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Denmark

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Introduction

The year 2015 will be remembered for the success of the Danish People's Party and the new party, the Alternatives; a new minority Liberal government; and the refugee/migrant crisis.

Election report

General elections, June 2015

From the time of the Prime Minister's traditional New Year's speech, focus was on the election that was to be held by September at the latest. The Social Democrats fielded major campaigns with a focus on PM Thorning-Schmidt because she did much better than the competitor, Lars Løkke Rasmussen (Liberals), who was deemed less competent by the voters due to bad press coverage after it became known in the summer of 2014 that the party had paid €20.000 worth of clothing and a family vacation for him (Kosiara-Pedersen 2015a).

On 27 May PM Thorning-Schmidt called for General Elections to be held on 18 June. The ten parties fighting the election supported either the incumbent PM or her Liberal challenger, Løkke Rasmussen. At the top of the political agenda were economic issues and employment, immigration, education and health, which are all classic campaign issues

(Kosiara-Pedersen 2015a). Contrary to the 2011 campaign, the opinion polls fluctuated during the campaign. But the result was a slight tilt to the 'blue bloc'.

Even though the Social Democrats increased their electoral support slightly, this was insufficient to retain the key to the Prime Minister Office. Two of their supporting parties, the Social Liberals and Socialist People's Party, were more than halved. The Red-Green Alliance only increased their support slightly, and the Alternative, a new party created in 2013, which also supported Thorning-Schmidt as PM, only compensated for some of this decline when they gained representation with nine MPs.

The Danish People's Party became the largest party within the 'blue bloc' of parties that resides right of centre on the traditional, economic left-right dimension. They increased their electoral support substantially from 12 to 21 percent, while the increase of the Liberal Alliance was more modest. On the other hand, support for both the Liberals and Conservatives were reduced.

In sum, the election increased the support for parties towards the ends of the left-right and post-material spectrums, hence leading to a polarization tendency within a consensus based system with a strong tradition for large legislative majorities.

Table 1. Elections to the Parliament, *Folketinget*, in 2015

| Date of election | | 18 June 2015 | | | Previous election | | 15 September 2011 | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------------|-------|--------------------|---------------------|-----|-------------------|--|
| Electorate | | 4,145,105 | | | Total seats | | 175 | |
| Total votes cast | | 3,560,060 | | | Turnout | | 85.9% | |
| Valid votes cast | | 3,518,987 | | | Share of valid vote | | 98.8% | |
| Party | Votes | | | Seats ^a | | | | |
| | N | % | Δ% | N | % | ΔN | Δ% | |
| Social Democrats/ <i>Socialdemokratiet</i> (S) | 924,940 | 26.3% | +1.5% | 47 | 26.9% | +3 | +1.8% | |
| Danish People's Party/ <i>Dansk Folkeparti</i> (DF) | 741,746 | 21.1% | +8.8% | 37 | 21.1% | +15 | +8.5% | |
| Liberal Party/ <i>Venstre</i> (V) | 685,188 | 19.5% | -7.2% | 34 | 19.4% | -13 | -7.3% | |
| Red-Green Alliance/ <i>Enhedslisten - De Rød-Grønne</i> (EL) | 274,463 | 7.8% | +1.1% | 14 | 8.0% | +2 | +1.1% | |
| Liberal Alliance/ <i>Liberal Alliance</i> (LA) | 265,129 | 7.5% | +2.5% | 13 | 7.4% | +4 | +2.3% | |
| Alternative/ <i>Alternativet</i> (Alt) | 168,788 | 4.8% | +4.8% | 9 | 5.1% | +9 | +5.1% | |
| Social Liberal Party/ <i>Radikale Venstre</i> (RV) | 161,009 | 4.6% | -4.9% | 8 | 4.6% | -9 | -5.1% | |
| Socialist People's Party/ <i>Socialistisk Folkeparti</i> (SF) | 147,578 | 4.2% | -5.0% | 7 | 4.0% | -9 | -5.1% | |
| Conservative People's Party/ <i>Det Konservative Folkeparti</i> (KF) | 118,003 | 3.4% | -1.5% | 6 | 3.4% | -2 | -1.2% | |
| Christian Democrats/ <i>Kristendemokraterne</i> (KD) | 29,077 | 0.8% | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | |
| Others | 3,066 | 0.1% | - | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | |

Note: ^aThe elections of the four MPs in the self-governing areas of Greenland and Faroe Islands are not included here.

