The Parliamentary System of Denmark
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Cabinet responsibility was introduced in 1901. This meant that it became possible for a parliamentary majority to overthrow the Government.
Danish democracy was introduced gradually as a result of foreign influences as well as of national debates and intellectual fights which had been going on for generations. It is founded largely on the ideas which saw the light of day in the 18th and 19th centuries as a reaction against royal absolutism. One of the main thoughts originated in the belief that power as exercised in society should not be the right of the upper classes but of the lower, it should stem from the people. All men are born equal and are therefore entitled to vote at elections to legislative assemblies.

After several decades of intellectual fights aimed at introducing a liberal Constitution, the central principles of Danish democracy were laid down in the Constitutional Act of June 1849, and they remain to this day the backbone of the present Constitutional Act of June 5th 1953. Today, Danish democracy is safeguarded by being a representative government built on individual rights laid down in the Constitutional Act. These rights comprise personal and political rights of freedom as well the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of association and the freedom of belief. Furthermore, Danish democracy is characterized by universal suffrage, secret ballot, proportional representation, a unicameral system and Cabinet responsibility.

Though Danish democracy is a sound and very lively form of democracy, it is important to bear in mind that democracy must never wither away. And since the date on which it was first introduced in Denmark, democracy has been undergoing a continuous process of development. Future challenges will, likewise, require changes if the living democracy is not to die. The Danish population as well as the Members of the Folketing need to make an active contribution to keep it this way. Parliament’s Interactive Visitors’ Centre entitled “Politician for one single day” has been set up in order to encourage young persons – throughout the year - to participate actively in promoting Danish democracy.

The present edition of “The Parliamentary System of Denmark” gives an outline of how Danish democracy actually works. And the booklet also gives you an overview of the parliamentary Administration and of the tasks with which the civil servants and staff are dealing.

Christian Mejdahl
Speaker of the Folketing

The Folketing, Copenhagen, November 2005
After 1814, the Danish political system was strongly influenced by developments in Europe. Liberal forces were heard speaking in favour of an increasing share in government on the part of the people.
Danish democracy is founded on the thoughts the seeds of which were sown in 18th century Europe as a reaction against royal absolutism which was introduced as the form of government in Denmark in 1660.

The transition from absolutism to representative government was on the whole a gradual process. There was no question of a revolution, for although the ruling monarch had almost absolute power, absolutism in Denmark was to a large extent a collegiate form of government; at the end of the 18th century it included the foremost men of the Age of Enlightenment. They carried through a social and economic revolution that covered agricultural reforms, abolition of adscription and school reforms for the ordinary population.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Denmark was involved in the wars between Germany, Britain and France. Admiral Nelson defeated the Danish fleet in the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801, the British bombarded Copenhagen and seized the Danish fleet in 1807, the State went bankrupt and subsequent to the peace negotiations in Vienna in 1814, Denmark had to cede Norway and accept that the most southern part of the Kingdom, the Duchy of Holstein, was integrated in the German federation.

After 1814, the Danish political system was strongly influenced by developments in Europe. Liberal forces were heard speaking in favour of an increasing share in government on the part of the people. And in 1849 the King signed a new democratic Constitution. The Constitutional Act of 1849 was strongly influenced by the Belgian Constitutional Act of 1830 in its structure and mode of thought as well as by the Norwegian Constitutional Act of 1814. These Constitutions can again be said to build on 18th century ideas primarily formulated by Montesquieu and Rousseau. The Danish Constitutional Act of 1849 was extremely liberal and contained provisions on i.a. universal suffrage, freedom of assembly, freedom of conscience and universal military service.

In the years succeeding the first Constitutional Act, reactionary currents instigated by large estate owners and civil servants, supported by the new King, as well as political pressure from foreign countries, led to curtailments in the liberal Constitution. Conservative forces made use of the continued confrontations with the most southern pro-German duchies – which in 1864 led to a military defeat for Denmark and a victory for Prussia and Austria – to make amendments to the Constitution.

The election rules applying to the Upper Chamber, the Landsting, were amended in 1866, in a way that gave large estate-owners and men of business a permanent majority. As the King chose his Ministers from the same circles, the popularly elected liberal Folketing was put out of the running especially in the period from 1884 to 1894 when the Government issued the annual Finance Acts without consulting Parliament.

It was only after the year 1900 that the liberal farmers’ party, entitled the Liberal Party, came into power. But the Party did not dominate legislation for long due to internal cleavages and a permanent conflict with the Conservative majority of the Landsting. In 1915, an amendment was made to the Constitutional Act which meant that the power of the Landsting was limited, women got the right to vote, and a more just electoral system, introducing the system of proportional representation came into use.

During the First World War, from 1914 to 1918, Denmark remained neutral vis-à-vis the combatants. And the Government succeeded in keeping the country out of the War.

