as a task force to combat cross-border narcotics crime has evolved into an agency that also addresses economic crimes, terrorism, and cybercrime. Today, Europol is an influential EU institution, holding Europe's largest criminal database and playing a critical role in coordinating policing efforts across the EU. This historical trajectory makes Denmark's rejection of deeper participation in 2015 all the more puzzling, but also central to understanding the role of identity and politicization in shaping integration outcomes.

3.3.2 Historical Context of Denmark–EU Relations

Denmark's relationship with the EU has been defined by sustained scepticism toward federalist ambitions in Brussels. The Danish public voted to join the European Community (EC) in 1973. This was a highly politicized referendum, where themes of identity and national sovereignty were first introduced and became legitimate public concerns. Denmark's accession to the EC focused primarily on practical and economic benefits for Danish industry and farmers, but proposals for

broader military cooperation were met with reluctance, as security was seen as NATO's responsibility. Accordingly, Denmark's early relationship was "*characterized by 'limited engagement', 'fragmentation' and 'pragmatism'*" (Miles & Wivel, 2013, p. 16).

The second phase of Danish EC membership was shaped by 1980s neoliberal forces and growing acceptance of a globalized economy. As a result, the Danish government became more favourable toward European integration, leading most major parties to support the Maastricht Treaty in 1991. This shift reflected Denmark's political class's growing emphasis on securing economic benefits through deeper integration and increasing its political influence within the EU framework. This momentum came to an abrupt halt when Danish voters narrowly rejected the Maastricht Treaty in a 1992 referendum, shocking the political establishment and revealing that pro-EU forces lacked sufficient public support for deeper integration. The rejection triggered political confusion and led to a compromise with Eurosceptic parties to ensure continued Danish membership in the EU, resulting in the adoption of the four opt-outs. This in turn also had to be accepted by the other member states, which they did in late 1992. A second referendum, now including the opt-outs, was held and passed with a 56.7% majority (Miles & Wivel, 2013, p. 18). One of these opt-outs was from the Justice and Home Affairs and that "*Denmark only participates in EU judicial cooperation at an intergovernmental level*" (Miles & Wivel, 2013, p. 18) and by extension Europol. This history highlights the enduring tension between functional cooperation and sovereignty concerns that defines Denmark's EU engagement, a tension that came to a head in the 2015 Europol referendum.

This tension also reflects ideas of Danish exceptionalism, with much of the public viewing Denmark as a small power with a superior societal model. This means that the Danish public understands the needs for the EU framework as Denmark is not strong enough to stand on its own while also believing that the Danish model should not be infringed upon by EU policy makers. As such Denmark attempts to balance the functional desires of an economic union while defending its autonomy against deeper political integration (Wivel, 2019).

3.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

My thesis draws on Norman Fairclough's interpretation of CDA, particularly its relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary dimensions. The concept of relational means that the primary focus is not on entities or individuals, but on social relations. Discourse, therefore, is not treated as a fixed

object, but as a web of complex relations that may take concrete forms, such as articles and conversations, or more abstract forms like language, genres, and discursive structures. These discursive forms are embedded in broader power structures, identities, and institutions, making it difficult to define discourse independently of the social forces surrounding it (Fairclough, 2010, p. 3).

Fairclough also views discourse as dialectic, meaning it exists in a dynamic relationship with other social forces such as power and institutions. These forces are deeply intertwined, and discourse cannot be fully understood without also considering the broader structures in which it operates. While power extends beyond discourse through mechanisms such as law, coercion, and institutional control, it also relies on discourse for legitimation. Therefore, CDA does not limit itself to the internal features of language but instead examines how discourse is embedded in, and contributes to, the reproduction of social structures (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4). Crucially, this explains the intersection of politics and discourse. The way Danish politicians and journalists frame specific arguments is inherently tied to broader social forces; no argument exists in a vacuum, it is always connected to something else. In this way, CDA is not merely linguistic, but transdisciplinary. Fairclough also explains his realist views, there is a real world, and that world exists independently of people's interpretations, but the way discourse is used on this world shapes the social reality. As such, there is a natural world and a social world, this world is created through discourse and depends on human action to construct it (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 4-5).

CDA, consequently, focuses on discourse not in isolation but its relation to other elements. This means that the subject of research could be the emergence of competing discursive strategies such as those used to overcome a political or social crisis (Fairclough, 2010, p. 5). This is important for this paper, the discursive strategies deployed during the 2015 referendum are central to understanding how the outcome was shaped and the subsequent failure. The third core principle, transdisciplinary, means that researchers must connect CDA to other theoretical frameworks, such as postfunctionalism. However, this also requires the researcher to translate abstract concepts into concrete categories of analysis. The aim is to examine how discourse and power interact dialectically without collapsing one into the other. In other words, the goal is to articulate how these forces relate, influence, and shape each other in context. This framework allows the researcher to explore complex political and discursive phenomena (Fairclough, 2010, p. 5).

In CDA, the analysis of an event or case necessarily includes the analysis of text. In principle, this means recontextualizing the case within a CDA framework, while also ensuring the case is adapted to fit within the boundaries of CDA's core principles. Fairclough approaches this through a dual-method model of textual analysis. The first component is interdiscursive analysis, which examines how different genres and styles of discourse are drawn upon and articulated together. The second is linguistic analysis, which focuses on the concrete words and language used in the discursive material. Together, these methods link textual and social analysis, allowing the researcher to trace how language interacts with political and institutional dynamics (Fairclough, 2010, p. 7).

The critical dimension of CDA focuses on identifying what is “*wrong*” in a society and how these wrongs might be “*righted*”. This stems from the idea that all societies hold normative visions of how they believe things ought to be. That said people have different views, and this difference creates divergence in the ideals and the practice of a society. CDA evaluates this process and interacts with it to understand this process. Fairclough defines this critical approach into two different critiques: “*We can distinguish between negative critique, which is analysis of how societies produce and perpetuate social wrongs, and positive critique, which is analysis of how people seek to remedy or mitigate them, and identification of further possibilities for righting or mitigating them.*” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 7). While this framework is less directly applicable to my case, it still provides a useful lens. In the context of the 2015 referendum “*wrongs*” will be viewed as something that is constructed in the debate, how Eurosceptic actors and elites frame the wrongs with Danish-EU relations and the rights needed by the public is differing and how this manifest itself in the debate is of interest for this paper. While Fairclough's critique framework offers insight into how social wrongs are contested, CDA's broader analytical strength lies in its ability to expose how language itself reinforces or challenges structures of power.

CDA involves analysing how discourse contributes to perpetuate societal inequalities and power structures, while also revealing alternative ways of understanding these inequalities. It acknowledges that society is already saturated with differing interpretations from everyday actors, politicians, and researchers alike. Engaging with CDA therefore means exposing how language maintains power and influences which representations become seen as legitimate or illegitimate. Through this lens, CDA helps to identify which arguments or discourse is led by an ideological framework, allowing for critical engagement, due to CDA's focus on what and how arguments are

created (Fairclough, 2010, p. 9). Building on this, Fairclough views discourse as a space where social action is a product. Human discourse is created through available linguistic and discursive narratives, meaning that discourse both shapes the world but is simultaneously shaped by it. Therefore, CDA must analyse how these are dialectically connected to wider social structures and practices, rather than treating them as isolated linguistic objects (Fairclough, 2010, pp. 9-10).

This thesis is also inspired by the framework developed by Cummings et al. (2020), who outline the strengths of a CDA analysis. They argue that CDA enables researchers to systematically uncover the underlying biases and assumptions in policy documents, while also being inherently critical of all discourse, which means that all discourse and interpretations are elements that can be studied (Cummings, Haan, & Seferiadis, 2020, p. 100).