Source: Danmarks Statistik (2016); The Electoral Office of the Ministry of the Interior (2015).

Referendum on a transformation of the opt-out to opt-in on criminal justice and home affairs

The EU positive parties agree on the need to replace Denmark's exemption from large parts of the EU's criminal justice and home affairs, established in 1993, with an opt-in agreement due to the terrorist attacks in Europe. The legislative proposal on twenty-two opt-ins was decided by parliament (69-37), but since it concerns giving away sovereignty, it needs either the support of 5/6 of the MPs, or a simple majority in parliament as well as the support at a referendum according to the Danish constitution. Hence, a referendum was called for 3 December. The campaign prior to the referendum was, as always, simplified. The Danish People's Party proved again their strong stance against the EU, and, also as usual, played the 'anti-immigration' card even though the proposal as such did not concern legislation within this area. The Red-Green Alliance and Liberal Alliance are the other EU sceptic parties. The established, EU positive parties, who span the political spectrum, did not manage to convince the electorate. Hence, the Danish voted against adopting this opt-in arrangement, and since

the no-side made up more than 30 percent (37.5 percent) of the eligible electorate, the proposal was rejected. The Danes rejected the *carte blanche* given on future opt-ins and not Europol, but it remains to be seen whether Denmark will get a parallel agreement enabling participation in this.

Table 2. Results of country-wide referendum on transforming the opt-out to opt-in on the legal area in EU

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------------------|--------|---------|
| Date of referendum | 3 June 2015 | | | |
| Electorate | 4,153,041 | | | |
| Total votes cast | 2,990,261 | Votes cast as share of electorate | | 72.0% |
| Total valid votes | 2,934,299 | Valid votes as share of votes cast | | 98.1% |
| Referendum question | Valid answers | Vote N | Vote % | Outcome |
| Legislative proposal on transforming the opt-out to opt-in on the legal area/ <i>Lovforslag om omdannelse af retsforbeholdet til en tilvalgsordning</i> | Yes | 1,375,862 | 46.9% | Reject |
| | No | 1,558,437 | 53.1% | |

Source: The Electoral Office of the Ministry of the Interior (2016).

Cabinet report

Thorning-Schmidt II, ending June 2015

Table 3. Cabinet composition of Thorning-Schmidt II in Denmark in 2015

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|-------|
| Duration of cabinet | Inception | 3 February 2014 | Dissolution | 28 June 2015 | | |
| Period covered by table | From | 1 January 2015 | Until | 28 June 2015 | | |
| Type of cabinet | Minority Coalition (MC) | | | | | |
| A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2015 | Seats in cabinet | | Seats held by women | | Seats in parliament | |
| | N | % | N | % of party | N | % |
| Social Democrats (S) | 14 | 70.0% | 4 | 28.6% | 47 | 26.9% |
| Social Liberal Party (RV) | 6 | 30.0% | 2 | 33.3% | 17 | 9.7% |
| Totals | 20 | 100.0% | 6 | 30.0% | 64 | 36.6% |
| B. Composition of Thorning-Schmidt II cabinet on 1 January 2015 | See Kosiara-Pedersen (2015b:89) | | | | | |
| C. Changes in composition of Thorning-Schmidt II cabinet during 2015 | There were no changes | | | | | |
| D. | | | | | | |

Sources: Kosiara-Pedersen (2015b).

Løkke Rasmussen II, beginning June 2015

Even though comprising a majority, the formation of a majority coalition was not a given. On the basis of the advice given by the nine parties represented in parliament, the Queen of Denmark appointed Løkke Rasmussen *informateur* and requested him to form a majority government comprising the four parties within the 'blue bloc' the day after the election. The Liberal Alliance wanted this kind of government, while the Conservatives wanted to stay out of it. However, the Danish People's Party was the one to decide. Both before and during the election campaign, their government participation had been a recurrent theme. They ended up not entering government, presumably because they deemed that they would get more out of staying outside, as they had argued. Hence, Løkke Rasmussen then got the mandate to form a minority government, and on 28 June, he was appointed PM and presented his government.

The number of ministries was reduced to 17, and some reshuffling of areas took place (see Table 4). The Liberal government is more traditional than that of Thorning-Schmidt II (Kosiara-Pedersen 2015b). It has a lower share of female ministers. Two of the ministers were recruited from outside parliament, which is not uncommon. Carl Holst has a long history within the party and was regional mayor, and Jørgen Neergaard was the long time CEO of the Confederation of Danish Employers.