In the interwar period, Denmark like many other European countries experienced a heavy migration from country to town pari passu with the growing industrialization. This meant a strengthening of the Social Democratic Party, which took the place of the Liberal Party as the dominating party in the Folketing.

During the Second World War, Denmark again observed neutrality but irrespective of this fact, Nazi Germany occupied Denmark in 1940. The Occupation lasted until May 1945. After the Liberation, the Danish Freedom Council, which was set up by the Resistance Movement, together with the largest political parties from the interwar period formed a coalition Government which was later to be replaced by Social Democratic Governments. The latter dominated
Danish politics up to some time in the 1960s apart from short intervals with Liberal-Conservative Governments.

In 1953, one of these Governments passed an amendment to the Constitutional Act which finally settled the everlasting conflict with the reactionary forces of the past by abolishing the Landsting and strengthening the Folketing.

From the end of the 1960s up to 1982, Denmark had alternating Social Democratic and Liberal minority Governments and from 1982 to 1993 conservatively dominated minority Governments. In January 1993, the Social Democratic Party and the three small liberal parties, the Centre Democrats, the Social Liberal Party and the Christian People’s Party formed a coalition Government supported by the smallest possible majority (90 seats out of 179). Subsequent to the 1994 general election, the Christian People’s Party was no longer represented in Parliament, and from 1996 the Centre Democrats were no longer part of the Government. From 1996 the Government was composed of the Social Democratic Party and the Social Liberal Party only. Subsequent to the General Election which was held in November 2001, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party formed a coalition government headed by a Liberal Prime Minister. At the 2005 General Election, the two political parties were returned to power.

**Tripartition of power**

As in most Western democracies, the Danish political and legal system is founded on a tripartition of power i.e. a division between the legislative, the executive and the judicial powers. In accordance with the Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark, “Legislative authority shall be vested in the King and the Folketing conjointly. Executive authority shall be vested in the King. Judicial authority shall be vested in the courts of justice”. As one will realize the idea behind the tripartition of the powers is to balance them against one another. Section 15 in the Constitutional Act, which deals with the parliamentary principle, lays down that “A Minister shall not remain in office after the Folketing has passed a vote of no confidence in him”.

An important feature of the Danish system is that a Government need not be supported by a majority – as long as it is not outvoted by a majority (negative Cabinet responsibility).

Another important feature of the Danish parliamentary system is that the Constitutional Act lays down that “The Members of the Folketing shall be elected for a period of four years”. Still “The King may at any time issue writs for an election”.

The relationship between the Government and the Folketing can briefly be described as follows. In principle, the Government and the Folketing exert the legislative power conjointly, but in reality it is unthinkable for a Government not to (recommend to the Monarch to) grant assent to a Bill passed by a majority in the Folketing. The Government exerts the executive power through its Ministers, but a Government cannot remain in office if the majority of the Folketing goes against it. The Folketing’s influence on the executive power is limited to issuing general guidelines via legislation and to controlling the Government’s activities. If the executive power acts contrary to the majority of the Folketing, the latter can overthrow the Government by moving a vote of no confidence. On the other hand, the Government can, at any time, dissolve the Folketing and issue writs for an election.
The Danish Parliament (the Folketing) is domiciled at Christiansborg Palace in central Copenhagen. This position on the small island of Slotsholmen – surrounded by narrow canals – has been the centre of the Kingdom of Denmark for more than 800 years.

During the Middle Ages, Bishop Absalon erected a castle here which was meant to serve as a protection against pirates from Northern Germany. This castle had existed for about 200 years when it was torn down in 1370. The remains of the castle can still be seen in the vaults below the present Palace. In the following centuries, the Danish Kings built and lived at Slotsholmen. Copenhagen had by then become the capital of the Realm.

In 1736, the King began the erection of a grand four-winged baroque Palace. This Palace was only in use for about 50 years because in 1794 a great fire devastated most of it.

In the years between 1806 and 1828, a new Christiansborg Palace was erected. It was built in the classical style and it was this Palace which became the centre of events when the country went from absolutism to democracy between 1848 and 1849. Also this Palace had a short life of about 50 years. It burnt down in 1884 and more than twenty years elapsed before it was possible to begin its reconstruction. The present – third – Christiansborg was built in the years between 1906 and 1918 making use of the same foundation walls which had been used for the two former buildings. In 1918 the Folketing and the Landsting moved to the new building. The style is that of the new Baroque and the heaviness and solidity of the construction is meant to underline the importance of the Palace as the political centre of the Realm.

Today the main parts of the Palace premises are used by the Folketing. Apart from the Folketing, Christiansborg Palace also houses the Supreme Court, the Prime Minister’s Office and the Royal Reception Rooms. This means that in addition to the legislative power, the Palace houses part of the judicial and executive powers. The Folketing also has at its disposal an impressive warehouse dating back to 1603. At the beginning of the 1990s, it was restored and converted into offices.
Danish form of government

Since 1901 it has been an unfailing constitutional principle that a Government must step down or call a general election if it is confronted with a vote of no confidence or finds itself in a minority in the Folketing.
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Cabinet responsibility
In the course of the twentieth century, this principle has developed into a grand and elaborate set of constitutional norms and political practices. It should, however, be noted that during the 1980s the Conservative–Liberal minority Governments in several cases accepted the fact that they were in a minority even in matters of considerable political importance without resigning or calling a general election.