The framework applied in this paper consists of four phases. First involves selecting a research topic and providing an overview of previous discourses (Cummings, Haan, & Seferiadis, 2020, pp. 103-104). In my case, I wanted to understand how discourse influenced Danish voters leading up to the 2015 referendum. Since little prior work exists on this specific debate, I have been forced to start this process from the start and from the literature I can conclude that the concepts of identity, Euroscepticism, politicization and national sovereignty were all important themes in the factor influencing the outcome.

The second phase is selecting and analysing texts. This involves choosing the appropriate text for my research question, after this the text will be analysed. Firstly, the words themselves, then how they relate to each other and finally how these fit within my themes (Cummings, Haan, & Seferiadis, 2020, pp. 104-105). The third phase focuses on contextualizing the discourse and understanding the social, political, and historical environment in which these discursive moments emerged. This context is essential for unpacking why certain narratives gained traction. The final phase is acknowledging and reflecting on how this paper will challenge or impact the discourse surrounding the 2015 referendum on Justice and Home Affairs (Cummings, Haan, & Seferiadis, 2020, pp. 105-106).

Beyond institutional structures, the media also plays a critical role in framing discourse and legitimizing certain narratives. Media coverage often reflects or exposes the interests of those in power. This means that the framing and focus of the media is also important to create a fuller picture of what constitutes legitimate arguments (Sabido, 2019, p. 25). If the media amplifies

Eurosceptic framing, public trust in the government may erode. Conversely, ignoring these voices risks reducing public interest and engagement, causing voters to default to party lines rather than informed positions.

The justification for using CDA is due to its importance in the relational and dialectic importance of discourse. It enables deeper engagement with discursive data and allows for nuanced interpretation. While CDA often aims to critique power structures, that is not the main objective here. Rather, this thesis uses CDA to highlight how those structures manifest discursively in debates about identity, national sovereignty, and EU cooperation. Ultimately, CDA also acknowledges that society is already saturated with competing discourses and interpretations, thus it offers tools to critically engage with these interpretations.

This fits with my goals as understanding these competing discourses is what this paper will be doing. Lastly CDA also operationalizes my theoretical framework as CDA gives me a consistent methodological toolkit that makes abstract theoretical concepts observable in the discourse. Hence, CDA provides the bridge between the textual analysis and the broader implications of Danish-EU relations. This context is important for understanding why Europol as an institution was impacted by the politicization in the Danish debate.

3.5 Coding Strategy

To analyse the selected discourse data, this thesis will be applying a single-cycle coding strategy grounded in the principles of CDA and guided by the theoretical concepts from postfunctionalism. Given the focused approach of this paper, a single-cycle coding is sufficient to generate key analytical points and dissect discursive patterns while remaining aligned to the research question. The purpose of coding is not to generate emergent themes inductively but to apply the frameworks deductive coding strategy that reflects the theoretical categories central to postfunctionalism, specifically: identity, national sovereignty, politicization, and functional pressures.

Single-cycle coding means the data will be coded once, based on predetermined categories informed by the theoretical framework (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, pp. 264-265). While first-cycle coding often begins with broader descriptive codes, this paper bypasses that step by directly applying refined, theory-based categories. As such, the coding process becomes an exercise in

theoretical coding, targeting discursive patterns relevant to the study's central concepts and analytical focus (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 266).

Coding has often been criticised for being subjective in nature, since the researcher decides how to code the segment of data into which theme. This is both a drawback of coding, however, this limitation is balanced by the analytical depth that coding enables, particularly when it is transparently guided by a well-defined framework (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 267). Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the interpretive nature of this process and reflect on the rationale behind coding decisions.

The rationale for using these broad, theory-driven codes is twofold: first, to establish a clear link between the discourse data and the analytical framework, and second, to ensure methodological cohesion between postfunctionalism and CDA. As CDA focuses on power, identity, and discursive construction, this coding process becomes the point of activation where theory meets text. My approach to my coding will be critical and utilizing context to gain insights into the underlying meanings will enhance the understanding gained from the codes. It ensures that the analysis remains connected to the research question and avoids methodological fragmentation.

My themes for coding will be outlined in the following table:

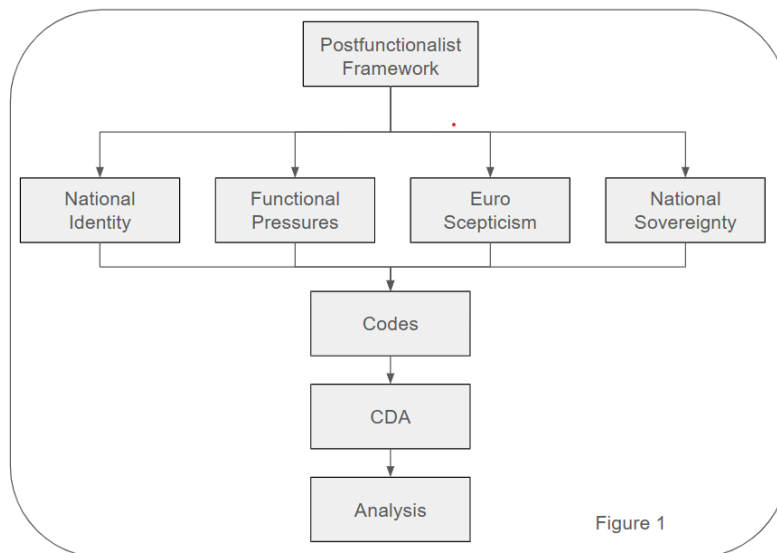
Codes	Description
National Identity	Refers to Denmark's unique cultural values or institutional traditions
Functional Pressures	Refers to practical needs for EU cooperation, such as cross-border policing or crime prevention.
National Sovereignty	Refers to defending Danish autonomy
Euroscepticism	Refers to critiquing EU authority, integration, or legitimacy

These themes will guide the coding process and allow for a focused exploration of how political identity and sovereignty are constructed in response to EU integration, especially during the 2015 referendum campaign.

3.6 Analytical Strategy

The analytical strategy is rooted in CDA, emphasizing how identity, Euroscepticism, sovereignty, and functional pressures are discursively constructed in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2015 referendum. The unit of analysis consists of selected discourse excerpts that being parliamentary debates and media commentary that reference the referendum.

NVivo will be used to manage and code the data. Its primary function is helping to structure and navigate the discursive material. A graphical overview of the coding structure (see Figure 1) is included to illustrate the relationship between theoretical categories and the coded data. This figure demonstrates how the theoretical framework has been operationalized and provides a roadmap for the analysis that follows.



The CDA-based analysis will then examine how Danish political and media actors framed identity, sovereignty, and EU cooperation across different arenas. Exploring how power, legitimacy, and meaning were constructed, contested, and circulated in the public debate.

3.7 Data Selection

The data for this thesis consists of parliamentary debates and media articles, where key actors engaged in shaping the public discourse surrounding the 2015 referendum. This is due to postfunctionalist focus on elites and the non-elites, this also allows this paper to focus on a specific political arena where the concepts from postfunctionalism become concrete and impacts the debate.

Hence, the importance of utilizing the texts, this also mean that these actors are actively involved in the debate and the outcome of it and as such their discourse will contain more interpretations about the rights and wrongs about Danish membership in Europol.

The data's focus is on the lead-up to the 2015 referendum, specifically between October and December 2015. This period captures the peak of the public and parliamentary debate, including speeches from all major parties and commentary in national media outlets. This timeframe provides a concentrated view of how identity, national sovereignty, and Euroscepticism were constructed and contested in the public sphere.

The parliamentary material is sourced from the Folketing's website, where parliamentary debates are all transcribed and uploaded, this means that I have a large database to collect discursive material from. This provides a comprehensive dataset featuring politicians across the political spectrum, including both pro-integration elites and Eurosceptic actors. Special attention is given to how different parties, from the far left to the far right, framed the referendum, often advocating for the same outcome but with distinct narratives and ideological motivations.

