

FACT SHEET

JANUARY 2012

FOLKETINGET



THE DANISH
PARLIAMENT
IS CALLED THE
FOLKETING.
IT IS LOCATED
IN THE CHRIS-
TIANSBORG
PALACE IN
THE HEART OF
COPENHAGEN.

The Danish Parliament in brief

The Danish Parliament, which has been unicameral since the last revision of the Constitution in 1953, consists of 179 Members (MPs). MPs are elected at general elections which must be held at least once every four years. Of the 179 MPs, 175 are elected in Denmark, whereas each of the other two members of the Danish Realm – the Faeroe Islands and Greenland – elects two MPs.

The Danish Parliament has 26 Standing Committees with up to 29 members each. The committees primarily discuss the Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolutions introduced in the Chamber of the Folketing. However, they also exercise parliamentary scrutiny of the Govern-

ment by asking questions to Ministers about their administration of existing laws.

The Speaker of the Danish Parliament is elected for each new parliamentary session. The principal task of the Speaker is to ensure that sittings in the Chamber are held in an orderly manner. He is also the Head of the Parliament's Administration, which employs about 400 people.

The Danish system of government

The Danish system of government is known as negative parliamentarianism whereby the Government need not have a majority in the Danish Parliament – but it must not have a majority against it. In fact, most Danish governments



The cheeky painter

A special feature of the Danish Parliament's interior is a 268 metre long floral frieze adorning the walls of the hall on the first floor. The frieze was painted in 1918-21 by Rasmus Larsen, who later became known as "the cheeky painter" because he added his own, ironic remarks on political life to the frieze: "Not every cock that crows promises a new day". And: "Everybody wants to be the boss, but where work's concerned, they're at a loss." These are just a couple of "words of advice" and admonitions for politicians to think about when they pass Rasmus Larsen's work.



More than 15,000 questions are put to Ministers by the Danish Parliament every year

have been minority governments. At least 90 seats are required to form a majority government.

Political work in the Danish Parliament

The Danish Parliament is in session from the first Tuesday in October to the same time in the following year. As a rule, work in the Chamber stops before the Danish Constitution Day on 5 June, but the committees continue their meetings over the summer.

Reading of Bills

A Bill (draft legislation) must always be read three times in the Chamber before it can become law. At first reading, the debate is of a principle nature. The Bill then proceeds to committee stage where it is scrutinized by one of the 26 Standing Committees, followed by a second and third reading in the Chamber.

A Bill can only become law if a majority votes in favour of it during the second and third reading. However, this does not mean that all 179 MPs

are necessarily present in the Chamber when votes are cast. Party groups enter into informal pairing agreements with each other, which is a distinctive characteristic of the Danish Parliament. These agreements make it possible for a number of MPs from each party group to be absent when votes are cast, thus allowing them to perform other political tasks without disturbing the balance of power in the Chamber. However, in order for the Danish Parliament to form a quorum, at least 90 MPs must take part in a vote.

Parliamentary scrutiny of the Government

In addition to making laws, the Danish Parliament also exercises parliamentary scrutiny of the Government. For example, MPs and the Standing Committees can put questions to Ministers. Most questions are answered in writing, but MPs can also ask Ministers to answer questions orally in the Chamber at the weekly Question Time. MPs may also ask "impromptu questions", which means that once a week, during Question Hour, Ministers must answer questions which they have not seen in advance.





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During each session,
there are just over
100 sitting days in
the Chamber, and
200-300 Bills are
debated

Parliamentary scrutiny can also be exercised in the form of a longer interpellation debate in the Chamber, which could result in the Government being censured and, in extreme cases, in a majority decision by the Parliament to unseat the Government.

The Danish Constitution

The Danish Constitution is embodied in the Constitutional Act of 1849, most recently amended in 1953 when the Danish bicameral system was abolished.

Similar to the model used in other democracies, the Danish Constitutional Act divides power into three independent branches in order to prevent the abuse of power.

In Denmark power is divided between:

- The Danish Parliament exercising legislative power, i.e. adopting legislation.

- The Government exercising executive power, ensuring that legislation is proposed and complied with once it has been adopted.
- The courts exercising judicial power, pronouncing judgements in disputes between citizens and between the authorities and citizens.

The people's Parliament

More than 60,000 people visit the Danish Parliament each year to meet politicians and experience democracy first hand. In addition, approx. 1,200 political party employees, civil servants, journalists and many others work at or regularly visit the Danish Parliament as part of their profession.

Following the work of the Danish Parliament does not require you to be physically present at Christiansborg. Instead, you can choose to watch the Parliament's own TV channel or visit its website at www.ft.dk/tv for live debates and information.