When the Constitution was revised in 1953, the principle of cabinet responsibility was directly confirmed and incorporated in Section 15 of the Constitutional Act of Denmark, which states that, “A Minister shall not remain in office after the Folketing has approved a vote of no confidence in him. If the Folketing passes a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister, he shall ask for the dismissal of the Cabinet unless writs are to be issued for a general election. If a vote of censure has been passed on a Cabinet or it has asked for its dismissal, it shall continue in office until a new Cabinet has been appointed. Ministers who remain in office as aforesaid shall perform only what may be necessary to ensure the uninterrupted conduct of official business”.

Thus the principle of cabinet responsibility is laid down concisely in the Constitution and at the same time the provisions of the Constitutional Act are the only written rules that regulate the forming of a Government in Denmark. Below follows a somewhat more detailed description of the process of the forming and resignation of a Government.

Minority Governments
We must go all the way back to the beginning of the twentieth century to find a Cabinet composed of one party backed by a majority in the Folketing. Since before the First World War, Danish Cabinets - being minority Governments - have been composed of various parties. After 1945, the successive Cabinets have also mostly been minority Governments even though several attempts have been made to create the broad majority Government which has always been held up as an ideal for Danish politics, but which has increasingly acquired all the characteristics of a mirage. Foreign observers often have difficulty in understanding how Danish politics can function in this way. Above all, it is probably the Cabinet’s minority basis that strikes an unfamiliar note. However, the mystery is partly solved the moment one realizes that a minority Government may usually rely on the support of one or several other parties in parliamentary votes if the Government’s survival is at stake. If one adds the support of the so-called supporting parties to that of the Government party or parties, it is understandable that the Government will be able to get a narrow majority on which to rely for its survival.

A supporting party is a party that is prepared to adopt a position of considerable flexibility to keep the Government in office. The cooperation between the supporting party
and the Government may sometimes resemble the cooperation within a coalition Government. At other times the relationship will be less close and situations may well arise in which the Government feels uncertain as to how far it can depend on the supporting party. At times a minority Government will need to function without an actual agreement of firm support. It must then carry out its work hoping that some of the parties are ready to negotiate on separate issues and/or remain neutral.

Whether or not Denmark is ruled by a coalition Government supported by a majority or by a minority Government with or without firm support from other parties, the Government’s strength must be safeguarded on the basis of negotiations during which the parties approach each other, yield to each other and make big or small concessions.

A Cabinet’s resignation
A Government may be brought down in many different ways. The nature and development of a Cabinet crisis are conditioned by two factors, the first being how the Opposition in the Folketing acts and the other how the Government itself chooses to act. As in a marriage, it takes two to decide whether the situation is to take a dramatic turn and just how dramatic the consequences will be.

The most clear-cut case is the one in which the Government is faced by a direct censure and in which it responds by dissolving the Folketing. In another case, the Government chooses to resign without having been defeated in the Folketing. In a third case the Government chooses to resign upon being defeated in the Folketing. In a fourth and more usual case the Government triggers off a Cabinet crisis by dissolving the Folketing without having suffered a defeat. The Prime Minister may for instance wish to precipitate an election in order to profit from some supposedly favourable changes in voters’ attitudes.

We must go all the way back to the beginning of the twentieth century to find a Cabinet composed of one party backed by a majority in the Folketing.
Electoral system

The Constitutional Act lays down that “Any Danish subject who is permanently domiciled in the Realm’ and who has reached the age of eighteen “shall have the right to vote at Folketing elections”. “Any person who is entitled to vote at Folketing elections shall be eligible for membership of the Folketing, unless he has been convicted of an act which in the eyes of the public makes him unworthy to be a Member of the Folketing”.

Proportional representation

The Danish electoral system is extremely complex but briefly it builds on the principle of election by proportional representation. The system is constructed in a way which allows for the regional affiliation of the candidates (135 seats in the Folketing obtained by election in 17 multi-member constituencies) and also for the mathematical accuracy of a proportional division of seats in relation to votes for the parties (40 supplementary seats). Thus the Folketing is composed of 175 Members elected in Denmark proper as well as two Members elected in the Faroe Islands and two in Greenland.

The Faroe Islands and Greenland are part of the Kingdom of Denmark but they both have comprehensive home rule arrangements and they have their own Parliaments. The Danish electoral system comprises a threshold rule which i.a. means that parties which obtain less than 2 per cent of the valid votes cast do not have a share in the supplementary seats.
In accordance with the provisions of the Constitutional Act, writs for an election shall be issued every four years.

