A country affected by the economic crisis.

Economic issues (recovery of growth and public finances) will be one of the central stakes in these elections. Denmark, whose GDP contracted by 0.1% in the first quarter of 2011 and which experienced negative growth in the previous quarter, is in recession at present. "The national economy or how can Denmark recover growth? This will be the theme of the electoral campaign," says Peter Goll, an analyst for the consultancy Geelmuyden.Kiese. "These general elections will be won according to the recovery of growth and improving employment. The next issue on the list will be how to guarantee the Welfare State," indicated Lars Andersen, director for the Economic Council for Labour.

Over the last few weeks the government and the opposition have each presented their plan to bring the country out of the economic crisis. On 23rd August Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen revealed his plan for "sustainable growth" designed to stimulate recovery over the next two years. "When the world is as uncertain as it is now we need to plot the path to follow, this is the government’s task. The solution lies in taking economic responsibility which makes Denmark one of the safest countries in the world and not one of uncontrolled debt and high taxes. We do not want to create growth by borrowing," declared the outgoing head of government, adding "at the height of the debt crisis the Danes have the choice between uncontrolled debt or a responsible fiscal policy and the duration of the Welfare State."

The sustainable growth plan, the total of which rises to 10.8 billion crowns (1.4 billion €), is designed to boost the building industry (further public spending – notably on the road and rail infrastructures, aid to the real estate market – suspension of some property taxes as well as registration fees on property – and support to investment and private consumption.) According to the Finance Minister the country’s deficit that rose to 2.8% of the GDP last year, is due

On 26th August Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen (Liberal Party, V) announced that the next general elections would take place on 15th September. The head of government had to convene the election before 13th November next.

The Prime Minister explained that the general elections should, in his opinion, take place before the next parliamentary session, planned in October so that the government could implement the necessary reforms for the recovery of the economy as quickly as possible. Recent general elections have always taken place early in Denmark. In 2001 they were organised 4 months before the end of parliament’s mandate, in 2005 they came 9 months early and in 2007, 15 months earlier than they were due. "It is customary in Denmark for the Prime Minister to announce the organisation of the general election like this and he always tries to do it unexpectedly. It is a kind of power that the head of government enjoys," says Soren Risberg Thomsen, a professor of political science at the University of Aarhus.

The general election traditionally takes place on a Tuesday except for those in 1990 and 1994, which took place on a Wednesday. This year the election will take place on a Thursday.

The Social Democrats are running favourite in the general elections that will take place on 15th September in Denmark.

From Corinne Deloy
Translated by Helen Levy
to rise to 68 billion crowns (9.1 billion €), i.e. 3.8% of the GDP, this year and to nearly 85 billion crowns (11.4 billion €) in 2012 (4.6% of the GDP), i.e. + 5 billion in comparison with what it was in May last. Low consumption, declining international growth forecasts and the collapse of stock exchanges has increased pressure on public finances said Finance Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen, in explanation to the rise in the budgetary deficit above the 3% set by the EU’s growth and stability pact. The Finance Minister also reviewed Denmark’s growth forecast downwards in 2011. This is due to lie at 1.3% of the GDP (and not 1.9% as announced in May last); it is due to rise to 1.8% in 2012. "The world is different today than it was before the summer," stressed Claus Hjort Frederiksen, explaining the declining economic forecasts. The recovery plan includes measures to improve economic activity and to create 8,000 new jobs. The unemployment rate was due to rise to 4% of the working population in June. “The sustainable growth programme is totally funded and does not endanger the goal of bringing balance to the budget in 2020,” he added.

Prime Minister Rasmussen also presented the draft budget. It includes austerity measures but the government has however promised to increase the education and healthcare budgets. Before the economic crisis in 2007 Denmark’s budget displayed a surplus of 80 billion crown. “This programme is the government’s answer to the new international crisis and to the upcoming general election; it basically comprises traditional measures in budgetary spending,” declared Steen Bocian, an economist at the Danske Bank.