Løkke Rasmussen had to change a minister already after about three months. The Minister for Defence and Minister for Nordic Cooperation, Carl Holst, was accused of, in his previous position as 'Regional Mayor', misusing public funds for his private election campaign. He was replaced by Peter Christensen, who had been a strong defender of Løkke Rasmussen during the media storm in 2014 (see Kosiara-Pedersen 2015b) and who, probably partly for that reason, had been one of the victims of the Liberals' electoral defeat at the 2015 general election.

The ideological base and span of the government naturally changed with this type of government change. Part of the government program, 'together for the future' (Regeringen 2015), was implemented in less than a year, including cut backs on third world aid, environmental policies (Kosiara-Pedersen & Little 2016), unemployment benefits, as well as a tightening of asylum and immigration rules and increased border control. The government decentralized part of the state administration to accommodate the interests of the outskirts (and Danish People's Party). The government also called the EU referendum (see above). However, important issues remain undone, in particular the reduction in the highest end of the marginal tax rate which Liberal Alliance, and the Conservatives, in particular are calling for. However, even though minority governments are sensitive to the opinions of their parliamentary supporting parties, the government doesn't seem worried by these two parties. It seems more focused on pleasing their larger partner, the Danish People's Party.

Table 4. Cabinet composition of Løkke Rasmussen II in Denmark in 2015

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|------|
| Duration of cabinet | Inception | 28 June 2015 | | Dissolution | Still in office at end of 2015 | | |
| Period covered by table | From | 28 June 2015 | | Until | 31 December 2015 | | |
| Type of cabinet | Single Party Minority (SPMI) | | | | | | |
| E. Party and gender composition | 1 January 2014 | Seats in cabinet | | Seats held by women | | Seats in parliament | |
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| A Liberals (V) | | 17 | 100% | 5 | 29.4 | 34 | 19.4 |
| F. Composition of cabinet on 28 June 2015 | | | | | | | |
| | Prime Minister: Lars Løkke Rasmussen (1964 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister of Finance: Claus Hjort Frederiksen (1947 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister of Foreign Affairs: Kristian Jensen (1971 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Cultural Affairs and Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs (Church): Bertel Haarder (1944 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Transport and Buildings: Hans Christian Schmidt (1953 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for the Environment and Food: Eva Kjer Hansen (1964 female, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Business and Growth: Troels Lund Poulsen (1976 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Foreigners, Integration and Housing: Inger Støjberg (1973 female, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister of Social affairs and the Interior: Karen Ellemann (1969 female, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister of Justice: Søren Pind (1969 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Energy, Supply and Climate: Lars Christian Lilleholt (1965 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Children, Education and Gender Equality: Ellen Trane Nørby (1980 female, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Health and the Elderly: Sophie Løhde (1983 female, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Taxation: Karsten Lauritzen (1983 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Education (Higher Level) and Research: Esben Lunde Larsen (1978 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister of Defence and Minister for Nordic Cooperation: Carl Holst (1970 male, V) | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Employment: Jørn Neergaard Larsen (1949 male, V) | | | | | | |
| G. Changes in composition of Løkke Rasmussen II cabinet during 2015 | | | | | | | |
| | Minister for Defence and Minister for Nordic Cooperation Carl Holst (1970 male, V) resigned due to accusations of misuse of public funds in his previous position as 'Regional Mayor' (<i>regionsrådsformand</i>); replaced by Peter Christensen (1975 male, V) on 30.09.2015 | | | | | | |
| H. Same as on 28 June 2015 | | | | | | | |

Sources: Statsministeriet (2016); Folketinget (2016a); Danmarks Statistik (2016a)

Parliament report

For the Spring of 2015, see above.

After the election Parliament was to elect a new chair, since Mogens Lykketoft (Social Democrats) left to chair the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015–6. The chair of parliament is a very honorary position within Danish representative democracy; hence, it has provoked some discussion that the government and its supporting parties elected Pia Kjærsgaard (Danish People's Party) to this esteemed position. She is the first female chair of parliament. Due to her parliamentary experience (MP since 1981, part of the parliamentary leadership team since 2012) and party leadership experience (Progress Party and Danish People's Party) she seems to be an obvious choice; however controversy rests on her political views.