Additionally, the media outlets of TV2 and Altinget will be used for their coverage of the 2015 referendum and their quotations from politicians. TV2, while mainstream, has a more commercial edge and leans toward broader appeal, which helps show how the referendum was framed for a more general audience. Then there's Altinget, the elite outlet, which dives into detailed political analysis and caters to a higher educated audience.

Together, these two media sources offer a broader view of the debate, from commercial mainstream to elite commentary. This mix captures Fairclough's idea of interdiscursive variation and makes it possible to see how different corners of the media shaped or challenged the dominant narratives around EU integration and Danish sovereignty.

By combining these sources, my thesis captures how the referendum was framed in both formal political spaces and public-facing narratives. This selection aligns with the research question's focus on how political discourses of identity and sovereignty shaped public resistance to EU integration.

3.8 Limitations of This Paper

Finally, before the analysis chapter begins it is important to set the scope and limits of this paper. Firstly, it is crucial to highlight that this paper's data was created in Danish, as this thesis is written in English, the material has been translated by me. While care has been taken to ensure that accuracy and meaning is properly translated, one must acknowledge that translation is an interpretive action. Another, paper or researcher may create different translations for this data, this introduces the risk of possible variation and nuance in the discourse analysis. Second to this, as this paper is rooted in a deductive discourse analysis, the research is shaped by its relationship with the theoretical framework. This use means that the coding and interpretation of it becomes oriented towards identifying themes that the theory create. As such, other potential meanings and patterns risk being overlooked due to this theoretical focus. However, this risk becomes deliberate since, the aim of this thesis is not to explore all possible narratives, but to understand how identity, sovereignty, Eurosceptics, and politicization are framed within the logic of postfunctionalist dynamics.

This also means that I might have some interpretive biases in my translations or even in my data collection, I am actively using data that my theoretical framework is created to explain but as such certain other interpretations might not come forth due to my interpretive focus on my coded themes. Finally, I have mentioned this earlier in the paper, but due to the special case of Denmark's participation in Europol, this paper will not be trying to generalize this to other cases, this case has some discursive moments and context's which are shared with other referendums and debates in Denmark's relationship with the EU, but this case remains very specific and as such there is limited use in trying to broaden the impacts of this.

Finally, as mentioned earlier while some discursive themes identified here may connect to broader EU-related debates in other cases, this study does not seek to generalize its findings beyond the specific case of Denmark's relationship with Europol and the 2015 referendum. Because of the unique political environment and legal constraints in Denmark that created the need for a referendum, it would be unfit to treat these findings as universally applicable. That said, the analysis might still offer useful takeaways for other cases dealing with identity, sovereignty, and contested EU integration are in effect.

4.0 Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical analysis of the discursive material collected in connection with the 2015 referendum on Justice and Home Affairs in Denmark. Guided by postfunctionalist theory and operationalized through CDA, the analysis will investigate how national identity, sovereignty, functional pressures, and Euroscepticism were constructed and contested in political and media discourse.

4.0.1 Context of the Referendum

To understand the referendum's discursive dynamics, it's essential to outline the events that led up to the vote. On 17 of March 2015, then Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt reached an agreement with the other parties to submit a referendum on opting into 22 existing legal cooperation measures (EU Information Centre, 2021). If passed, this would mean that the Danish opt-out from the Justice and Home Affairs would become a case by case opt-in agreement (Jacobsen, 2015). The motivation behind this move was in order to secure continued Danish membership in Europol, which, under the Lisbon Treaty, was transitioning into a supranational agency, as such, Denmark would be excluded due to its opt-out (Heron, 2024).

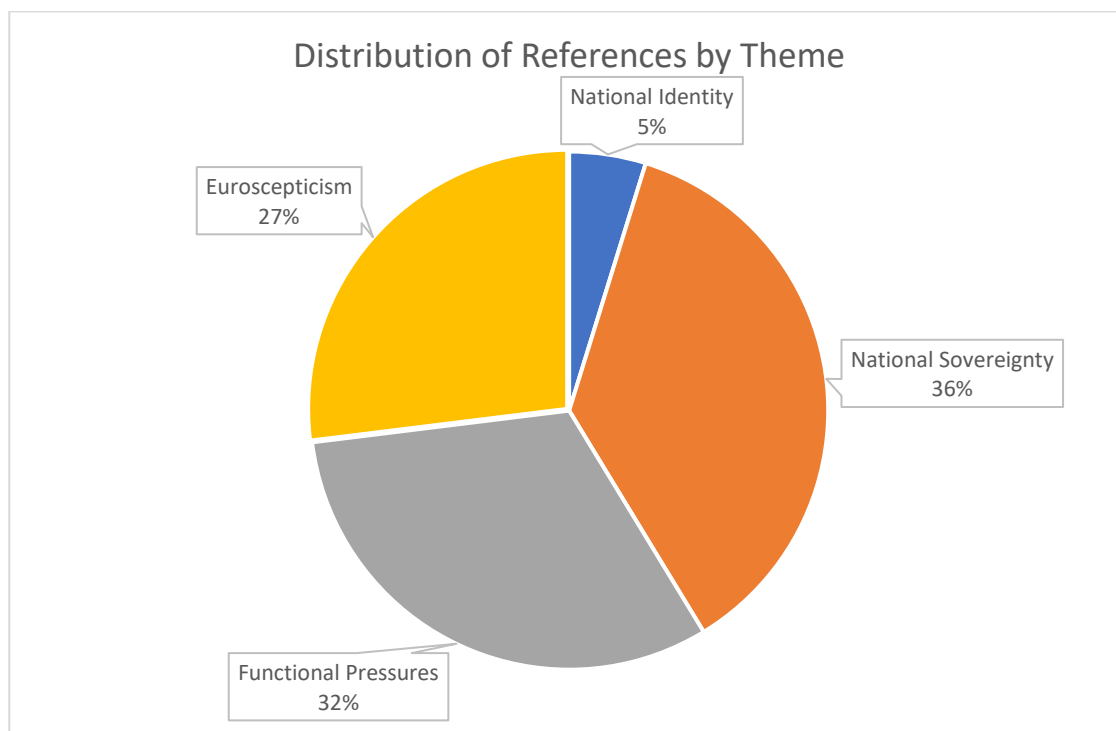
Following the summer 2015 general election and a change in political leadership, new Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen confirmed on 21 August that the referendum would be held on 3 December 2015. Rasmussen, leading the pro-EU camp, faced heavy resistance from Eurosceptic parties, particularly around fears tied to the EU's common asylum and immigration policy, which Denmark remained outside of due to the opt-out. If the yes vote passed, constitutional safeguards would be removed, allowing Parliament to alter Denmark's position on issues such as the common asylum and immigration policy without a referendum or a 5/6 parliamentary majority. Rasmussen attempted to please the sceptics by promising that any future participation in the EU's common asylum and immigration policy would mean a new referendum, but this promise was without any legal binding procedure and thus was dismissed by the opposition (Beach, 2021, pp. 547-548).

At the same time, the civil war in Syria triggered a major refugee wave across Europe. These refugees caused what is now known as the 2015 refugee crisis. The Syrian refugees arrived in Denmark on the 6th of September and immediately divided the public and shaped the discourse (Nexø, 2019). Public sentiment quickly polarized, while some of the public and political establishment emphasized humanitarian responsibility, others fixated on fears of border insecurity,

cultural erosion, and the EU's perceived failure to respond cohesively. These anxieties fed directly into the referendum debate, making sovereignty and EU responsiveness central points of contention.

While the legal question on paper was simple, the broader context made it highly charged. On 3 December, 53.1% of voters rejected the proposal. This outcome caused the Danish parliament to scramble to create an agreement with the EU to allow for continued Danish access to Europol databases (Heron, 2024). The result from the referendum meant that Denmark had to leave Europol as a member state and become a third-party country. A deal was reached with the EU, and it became ratified in 2017. This new agreement meant that Europol would still be allowed to share information with the Danish police, but this has also meant that Denmark would be standing outside of the internal decision makings in Europol as well as much of the internal cross police cooperation led by Europol Denmark would not be able to join in (Lauritzen, 2023).