On 21st August last the leftwing opposition presented its own economic recovery plan. It plans for spending to an almost equivalent sum in infrastructures, education, healthcare and renewable energies. The funding is due to come from new bank taxes, capital gains tax and from the wealthiest Danes. “In this period of international debt crisis that is affecting Denmark as well, our economy needs responsible economic policies not irresponsible wishes,” declared Mr Rasmussen as he spoke of the left’s proposals.

### The Political Situation

Lars Lokke Rasmussen’s government brings together the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party (KF), led by Lars Barfoed. The former Finance Minister and head of the present government replaced Anders Fogh Rasmussen in April 2009 after the latter’s appointment as Secretary General of NATO. The government has been the minority in government since it came to power in 2001. It enjoys the support of the Danish People’s Party (DF), a far right populist party led by Pia Kjaersgaard. This support was conditioned by a major tightening up in terms of Danish legislation with regard to immigration. Hence Denmark is one of the most closed EU Member States to foreigners.

An individual has to be aged at least 24 in order to be able to bring a foreign spouse into the country (who must also be at least 24). The latter also has to have strong links with Denmark (more than with any other third country), pay a deposit of 100,000 crowns (13,400 €) and finally live in an apartment that matches the required standards. In 2002, there were 8,151 cases of family spouse reunion whereas in 2005 they totalled 3,252.

In the spring of 2011, parliament approved a new law restricting immigrant access to resident permits. A point permit system combining the knowledge of Danish and a person’s professional situation was established. Under pressure on the part of the Danish People’s Party on July 1st last year Denmark also re-introduced a measure that was highly criticised by its partners in the EU, in the shape of permanent customs checks on borders.

The outgoing Prime Minister declared on 26th August last that his government coalition would campaign towards the centre and not the far right. “The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party are standing to win a new term in office and make safe public finance in a world that has been marked by market turbulence and the debt crisis,” indicated Mr Rasmussen. The parties in the government are approaching these elections in a weak position. With the leftwing opposition ahead in the polls, they also failed to win the support of the Danish People’s Party with regard to their economic recovery plan. After having spent 10 years in the opposition the Social Democratic Party (SD) led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt hopes to form a majority government with its allies in the People’s Socialist Party (SF) led by Villy Soevndal, after the election. “After ten years of government by the right the country is struggling,” declared the opposition leader. “The crisis has been...
have any rules with regard to how the campaign is conducted and no limit is set on how the election in funded.

In view of the general elections the political parties started campaigning at the start of 2011.

8 political parties are represented in the present Folketing:
- The Liberal Party (V), the party of outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen. Founded in 1870 it has 46 seats;
- The Social Democratic Party (SD), the main opposition party led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt since 2005 has 45 seats;
- The Danish People’s Party (DF), a populist far right party founded in 1995 and led by Pia Kjaersgaard; it supports the government coalition in Parliament and has 25 seats;
- the People’s Socialist Party (SF), an opposition party created in 1959 by a former chair of the Danish Communist Party who was excluded for having criticized the USSR’s invasion of Hungary in 1956. It brings together socialists and ecologists and is led by Vilbo Sovndal, and it has 23 seats;
- The Conservative Party (KF), founded in 1915, is a member of the government coalition and led by Lars Barfoed with 18 seats;
- The Social Liberal Party (RV), an opposition party founded in 1905 and led by Margrethe Vestager with 9 MPs;
- New Alliance (Y) (that became the Liberal Alliance) was founded in 2007 by dissidents of the Social Liberal and Conservative Parties. Led by Anders Samuelsen with 5 seats;
- The Unity List (E), results from the alliance of the Communist Party (DKP), the Socialist Workers’ Party (SA) and the Socialist Left (VS). The party does not have a leader but is managed by an executive committee of 25 people. It has 4 MPs.

The latest poll by Megafon and published on 26th August last by the daily Politiken credits the left opposition with 52.2% of the vote and 90 seats in the Folketing i.e. a majority. The government coalition and its parliamentary ally, the Danish People’s Party, is due to win 47.8% of the vote together and 85 seats.

