The So-Called 2015 Migration Crisis and Euroscepticism in Border Regions
Facing Re-Bordering Trends in the Danish-German Borderlands

Klatt, Martin

Published in:
Geopolitics

DOI:
10.1080/14650045.2018.1557149

Publication date:
2019

Document version
Final published version

Document license
CC BY-NC-ND

Citation for published version (APA):
https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1557149

Terms of use
This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark through the SDU Research Portal. Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving. If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

• You may download this work for personal use only.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim. Please direct all enquiries to puresupport@bib.sdu.dk

Download date: 18. Feb. 2020
The So-Called 2015 Migration Crisis and Euroscepticism in Border Regions: Facing Re-Bordering Trends in the Danish–German Borderlands

Martin Klatt

To cite this article: Martin Klatt (2018): The So-Called 2015 Migration Crisis and Euroscepticism in Border Regions: Facing Re-Bordering Trends in the Danish–German Borderlands, Geopolitics, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2018.1557149

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1557149

© 2018 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

Published online: 18 Dec 2018.

Article views: 768

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 1 View citing articles
The So-Called 2015 Migration Crisis and Euroscepticism in Border Regions: Facing Re-Bordering Trends in the Danish–German Borderlands

Martin Klatt

Center for Border Region Studies, University of Southern Denmark, Sønderborg, Denmark

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of Euroscepticism on regional cross-border cooperation between Germany and Denmark. It demonstrates that Euroscepticism, while absent from local mainstream politicians, had already caused civic unrest in the 1997 attempts to construct a return to history Euro-region Schleswig. It resulted in a re-scaling of the Euro-Region to Region and Schleswig to “Sønderjylland/Schleswig”, omitting any reference to Europe, European identity or a commitment to a closer European union in the relevant agreements. Border controls, on the agenda in 2011 and again since 2015, have demonstrated the institutional weakness of cross-border politics when faced with determined initiatives from the national center. Furthermore, the Eurosceptic Danish People’s Party had its best results in the border precincts both at the latest European and Danish national elections. Euroscepticism, even though difficult to measure on a regional level, seems to have been an ever present underneath current despite a political rhetoric of successful cooperation and cross-border reconciliation. The Danish-German case’s development might be more distinct, but nonetheless representative for European border (and cross-border) regions. While European metropolises develop into thriving cosmopolitan post-nation state societies, this is not necessary the case at Europe’s borders, where categorization and bordering remain common social practices by the large majority of national borderlanders with only a small portion of transnational borderlanders or ‘regionauts’ getting involved in border crossing social practices on a larger scale.

To ease cooperation across the border, so-called Euroregions have been established across virtually all European borders, both internal and external ones. In the twenty-first century, some Euroregions have formed European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, applying a new European legal tool to incite more commitment of the partners to actual functional integration across the border. At the same time, the Schengen system of open borders is challenged by perceived security threats as well as unwanted migration predominantly from Africa and the Middle East. EU member states have reintroduced border controls to...
demonstrate that they are ‘in control’, accompanied with more voiced demands of neo-nationalist movements for a devolution of power from the EU back to the nation states.

In this paper, I will use the Danish–German Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig as a case to assess the cause and impact of these trends within the border regions. The oppositional reaction of Danish and German national politics to the influx of refugees to the EU in late summer of 2015 has demonstrated the perplexity of cross-border institutions and actors to live up to a narrative of overcoming borders faced with nationally based discourses on security and immigration control vs. regional civil society agents’ support of multiculturalism and open societies welcoming migrants. Do borders here function as a trigger for renewed Euroscepticism, as a continuous representation of otherness, despite the de-bordering trends experienced during the last decades? Or is there a conflict between local politicians and the political centre? Borderland politicians’ agenda of creating ever more integrating cross-border regions, triggering development and growth, may be threatened by re-bordering trends initiated in the national capitals. In consequence, it is time for a thorough examination of European border regions, Euroregions, Eurodistricts and EGTCs to assess the development of new borderscapes in these laboratories of European integration.

In this article, I will start with an introduction on the application of Euroscepticism on border-regional cross-border cooperation, supported by the concept of unfamiliarity as a framework to explain social practices in border regions. I will then discuss possibilities of a regional variant of Euroscepticism before going into the Danish–German case. For this case, I focus on the development of cooperation in the region, both formalized cooperation and informal social interaction. The next section will analyse how the so-called migration crisis of 2015 has challenged the Schengen system of open borders (not only) in this region, and how state-ism has returned to the border regions, with national agendas and discourses pushing back regional stakeholders’ rhetoric and strategies of cross-border region building.