Lastly before delving into the thematic analysis, the following figure provides an overview of the distribution of codes across the data set. The chart reflects how frequently each theme appeared in the parliamentary and media discourse surrounding the 2015 referendum. As shown, national sovereignty emerged as the most dominant theme, accounting for over a third of all coded references, followed by functional pressures, Euroscepticism and national identity.



4.1 National Identity

As mentioned earlier, the theme of national identity is used to code for references to a unique or special Danish identity, this constitutes norms and values but also institutional distinctness.

In the parliamentary debate from the 12th of November, Pelle Dragsted from the Red-Green Alliance states:

"There is just a really big leap from that to saying: Now we're making decisions about something as central as the relationship between the state and the citizen—that is, the state's ability to use coercive measures against the citizen, which is what the justice area involves; it's the most central of all political domains—and saying that we should hand over that power to a table where we have to accept the outcome. And I'm not saying that the other countries are backward, I'm just saying that we have countries, for example, with a strong Catholic tradition, who view things like sexuality, gender, and many other issues very differently. And I am concerned about what that could mean in the long term for our ability to organize society in the way Danes want it." (Folketinget, 16. Møde, 2015)

In this quote, the construction of a distinct Danish identity is clear. Dragsted sees this referendum as not merely a political decision, but as a threat to national identity. He argues that the loss of national autonomy to the EU, risks undermining Danish norms and values. Moreover, Dragsted highlights cultural differences, particularly regarding sexuality and gender, where Denmark's progressive stance contrast those with strong Catholic traditions. As such, a yes in the referendum will mean that this uniqueness will be diluted by other member states. Although Dragsted avoids explicitly labelling these other member states as backward, his framing implies a fundamental incompatibility with more conservative states. A no vote, in this context, is positioned as a way for the Danish public to protect their unique cultural identity from EU overreach.

This distinction aligns with postfunctionalist theory, which argues that the more distinct a national identity is, the more resistant it is to deeper integration, particularly when core identity issues are at stake. The stronger the in-group, the greater it rejects the perceived out-group. Dragsted in this sense, creates the distinction between “us” (Denmark) and “them” (the EU), framing the referendum as a choice between protecting Danish values or submitting to the homogenising EU. Through this lens, he mobilizes the latent public identity-based anxieties to

legitimize the resistance to the EU framework and reinforcing public animosity towards supranational cooperation.

Dragsted also underlines the distinct legal traditions of Denmark, arguing that this referendum would transfer power away from Danish citizens and surrendering it to a body where Denmark must passively accept outcomes. This frames Denmark as a nation of distinct institutional that risk being diluted through deeper EU integration. The opt-outs are portrayed as a protective mechanism that can Denmark from institutional overreach by more conservative EU member states. For Dragsted, surrendering Denmark's opt-out, would mean the loss of Danish institutional distinctness and with it, national identity. Dragsted views the Danish institutional independence as something that should not be infringed upon due to it being central for all political domains, thus by the act of rejecting the referendum, Danish citizens can defend their national identity.

Through this, Dragsted's discourse exemplifies how meaning is not just shaped by language but is also dependent on broader cultural and institutional contexts. His emotionally charged phrases, such as "*coercive measures*" and "*hand over that power*", underscores the perceived threat that the EU is posing to fundamental Danish norms. At the same time, he taps into deeper historical narrative in referencing the distinction between the conservative Catholics and the progressive protestants. Within the context of the referendum, Dragsted's framing draws on broader cultural anxieties of losing control over Danish identity. In this way, Dragsted's discourse not only reflects public anxiety but actively reproduces and legitimizes the idea that Danish identity must be safeguarded through institutional distance from the EU.

In another parliamentary meeting from the 20th of October, Pernille Skipper, also from the Red-Green Alliance posed a rhetorical question to the Social Liberals:

"How do the Social Liberals view the prospects for future legislation when you consider that countries like Poland, Ireland, and Malta ban abortion, that only a minority of EU countries have legalized same-sex marriage, and that we have countries like Lithuania that ban so-called homosexual propaganda? Isn't it concerning that they will also have influence over parts of our very progressive legislation in Denmark?" (Folketinget, 2015)

As with Dragsted's framing, Skipper constructs a clear distinction between "*us*" and "*them*". However, unlike Dragsted's broader reference to Catholic Europe, Skipper emphasizes specific countries such as Poland, Ireland, Malta and Lithuania. This gives the threat a more immediate and

tangible distinction to the Danish identity. She also uses value-laden phrases such as “*ban abortion*” and “*very progressive legislation in Denmark*” establishing a moral contrast between Denmark’s liberal values and the perceived conservatism of other member states. This rhetorical framing utilizes the public’s feelings of fear by suggesting that a yes in the referendum, will allow these countries to influence core identity related issues in Denmark. Additionally, Skipper also specifically by addressing the Social Liberals with the rhetorical question, she creates a distinction between the two parties, the Red-Green Alliance, as the protector of Danish values and the Social Liberals as the party that wishes to surrender to the homogenising EU.

Skipper further politicizes core identity issues, especially those related to abortion and sexuality. She presents these as distinctive identity markers of Danish identity and frames them as being under threat by this referendum. In her views, these issues are symbolic of a broader clash between the Danish identity and rest of the member states. By rejecting the referendum, the Danish public protects these cornerstones of this identity. This reflects a core postfunctionalist insight, where integration becomes constrained when it encroaches upon core identity issues. When cultural distance between member states is wide, certain identity-based issues are perceived as incompatible with the broader EU framework. Hence, the perceived threat is not just political, its existential. Rejecting the referendum becomes the way for Danish voters to assert control in how Danish society and identity should shaped. Skipper’s framing underlines how political discourse and morally charged language portray EU integration as a threat to national distinctiveness, thereby legitimize public rejection of the referendum.

Later in the same debate, Pernille Skipper also states:

“I mean, it’s a genuine curiosity whether people actually believe that Denmark, as one out of 28 countries, has enough influence to convince all the others to adopt the same progressive and forward-thinking positions we have in Denmark—for example, on abortion, same-sex marriage, LGBT rights more broadly, and freedom of expression. There are really serious problems in those countries, and that will end up directly affecting Denmark as well.” (Folketinget, 2015)

This quote builds on earlier established arguments from Skipper. Her choice of phrases such as, “*progressive and forward-thinking positions*” and “*really serious problems in those countries*” reinforces the view of Denmark being morally superior, while other member states are implicitly characterized as being backwards. Thus, by drawing this contrast, the special progressive Danish identity becomes unique and exceptional to the EU framework. This also creates a moral boundary

between Denmark and the rest of the EU. By using phrases such as “*those countries*” and “*as one out of 28*”, Skipper emphasises the threat posed by this referendum. Denmark as an isolated small progressive country with limited influence. he not only presents the referendum as a risk to national identity, but by showcasing the contrast between Denmark and the rest, she makes the perceived threat from EU integration more immediate.

As mentioned before, Skipper again utilizes the cultural distinction as a powerful argument. She stresses that Denmark is not like the other member states, and thus the public should reject the referendum. This framing underscores the salience of the core identity-related issues, suggesting that this attempt at integration touches on something deeply embedded within Danish society. This also touches on norm diffusion; by relating Denmark’s progressiveness to the comparative conservatism of other countries, Skipper outlines the fear that their norms will be diffused into Danish society, if the Danish voter does not reject the referendum. Thus, this relates to postfunctionalist ideas of that even when functional benefits existence, the resistance is strong when identity concerns is activated.