The poll by Voxmeter for Ritzau credits the left opposition with 96 MPs and the right coalition with the populists led by Pia Kjaersgaard with 79 seats. “The polls give a clear lead to the opposition. It will take a major event for Lars Lokke Rasmussen to win,” analyses Peter Goll of the consultancy Geelmudy-den.Kiese.

If the left wins, Helle Thorning-Schmidt may very well become the first woman ever to lead the Danish government.

The Danish Political System

The Folketing, the single Chamber of Parliament, comprises 179 members who are elected for 4 years by proportional representation according to the Sainte-Lagüe method. To be able to put forward lists in the general elections all parties have to be represented in Parliament when the election is held. If this is not the case a number of signatures has to be collated corresponding to 1/175th of the votes declared valid during the last general elections. The provinces of Greenland and the Faeroe Isles each have two representatives. The other 175 seats are distributed across three regions: Copenhagen, Jutland and the islands. These three regions are then divided into three urban and seven rural constituencies. The number of seats allocated to each of the constituencies is proportional to the number of inhabitants and is reviewed every five years. The calculation undertaken (addition of the population, the number of voters at the last election and the surface area of the constituency in square km multiplied by 20, the result of this is then divided by 175) favours the regions where the population is low.

The distribution of seats is undertaken in two stages, firstly by party and then by candidate. One hundred and thirty five of the 175 are constituency seats, forty of them are compensatory seats. This makes it possible to guarantee a national representation for the “small parties”. However in order to accede to the distribution of compensatory seats a party must have won a minimum of seats in a constituency or a number of votes that is either higher or equal to the number of votes necessary to win a seat in at least two of the three regions in the kingdom, or at least 2% of the votes cast nationally.

Although the principles governing the organisation of the general elections are included in the Danish Constitution of 1953, the kingdom does not have any rules with regard to how the campaign is conducted and no limit is set on how the election in funded.

The opposition has promised to relax the immigration policy and to review the government’s decision to re-introduce customs controls on its land borders if it wins the next general elections.

The Social Liberal Party (RV), that lies in the centre of the political scale but which since the 1990’s has mainly worked together with the Social Democrats, has often found itself in the position of kingmaker in the past. Its leader, Margrethe Vestager, repeated on TV2 that she supported Helle Thorning-Schmidt in her bid for the post of Prime Minister.

General elections in Denmark
15th September 2011

Reminder of the General Election Results in 2007 in Denmark
Turnout : 86,53%

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Source : Interior Ministry of Denmark

The Opposition in the Lead in the Danish General Election Race

Economic issues, notably the recovery of growth, more jobs and the protection of the Welfare State are the focus of the Danish general election campaign. The election will take place on 15th September next. The present economic crisis has taken over from immigration, which was the main focus of attention in the elections in 2001, 2005 and 2007, years when the Danish economy was flourishing.

"People have dropped the theme of immigration which has been the heart of the political agenda for the last ten years. Moreover the Danes are satisfied with what their government has done in this area, which, in their opinion, has succeeded in reducing immigration in the main," says Jacob McIangama, co-director of the think-tank Political Research Centre.

The Danish People’s Party (DP), on the far right, led by Pia Kjaersgaard, and a provider of parliamentary support to the government led by outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen (Liberal Party, V), has on several occasions tried to bring its favourite subject to the fore. Hence it suggested moving the reception centres for asylum seekers from Denmark to the countries from where the asylum seekers come, such as Pakistan and also the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. The People’s Party continues to fight for greater control over the country's borders. Hence on July 1st it succeeded in convincing the government to restore permanent customs controls on the borders in exchange for its support to the reform of early retirement pensions. "In a globalised world it is important to protect our Welfare State from people who come from elsewhere and take advantage of the benefits our society can provide," declared Peter Skaarup, the DP’s spokesperson for Justice.

The outgoing Prime Minister has repeated that he will not form a government alliance with the People’s Party after the election on 15th September. After the crime committed by Anders Behring Breivik in Norway on 22nd July last (76 deaths in a shooting incident), Lars Lokke Rasmussen has, over the last few weeks, tried to distance himself from the People’s Party.
The National Statistics Institute reviewed its socio-economic data upwards for the first quarter of 2011 (increase of 0.1% of the GDP). Hence Denmark has escaped (after two consecutive quarters of negative growth) recession, since the Danish GDP contracted by 0.2% in the fourth quarter of 2010. “This confirms that we are experiencing a moderate recovery and that the plan set up by the government to boost consumption was the right one,” commented Finance Minister Claus Hjort Frederiksen (V).