The article is based on a media analysis of the two daily regional newspapers Der Nordschleswiger and Flensborg Avis, which, as papers edited by the respective national minorities, have a very sensitive approach to report on border and cross-border issues, as well as observation of cross-border activities and regular informal discussion with stakeholders. Furthermore, relevant publicly available documents of the Interreg cooperation projects Dybbøl 2014 and Kurs Kultur, as well as kulturfokus.dk, the web-magazine of the cross-border cultural region project, have been studied. Besides these sources, it is based on my own previous research of the region’s approach to cross-border cooperation (Klatt 2006b, 2017a), the model of accommodation of diversity in national minorities (Klatt 2017c) and my observations and experiences as a cross-border commuter and transnational borderlander (Martinez 1994). Non-referenced observations may reflect this bias.
Cross-Border Cooperation – De-Bordering the Border Regions

Border regions are laboratories of European integration. Opening and overcoming the borders, as expressed in the four freedoms of movement, has been central to this project. Its success can be measured at the borders: have they become more open or even overcome? Do the flows across the borders and the social practices of border region residents reflect a de-bordering, or are borders persistent in the mind? The EU has designed specific European policies (Interreg) to support these aims and to lead poorly developing border regions on the path to develop into thriving cross-border regions. Cross-border Euroregions function as policy entrepreneurs, implementing but also co-designing and governing EU cohesion policy (Perkmann 2007; Perkmann and Sum 2002). Euroregions operate in a multilevel governance framework endeavouring to facilitate flows, but also people-to-people interaction and even peace-building and reconciliation (Blatter 2004; Klatt and Wassenberg 2017; McCall 2014; McCall and Itçaina 2017).

Even though European integration in principle has been a story of de-bordering, border regions demonstrate that borders have been quite persistent and have continued to be the physical expression of state sovereignty, reflecting the complicated reality of the EC/EU of shared sovereignty between member states and supranational institutions. Furthermore, de-bordering of the EU has been challenged by competing political elites, who construct otherness to demonstrate efficiency and strength of dealing with alleged threats to security. By ‘taking charge’, when ‘emergency narratives call for immediate action, forceful measures and direct interventions’ (Scuzzarello and Kinnvall 2013), political elites are tempted to implement re-bordering processes as the introduction of border controls or a militarization of the border. Since 2015–2016, this has been the case at the external borders of the EU, but also internally on the Slovenia–Croatia border and other borders on the so-called Balkan route and further on into Europe and Scandinavia, with a direct impact on many border regions.

Unfamiliarity and Stereotypes

The concept of unfamiliarity, developed by the Dutch scientists Martin van der Velde and Bas Spierings (Spierings and van der Velde 2008, 2013), can be invoked to explain choices of individual mobility across national borders. It explains how differences or otherness (unfamiliarity) encourage or discourage cross-border mobility. National socialization might imply reluctance to engage in cross-border social practices (Knotter 2014), but unfamiliarity could also encourage cross-border activities to explore the exotic other (Klatt 2017b). Here, what Van der Velde and Spierings have called the bandwidth of unfamiliarity (Spierings and van der Velde 2008, 502) is the analytical lens within which border crossing social practices happen: rational and emotional differences are in a relation that makes mobility acceptable as an individual choice. National stereotypes are a further
category that defines the bandwidth of unfamiliarity, as they explain the perceived familiarity or unfamiliarity with the neighbouring country.

With respect to the Danish–German case, I have earlier demonstrated that unfamiliarity here is twofold. It explains the almost total lack of labour mobility into Germany, but also the ingenuous appraisal of German commuters to Denmark (Klatt 2014b). An attempt to celebrate the 150th anniversary of an important war battle as the starting point for a new, joint history of reconciliation coupled with joint efforts to trigger cross-border economic development remained a showcase for already active stakeholders of cross-border cooperation, while unfamiliarity hindered a wider dissemination of the activities (Klatt 2017b). Research into Danish–German stereotypes has demonstrated the persistence of negative Danish stereotypes on Germans as well as the lack of knowledge and indifference of many Germans towards Denmark and the Danes (Hofmann and Hallsteinsdottir 2016).

**Euroscepticism as a Regional Phenomenon**

Euroscepticism, broadly defined as ‘contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total and unconditional opposition to it’ (Taggart 1998, 364), has not yet been analysed as a regional phenomenon, as it is usually referred to as either general opposition, as opposition to specific policies, as national Euroscepticism or connected to social class in relation to the cleavage between cosmopolitan ‘winners’ of globalization vs. groups on the social periphery perceived as ‘losers’ (Leconte 2015; Schönlaub 2010). Taggart differentiates between soft Euroscepticism criticizing certain aspects of European integration within the framework of the EU, while hard Euroscepticism refers to objection to the idea of European integration and the EU in toto (Taggart 1998). For the analysis of the regional Danish–German case, I will use the four different types of Euroscepticism defined by Catharina Sørensen: economic, sovereignty-based, democratic and social Euroscepticism (Sørensen 2008, 86). In Germany, Euroscepticism, until recently, used to be a symptom of the extreme political fringes only. This might have changed with the advent of the populist Alternative für Deutschland AfD, which started as a movement criticizing the EMU and its risks for Germany, but has moved to a more general critique of the EU as a system since 2015. Still, Eurocriticism of any sort has not been articulated politically on the German side in the border region, yet. In Denmark, on the contrary, it has featured highly since the country joined the EC in 1973. In all the eight Danish plebiscites on European integration, the ‘No’-side mobilized between 37% and 53% of the voters.¹ Political parties on the left and right wing have been explicitly Euroseptic in programme and action. For these reasons, the article focuses on Danish Euroscepticism only.