Status of Members of Parliament

In order to ensure an independent carrying out of the tasks of the Members of the Folketing, provisions to this effect are to be found in the Constitutional Act and in the Folketing Election Act respectively. In accordance with the Constitutional Act 'No Member of the Folketing shall be prosecuted or imprisoned in any manner whatsoever without the consent of the Folketing, unless he is taken in flagrante delicto'. This rule on immunity may, however, be disregarded if the Folketing gives its consent. Since the beginning of the present century, this has happened in all cases in which the Minister for Justice as supreme head of the Prosecution has requested it.

'The Members of the Folketing shall be bound solely by their own consciences and not by any directions given by their electors'. In practice, Members do, however, vote in accordance with their respective parties. Moreover, a Member of the Folketing cannot without the consent of the Folketing be held responsible for his statements in the Chamber e.g. by the courts of justice. In practice, such a consent is never given. Nevertheless, the Speaker of the Folketing can, in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Folketing, call a Member to order, forbid a Member to speak or exclude a Member from committee meetings or debates in the Chamber for up to 14 days. However, the last mentioned sanction is applied very rarely.

Members’ other activities and financial interests

Subsequent to the general election in 1994, a new set of rules was introduced according to which the Standing Orders Committee invites Members of the Folketing to register a number of activities and financial interests. The aim of the rules is to make Members’ financial interests outside Parliament more easily accessible to the public. According to the rules, the registration is voluntary and it is up to the individual Member to decide whether he wishes to be registered. If a Member wishes to have his activities and financial interests registered, the set of rules must be accepted in its entirety. The information which is registered is information – but not amounts – on board membership, salaried jobs, independent activities, financial assistance, presents received, paid for trips abroad, real property issues, company interests and agreements with former or future employers. The information registered will be accessible to the public according to special rules.

Budget of the Folketing

The accounts of the Folketing are forwarded to the Prime Minister in order for his Office to include them in the overall Finance Bill. For the year 2005, the collective budget amounts to DKK 581.000.000 (€ 78.000.000). The accounts of the Folketing are revised by a Firm of Chartered Accountants.

Speaker and Presidium

The Speaker of the Folketing has the supreme responsibility for the Folketing services. In this capacity, he is assisted by the four Deputy Speakers. Together the Presiding Officers make up the Presidium of the Folketing, which is also the official body representing the Folketing extra-murally.
In order to ensure an independent carrying out of the tasks of the Members of the Folketing, provisions to this effect are to be found in the Constitutional Act and in the Folketing Election Act respectively.
In the period up to mid-January, the Government and the Opposition parties submit their Bills. The time limit for submitting Bills is agreed between the Speaker of the Folketing, party leaders and the Prime Minister.
Sessional year and work in the Chamber

The sessional year begins on the first Tuesday of October and runs to the first Tuesday of October of the following year. In the course of a year, the Folketing convenes approximately 100 times. There are, however, always non-session weeks in October, February and March, as well as 3 non-session weeks around Christmas and the New Year, 1-2 non-session weeks around Easter to which can be added the summer recess which normally starts at the beginning of June and lasts until the opening of the sessional year. The Folketing can, however, be called upon to take part in extraordinary sessions in June and August. In recent years, sessions in the Chamber have amounted to approximately 600 hours a year.

The planning of the work of the Folketing is done partly by preparing an annual calendar, partly by elaborating plans for each week which describe the matters which are to be dealt with in the week in question and in what order. The planning of the meetings in the Folketing is undertaken in close cooperation with the Government.

In recent years, a more efficient planning of the work in the Chamber has been attempted with a view to making the interplay between the committee work and the work in the Chamber as expedient as possible.

On the first sitting day of October, the Prime Minister renders “an account of the general state of the Realm and of the measures proposed by the Government” in accordance with the Constitutional Act. This is the day on which the Government submits its policy and its legislative programme for the coming sessional year. The Prime Minister’s account forms the background of the ensuing debate in the Chamber (the opening debate).

Reading of Bills

In the period up to mid-January, the Government and the Opposition parties submit their Bills. The time limit for submitting Bills is agreed between the Speaker of the Folketing, party leaders and the Prime Minister. However, deviations from the time limits do occur.

In accordance with the Constitutional Act, a Bill shall be submitted to three readings in the Folketing before it is passed and becomes legally binding upon the citizens. The reading shall be finished before the end of the sessional year at the beginning of October. If this is not the case, the Bill shall be void.

At the first reading, the parties take a principal stand on the Bill in question and normally one knows after the first reading whether the Bill will be passed or not. At the first reading, no amendments can be moved. After the first reading, the Bill will as a main rule be referred to one of the standing committees whose Members will then continue the reading. The committees finish their reading by submitting a report to the Folketing in which the parties’ stand on the Bill is entered together with eventual amendments which may be moved by the Minister as well as by the parties represented on the committee in question. Thus the committees do not take a decision on the Bills but only make a recommendation to the Folketing.

