



SPOTLIGHT

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Parliamentary Elections in Denmark

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The parliamentary elections in Denmark on 5 June was won by the Social Democrats (SD), which headed the informal “red” bloc that won a small majority. This means the current centre-right coalition has lost power. The new government is likely to increase its commitment to the welfare state, but it will not necessarily mitigate the country’s current migration policy.

What were the election results?

Although SD received less than 26% of votes (48 of 179 seats), its centre-left bloc has the chance to gain a total of 91 seats, thus the majority. The “reds” also includes the Danish Social-liberal Party (8.6%), the Socialist People’s Party (7.7%), and the socialist Red-Green Alliance (6.9%). Meanwhile, the main grouping in the centre-right “heavenly” coalition—Denmark’s Liberal Party (Venstre) of Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen—won just over 23% of the votes. The anti-immigrant Danish People’s Party took third place overall (8.7%), but lost more than half its seats in parliament. That party’s success prompted the government to introduce, for example, a ban on wearing garments that cover the face, such as a burka or niqab, in public. The anti-Islamic Hard Line party did not win enough votes to enter parliament.

What are the scenarios for forming the new government?

Although theoretically, the “red” bloc could form a majority coalition, SD chairwoman Mette Frederiksen initially announced that the party would appoint a minority government. In Denmark’s proportional system and with the large fragmentation of the political scene, this would not be a precedent. It is rare, however, to establish a one-party cabinet. If SD decides to govern by itself, it will mean it must build an ad hoc parliamentary majority on various matters.

What challenges does the new government face?

It is assumed that a minority government would allow SD to fulfil promises about the welfare state, then gain the support of other left groups. On migration policy, SD will probably seek agreement with the right, in line with its campaign announcements, including maintaining the government’s previous decisions (such as shortening the residency period and tightening family reunification procedures). SD argues there is a need to maintain the country’s anti-immigration course to secure the high standards of the Danish welfare

state. That is why the new government will probably increase spending and focus, for example, on the development of the education system and healthcare. It will seek to raise taxes on businesses and the richest citizens and to partially withdraw pension reforms limiting early retirement rights.

Will there be changes in Denmark's European and foreign policy?

Migration and asylum policy will remain a determining factor of Danish European policy. Despite the lack of the extreme right in the next government, Denmark's generally anti-immigrant position will be maintained. The main assumptions of Danish foreign policy will not change. The Baltic Sea region will remain an important area of action, especially in the context of security and strengthening cooperation if the UK leaves the EU. The new government will implement the defence agreement negotiated in 2018, but it will be more difficult for SD to pursue the goal of increasing defence spending. In addition, Denmark's involvement in the development of gas infrastructure in the region (Baltic Pipe) will be conducive to energy security.

What do the parliamentary elections mean for Denmark's position in the EU?

Despite Denmark's special status, which, like the UK, includes opt-out clauses and excludes it from the obligation to participate in the Economic and Monetary Union and freedom, security and justice matters, the majority of the population assesses its view of the EU as neutral or very positive (in total, 84% of respondents, according to data from 2018). The chaos surrounding Brexit has intensified the pro-EU attitude of the Danish government. Although the victory by SD means strengthening the position of the Social Democrats in the European Council, the new government will probably support the candidacy of the Danish liberal Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, who has a good chance to become the next president of the European Commission. Additionally, Denmark's image in the EU will be positively influenced by its increasing commitment to environmental protection and the implementation of EU climate policy, including meeting EU commitments regarding growing the share of renewables in the energy balance and reducing CO2 emissions. SD's goal is for Denmark to end fossil fuel use by 2045.