Sørensen’s analysis of Danish Euroscepticism reveals a constant decrease of hard Euroscepticism as total opposition to the EU over time to about 15% of the population in 2005, but also a high score of sovereignty-based Euroscepticism in
between 50% and 70% of the population revealed in different Eurobarometer polls in the 1980s and 1990s (Sørensen 2008, 90). Regional Euroscepticism is more difficult to measure quantitatively, but also qualitatively. For the Danish part of the border region, the only indicator is the outcomes of the different Danish EC and EU referendums (on EC membership 1972, on the Single European Act in 1986, on the Treaty of the European Union in 1992, modified by the Edinburgh Treaty on Danish opt-outs in 1993, on the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1998, on the Euro in 2000, on the European Patent Court in 2014 and on the revision of the Danish opt-out in Justice and Home Affairs in 2015). Here, except for the 2015 referendum, Southern Jutland always had a higher share of Yes-votes than national average. This apparent recent increase of Euroscepticism in the border region is also reflected in the latest electoral successes of the DPP. It scored their best results in the immediate border region both at the EU elections of 2014 and the national Danish elections of June 2015, becoming the strongest party regionally with voting percentages well above 30%. These results indicate an increasing regional Euroscepticism even before the migration crisis in autumn 2015, but there are no data available to come with a more qualitative assessment of its kind. Some speculations are that it is partly economic Euroscepticism: Logistics, an important economic factor in the immediate border region, has experienced tough competition between Danish labour and cheaper labour from Eastern and Central Europe (Klatt 2008).

In my historical research on the development of cross-border cooperation in the Danish–German case, I have demonstrated that most Danish regional politicians had a generally positive attitude to cooperation, but also that sovereignty-based Euroscepticism played an important role in all negotiations (Klatt 2006b). Danish–German historiography had predominantly been a historiography of national conflict until the end of the twentieth century. The reality of cultural and national diversity as well as national indifference across the region was canonized (and re-bordered) in national majorities and respective minorities on either side of the border to secure stability of national identity and minimize challenges to the physical placement of the border. Danish sovereignty-based Euroscepticism rather than general Euroscepticism led to a rejection of regional German advances in the 1970s to establish institutionalized cooperation in the form of a Euroregion or even a cross-border spatial planning commission. Regional and national Danish politicians preferred a non-institutional case-to-case approach to cross-border cooperation as it appeared to be better feasible and suitable considering the perceived imbalance of power between ‘large’ (West-) Germany and ‘small’ Denmark (Klatt 2006b, 2004). Regional politics were enacted by politicians (and parties) clearly supporting Danish membership in the EC. They put a much stronger focus on case-related cooperation resulting in measurable gains, while a more social-constructivist (or idealistic) approach dominated with their regional German colleagues (Klatt 2004).

The significance of this sovereignty-based Euroscepticism became apparent especially when the regional partners discussed the establishment of
a Euroregion in spring 1997. Denmark debated to join the Schengen cooperation at the same time, and the then left-wing dominated Eurosceptic anti-EU movement mobilized a rather strong resistance against both projects, mostly on sovereignty-based arguments (Klatt 2006b; Yndigegn 2012). A compromise was reached by omitting the ‘Euro’ from the name of the cross-border region, which was named Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig, as well as all references to European integration and the European Union were omitted from the text of the agreement to set up the cross-border region (Klatt 2006b). The institutionally weak set-up of the region, without real decision-making competency, has resulted in calming the resistance to the project later.

**The Danish–German Case, Trapped in Euroscepticism, Nationalism, State-Ism and Systemic Non-Compatibility**

Die neue deutsch-dänische Geschichte hat bereits begonnen und wird 2014 ihren ersten Höhepunkt erleben, wenn die deutsch-dänische Jugend, Kultur und Wirtschaft sich grenzüberschreitend begegnen, um die gegenwärtige Zusammenarbeit zu feiern – und sie für die Zukunft weiter auszubauen. Denn nur zusammen können wir unser gemeinsames Ziel erreichen: unsere Grenzregion zu einer Wachstumsregion werden zu lassen.³

This quote reflects the Danish–German narrative of post-WWII reconciliation, a narrative which has been widely used by politicians and stakeholders as a driver for more regional cooperation across the border and the establishment of a return to history cross-border Euroregion Schleswig in 1997 (Klatt 2006b). It is taken from the (now defunct) homepage of a large Interreg IV project for the region, Dybbøl 2014, which intended to use the 150th anniversary of the decisive battle of Dybbøl in the Danish–German war in 1864 to commemorate history, and at the same time start into a new era of Danish–German cooperation to transform the border region into a cross-border growth region (Klatt 2017b). It sends the message of a favourable cross-border perspective for youth, culture and business to together create an integrated cross-border growth region. But does it reflect the reality of social practice?