At the second reading, the amendments moved are debated and a vote is taken on them as well as on the individual Sections of the Bill. As a main rule, the Bill is then passed directly on to the third reading. About 20 per cent of the Bills are again referred to a committee for a new reading. This reading is inserted between the second and third readings.

At the third reading, eventual amendments are debated and put to the vote. Then the Bill is debated and a vote is taken before it is finally passed. This step marks the completion of the reading in the Folketing. Subsequently, the Bill is – via the Prime Minister’s Office – forwarded to Her Majesty The Queen for the Royal Assent and is also signed by the appropriate Minister before it is published and becomes law.

In recent years, the number of Government Bills has amounted to between 200 and 300 while the number of Bills submitted by the Opposition parties has amounted to about 20 a year on an average. In the sessional year 2003-2004, 222 of the 226 Government Bills were passed. 3 of the 15 Opposition Bills were passed.

Parliamentary resolution

Proposals for parliamentary resolution are also read in the Folketing. A proposal for parliamentary resolution is typically an invitation or an order to the Government to take action within a specific area. It is first and foremost the Opposition which moves such pro-
Proposals. Proposals for parliamentary resolution moved by the Government typically deal with ratification of international treaties. Contrary to Bills, proposals for parliamentary resolution are only read twice in the Chamber, including an intermediary committee reading. The reason for this is that proposals for parliamentary resolution are addressed to the Government and as such are not directly legally binding upon the citizens. On an annual basis, 100 to 200 proposals for parliamentary resolution are moved. In the sessional year 2003-2004, all proposals for parliamentary resolution which were moved by the Government were passed (10 in all). Only 5 of the private Members’ proposals for parliamentary resolution were passed.

**Control of Government and administration**

In addition to the reading of Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution, a number of other activities take place in the Chamber. All of these belong under the category of ‘parliamentary control of Government and administration’.

**Questions to Ministers**

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Folketing, Members of the Folketing may put questions to Cabinet Ministers. Questions shall be made in writing and be accompanied by a brief justification. The questioner may ask for an oral reply during Question Time. If the Member asks for a written reply, the Minister should answer the question within a short span of time.

The device of putting questions to Ministers is used a great deal in the Folketing. In the sessional year 2003-2004, 5,635 ordinary questions were introduced.

**Interpellations**

One or several Members can make a public matter the subject of a debate in the Folketing by means of an interpellation addressed to one or several Ministers. An interpellation debate often ends in a vote being taken on one or several proposals.

**Accounts**

A Minister can give the Folketing an account of a public matter and if the Minister does so, the account is published in the Official Report entitled Folketingstidende. The account is most often made in writing and gen-
erally speaking it will become the subject of an interpellation debate at a later date. However, Ministers may also simply forward an account to MPs or to a given committee.

Other types of parliamentary decisions
A special proposal for adoption can be moved when debating a proposal, during the Opening Debate or during an interpellation. If a proposal implying a vote of no confidence in the Government is adopted, the Government or the Minister in question shall resign. It is, however, very rare for such proposals for adoption to be moved.

Other parliamentary means of control
In addition to the parliamentary control which is exerted in the Chamber, the Ombudsman of the Folketing exerts control on the part of the Folketing and eventually criticizes authorities belonging under the public administration. The Ombudsman can take on a matter on his own initiative or in the light of complaints on the part of the citizens.

If it is suspected that a serious mistake has been made or that the Central Administration has been negligent of its duties, the Folketing can e.g. demand that the Government set up a Committee of Enquiry or a Select Committee to investigate the matter. If a Minister is to be prosecuted for having acted as he did in his capacity as Minister, the matter is brought before the High Court of the Realm (a court of impeachment). In 1993, the Folketing – for the first time since 1910 – brought a charge against a former Minister for Justice at the High Court of the Realm for having administered in contravention of the Aliens Act.

Government Bills and the Constitutional Act
Formally, the Speaker of the Folketing shall control that the Bills moved are not in contravention of the Constitutional Act but this is only verified if an objection is raised to a Bill. If the Speaker finds that a disparity exists between a Bill which has been moved and the Constitutional Act, the Speaker shall request the Folketing to reject the Bill.

In Denmark, there is no special constitutional court of justice. It is for the ordinary courts of justice to decide whether an Act is in accordance with the Constitutional Act. This competence is not laid down in the Constitutional Act. It is a legal practice, which goes back to the beginning of the past century.

In 1999 the Supreme Court failed to approve certain provisions of an Act, which the Folketing had adopted three years previously. The passing of this judgement marked a historical event in the sense that it was the first time the Supreme Court had acknowledged that the Folketing had infringed the competences to which the legislative power is entitled in accordance with the Constitutional Act.