To conclude on this theme, Dragsted’s and Skipper’s framing of this referendum being a threat to the Danish identity and cultural values demonstrates how political actors create division in the public debate about supranational cooperation. By using value-laden phrases and contrasting Danish values with other member states, they discursively highlight the underlying emotional and ideological concerns of the speaker. They construct a space in which the EU appears as the overreaching institution, filled with culturally incompatible member states, where only by rejecting further integration are Danish voters able to protect their national identity. This aligns with postfunctionalist theory, as highlighted multiple times in my thesis, when referendums touch on core identity related issues, political actors are activated and mobilize the public to reject and resist further integration. As seen in the introduction, national identity was the least common code, therefore the discursive weight, was smaller than expected. But even with its limited presence, the narratives advanced under this theme were consistent with postfunctionalist expectations. This identity theme lays the groundwork for the other themes, which will be further explored in the following themes.

4.2 National Sovereignty

This theme was coded for discourse relating to Danish sovereignty, whether framed as being lost with a yes or regained through it. Both concerns about loss of autonomy and arguments about reclaiming control fall under this broader category.

In the parliamentary debate on the 3rd of November, MP Marlene Harpsøe from the Danish People's Party states:

“This referendum on December 3rd about the justice opt-out will — if the Danes vote yes — involve surrendering sovereignty to a degree where we have no idea what the consequences will be. Are we going to have a common criminal code in the EU? What will this mean for Denmark, and so on and so on? I just want to say that in the Danish People's Party, we are extremely nervous about what this will mean for Denmark” (Folketinget, 2015)

This quote highlights how national sovereignty is constructed in the debate. Harpsøe uses emotionally charged phrases, such as “*extremely nervous*” and “*we have no idea*”, to frame the referendum as a step into the unknown, thus creating a sense of anxiety about the consequences of Denmark losing its opt-out. Beyond this, Harpsøe legitimizes resistance to the referendum, by discursively constructing a scenario of uncertainty, one where Denmark's potential loss sovereignty is undefined and unknown. Through this framing, the referendum becomes an existential issue tied for protecting Danish autonomy in the face of deeper EU integration. It reflects a broader discursive strategy, where EU encroachment on Danish sovereignty is framed as undesirable and disrespectful.

Harpsøe also specifically references “*a common criminal code in the EU*”, by doing this, she touches on core state power, namely, the ability of Danish courts and parliament to define criminal law independently. Therefore, Harpsøe makes the threat concrete, as she presents a slippery slope argument, if Danes do not say no now, then it will be too late. In this framing, the future is by voting yes is unknown and alarming, while a no vote, is protecting Denmark and Danish sovereignty. This aligns with postfunctionalist theory, which suggests that when integration upon core state functions, such as justice and sovereignty, backlash and politicization increases. Since this is a referendum, the politicization is already increased by default and Harpsøe uses this to highlight the concrete threats to core power of the Danish state and people.

During the parliamentary debate on 16 November, Danish People's Party MP Kenneth Kristensen Berth remarked:

“The problem is future governments, a future Parliament, which we fundamentally cannot predict. We have no idea how voters will decide in the future, and the problem here is that once sovereignty has been surrendered in the EU area, you can’t get it back again.” (Folketinget, 2015)

Berth illustrates the fears that surrendering sovereignty to the EU, it is an irreversible act. Thus, framing EU integration as a singular path towards more sovereignty loss. This reflects a high-stakes logic, due to even small concessions of autonomy are perceived as permanent. Berth frames the referendum as a now-or-never moment, emphasizing that future governments are unpredictable, and current promises are not binding.

As with Harpsøe, Berth invokes the fear of the future to create an immediate threat towards Danish autonomy. His focus on the future governments means that taps into public distrust, suggesting that elites will push for further integration without democratic input. Therefore, this referendum is a push-back against elite-driven integration. The voters have a final chance to reject further EU influence. Berth’s emotional framing such as, *“cannot predict”*, *“we have no idea”* and *“you can’t get it back”* appeals to Danish resistance towards integration. His argument is also reinforced by the context of earlier referendums, such as on the euro or the Maastricht Treaty, where public scepticism clashed with the elite’s efforts. In doing so, Berth casts himself and his party as the protectors of Danish sovereignty.

In a TV2 article from 23rd of November, the Danish parties were asked to put forward their arguments for either a yes or a no. In this article Liberal Alliance lay out their arguments for a no, stating:

“In Liberal Alliance, we prefer to deal with harsh realities rather than scary predictions read in stars, tea leaves, or crystal balls, and the reality is that once we surrender sovereignty, the table is set — it can’t be undone by the people or changing parliamentary majorities. That’s a fact. Even if the yes-parties today exempt certain legal acts, they would still be able to opt into them after a potential yes on December 3rd. The reality is that Danish legal policy will be moved further away from the citizens and will be implemented through highly non-transparent decision-making processes. That benefits no one, and that’s why Liberal Alliance wants to keep the opt-out.”

(Selmer, 2015)

These framing positions the referendum as an irreversible action. By stating that *“it can’t be undone”*, Liberal Alliance highlights how this loss of sovereignty is permanent and cannot be

altered back again. Therefore, the referendum is a threat towards the Danish democracy and citizens. The power to make decisions will be taken away from them. By this framing Liberal Alliance uses some of the same discursive methods used by MPs from the Danish People's Party and aligns themselves with their construction of the referendum. However, their tone is slightly different. They are not projecting the idea of an uncertain future, instead focusing on the “*harsh realities*”, this means that the future is not the frightening one, the reality is. In this framing, Danish voters risk losing sovereignty not later, but now, and permanently, if they do not reject the referendum.

Liberal Alliance also creates a distinction between them and the yes-parties. They focus on a distrust in the Danish political elite accusing them of surrendering decision-making power to “*highly non-transparent decision-making processes*”. This narrative shows how the results of the referendum will impact the citizens ability to interfere in policies that directly impact them. But Liberal Alliance also focus on sovereignty itself, its not only legal but also about proximity. By voting no, Danish voters keep the autonomy close to themselves.

Countering the arguments made by the Danish People's Party and Liberal Alliance, MP Morten Løkkegaard from the Liberal Party states:

“Then there's the matter of sovereignty. I find it incredibly interesting that people keep clinging to this issue of sovereignty. As I see it, sovereignty is a matter of formal versus real sovereignty. No one has hidden — and we haven't either in the preparatory documents — that when we hold a referendum, it is of course because we are transferring sovereignty. But what kind of sovereignty are we transferring? We are transferring the kind of sovereignty you give up when you enter into a negotiation and reach an agreement. So, let's not over-theorize this. It's about entering agreements with other states, and in doing so, of course we transfer sovereignty to reach common solutions. In return, we actually gain more sovereignty, because we gain more influence and thus more, so to speak, power to decide things for ourselves — to take control of our own future. That is what I consider real sovereignty.” (Folketinget, 2015)

In this quote, Løkkegaard frames the referendum as a strategic gain, rather than a loss. He distinguishes between formal sovereignty, which is symbolic and real sovereignty, which is actual influence. Therefore, the sovereignty is not lost but transformed into something empowering. By voting yes in this referendum, Danish citizens gain real sovereignty because they gain influence in the decision-making process. Løkkegaard counters the no-parties' arguments by framing integration

as a functional enhancer of power and influence. He also critiques the opposition's concerns as exaggerated by framing them as stubborn and irrational about the sovereignty issue. By using a phrase such as "let's not over-theorize this" he delegitimizes their arguments about sovereignty and their constructed fear for the future. Therefore, Løkkegaard undermines the opposition to the referendum, while framing the yes-parties as the rational and pragmatic parties, which provide a real solution while the opposition is merely constructing a fear-driven narrative.

To conclude this theme, national sovereignty emerged as the most dominant theme in the 2015 referendum debate. 36% of the codes in my discursive data was coded under this theme. This highlights the symbolic and emotional weight of this theme was in the debate. Parties across the political spectrum framed this theme as either being irreversibly lost through EU integration or strategically gained through cooperation. While the Danish People's Party and Liberal Alliance emphasized fear, the irreversible loss of sovereignty and critiquing the elite-driven integration., Løkkegaard framed the same debate as an opportunity for increased Danish influence through cooperation.