**History, Institutional Set-up and Governance**

The establishment of Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig in 1997 had a historical dimension, which both eased and complicated the process. The historic duchy of Schleswig, with the early medieval name Southern Jutland – Sønderjylland – served as a focus point and raison d’être. The political narrative employed of establishing a Euroregion reuniting a historic region did not reflect on the narratives of conflict present in Danish and German historiography (Klatt 2006a). From the eighteenth century, regional history had been about bordering the Danish–German border zone. A bordering completed with the 1920 plebiscite and division of Schleswig, as well as the division of the borderland population into
national majorities and minorities on either side. Challenged in the interwar years and immediately after World War II, the border and the settlement of the minority issues in 1955 had been catechized in a model solution of a national conflict, minority-majority accommodation, reconciliation and peace-building (Kühl 2005; Megoran 2011; Thaler 2007).

Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig followed the usual set-up of Euroregional governance, comprising a board, a small secretariat to cater for daily work and an advisory assembly of delegates from the constituents’ elected councils as well as some non-political stakeholders. A special characteristic was the inclusion of the two reciprocal national minorities in the border region, which soon became central initiators in the debates of the advisory assembly. Concerning the practical output results of Region Sønderjylland-Schleswig, it proved to be an advantage to have only one Danish member in the first 10 years, Southern Jutland County, with a strong institutionalization and financial sustainability. The Euroregion provided a platform for para-diplomatic activities with German sub-state institutions to promote the county’s interests in the border region. It provided cross-border contacts useful in finding flexible solutions to public service bottlenecks: for example, the county used the Euroregion to outsource some functions in the healthcare system to German operators, such as cancer treatment and ambulance services. It also tried to obtain administrative control over the Danish–German Interreg programme, but without success: the Interreg programme continues to be managed by the German Land Schleswig-Holstein and the two Danish regions Syddanmark and Sjælland. After the Danish administrative reform of 2007, when the counties were dissolved to be partially replaced by institutionally weak regions, the Euroregion has lacked political impetus. It has still coordinated a few cross-border activities especially in the field of culture, but has now foremost developed into a knowledge and counselling centre on cross-border issues. Concrete political initiatives have become scarce after the members decided to dissolve the political assembly of the Euroregion in 2011, considering it to be ineffective (Klatt 2013). Since 2000, parallel cross-border networks and agreements have been established by different stakeholders, resulting in a networked structure of cross-border cooperation rather than a spatial organization. This has resulted in frequent meetings and conferences, but not in concrete agreements on sustainable cross-border integration or resource sharing.

**Policy Initiated Practices**

Like in many European border regions, Interreg has been a primary facilitator of many cross-border initiatives in Sønderjylland-Schleswig. Here, a core cluster of Interreg participants can be identified (Javakhisvili Larsen 2016, 136ff.). It is especially the region’s institutions of higher education, as well as the border municipalities of Flensburg, Aabenraa, Tønder and Sønderborg that are central actors in the network. The institutions of higher education have participated in
various Interreg projects since Interreg I (1991–93), including a large-scale project stretching over two funding periods (III and IV), ‘The Knowledge Region’, specifically aimed at just this. Unfortunately, the project has not resulted in measurable collaborative research activities, though, as joint publications of researchers of these institutions are few, indicating that the immediate border region is generally bypassed in international research cooperation (Makkonen 2015). Furthermore, joint study programmes launched successfully in the 1990s have since either separated or been silently dismantled in recent Danish expenditure saving rounds in the education sector.

Development has been similar in the business sector. Several Interreg projects targeted business cooperation across the border. One of them was a joint business strategy (Schack and Dall Schmidt 2005), and another one resulted in the establishment of a cross-border business management office based at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Flensburg. Likewise, Interreg IV supported ‘The Danish-German Region’ (Den dansk-tyske region/Die deutsch-dänische Region), the largest Interreg project ever in the region, which was to create a cross-border business region around six regional strengths: sustainable energy, tourism and leisure economy, health and welfare technology, food industry, logistics and the transversal topic knowledge. In 2012, a joint logo was revealed to be used in the whole region to develop a common identity. However, today Den dansk-tyske region’s website is closed and the logo has sunk into oblivion.

The above-mentioned ‘Dybbøl 2014’ project attempted to construct Dybbøl, the scene of the decisive and violent battle of the Danish–German war of 1864, as a common ‘lieu de memoire’ for both Danes and Germans (and the respective national minorities), combined with the vision of a de-bordered cross-border region for people and business – with very limited success and a defunct homepage today (Klatt 2017b). Many other cross-border projects focusing on people-to-people activities and culture have been implemented, a cross-border cultural region being the latest (Kulturministeriet 2013). My examination of the documentation of activities available on the webpage reveals that this cultural region, claimed by its proponents to be unique in Europe, appears to be nothing but another pool to raise money for cross-border cultural projects, instead of developing a general strategy for the development of the fabric of cultural institutions in the border region.

