

## An active and open democracy

*In Denmark, democracy equals active participation, both politically and in civil society. This indicates that people believe in the usefulness of making their voices heard.*

Denmark is a constitutional monarchy. The constitution dates back to 1849, but has continuously been exposed to amendments. Important ones were the amendment of 1901 allowing for a one-chamber parliamentary system, the amendment of 1915 enfranchising women as well as servants, and the amendment of 1953 which allowed for a female Head of State.

Together, the Government, the Folketing (the parliament) and the courts constitute the Danish political system, and checks and balances are ensured through their active interplay. The democratically elected government and the parliament govern the country. The Danish Parliament has 179 members. 175 are elected in Denmark, two in the Faroe Islands and two in Greenland, representing a total of eight parties, dispersed on a political continuum from left to right. The seats in the Folketing are allocated on the basis of proportional representation, so that the composition of the parliament reflects the party-political preferences of the total electorate. Every Danish citizen over the age of 18 is entitled to vote. The present government was re-elected at the general elections in November 2007. It consists of a minority coalition of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party with H.E. Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen from the Liberal Party as Prime Minister.

Danish governments have frequently been minority governments. Danish politics are therefore characterized by broad compromises between the political parties. There is a low threshold for a party to be allocated seats in parliament (2% of the votes). This means, that Denmark has a relatively high number of political parties. Despite this, the Danish political system is stable, highly organised and well functioning. All these things may be the reason for Denmark's large election turn-outs compared to other European countries. It makes the constituents believe in the use of voting. At the 2007 elections, the poll was 86.6 %.

At both the local, regional and national levels the civil society of Denmark is thriving. There is a long tradition for associations consisting of everything from sports clubs over co-operative housing movements to national environmental organisations and political parties. Most Danes are members of one or more of these associations and Danes are known for a strong commitment to voluntary social work. Memberships of political parties have declined over the last decades. Yet, this is not necessarily tantamount to a weakening of the Danish democracy. Instead, it may indicate that people are actively participating elsewhere in civil society, and that their political involvement is shifting towards single-issue politics.

The political system in Denmark is highly decentralised. In 2007, one of the largest structural reforms in modern Danish history was enacted with far reaching consequences for the ordinary Dane. As a result, five regions, each with an elected mayor and council, are responsible for healthcare and regional development plans. 98 municipalities, each with an elected mayor and council, are responsible for citizen-related service tasks, including primary schools, social services as well as local planning and cultural affairs. The municipal budgets are based on local taxes, block grants and refunding from the state.

For more information on Danish politics: [www.folketinget.dk](http://www.folketinget.dk), [www.statsministeriet.dk](http://www.statsministeriet.dk), [www.um.dk](http://www.um.dk), [www.borger.dk](http://www.borger.dk)