On 23rd August the government revealed “its sustainable growth plan” designed to stimulate growth over the next two years. Totalling 10.8 billion crowns (1.4 billion €), the latter includes several investments in the construction sector (further public spending – notably in terms of road and rail infrastructures – help to the property market – suspension of certain local taxes and also on fees to register property – and support to investment and private consumption). “The economy is moving in the right direction,” declared Kristian Thulesen Dahl, in charge of financial issues for the People’s Party.

Steen Bocian, an economist for the Danske Bank, sees an encouraging sign in the most recent figures published by the National Statistics Institute but warns that the data does not take into account the financial and economic crisis of this summer, the effects of which are not due to emerge in statistics until the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2011. “Denmark has just managed to avoid the recession. We should be happy but the figures reveal the fragility of the Danish economy,” indicates Michael Staehr, chief analyst at the Sydbank. Denmark is due to experience growth of 1.7% this year and 2% in 2012, according to the latest Central Bank figures. According to the latter the decline in household consumption was balanced out by an increase in public spending and investments. The decrease in consumption, a lifeless property market and high salaries (some of the highest in the world) which impede growth and reduce competitiveness are still a problem for Denmark.

The government believes that fiscal consolidation and severe social cuts (notably the reform of early retirement pensions and a reduction in aid granted to students) should prevent the public debt from rising and enable budgetary balance by 2020. The opposition forces want to fund the debt via growth. They are suggesting to boost public investments and to extend the weekly working time (by 12 minutes per day) to improve productivity and fiscal revenues. “The Danes must choose between uncontrolled debt and the upkeep of their Welfare State,” declared the Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen who maintains that the government has chosen a policy to limit spending and that it is fighting to counter tax increases (the Conservative Party, an ally of the Liberal Party at the head of the State, supports further tax reductions to stimulate demand) whilst the opposition, which he depicts as irresponsible, is planning to boost growth via further borrowing. The left wing regularly promotes budget figures: Denmark has indeed moved from a 5% GDP surplus to a budgetary deficit of 4.6%.

The Social Democratic Party (SD) won the local and regional elections on 17th November 2009. In the local elections it won 30.7% of the vote, ahead of the Liberal Party (V), which won 24.8% of the vote. In all the left won 51.2% of the vote against 43.9% to the right. The Social Democrats won in Copenhagen, Aalborg and Odense. Regionally they won three regions (Hovedstaden, Midtjylland and Nordjylland) and the Liberal Party two, (Sjaelland and Syddanmark).

“The Liberal Party and the Conservative Party are going to ballot with the idea of working with all of the Danish political class,” declared outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen.

According to the polls the so-called “red” coalition that brings together the opposition parties (Social Democratic Party, the People’s Socialist Party (SF), the Social Liberal Party (RV) and the Unity List (E)) are due to win the election on 15th September. In a poll published by the daily Jyllands-Posten the Ramboell Institute credits it with 53.8% of the vote (95 MPs in parliament) against 46% for the so-called “blue” coalition (80 seats) that brings together the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the Danish People’s Party.

The gap between the two coalitions is just as big in the poll by Voxmeter, published by the press agency Ritzau: 54.6% for the opposition (97 MPs) and 44.6% for the government parties (78 seats).

Finally, according to the Berlingske Barometer dated 6th September last, 52.4% of the electorate is about to vote for the red coalition (92 MPs) and 47.6% for the blue (83 seats). The Social Democrats are due to win 25.8% of the vote – a low score (just above that achieved in the last general elections on 13th November 2007) but which would enable them to recover their position as Denmark’s leading party, ahead of the Liberals, who are due to win 23.7%. The Danish People’s Party is credited with 12.3% of the vote.