**Systemic Differences Reduce Cooperation**

A narrative of continuing cooperation and good dialogue was reiterated after the Danish minority party in Germany, Südschleswigscher Wählerverband (SSW), for the first time joined a Schleswig-Holstein government coalition in 2012. The Danish minority had successfully managed to promote an image of Danish-ness as being relaxed, open-minded, democratic and inclusive since the 1970s. This is reflected in the political success of their party, as well as in the increasing
recruitment of children from parents without a minority background to the minority schools (Klatt and Kühl 2015). Thus, expectations for a renewed drive into more cross-border cooperation raised and were actively promoted by the SSW as a core theme of the new government coalition. In fact, though, several examples of cross-border cooperation hitherto praised as best practice were reduced or even discontinued by the Danish partner: When confronted with central government demands to reduce health expenditures, the Region South Denmark decided to cancel the agreement with German health services from 1 January 2017 on, as treatment capacities in Denmark were now considered sufficient. The use of German ambulances and a German rescue helicopter in South Denmark has also declined significantly after a similar Danish health infrastructure had been established. The two universities in the border region, the University of Southern Denmark and the Europauniversität Flensburg, have developed joint study programmes since 1993. Bureaucratic issues increasingly ‘divorced’ most of these, so that at present only one Danish–German programme in International Management is of truly cross-border character, including cross-border enrolment plus teaching and diplomas being offered by both universities. Even this programme has been threatened, though, because the Danish ministry of higher education refused to continue to fund this programme in case teaching only took place at the campus of Europauniversität Flensburg, which had been the practice since the programme’s start as it was the most practical solution for the students (Klatt 2014a). A cross-border express bus, inaugurated with Interreg funding, has been discontinued because of different policies in local transport by the responsible authorities on either side of the border: Schleswig-Holstein required the operators to use wheelchair accessible buses, while Southern Jutland County demanded long-distance coach comfort. For rail traffic, the only direct high-speed ICE connection from the border region to Berlin was discontinued in December 2015 because Danish and German railways could not agree on who should pay for the maintenance of the trainsets. A cross-border infrastructure and transport commission did not produce more than a list of desirable projects, none of which was new to stakeholders on either side, but no concrete action plan to implement any of them. The management as well as the musicians refused merging the two symphonic orchestras of the region. New initiatives like a joint cross-border-region public health insurance card, announced profoundly in November 2013 (Flensborg Avis, 1 November 2013), have not come beyond the preliminary planning state.

New Schengen Borderscapes? Social Practice outside Formalized Cooperation

It has been demonstrated that the sustainability of Interreg-incited cooperation is debateable. Still, the Danish–German borderscape has changed since the implementation of the Schengen agreement in March 2001.
Border crossings have increased in manifold ways. As far as we can assess it, though, residents of the border region have reacted differently. Many locals on the Danish side began to lock their front doors, cars and stables out of fear of increasing crime. The Germans, on the other hand, celebrated the opening of the border at the border crossings and were surprised over Danish reluctance to do likewise (Andersen 2004, 14–15). However, after a moment of insecurity, many border residents apparently took the opportunity to discover their new backyard, meeting new neighbours and thus developing a new understanding of borderlands space (Andersen 2004, 20–21). Also, local shopping behaviour changed. While Danes by tradition mostly bought alcoholic beverages and candy in Germany before, it now became more popular to purchase other goods. However, preferences for some products remained national. As an example, most Danes would not buy any German dairy products, vegetables and meat (Andersen 2004, 35–37). All in all, a trend to take advantage of generally cheaper German consumer prices as well as from services like hairdressing and car maintenance has increased the level of cross-border interaction of Danish borderlanders, but also of Danes residing in a considerable distance from the border. According to Flensburg’s tourism director, overnight stays of Danes in Flensburg increased by 139% from 2011 to 2015 (Jyske Vestkysten, 30 October 2015). Nonetheless, not everybody sought to take advantage of the new opportunities, and not all social activities became adapted to the new borderscape. For example, people only seldom crossed the border to join sports clubs etc., and both older data from 2004 (Andersen 2004) and more recent data reveal that most Danes still only have superficial social contacts to people south of the border. Thus, frequent border crossings do not necessarily indicate cross-border ties. Cross-border shopping, for example, is incited by economic gain and thus not influenced by Euroscepticism at all.