Official Report and recordings from the Chamber
The work in the Chamber is recorded in various forms. An official record of the debates in the Chamber has since 1849 been printed in the Official Report (Folketingstidende). Speeches are nowadays digitally recorded, transcribed and revised by a staff of transcribers, editors and proofreaders in the Office of the Official Report. A couple of hours after the speeches have been made, an online non-revised edition can be read on the intranet of the Folketing. The same evening, the text is published on the Folketing’s internet homepage in a revised edition, and within a week a printed version of the proceedings is issued. In the year 2003-2004, the proceedings of the Folketing amounted to about 13,000 printed pages.

It is possible for the general public to follow the Folketing debates on TV. The transmissions from the Chamber can also be accessed via the Folketing’s homepage.
Committee readings

Standing Committees of the Folketing

The Standings Orders Committee
The Scrutineers Committee
The Labour Market Committee
The Housing Committee
The Energy Policy Committee
The Trade and Industry Committee
The European Affairs Committee
The Finance Committee
The Research Committee
The Defence Committee
The Naturalization Committee
The Ecclesiastical Affairs Committee
The Municipal Affairs Committee
The Cultural Affairs Committee
The Environment and Regional Planning Committee
The Economic and Political Affairs Committee
The Legal Affairs Committee
The Fiscal Affairs Committee
The Social Services Committee
The Health Committee
The Transport Committee
The Education Committee
The Foreign Affairs Committee
The Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Committee
The Immigration and Integration Affairs Committee
There are 25 standing committees in the Folketing. Moreover, the Folketing may appoint ad hoc committees to deal with special cases. Likewise the Folketing appoints delegations to participate in the work of various inter-parliamentary fora.

Each committee is composed of 17 Members and a number of substitutes. The substitutes can participate in the meetings of the committee in question in the same way as ordinary Members. However, they cannot take part in the voting and they are not entitled to make a statement in the committee reports.

Committee work
Apart from the more internationally oriented committees and delegations the main task of the committees is to deal with the Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution which the Folketing refers to the committee concerned. It is typical for a Bill to be referred to a committee after the first reading. In practice, the committee reading consists in the committee putting clarifying questions to the appropriate Minister. Thus it is the Minister (Ministry), who serves as the main source of information to the committees during the committee work.

It is not normal practice for a committee Member to go into detail about the individual provisions of a Bill, and the system of rapporteur does not apply to the Folketing committees either. The Minister’s reply to the written questions of the committees is, with a few exceptions, accessible to the public. The Minister may also be called in by the committee in order to give an oral briefing and to discuss a specific question which has previously been put in writing (consultation). Furthermore, citizens, institutions, enterprises and others apply to the committee either in writing or by asking for an interview with the committee.

The committee can also deal with matters, within its own sphere of competence, regarding which no Bills have been moved in the Folketing. This is typically done by putting questions to the Minister.

Committee readings are usually undertaken behind closed doors and the debates are confidential. However, MPs may quote what they themselves have said in the committee in question. Subsequent to an amendment of the Standing Orders in 2000, many committees have begun to hold open consultations to which the general public and the press have access.

As part of the reading of Bills which have been referred to a committee or in order to throw light on a special matter of public interest, committees may also institute a hearing during which persons whom the committee asks to do so can make an account of a given subject or express points of view. Such hearings may be public.

In recent years, initiatives have been taken to improve the quality of legislation further and to make EU law part of the committee work on an even larger scale. This has been done on the initiative of a committee, a committee Member, the clerk to a committee or a person belonging to the Administration of the Folketing who is particularly knowledgeable within one of the areas with which the said committee is dealing.

Reports
The committees’ dealing with Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution concludes in the submission of a report. A committee report is a document in which the political parties make an account of their stand on a Bill or on a proposal for parliamentary resolution and eventually state their reasons for deciding to vote for or against the Bill in the Chamber or eventually to abstain from voting.

Moreover, the report may contain amendments moved by the Government or by the political parties represented on the committee. The report may also comprise interpretation contributions e.g. information as to the way in which the Minister has informed the committee that he intends to administer a given provision. In addition, the report may also contain reprints of the Minister’s reply to selected questions, notes etc. Thus the committee report is a document which sends a Bill back from the committee for reading in the Chamber and which forms the basis of the continued reading.

If the Folketing wishes to have a new committee reading between the second and third readings of a Bill, the Bill is once more entered on the agenda of the committee, and subsequently the committee elaborates a new report (supplementary report), which forms the basis of the third reading of the Bill.
The Administration employs a number of academic staff as clerks. Normally, 1 staff services 2 or 3 committees. The European Affairs Committee and the Finance Committee do, however, have their own secretariats.

European Affairs Committee and Finance Committee
Two of the standing committees are particularly influential: the European Affairs Committee and the Finance Committee.

European Affairs Committee
The European Affairs Committee was set up in 1972 in connection with Denmark’s accession to the European Communities in 1973. The main task of the European Affairs Committee is to coordinate the reading of EU matters in the Folketing. The Government shall consult the Committee on questions of major importance so that the impact of the Folketing as well as the Government’s freedom to negotiate are taken into consideration.