Although his party is losing ground in the polls,
General elections in Denmark
15th September 2011

outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen is however deemed by his countrymen to be the most credible political leader according to a poll by Ramboell for the daily Jyllands-Posten. Nearly two Danes in ten (19.4%) who were asked to appoint the most credible politician quoted the head of government; 16.4% would choose Margrethe Vestager, leader of the Social Liberal Party (RV), 14.2%, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the Social Democratic leader and 9.2% Pia Kjaersgaard, leader of the People’s Party. “The Danes are tired of having a government which has been the same for the last ten years. They want something else. We have a tradition in this country: governments last ten years. We are now going to be governed by the Social Democrats for some time,” declared Svenning Dalgaard, political editor of the TV channel TV2. “We are going to have a new government after the general election on 15th September next but post-electoral negotiations between the various parties will be difficult,” stresses Soren Risberg Thomsen, professor of political science at the University of Aarhus.

A change of government in Denmark where the opposition just wins the general elections.

The leftwing opposition forces led by the Social Democratic Party (SD) won the general elections that took place in Denmark on 15th September. Together the four parties in the Red Bloc – the Social Democratic Party, the Social Liberal Party, the People’s Socialist Party and the Unity List – won 50.2% of the vote and 89 seats in the Folketing, the only chamber in Parliament, i.e. +8 in comparison with the previous election on 13th November 2007, pushing ahead of the Blue Bloc – formed by the rightwing – the Liberal Party, the Danish People’s Party, the Liberal Alliance and the Conservative Party – which won 49.7% of the vote and 86 seats (+3). The Liberal Party, (V) led by outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen, maintains its position as the country’s leading party with 26.7% of the vote and 47 seats (+1). It leads over the Social Democrats led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt who won 24.9% of the vote, i.e. their weakest result since 1906, and 44 seats (+1). The Danish People’s Party (DF), a far right populist party led by Pia Kjaersgaard, lost ground for the first time in its history; it won 12.3% of the vote and 22 seats (+3). The Social Liberal Party (RV), an opposition party led by Margrethe Vestager, made a breakthrough with 9.5% of the vote and 17 seats (+8). Conversely the People’s Socialist Party is clearly on the decline, winning 9.2% of the vote and 16 seats (+7). The Conservative Party (KF), a member of the outgoing government coalition led by Lars Barfoed, won 4.9% of the vote (+10), losing more than half of its seats, thereby becoming the smallest party in the Folketing. The Liberal Alliance, formerly the New Alliance (Y) won 5% of the vote and 9 seats (+4). Finally the Unity List (E) a leftwing opposition party won 6.7% and 12 seats (+8).

Kaj Leo Johannesen and Aksel Johannesen were elected in the Faroe Islands; Kuupik Kleist and Aleqa Hammann in Greenland.

Turnout rose to 87.71%, very slightly over the rate recorded in the previous elections on 13th November 2007 (+1.18 point).
“We did it! Today is the day of change. We have shown again tonight that the Social Democrats are a major force which occupies a central position in Danish society,” declared Helle Thorning-Schmidt on the announcement of the results. “Together we can write history. We can say goodbye to ten years of bourgeois rule that has now ended so that we can offer a new government and a new majority to Denmark,” she added, saying that she would work towards building “a society that leaves no one out and in which everyone has a second chance.”

Outgoing Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen acknowledged defeat, congratulating his rival on her success and announced that he would resign the next day. “Tomorrow at 11am I shall deliver my government’s resignation to the Queen. There is no longer any reason to remain in government,” he said on the TV channel TV2.

The general elections were dominated by the Danes’ concern about their economy. In a poll undertaken at the beginning of September, three quarters of them (74%) quoted this subject as being the most important issue in the election.

Denmark, which was considered to be top of the class in Europe in terms of its economy, only just managed to avoid recession (two consecutive quarters of negative growth) thanks to an increase of 0.1% of its GDP in the first quarter of 2011. The unemployment rate is rising and the country’s budgetary deficit, which totalled 2.8% of the GDP last year, is due to rise to 68 billion crowns (9.1 billion €), i.e. 3.8% of the GDP in 2011 and to nearly 85 billion crowns (11.4 billion €) the following year (4.6% of the GDP). Four years ago in 2007 Denmark’s budget was in surplus of over 80 billion crowns (5% of the GDP).