Economic gain has remained the major incitement for Danes to interact across the border, whereas German borderlanders’ motives for cross-border social practices are more difficult to assess. Shopping is motivated by the experience of difference: there are other products and a different shopping atmosphere in the cosy Danish small cities (Bygvrå 1995). Cross-border commuting surged in 2005–2008, when the Danish labour market experienced a shortage of labour in some sections, mainly construction, the health sector and some services. Attractive wages were a decisive pull-factor, but also ‘soft’ factors such as a better workplace climate (Buch, Dall Schmidt, and Niebuhr 2009; Klatt 2014b). Nevertheless, social contacts across the border appear to remain superficial, as about three-fourths of the members of a sample of borderlanders interviewed in 2012 acknowledged that they did not have any friends or relatives on the other side of the border.
Schengen Challenged – Euroscepticism or Unfamiliarity?

In summer 2015, a new migration route opened from refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to the Greek Aegean islands were only small straights had to be crossed in rubber boats. Soon, pressure on the refugee centres on the islands became too strong, migrants were permitted to transfer to the mainland and then were trekking north via the so-called Balkan route. In September, Germany and some other countries de-facto suspended the Dublin rules of processing requests for asylum in the country of entry to the EU and allowed refugees to enter. Many continued to Sweden, which already hosted a large community of ethnic Arab immigrants, thereby transiting Denmark on the way north. Much of this transit took the longer and more difficult to control land-route via Flensburg instead of the sea passages from Puttgarden and Sassnitz (see Figure 1). While German mainstream discussants (and official politics) maintained a ‘welcome culture’ during the second half of 2015, the migratory pressure was met by restrictive Danish policies from the very beginning. This was especially visible in the city of Flensburg, where locals including the city’s then member of the Schleswig-Holstein diet and mayor since 1 January 2017, as well as prominent members of the Danish minority committed themselves to welcome refugees in transit to Denmark-Sweden, faced the Danish measures to contain the flow of

Figure 1. Migration routes to Sweden, September–December 2015. Map elaborated by Katja Friis.
refugees. This contrary approach to the so-called refugee crisis affected the German-Danish borderscape and challenged the narrative of cooperation and familiarity that had developed between a part of the borderland population and regional politicians. In the following, I will evaluate how the events of 2015 induced if not a physical re-bordering, but definitely caused gradual changes in the borderscapes, assessing the role of Euroscepticism, but equally of EU border region policies and border region governance, to explain the failure to create sustainable cross-border regions with stable frameworks to counteract re-bordering trends in periods of crisis.

Danish sovereignty-based Euroscepticism had already been voiced in the political debate surrounding the Schengen treaty and the establishment of the Euroregion in 1997. It did not impact the cooperation in the following decade, though, as the Danish economy boomed. At the same time, it became visible that the Euroregion de facto remained without any political power to change political and territorial structures. On the Danish national level, the Socialist People’s Party Socialistisk Folkeparti, having previously been the strongest proponent of left-wing Euroscepticism in Denmark, became a pro-EU party in the 2000s and joined a Danish government for the first time from 2011 to 2014. On the right wing, the DPP had been advocating a return to border control in every national election campaign since Denmark implemented Schengen in 2001, arguing mostly with a perceived increase in organized cross-border crime – an increase that never could be documented by statistical evidence.

The DPP had supported the right-wing government elected in 2001 but remained without influence on Danish EU politics until the government needed their votes for a reform of the early retirement scheme efterløn in 2011 (Wind 2012). This was central to the core voters of DPP, unskilled workers, and the DPP had promised before that they would not agree to a deterioration here. In the end, political horse-trading secured the DPP’s vote for the reform on the price of the introduction of permanent customs controls on the borders (Wind 2012). While the government ‘naïvely believed that an internal national debate on border control could be kept away from the attention of an international audience’ (Wind 2012, 133), it turned into a major international crisis for Denmark. Especially German, but also other international media suddenly focused on ‘little Denmark’, a country else largely absent from international news and still enjoying a reputation of not only housing the ‘happiest people of the world’, but also of being a liberal, open and social welfare society. Opposition was voiced strongly by German politicians of the border region, but also by the Danish minority and its political party, the South Schleswig Voters’ Association SSW.

The dilemma of the Danish government, as explained by Marlene Wind (Wind 2012), was not the substance of the agreement, which remained unclear for a couple of months, but was its communication in the Danish media and the fact that it broke the previous consensus of the major Danish parties to keep the right-wing and left-wing critics out of influence on Danish EU politics. In this
case, the defence of Schengen, of free movement and of the European project as such had to come from outside the government: academics, foreign correspondents in Denmark, the Danish industry and a few retired politicians with a strong pro-EU stand (Wind 2012, 135). Furthermore, the deal was struck by finance minister Claus Hjorth Frederiksen without prior consulting the Ministry of Justice, Germany or the European institutions. Additionally, the National Commissioner of the Danish Police rejected the argument that increased cross-border crime required more border control (Wind 2012). The social democrats, originally not totally against increased border controls, reacted quickly when taking power after the September 2011 elections and stopped the customs control on the border.