No formal votes are taken in the Committee, but as a rule the Chairman of the Committee may conclude after the discussions that there is no majority against the Government’s mandate for negotiation if the spokesmen for the parties which together reach 90 seats or more (i.e. more than half the 179 Members of the Folketing), have been against the mandate.

Since 1989, an EU Counsellor has been permanently attached to the European Affairs Committee. The task of the Counsellor is to provide impartial advice and analyses to the Members.

The EU Information Centre was established in 1994 in order to facilitate the general public’s access to information about the EU. The priorities of the EU Information Centre are thus clearly focused on the ordinary Danish citizen with no special background knowledge about the EU system but with a keen interest in obtaining information on what is going on in the EU.

Finance Committee
The main task of the Finance Committee is to read Finance Bills and Supplementary Appropriation Bills and to consider legal documents dealing with the supplementary appropriations from the individual Ministers in the course of the year. Moreover, the Finance Committee discusses the general outlines of finance policy. Contrary to what is the practice in many other countries, the Finance Committee does not deal with fiscal policy. The latter is the task of the Fiscal Affairs Committee.

International relations and cooperation
The Folketing is part of international cooperation in two ways: 1) indirectly via the work done in the internationally oriented committees and commissions, and 2) by appointing a number of delegations to various Interparliamentary assemblies.

The international committees and commissions are: The Foreign Policy Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defence Committee. The work in these committees is focused on the various aspects of Danish foreign policy and security policy rather than on actual legislative work.

Foreign Policy Committee
In accordance with the Constitutional Act, the formulation and the implementation of Danish foreign policy and security policy is primarily the task of the Government. Therefore, the committee’s work on these issues is formally limited to a counselling function. This function is most clearly formalised in relation to the Foreign Policy Committee, “which the Government shall consult before making any decision of major importance to Denmark’s foreign policy” as stated in the Constitutional Act.

Act. no. 54 of 5 March 1954 on the Foreign Policy Committee defines the provisions relating to the work of the Committee. It is laid down that the duty of the Government to consult the Committee requires that the Committee shall discuss issues with significant bearing on Danish foreign policy with the Government, and that the Committee shall be informed by
Apart from the more internationally oriented committees and delegations the main task of the committees is to deal with the Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution which the Folketing refers to the committee concerned.
the Government of matters relating to foreign policy. The members of the Committee therefore receive relevant memoranda from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and reports from Danish embassies.

As an overall rule, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Defence represent the Government at meetings.

Consultations between the Government and the Foreign Policy Committee are not open to the public, and the members of the Committee are therefore bound to observe secrecy with regard to information received at or in connection with meetings of the Committee.

Parliamentary delegations to international organizations
In the efforts made to strengthen parliamentary influence on the work undertaken in the international organizations such as the Council of Europe, NATO and the OSCE, parliamentary assemblies have been attached to these organizations so that they may follow the work of the Government organizations in question.

The main objective of the work of the delegations varies from one organization to another but a dominant aspect is that topical issues are discussed and the activities are being followed up and recommendations to Government organizations adopted.

The Folketing sends delegations to the following parliamentary assemblies: The Interparliamentary Union (IPU) – which is not attached to a Government organization – the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE PA).
The Folketing services provide assistance and counselling to the MPs, and in so doing contribute to the Folketing’s efforts to improve the quality of legislation, the access of the Folketing to control the Government and the political debates. The Administration employs 440 staff. The Folketing Services are headed by a Board of Directors consisting of the Secretary General, the Clerk and 2 deputy Secretaries General.

Secretary General
The Secretary General is responsible for ensuring that the Administration functions according to the guidelines laid down by the Presidium. In the parliamentary area, the Secretary General is responsible for matters of principle and for matters relating to new administrative initiatives.

Clerk
The Clerk – who is also Deputy Secretary General – is responsible for the work in the Chamber. He is assisted in this task by staff in the Law
Secretariat and working tasks include counselling on constitutional and parliamentary matters on the part of the Speaker, the Presidium and the Members of the Standing Orders Committee. In these areas, the Clerk refers directly to the Speaker and to the Presidium and is responsible to the Secretary General.

**Speaker's Secretariat and General Management Department**
The Speaker’s Secretariat and General Management Department service the political and administrative managements. The General Management Department deals with various tasks across the organization as well as with tasks relating to developments, planning, coordination and information to the overall organization. The General Management Department also acts as secretariat to the Board of Directors of the Folketing Services.

**Law Secretariat**
The main task of the Law Secretariat is to assist the Clerk in planning the work in the Chamber. Moreover, the staff of the Secretariat assists the Clerk in counselling the political and administrative managements on constitutional matters and other parliamentary legal matters as well as on questions pertaining to public law.

The Secretariat is also responsible for ensuring that questions which are read in the Chamber are correct from a legally, technical point of view. Moreover, the Secretariat is responsible for administering the rules on MPs’ leave of absence and calling on their substitutes. And finally, the Secretariat in cooperation with the other secretariats elaborate written explanatory notes to the committees.

