

FACT SHEET

Political system of Denmark

1. Overview

1.1 Denmark is a constitutional monarchy with a representative parliamentary system. The monarch is the head of state and the Prime Minister is the head of government. The *Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark* ("Constitutional Act") enshrines the principle of the tripartition of powers into the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches. This fact sheet provides an overview of the three branches in Denmark.

2. The monarchy

2.1 Queen Margrethe II is the incumbent monarch acceded to the throne on 14 January 1972. The power of the monarch is largely ceremonial which include:

- (a) appointing the Prime Minister and other Ministers;
- (b) signing Acts of Parliament into law to be countersigned by a Minister;
- (c) hearing the regular reports from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs regarding the latest political development;
- (d) hosting official visits by foreign heads of state and paying state visits abroad; and
- (e) receiving ambassadors of foreign countries.

3. Executive Branch

3.1 While the *Constitutional Act* grants the executive power to the monarch, he or she always exercises the power via the Ministers in the government. The monarch appoints an individual receiving a majority of support in Parliament to be the Prime Minister, and appoints other Ministers as recommended by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister and other Ministers together form the government, which is responsible for executing policies, submitting bills to Parliament for approval and representing Denmark in international settings. Helle Thorning-Schmidt of the Social Democratic Party has been the Prime Minister since October 2011.

3.2 The Council of State is another institution of the Executive Branch established under the *Constitutional Act*, encompassing the monarch, successor to the throne and all Ministers. One of the major functions of the Council of State is to discuss all bills and important government measures. The ministries concerned have the ultimate powers to make decisions relating to their respective policy portfolios.

4. Legislative Branch

4.1 The unicameral Folketinget is the Legislative Branch of Denmark. It is empowered to scrutinize and pass legislation, approve the national budget and monitor the work of the Executive Branch through questioning, debate and vote of no confidence. The Folketinget also takes part in international co-operation such as exercising control over the government's policy on the European Union and collaborating with inter-parliamentary assemblies.

Parliamentary election

4.2 Election of the Folketinget is held once every four years unless it is dissolved earlier. The last election was held in September 2011 with the Liberal Party securing 47 seats to remain the largest party in the Folketinget. However, the Social Democratic Party managed to form a minority government coalition with the Social Liberal Party and the Socialist People's Party to rule Denmark. The Socialist People's Party subsequently left the coalition but continued to pledge its support to the ruling coalition. The next election will take place in 2015.

4.3 The Folketinget is made up of 179 Members elected by the proportional representation system, with 175 Members elected in Denmark, two in the Faroe Islands and two in Greenland. Of the 175 seats in Denmark, 135 are returned from 10 multi-member constituencies in the country. The remaining 40 seats are "compensatory seats" distributed on the basis of the number of votes obtained by the parties across the country to ensure that the seats are distributed to parties as equitably as possible according to the votes.

4.4 In order to have a share in the "compensatory seats", a party must fulfil one of the following three requirements:

- (a) winning at least one constituency seat;
- (b) obtaining, in two of the three electoral provinces¹, at least as many votes as the average number of valid votes cast per constituency seat in the province; or
- (c) securing at least 2% of the votes cast nationwide.

Current party composition

4.5 The composition of the Folketinget by political party is as follows:

- (a) Social Democratic Party (47 Members) which focuses on solidarity with the poorest and social welfare to those who need it;
- (b) Liberal Party (47 Members) which supports free trade and minimum state interference;
- (c) Danish People's Party (22 Members) as a right-wing populist party opposing multi-culturalism and the European integration;
- (d) Social Liberal Party (16 Members) which supports international co-operation and reduces social inequality;
- (e) Socialist People's Party (12 Members) which is a strong supporter of human rights, the rights of minorities and democracy;
- (f) Unity List-the Red-Green Alliance (12 Members) being an alliance of three left-wing parties placing great emphasis on combating social inequality and poverty;

¹ For electoral purpose, Denmark is divided into three electoral provinces which are further sub-divided into 10 multi-member constituencies.

- (g) Liberal Alliance (nine Members) as a centrist and pro-European party supporting a lower income tax rate and promoting green energy;
- (h) Conservative People's Party (eight Members) which focuses on social responsibility and advocates a free society;
- (i) Parties in the Faroe Islands and Greenland (four Members);
- (j) Independent (one Member); and
- (k) Vacancy (one seat).

4.6 Mogens Lykketoft of the Social Democratic Party has been the Speaker of the Folketinget since October 2011.

5. Judicial Branch

5.1 The Judicial Branch of Denmark is made up of ordinary courts and specialized courts. Ordinary courts comprise the Supreme Court, two high courts and 24 districts courts:

- (a) the Supreme Court to serve as the final court of appeal for civil and criminal cases from the subordinate courts. Since a decision cannot normally be appealed more than once, district court cases rarely reach the Supreme Court-level;
- (b) the high courts to function as civil and criminal courts of first instance, and civil and criminal appellate courts for cases from the district courts; and
- (c) the district courts to handle both civil and criminal cases. Under certain circumstances, the district courts may refer civil cases to the high courts, such as those involving consideration of general interest.

5.2 Specialized courts include the Land Registration Court responsible for handling cases concerning land title registration, and the Labour Court tasked with adjudicating disputes between employers and employees.

References

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