This contrast showcases the core divide in the political debate, whether EU integration is a threat to Danish sovereignty or a platform for gaining influence. In line with postfunctionalist theory, when issues of sovereignty become politicized through the political arena, resistance is high and as such impacts the debate. Hence, this theme outlays the foundation for understanding the broader dynamics in the referendum, which will be explored further in the following themes.

4.3 Functional Pressures

This section analyses after political discourse referencing the risk of Denmark missing out on certain benefits of EU cooperation. In effect this means references to Denmark being worse off in the event of a no vote in the referendum has been coded under this theme. This means that any discourse that relates to the narrative of the Danish police or position in the EU being threatened or detrimental by a negative outcome in the referendum.

In the opening speech of the parliamentary year on the 6th of October, then Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen states:

“With the opt-in model, we create security that Denmark can remain a full member of the European police cooperation, Europol. That is absolutely crucial for catching and prosecuting human traffickers, drug traffickers, burglary gangs, and other criminals who operate across borders. And

the police cooperation also proves its value in the current situation with many refugees and migrants. Europol provides intelligence on the pressure on Denmark's and Europe's borders and contributes to combating human smugglers. They are an important link in the efforts to control the influx.” (Folketinget, 2015)

This quote exemplifies how functional pressures were used to frame EU integration as essential for Denmark's national security and managing cross-border crime. By presenting Denmark's membership of Europol as pivotal in the fight against organized crime, Lars Løkke Rasmussen frames a yes in the referendum as the only rational choice, thereby positioning the opposition as endangering Danish national security. This framing aligns with postfunctionalist elitist framings, where EU integration is portrayed as necessary due to the interdependence between member states. Therefore, the only logical and pragmatic choice is to continue the integration process. By stating that Europol is *”absolutely crucial for catching and prosecuting human traffickers, drug traffickers, burglary gangs, and other criminals who operate across borders”*, he constructs a view that, no single nation-state can combat these criminals alone, hence Denmark need for a yes in this referendum, because a no would leave Denmark isolated.

He uses functional pressures to discursively construct a threat to Danish society, asserting that the only way to combat cross-border crime is through Europol. He also links the referendum to the broader context of the then ongoing refugee crisis. Lars Løkke Rasmussen makes the case that without Europol membership, Denmark would be vulnerable and lacking intelligence. This argument showcases how functional arguments also intersects with broader political debates. Lars Løkke Rasmussen uses the ongoing crisis and links it to the public fears of a wave of immigrants coming to Denmark. Thereby, he constructs an argument that legitimizes EU integration as indispensable for Denmark and normalizes integration, not a choice but as a requirement for efficient governance. Thus, he positions the opposition as risking the government's ability to protect Denmark.

In the earlier mentioned article from TV2, the Liberal Party makes their argument for a yes like this:

“A YES will make it safer to be Danish, harder to be a criminal, and easier to run a business. By voting YES, we preserve what we know — namely, full membership in Europol. Danish police must continue to be full members of Europol so they can best combat international crime like burglary

gangs, drug trafficking, and child pornography. We must not throw Danish police into uncertainty but instead equip them with the best tools in the fight against international crime.” (Selmer, 2015)

The Liberal Party’s framing of the referendum in this quote is more emotional with value-laden words than the statement from their Prime Minister, Lars Løkke Rasmussen. Their argument uses phrases such as “*a YES will make it safer to be Danish*” and “*We must not throw Danish police into uncertainty*”, this constructs a connection between the vote and public safety. Hence, implying that a rejection in the referendum will throw Denmark into uncertainty regarding public safety. Therefore, establishing a discursive contrast between a yes, where Denmark gains the “*best tools*”, so that Danish police can “*best combat international crime*“, making a yes, the rational and safe choice for the voters. A no in the referendum, thus, means a risk to Danish policing and is an irresponsible choice.

The framing of preserving the known is also significant. While the opposition frames the referendum as a step into the unknown regarding EU integration, the Liberal Party frames the referendum as maintaining the status-quo and preserving existing cooperation. As such, the Liberal Party constructs an argument where integration is the familiar, therefore, attempting to diffuse public backlash towards their integration efforts. The Liberal Party also position the referendum as a functional need, portraying Europol as a vital institution for Danish law enforcement efficiency. Suggesting that with a no in the referendum, Danish police will be less capable, therefore membership is not a matter of preference, but one of capability. This argument aligns with postfunctional theory about functional pressures, where the capacity to act is correlated with the level of integration. Lastly by highlighting specific transnational crimes, by saying “*burglary gangs, drug trafficking, and child pornography*”, the threat is made immediate and concrete. This connects the functional needs with real-life issues, thus the urgency in voting yes.

In another media article from Altinget dated December 3rd, Rikke Albrechtsen, their EU correspondent, writes about why this referendum is happening. She says:

“In Brussels, negotiations are currently underway to update the common European police cooperation, Europol, so that it transitions from being an intergovernmental cooperation between countries to becoming standard supranational EU cooperation. This means that Denmark will soon no longer be able to remain part of Europol. That is the primary reason why five parties — the Liberal Party, the Conservatives, the Social Democrats, the Social Liberals, and the Socialist People’s Party — have agreed to remove the opt-out. There are also other areas, such as

cooperation on human trafficking and child pornography, where a majority of politicians want Denmark to participate. But the most important reason is that they do not want Denmark to be left out of police cooperation. That's why the proposal from the yes-parties earlier this year was titled 'Agreement on Denmark in Europol.'” (Albrechtsen, 2015)

This quote reflects postfunctionalist theory through its framing of this referendum being necessary due to the changes in EU governance structures. These changes created an external pressure that forced pro-EU parties in Denmark to act, ultimately creating a referendum. This reflects the idea that external institutional changes create internal pressure in the member states. In this case, Denmark is forced to decide, which means that by their institutional boundaries a referendum became necessary. Albrechtsen also highlights the urgency of the referendum by stating *“This means that Denmark will soon no longer be able to remain part of Europol”*. This creates a deadline for Danish participation in the Europol framework, and voters need to position themselves now or risk losing influence and security cooperation. Discursively this creates a narrative, where only by voting yes can Denmark avoid being left out.

She also frames the referendum as having broad political support for the referendum. Phrases such as *“That is the primary reason why five parties”* and *“where a majority of politicians”*, serves to legitimize the referendum and suggest broader national unity behind the referendum. Thus, making the no-parties discursively appear marginalized, framing the referendum as pragmatic and useful for Danish public safety. She creates a reasoning that aligns with postfunctionalism, where inside cooperation is safety and influence. Albrechtsen's context is also important to consider. She represents an elite media perspective, by using characteristically EU elitist commentary. Her article draws on institutional influence and technocratic reasonings to legitimize EU integration. As a long-time journalist in the EU, she frequently interacts with the insides of the system and not from the outside and this context shapes her perspective. Therefore, her framing of the referendum as being broadly politically supported, urgent for Danish police and the referendum being pragmatic and functionally important, reflects some of the elite-driven discourse.

Another prominent framing of the referendum was made in the parliamentary debate on October 20th by the Conservative MP Rasmus Jarlov:

“I'd like to take a moment to touch on the broader issue of entering parallel agreements, because I understand that the Red-Green Alliance believes this can just be done instead of joining all the areas we want to opt into through the legal acts. But isn't it easier to simply be part of the

cooperation instead of having to make all those parallel agreements? I mean, a parallel — if I may use that word — would be like if a left-wing faction wanted to cooperate with the Red-Green Alliance. Wouldn't it be easier for them to just be part of Red-Green Alliance instead of sitting around making special agreements on a whole range of different things? Can't we say the same thing here? That it's probably easier to just be part of the cooperation than to have to make 22 separate parallel agreements, which could take many years to negotiate?" (Folketinget, 2015)

This quote translates functional pressures into political logic. Jarlov simplifies the argument into “*isn't it easier to simply be a part of the cooperation*”, which makes the debate seem overly complicated and reduces it into a simple argument that EU cooperation is simply more efficient. In doing so, he frames a no as being unnecessarily complicated, implying that a parallel agreement is difficult to reach and would be significant time consuming. This framing detaches the debate from ideological concerns but instead makes it into being about efficiency and feasibility. Jarlov also discursively makes a comparison with the Red-Green Alliance and the referendum. He constructs a logic, wherein EU integration is the same as everyday domestic political cooperation. Thus, framing the vote into something easier to digest for the voters, it becomes a vote about efficiency in time and institutional cooperation. Jarlov therefore legitimizes integration through by arguing that its is the most viable strategy for continued Danish membership. The statement of “*That it's probably easier to just be a part of the cooperation*” highlights this view. It is not overly difficult to understand, it is simply the rational choice for Denmark and basic political efficiency.