**Committee Secretariats**
Three of these secretariats service the standing committees of the Folketing and the inter-parliamentary delegations. The secretariats employ a number of committee clerks and clerical staff. One or more committee clerks assist the committee in the work of the reading of Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution, arranging hearings, planning committee trips etc. The committee clerks also assist the MPs in drafting private Members’ Bills and proposals for parliamentary resolution. Moreover, the secretariats provide assistance to the various kinds of international cooperation in which the Folketing takes part, and they assist the committees in dealing with foreign policy and security policy and also assist the delegations sent to international parliamentary assemblies.

**EU Secretariat**
The servicing of the European Affairs Committee is centered in the EU Secretariat which also comprises the Office of the EU Counsellor and the EU Information Centre. The EU Counsellor makes analyses of EU matters for the use of the European Affairs Committee and the standing committees while the EU Information Centre is at the disposal of the general public and the MPs with information and documentation on EU questions.

**Secretariat of the Danish Delegation to the Nordic Council**
The Secretariat services the Danish Members of the Nordic Council and to some extent the Faroese and Greenlandic Members. In cooperation with the Council’s secretariats in the other
Nordic countries, it also services the collective Nordic Council, carries out practical tasks in connection with the arrangements of the Council and informs the general public about the Council.

Office of the Official Report
The Office of the Official Report (entitled Folketingstidende) takes minutes of the proceedings in the Chamber and is responsible for the linguistic proofreading of the Folketing publications. They also publish Yearbook and Records and other documentation.

Salaries and Financial Affairs Office
The Salaries and Financial Affairs Office takes care of tasks related to the administration of and developments in the Folketing budget and accounts, financial support to the parliamentary groups, remuneration to the MPs, salaries to the Folketing staff and pensions to former MPs and civil servants.

Personnel Office
The Office deals with tasks related to personnel policy and administration, including collective talks on conditions of employment, staff development, recruiting, development of individual competences and post training. The central records are to be found in this Office.

User Services
The main task of this unit is to service MPs, take care of security matters and to undertake the cleaning of the Folketing building. The core of the User Services is the User Centre comprising the Security Unit, the Maintenance Unit, the Service Unit, the Cleaning Unit and also the Visitors’ Service which arranges guided tours of the Folketing.

The User Centre administers a system of various kinds of free admission tickets, parking permits etc. to MPs. Moreover, the User Centre, upon request, provides documents related to the parliamentary work. Furthermore, various kinds of teaching, insurance matters and booking of meeting rooms are administered by this Unit. Rules on the access of the Press, rules on photographing and TV broadcasting in the Folketing as well as membership of the Office of the Press Gallery also belong under the User Centre. The Post Office, the Telephone Exchange and the Travel Agency are also placed here.

Linguistic Service and Language School
These services also belong under the User Services. The Linguistic Service is responsible for official translations, for answering questions of a linguistic nature on the part of the Ministries and other external clients, MPs and staff. It is also responsible for providing interpretation at hearings, international meetings, EU Presidencies etc.

The Language School provides teaching in English and/or French to MPs.

IT and Telecommunications Unit
The IT and Telecommunications Unit is responsible for the primary running of the IT, for providing IT user support and for the current development projects related to the technical infrastructure, including telephony.

Communication
The Information and Communication Unit is responsible for providing infor-
information to the general public on the work carried out in printed and in electronic form. It is also responsible for drawing up and implementing the information policy of the Folketing. The latter policy is aimed at providing neutral information about the legislative process and democratic issues to the political parties, the Press and the general public.

Politician for a Day
In 2003 the Folketing opened an interactive visitors' centre, Politician for a Day, for the 8th and 9th forms of primary schools. This computer-controlled role play is the first of its kind in the world and lasts for slightly less than three hours. During the game pupils learn about the political process and personally experience the everyday work of a Member of the Folketing.

Politician for a Day is laid out in a 300 square metre room beneath Christiansborg as a miniature version of the Folketing, with a Chamber, a lobby, members’ offices, group and committee rooms.

The purpose of Politician for a Day is to enhance young people's knowledge of the political decision-making process and inspire them to play an active role in Danish democracy. Young people must feel that they can make a difference.

More than 10,000 pupils try out Politician for a Day every year. A visit to the centre is free of charge and can be combined with a brief conducted tour of the Folketing.

Folketing Library, Archives and Information
The Folketing Library, Archives and Information provides information and documentation to MPs, staff, the Press and the public. The Library holds a very large collection of books and documents and cooperates with other libraries in Denmark and abroad on quite a large scale. The Archives file documents of an administrative nature as well as documents on the legislative process including committee documents.

Planning
Tasks relating to planning are organized in a separate section. They include the premises of the Folketing, among these planning and control of conversions, refurbishments and decoration as well as the running and maintenance of all technical plants and installations.