When Denmark eventually introduced permanent police presence with random checks at the major border crossings in January 2016, this did not come as a surprise but manifested the return of state-ism in the (cross-) border region. Positive stereotypes of Denmark as a liberal, relaxed, open and inclusive society were challenged, as ‘Scare-campaigns’ were launched by the Danish government in Middle Eastern newspapers to discourage refugees from travelling to Denmark. Furthermore, allowances for foreigners residing in Denmark who are not able to support themselves were cut, and there were political proposals to body search incoming refugees for money, gold and jewellery to be confiscated as a contribution to the costs of their stay. At the EU level, Denmark opposed acceptance rates as well as a joint EU migration policy. Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen of the liberal party Venstre proclaimed in his speech on the Danish Constitution Day on 5 June 2016 that Denmark was the world’s best society to live in; as employment grew, unemployment fell, there was economic growth and the number of asylum seekers in May 2016 was the lowest per month since 2012.

While the tangible threat to public order, precondition for introducing border controls within the Schengen system, has remained dubious, controls have been costly. The Danish railways assessed the costs of their pre-check of passengers travelling to Sweden to be 130,000 €/day (Politiken, 28 December 2015). Costs of controls on the border to Germany are estimated to 29 mio. € for 2016 according to Danish Minister of Justice Søren Pind (Der Nordschleswiger, 14 June 2016). Because of overburdening the police, the Danish volunteer militia organization Hjemmeværnet (literally ‘Home Defense’) has been assisting the Danish police since June 2016; in camouflage uniforms, but not bearing arms. The Hjemmeværnet is a remnant from the Cold War. Formed out of the resistance movement against the German occupation in WW II, it was meant to function as a guerrilla against possible Soviet occupiers. Today, it is mainly used as assistance to the police at large public events. From September 2017, regular military units have assisted the police, and a special force of police cadets has been trained in a six-month programme, so the regular police assembled at the border are set
free to return to their original tasks. Nevertheless, DPP continuously argues for complete 24/7 controls at all border crossings, using the military to support the police, dog patrols and more. Even setting up a fence as on the Hungarian-Serbian border has been proposed (Politiken, 21 May 2017).

Controls have also been introduced on the Øresund crossing between the Danish capital Copenhagen and the Swedish city of Malmö, but by Sweden. Here, together with the construction of the fixed road and rail link across the border, a lot of political emphasis had been put on creating a true cross-border metropolis (Matthiessen 2004, 2010; Schönweitz 2008). Commuting as well as other forms of cross-border interaction have increased significantly due to the frequent and fast rail connection. Copenhagen airport, located directly at the bridge between Copenhagen and Malmö, has become Southern Sweden’s international airport, too. The reintroduction of border controls abandoned more than 60 years of open borders between Denmark and Sweden. Due to carrier liability, Danish Railways chose to use the airport station as a checkpoint for passport or photo ID controls of the about 30,000 daily rail passengers. Through trains were cut at this station, which has a metro-station design of two tracks only without any switches or side tracks. Passengers had to detrain and cross a bridge to the other platform, where their IDs were checked and scanned by a private security firm, before they could retrain to continue to Sweden. These controls were lifted in the summer of 2017, though, as Sweden did no longer perceive a significant threat.

During the period of controls, commuting time from Copenhagen to Malmö increased from 35 minutes to up to 90 minutes during rush hours because of congestions at the gates and in the train. This major setback for the Øresund cooperation was a thorn in the eye of the Danish government. Still, attempts to negotiate with Sweden on a joint ‘Nordic’ border control to assure free passage across the Øresund did not lead to immediate success. On the contrary, both the DPP and the Danish Conservatives criticized Sweden for not having the refugee situation under control and called the idea of a joint Nordic passport control to be unrealistic. The DPP even argued for Denmark to introduce permanent and total border controls for travellers entering Denmark from Sweden (Berlingske, 6 February 2016).

Danish police claim that 887,995 persons were controlled at the borders from 4 January to 20 May 2016, resulting in 1,336 persons being denied entry and 143 persons being charged for human trafficking. The police have admitted, though, that these 143 include family members of refugees and humanitarian activists; the share of professional traffickers being much lower. The controls have not resulted in significant numbers of arrests or charges against other forms of cross-border crime. The police themselves have not really assessed the controls’ effectiveness, but rather voiced criticism including denouncing the controls as symbolic policy (Jyllands-Posten, 9 April 2016). South Jutland police confirmed in June 2016 that there was no correlation between a decrease of crime in the region and the border
controls, as most of the perpetrators had always been residents of the region (Der Nordschleswiger, 14 June 2016).