Concluding this theme of functional pressures, this theme captures how some political actors frame EU cooperation as a necessity for Denmark. As the second most coded theme, functional pressures showcase how central this framing was to the debate about the referendum. This framing was used by both politicians and journalists to present Denmark's continued membership in Europol and other legal frameworks as essential for public safety, governance efficiency and institutional effectivity. These arguments ranged from emotional appeals to safety, technical arguments of functionality or simplifying the referendum. The dominant users of this frame were the yes-parties, who argued that a yes was being the rational, pragmatic and safe choice for the voters, while framing the opposition as hazardous and endangering Danish police efficiency. Therefore, supranational cooperation was not just beneficial but required. In doing so, this argument presents the political and media elites working to normalize EU integration as required for Danish governance.

4.4 Euroscepticism

This theme will refer to discursive moments where the EU is positioned as detrimental for Denmark, critiquing the EU's involvement and reach within the Danish political or legal system.

In the parliamentary debate on the 10th of November, previously mentioned MP Kenneth Kristensen Berth delivered a very core critique of the EU. He stated:

“The justice opt-out was introduced in 1993 after the Danes said no to the Maastricht Treaty in the 1992 referendum. In 1992, the same parties that today recommend abolishing the justice opt-out, with one exception, advised Danes to say yes to the Maastricht Treaty. Had the Danes followed that advice, Denmark would today be part of the EU's common asylum and immigration policy, and, like several Eastern European countries, could have been overruled when EU countries recently decided to distribute 160,000 refugees, and would thereby have been forced to participate. If the “yes parties” succeed in persuading Danes to give up the justice opt-out, these same parties could easily send Danish asylum and immigration policy to Brussels. One must remember what drives these parties: boundless enthusiasm for the EU. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that these parties will take advantage of the opportunity they get to hand over Danish sovereignty to Brussels.” (Folketinget, 2015)

This quote exemplifies the divide between elite-driven integration and public resistance. Berth frames the yes-parties, as bureaucratic elites, who are forcing Denmark and the public, against their wishes, into deeper EU integration. He claims, *“what drives these parties: boundless enthusiasm for the EU”*. Berth frames the yes-parties as having an irrational preference for EU politics. Berth uses this to construct a reasoning where these parties are irrational actors with excessive faith in the Union. He constructs a narrative where these elites are eager to surrender sovereignty, for example he uses the phrase, *“there is no reason to doubt that these parties will take advantage of the opportunity they get to hand over Danish sovereignty to Brussels”*. This discursively creates a threat to Danish sovereignty, with the EU is a political Leviathan and the yes-parties as its agents. In contrast, Berth and the Danish People's Party positions themselves as taking the fight and protecting Danes from EU overreach.

Berth also uses the framing that much of the debate came to be about, EU's common asylum and immigration policies. The context being the ongoing refugee crisis, as such he outlines the immediate and concrete threat Danish society is facing from the yes-parties. Therefore, he uses a

specific issue, to create a concrete threat to Denmark, this becomes symbolic for critiquing the EU. Hence, the critiques of the establishment and the elite-driven integration is central for his argumentation. The elites leading the referendum are out of touch and dismissing the public will for EU integration. Relating this to postfunctionalism showcases how these Eurosceptic views also relate to identity issues and sovereignty concerns. Berth frames the debate as being critical of the parties leading a “*boundless enthusiasm*” but also the European framework itself for overruling and dominating national states. He also uses history to bolster his argument about how these parties have attempted this before. Berth therefore uses history to legitimize the resistance against the referendum. This historical reference legitimizes scepticism and casts the referendum as a critical moment for rejecting EU overreach.

In the same parliamentary debate, Karina Due, also an MP from the Danish People’s Party, added:

“Time and again, we see that there is much more scepticism towards the EU among the population than there is among the ‘yes-parties’ in the Danish Parliament. It seems to me that the yes-parties are now pushing to gain the power to decide without involving the population, solely because the Danish people refuse to comply.” (Folketinget, 2015)

Due’s argument complements Berth’s framing. She also frames the public divide into being the public and the elites. She frames herself as representing the will of the people, she does this while using the implications of earlier referendums, that the Danish public do not desire deeper EU integration. She also uses democracy and public involvement as reasoning for rejecting the elite driven discourse. She accuses the yes-parties for removing decision making ability from the people, “*because the Danish people refuse to comply*”, using this framing, Due creates an argumentation where herself and her party, are the protectors of Danish sovereignty and EU overreach in the face of a popular scepticism towards the EU. She polarizes the debate by this divide reinforcing the politicization of the debate and the political conflict. This argumentation uses core values of democracy and the public’s ability to engage with the decision-making processes to mobilize and legitimize resistance against elite driven integration.

In another parliamentary debate on the 16th of November, MP Søren Søndergaard from the Red-Green Alliance stated:

“Regarding pursuing a sensible refugee policy, it is the Red-Green Alliance’s view that the problem primarily lies with the Danish Parliament. Of course, we are subject to certain things that have come from the EU and which have been really bad, but, for example, whether we want to take 1,000 or 5,000 in some voluntary distribution scheme that we join is solely a matter for the Danish Parliament. It is clear that we hold different views than many others there, and therefore, we will not participate in giving the EU more power in this area.” (Folketinget, 2015)

Here, Søndergaard reflects a left-wing variant of Euroscepticism. Unlike Berth and the Danish People’s Party who framed the EU’s common asylum and immigration policy as collapsing and allowing uncontrolled immigration into Denmark, the Red-Green Alliance offers a different critique of the EU. Søndergaard critiques the EU’s approach as ineffective and distant from democratic control. His argument is rooted in the belief that immigration policy should remain exclusively within the Danish Parliament, adding that this *“is solely, a matter for the Danish parliament.”* Doing this takes away legitimacy from the EU and legitimizing resistance.

Søndergaard is also expressing firmly critical stance toward the EU, he states *“It is clear that we hold different views than many others there, and therefore, we will not participate in giving the EU more power in this area.”* Reflecting the view that while there may be other argumentations, the Red-Green Alliance and Søndergaard refuses to give power away to the EU. He reinforces argumentation that the decision-making process, is something that solely belongs to Denmark and not to the EU. This reflects postfunctionalist theory, that core identity issues are engaged in this referendum, the distribution of refugees and the treatment of them, are powers belonging to the national parliaments. Migration is especially sensitive, the Red-Green Alliance does not agree with the Danish People’s Party about immigrations, but both parties despite ideological differences, converge on the belief that migration policy must remain under domestic control.

