

Ireland (Éire) and Denmark (Danmark)

Ireland and Denmark joined the European Community in 1973, at the same time as the United Kingdom. Ireland is located in the British Isles and shares land and sea borders with the UK. Denmark sits on the Jutland peninsula and neighbouring islands. Both the Faroe Islands and Greenland are Danish overseas territories (but are not members of the EU). As the first new members of the club since its foundation in 1958, their entry marked a significant change for the European Community. While many European projects have been welcomed in both countries, in recent years their electorates have expressed increasing scepticism about EU integration.

Recent History

For much of the postwar period, Danish politics was dominated by the Social Democratic Party. However, since 2001 a centre-right government has been in power, which has taken a much stronger line on policies such as immigration. In 2005 the Danish government faced a major crisis when protests erupted across the world in response to cartoons depicting the Islamic Prophet Mohammed that were published in a Danish newspaper.

Ireland's history over the last ten years has been dominated by the incredible economic transformation that the country has undergone. However, in 2008, Ireland became the first country in Western Europe to officially fall into a recession in the wake of the global financial crisis. Another important issue has been the progress of the Northern Ireland peace process, in which the Irish government has played an important role. Ireland has also sought a place on the world stage, as was seen during the very successful 2004 Irish Presidency of the European Council.

Government Structure

Ireland is a parliamentary republic. The Head of State is the President, currently Michael Higgins, elected October 2011, who has a mainly ceremonial role. Executive power rests with the cabinet, led by the Prime Minister, and the Parliament (*Oireachtas*). The Parliament is made up of two chambers – the lower house (*Dáil*) and the Senate. The *Dáil* is the main decision-making chamber and its members are elected by **proportional representation** for terms of five years. The current government, agreed after a general election in February 2011, is a coalition formed of the Fine Gael and Labour Party, and the Prime Minister is Enda Kenny. The election was triggered by the resignation of the former Prime Minister.

Denmark is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The Head of State is Queen Margrethe II, but executive power rests with the Prime Minister, the cabinet and the Parliament (*Folketing*). The *Folketing* has one chamber made up of 179 MPs representing Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. The current Danish government, led by Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, is a minority coalition between the Social Democrats, the Social Liberal Party and the Socialist Peoples' Party.

Relations with the EU

Ireland and Denmark's decisions to join the European Community were closely linked to UK's decision to join in 1973. As a former part of the UK, Ireland had close cultural and economic links with Britain, while for Denmark the UK was one of its principle export markets, meaning that both countries felt that it was in their interests to follow the UK's lead.

While Denmark was a well developed economy before joining the EU, Ireland was economically backward with a shrinking population and a huge reliance on agriculture. After joining the European Community, Ireland's economy was transformed, in part due to the greater trade possibilities within the single market, and both countries experienced significant economic growth, making them amongst the most dynamic economies in Europe. However, the global economic downturn, which began in 2008, caused many problems for countries across the EU, and Ireland in particular suffered badly. In November 2010, the EU and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to Ireland's request for a €85 billion bailout. After some controversy, the *Dáil* approved the loan package by 81 votes to 75 in December 2010. The bailout agreement left many Irish citizens angry at their government, forcing Prime Minister Brian Cowen to resign. The ensuing February elections saw his party, Fianna Fáil, suffer their worst defeat in 85 years, in a backlash against their agreement to the EU's bailout terms.

Both countries have had mixed relationships with the EU. In 1992, Danish voters rejected the Maastricht Treaty at a referendum. In a similar backlash against the EU, the Irish electorate voted against the Nice Treaty in a 2001 referendum. On both occasions, the treaties were later accepted following further votes, yet they demonstrated the mixed attitude of both countries towards closer integration into the EU. More recently, whilst Denmark ratified the Lisbon Treaty in April 2008, Ireland rejected it at a referendum in June 2008. To be implemented, the Treaty needed to be ratified by all member states, so Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty caused confusion and controversy. Intensive negotiations followed, and Ireland secured a number of conditions ('protocols') to the Treaty, including a promise to safeguard its neutrality in defence issues and its right to decide on abortion laws. A second referendum was held in October 2009, when the Irish people voted 'Yes' to the Lisbon Treaty.

While Ireland is a member of the Eurozone, Denmark negotiated an **opt-out** from full Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the adoption of the Euro. This decision was confirmed in a referendum in 2000. Ireland does not belong to the Schengen area.

Denmark holds the rotating Presidency of the Council of Ministers from January to June 2012.

Facts and Figures

- Denmark and Ireland enjoyed relatively low unemployment in 2005; the Danish unemployment rate was 4.9%, while the Irish rate was 4.3%. By January 2011, Ireland's unemployment rate was 14.9% and Denmark's was 7.6%.

Technical Terms

Proportional Representation: electoral system where the overall number of votes determines the distribution of seats.

Opt-out: the ability of a member state to permanently exempt itself from part of an EU treaty.

Links

- <http://www.irlgov.ie/>
- <http://www.stm.dk/Index/mainstart.asp? a 1644.html>