Nevertheless, political support for the controls has remained continuously high in Denmark. Business has been sceptical, but does not consider the present soft form of random controls to be a serious impediment for trade and growth. Opinion polls also indicate continuous support for the measure: In a Gallup poll conducted in the first week of January 2016, only 21% thought that the controls should be abolished again, while 55% wished them to be permanent. Forty per cent thought that all persons crossing the border should be checked, instead of random checks only. Support for controls was considerably higher among centre-right voters and only marginally lower in the border region. Approval rates have continued to be high after about half a year of control. In an opinion poll of the Norwegian institute Norstat for the Danish net-paper Altinget, 66% expressed their support to prolong border controls to two years, only 22% thought this was a bad idea. While 98% of the Danish People’s Party supported continuing border controls, also 84% of the ruling liberal party Venstre’s voters, and even less (63%) of the Social Democrat’s voters did. Only the supporters of the left-liberal Radikale Venstre and the New Leftist Alternativet have a clear majority against continuing border controls, while the leftist Socialist People’s Party and Enhedslisten are divided. The north German daily Flensburger Tageblatt, definitely not supporting the border controls, commented ‘Dänische Begeisterung über Kontrollen kennt keine Grenzen’ – there is no limit (border) to the Danish enthusiasm on (border) control (2 June 2016).

Conclusion: New Borderscapes – or Persistence of Indifference?

The implementation of the Schengen treaty created new borderscapes in European borderlands. The dismantling and destruction of border control posts, the opening of new crossings previously closed, new public transport connections crossing the border as well as the new feeling of just crossing over like into any other different town or landscape have changed the perception of European borderlands, or have they?

Statistical data on passenger as well as freight traffic document that cross-border interaction have increased across all borders within the Schengen-zone. More in-depth research on cross-border social practices, though, reveals many impediments to factual cross-border integration and region-building, as well as the persistence of legal, administrative, linguistic and cultural borders. The majority of cross-border interactions are incited by exploiting cost and price differentials instead of politically incited cooperation.

For the labour market, open borders should create new opportunities of cross-border integration, as the border crossing has become much easier, dependable and less time-consuming. Still, the number of cross-border commuters, understood as people who work on a permanent basis in another
country than their country of residence, remains small. For 2006/2007, only about 780,000 border region residents were documented as commuters across a border within the European Economic Area, hereof 206,000 commuting into Switzerland and 127,000 into Luxemburg (Nerb et al. 2009). Intensive cross-border commuting is characteristic of four regional cross-border labour markets only: The greater Luxemburg area, the Basle and Geneva metropolitan regions as well as the Swiss canton Ticino as the most important in-commuting regions of Switzerland. In all four, there are clear economic incitements to cross the border for work, low linguistic barriers and thriving regional economies. At the political level, cross-border regions are not sufficiently institutionalized to function as policy coordinating bodies or even cross-border governments. Functional cooperation reveals the state’s decisive rule as norm-setting body, both legally and culturally.

Euro scepticism as such, in whatever category, does not appear to have had an influence on this lack of cross-border interaction. Resilience to engage in border crossing social practices cannot be explained by tides of Euro scepticism only. Unfamiliarity as well as the lack of necessity contributes to maintain national preferences. A certain form of exposure to perceived external threats is sensed stronger in border regions, as the external ‘other’ is more present in the periphery than in central regions of a state. This may result in a general lack of trust in globalization, cosmopolitanism and diversity, expressed by mistrust, blaming European integration and demanding a re-bordering. Even in the Danish–German case, Euro scepticism only expressed itself in crisis and elections as sovereignty-based and increasingly economic Euro scepticism, the latter expressed in the fear of cross-border crime and competition from low-wage labour from Central- and Eastern Europe. In actual cross-border politics, Euro scepticism was never expressed, on the contrary.

Regarding factual cross-border cooperation, the Danish–German development indicates a ‘home first’ – approach by the relevant systemic actors. Though never outspoken, there is reluctance to give up institutional power to a cross-border institution or even an institution in the neighbouring country. The only exception is some institutional flexibility when solving bottleneck problems. Additionally, these examples demonstrate the systemic difficulties in applying cross-border solutions between highly developed and regulated welfare state administrations.

Lastly, social border crossing practices develop independently from institutional frameworks, political directions and policy targets. Even though border crossing practices are difficult to quantify and to qualify, Euro scepticism does not seem to influence a border region’s population’s social behaviour. Euro scepticism does not have an impact on economic incentives for border shopping. Furthermore, it can be ascertained that open borders increase interaction. Still, our knowledge on borderlanders’ behaviour remains limited. It is characterized by transnational behaviour as well as border surfing, but also by continuing indifference or even directly hostile attitudes.
Notes

3. ‘The new German-Danish history has already begun, and it will experience its first climax in 2014 when the German-Danish youth, culture and economy will meet across the border to celebrate the current cooperation – and further increase it for the future. We can achieve our common goal only together: to turn our border region into a region of growth.’ Dybbøl 2014, [online] Available at: <http://www.dybboel2014.dk/om-projektet> [Accessed 23 June 2015].
4. The author of this text served as observer of the Danish government in the assembly at many meetings.
10. For nation branding of Denmark, see http://kommunikationsmaaling.dk/artikel/den-marks-international-image/, accessed 6 October 2017, which reflects this rather positive image, but also concedes that most surveyed do not really distinguish among the Nordic countries Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

References