On the 1st of December in Altinget, a feature was written by MEP Anders Vistisen from the Danish People’s Party in this feature he argues that:

“Another thing is the risk of a common EU asylum policy, which one can very well imagine being dictated by a country like Germany, which itself has carried out the ‘total immigration.’ That is also what we are voting on December 3rd. Don’t trust the yes-parties one bit when they solemnly announce that we will have to vote on immigration policy.” (Vistisen, 2015)

Vistisen discursively frames EU asylum policy as a direct threat to Denmark. He makes the concrete comparison to Merkel's immigrant friendly policies of Germany, and highlights how these threaten a common EU policy, where Denmark loses control over immigration policy. Therefore, this referendum is threatening Danish autonomy by risking Denmark is being forced to align with other EU member states. He constructs Germany as a dominant actor, using its influence to push a one-size-fits-all policy on other member states. This plays on public anxieties around loss of control and external domination, suggesting Denmark would be forced into policies it fundamentally opposes. Vistisen uses this to appeal for public backlash against the yes-parties and the distrust towards the European elites in Denmark. He uses the phrase of "*total immigration*" to highlight the consequences of this referendum. Vistisen also displays this distrust when he says, "*Don't trust the yes-parties*", framing the debate into trustworthy and untrustworthy, there is a clear emotional appeal to the voters.

Using public euroscepticism, he unveils the view that elites are attempting to sneak Denmark into an EU common asylum policy led by Germany, wherein Denmark loses its ability to refuse, due to the untrustworthy yes-parties who are lying to the voters. Migration is also constructed as an identity threat and a symbolic fight against EU overreach within Danish society. Therefore, Vistisen attacks and delegitimizes the yes-parties into untrustworthy and questions their sincerity in making the referendum about joining the EU common asylum and immigration policy. He uses the public distrust of political elites to construct a debate where these elites are misleading the public. This reinforces the level of politicization and increases the stakes for the referendum. It is not about Europol, it is about national identity and protecting Danish interest in the face of German, EU and elite-driven integration eroding Danish autonomy. As such Vistisen represent classic Eurosceptic views, the framing of losing autonomy and identity to the EU is a non-desirable outcome because the elites are lying and will keep eroding the Danish national state for their own agenda's.

In sum, this theme, being the third most used coded theme highlights how discourse surrounding concerns about sovereignty, identity and EU overreach were deeply rooted. Political actors from the Danish People's Party and Red-Green Alliance consistently framed the EU and the yes-parties as detached elites, driven by irrational enthusiasm for integration and out of touch with public sentiment. The central narrative in this theme was resisting the EU structures and using the common asylum and immigration policy as a symbolic fight in protecting Danish society, public and national autonomy. The recurring framings was a distrust towards the elite, threats to Danish

sovereignty and fears of losing control to the EU. Relating this to postfunctionalist theory, these Eurosceptic views unveil how identity and sovereignty concerns increased the politicization creating a polarized debate where rejecting the referendum was essential for preserving Danish agency and self-determination.

5.0 Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

In this last chapter, I will be discussing the implications of this paper, my positionality in the research, as well as summarizing my key findings from the analysis. The framework used in this thesis is unique, it is an underexplored combination where postfunctionalist theoretical concepts and CDA were used to code political and media discourse. This approach to the referendum led to a unique angle of analysis, where the constructed debate was critically engaged and positioned within the context of the referendum. Coming from the field of International Relations, also impacted the way that I understood the case and the framework I used to analyse the referendum. I hope this thesis contributes to broadening the methodological and theoretical framework used to analyse EU referendums. As mentioned earlier, this case stands apart from other EU referendums, Denmark already participated in the Europol framework, and as highlighted in my analysis, actors framed this debate around that. Therefore, the catalyst for this referendum was institutional changes in the EU and this context meant that the case is uniquely different.

Going back to the analysis itself, the 2015 referendum and the surrounding discourse revealed how postfunctionalist concepts interacted dynamically between identity, sovereignty, functional pressures and Euroscepticism. Across the analysed themes, it became clear that political actors and the media mobilized framings that resonated with their political beliefs. This case and the discourse display how the pro-EU parties in Denmark struggled to overcome the identity issues, sovereignty concerns and the Eurosceptic voters. Even in the face of functional pressures, Danish voters preferred preserving the Justice and Home Affairs opt-out rather than risking more integration. This case illustrates that the forces and actors involved in causing differentiated integration is not uniform.

Identity, while this framing was limited, the emotional and symbolic weight used supports a broader postfunctionalist pattern, where identity is core to understand resistance towards EU integration. The restrictive use of this theme was of surprise to me but Dragsted's and Skipper's mobilizations of cultural and moral norms to legitimize resistance were crucial for the analysis.

Sovereignty however was the dominant theme in my discursive data. The debate revealed diverse constructions of sovereignty, displaying how its framing depended on political alignment. This dualism reflects Denmark's broader EU discursive tradition.

Functional pressures functioned as the critical counterargument to these framings. The yes-parties portrayed EU-integration as pragmatic, rational and beneficial for Denmark, highlighting how these parties framed EU cooperation as essential for Denmark. Their arguments used both emotional appeals and technical arguments to normalize integration, which was notable, since researchers such as previously mentioned Sørensen found that the emotional versus technical language was a large influencing factor.

Euro-scepticism cut across left and right but focused on distrust to technical pragmatism, their resistance was through raising identity-based conflict and sovereignty-based concerns. The asylum framing, further increased the stakes of the referendum, showcasing how distrust to the yes-parties, elites and the EU institutions combined with the emotionally grounded narratives became a large challenge to the yes-parties.

These findings align themselves with the expectations from postfunctionalist theory. As outlined in my theory section and the operationalization of postfunctionalist theory, this theory highlights how the political arena and domestic politicization will hinder integration efforts by the elites. The discourse employed by these political actors give us an insight into how legitimate arguments are constructed in the political arena and how they impact other political actors.

While these findings from my analysis were created through CDA, as defined in my methodology chapter, the last step for this is reflecting on how my paper contributes to the broader discourse. Although this referendum has often, by others and me, been framed as a vote about Europol, the formal subject of the vote was Denmark's JHA opt-out. The discursive anchor around Europol, and my contribution to this is due to its communicative simplicity. Most people I have spoken to remember it as "*the Europol referendum*". However, in reality, the public and political debate extended beyond Europol. This was a referendum where different actors also intensely debated asylum policy, sovereignty, identity, and trust in elites. As such, this thesis may have unintentionally also been perpetuating the Europol-centric framing but given Europol's significant role in shaping the political and discursive landscape, this framing has become very salient in the public memory of the referendum.

This case must also be situated within the broader European context of the 2015 refugee crisis. This event fundamentally reshaped public discourse across the EU. This influx of refugees intensified Eurosceptic feelings in Denmark, as in other member states and raised concerns regarding the EU's capability to manage the Schengen area and protect the EU's external borders. For many voters, this vote never concerned Europol but rather a deeper anxiety about unregulated integration and losing control over Denmark's borders. Similar dynamics could also be seen in the Brexit referendum, where fears of not controlling their border and identity concerns regarding the EU were amplified by the refugee crisis and mobilized through emotional appeals for resistance. In both cases, the cause and strength of identity-based resistance to integration has to be understood in the social context in which the referendums are held. Therefore, the level of politicization is not simply about the content of the integration but also about the context in which it unfolds. Crises create powerful emotional reactions, and functional logic is often ignored in the face of emotion.

The framework used in this thesis remains underexplored in existing research. Applying this approach to other referendums, such as the Brexit vote, could offer interesting insights into the comparability between these two referendums. Beyond this, it could also be extended to more recent cases, such as the Danish vote on the defence opt-out in 2022, exploring why that succeed while the 2015 referendum failed. Additionally, my data used in my analysis is quite substantial, with 230 references coded, therefore alternative quotes selected might create different interpretations. Last recommendation, using a different methodology to be approaching my discursive material will inevitably change the focus of the analysis, further highlighting the interpretive flexibility of this data.

Finally, in directly addressing the research question; How do political discourses of identity and sovereignty shape public resistance to European integration in the context of differentiated integration? This thesis finds that such discourse serves as powerful forces to mobilize public resistance towards European integration. The concerns were repeatedly invoked to frame EU integration as a threat to a national distinctness and democratic control. These framings are especially powerful when responding to external crisis, such as a refugee crisis, and played a key role in shaping public resistance. In this way, the forces driving differentiated integration are not simply institutional but a reflection of deeper social, symbolic and emotional dynamics within domestic discourse.

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