Helle Thorning-Schmidt criticised Lars Lokke Rasmussen’s outgoing government for having failed to recover growth and for having increased the budgetary deficit. She suggests that Denmark should have “a new start”. To do this she supports raising public investments in education and infrastructures and to raise taxes on the highest revenues; she also defends the retirement system that the outgoing government wanted reform. The leftwing opposition plans to inject 18 billion crowns into the economy (2.4 billion €) funded by loans and a 12 minute increase in working hours (one extra hour in the week). “We are not joining the austerity band wagon,” said Helle Thorning-Schmidt. The left has promised the return of budgetary balance by 2020.

“We are sure of one thing only, and that is that the new government will make it more costly to be Danish. We already have the biggest public sector in the world. We should stay on the path which brought us through the crisis reasonably, provide Denmark with optimism and not create obstacles to private consumption nor should we make life more expensive for the Danes,” declared Lars Lokke Rasmussen, who had asked voters to remain loyal to him to prevent the left from undoing everything that his government had achieved; he warned of promises that were “funded by tax increases which will lead to a reduction in household consumption.” The outgoing Prime Minister, whose party had probably lost momentum, after ten years in power, was not heard and economic difficulties prompted the Danes to sanction the outgoing government.

In terms of immigration – a subject that has divided the Scandinavian kingdom for a long time – Helle Thorning-Schmidt said that she wanted to establish a more human system of political immigration than that implemented by the previous government – however she said that she would not go back on most of the measures taken over the last ten years by the latter. “One of the reasons why immigration was not a stake in the election was that the left adopted the same attitude as the right on this issue,” declared Peter Kuriel-Klitgaard, a political science professor at the University of Copenhagen.

Aged 44, Helle Thorning-Schmidt is a graduate in political science from the University of Copenhagen and of the Collège d’Europe in Bruges. She is married to Stephen Kinnock, son of the former leader of the British Labour Party, (1983-1992), Neil Kinnock. Joining the Social Democratic Party in 1993, she first was head of the secretariat of the party’s delegation in the European Parliament in 1994 and 1997 before becoming an international consultant for the Danish Unions’ Conference (LO). In 1999 she became an MEP, then entered the Folketing after the general elections of 8th February 2005.

After the election that was won by the right and after the resignation of the previous social democratic leader, Mogens Lykketoft, Helle Thorning-Schmidt stood to succeed him. On 12th April 2005 she was elected to lead the party with 53.2% of the vote, beating Frank Jensen who was positioned more to the left. She then became the first woman to lead the social-democrats.

In this position she has worked in support of bringing her party closer to the People’s Socialist Party...
and the Social Liberal Party and recommended a unified government supported by the Red and Green Alliance if the leftwing won. "She has been able to heal wounds that date back to the 90’s and rebuild unity in the party thanks to her qualities as a leader, which include both authoritarianism and team spirit," says Rune Subage, a political expert at the University of Aarhus.

Having succeeded in federating the Danish left and in winning the elections she is now due to become the first woman Prime Minister in Denmark’s history. Although the Red Bloc’s victory is undeniable, the left only won by a narrow majority. The formation of the next government may be difficult. The coalition led by Helle Thorning-Schmidt is effectively heterogeneous. Hence, the Social Liberal Party (RV), that lies in the centre of the political scale supports a liberal economic policy and tried, during the campaign, to minimise the role that the People’s Socialist Party and the Unity List would have in the future government. These parties disagree on several major issues: retirement reform, immigration, taxation and economic policy.

Moreover the change in government should not make any deep changes in Denmark. "The differences between the two ends of the political scale are minimal. The changes will not be very big," says Bo Sandemann Rasmussen, professor of political science at the University of Aarhus.

**General Elections results of 15th September 2011 in Denmark**

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<th>No of votes won</th>
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Source : institut danois de la statistique (http://www.dst.dk/valg/Valg1204271/valgopgmid/valgopgHL.htm)

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