Table 5. Party and gender composition of parliament (Folketinget) in Denmark in 2015

| Party | 1 January 2015 ^a | | | | 31 December 2015 | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------|-------|-------|------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| | All | | Women | | All | | Women | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Social Democratic Party (S) | 47 | 26.9% | 17 | 36.2% | 47 | 26.9% | 18 | 38.3% |
| Socialist People's Party (SF) | 12 | 6.9% | 8 | 66.7% | 7 | 4.0% | 3 | 42.9% |
| Social Liberal Party (RV) | 17 | 9.7% | 10 | 58.8% | 8 | 4.6% | 5 | 62.5% |
| Conservative People's Party (KF) | 8 | 4.6% | 2 | 25.0% | 6 | 3.4% | 2 | 33.3% |
| Danish People's Party (DF) | 22 | 12.6% | 8 | 36.7% | 37 | 21.1% | 15 | 40.5% |
| Liberal Party (V) | 47 | 26.9% | 14 | 29.8% | 34 | 19.4% | 9 | 26.5% |
| Liberal Alliance (LA) | 9 | 5.1% | 3 | 33.3% | 13 | 7.4% | 5 | 38.5% |
| Red-Green Alliance (EL) | 12 | 6.8% | 4 | 33.3% | 14 | 8.0% | 5 | 35.7% |
| Independent | 1 | 0.6% | 0 | 0.0% | - | - | - | - |
| Alternative (Alt) | - | - | - | - | 9 | 5.1% | 3 | 33.3% |
| Totals | 175 | 100.0% | 66 | 37.7% | 175 | 100.0% | 65 | 37.1 |

Notes: ^a The parliament also contains two MPs from Greenland and two from the Faroe Islands. The former has two female MPs, whereas the latter has two male MPs, thus bringing the total number of women to 68 or 38.0% for 1 January and 67 or 37.4% for 31 December 2015.

Sources: Folketinget (2016a, 2016b); Kosiara-Pedersen 2015b.

Institutional changes

Political Party Changes

New Party

The Alternative was formed in 2013 by Uffe Elbæk (1954 male, independent/Alt), a former Social Liberal MP (2011-2013), independent MP 2013-2015, and Minister of Cultural Affairs (2011–2012). In the capacity of the latter he was accused of nepotism, harassed by the media and opposition, and chose to resign for personal reasons (Bille 2013: 60). He was later cleared of the accusation. The Alternative was established in November 2013 but wasn't predicted any chances. However, they became authorized to stand for election in March 2015 and quickly performed so well in the opinion polls that they were taken serious by the established system. The Alternative is alternative in both form and substance: They want to contribute to a transformation of the political culture and decision-making processes and have tried to organize differently than the other parties. Their main goal is environmental sustainability, and this as well as their opinions on all other issues, placed left of centre.

Party Leader Change

The year 2015 was characterised by one important party leadership change. Helle Thorning-Schmidt (1966 female, S) chose to step down as chair on the election night when it was clear that she could not remain in the Prime Minister's Office. Mette Frederiksen (1977 female, S), the crown princess, was not challenged and officially elected 28 June 2015. Frederiksen has the image of being more of a traditional Social Democrat compared to her 'Gucci-Helle' nicknamed predecessor. Frederiksen seems to have made an impact both on the party strategy and organization, of course, not only due to her personality but also the position in the opposition. Strategically Frederiksen has, for example, chosen to be almost as tough as the Danish People's Party when it comes to the refugee/immigration crisis. Organizationally she seems to be reemphasizing the party as a membership organization, not merely a campaign organization. However, the size of her impact remains to be seen.

Table 6. Changes in political parties in Denmark in 2015

| | |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A | New Parties |
| | The Alternative was created in 2013 by Uffe Elbæk (1954 male, independent MP), a former Social Liberal MP (2011-2013) and Minister of Cultural Affairs (3.10.11-6.12.12). |
| B | Party leadership changes in 2015 |
| | Social Democratic Party chair Helle Thorning-Schmidt (1966 female, S) resigned after loss of governmental office at the election night; replaced by Mette Frederiksen (1977 female, S) on 28 June without competitors. |

Source: Kosiara-Pedersen 2015b.

Issues in National Politics

The strong image of refugees and migrants walking the highways of Southern Denmark on their way from Germany to Sweden in September was a wakeup call to the public and politicians that the refugee crisis had hit the Danish borders. Hence, in the second half of 2015 immigration/integration is the most important issue on the agenda. This is far from a new theme in Danish politics, and it has been important for many years now, not least since the split of Danish People's Party from the Progress Party in the mid-1990s.

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