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'The Social Democrats have succeeded in winning back voters'

The Social Democrats managed to win the national elections in Denmark. Jesper Vind explains how that happened

Read this interview in German.

The Social Democratic Party won the Danish parliamentary elections with 25.9 per cent. The result is a little worse than in the previous election, but the "red bloc" has an absolute majority with 91 seats. How did the Social Democrats manage to mobilise their voters?

The Social Democrats led their campaign with four headings: social democratic welfare policy – for example, better day-care centres and more teachers. Stronger taxation of the rich, for example through higher inheritance tax, higher bank tax and the EU financial tax. Furthermore, a continuation of Denmark's migration policy – because a vast majority has supported it for many years. And finally, a very strong emphasis on an active climate policy. Party leader Mette Frederiksen has repeatedly talked about old social democratic virtues during the election campaign.

What role did the decision play to adopt a much stricter course in questions of migration and asylum policy?

That played a decisive role. In recent years, the Social Democrats have almost copied the strict foreign policy of the government because it was supported by a large majority of the population. Since the turn of the millennium, the Danish elections have been more or less decided by immigration. The Social Democrats have typically lost for two reasons. Firstly, their course was not as tough as that of the centre-right parties. On the other hand, the social democratic supporter parties on the left (Enhedslisten and Socialistisk Folkeparti) and in the liberal centre (Radikale Venstre) stood for an even more relaxed migration policy. This made it easy for civil society and the right to say that a social democratic government would pursue a careless

migration policy.

The new social democratic leadership has changed course and made clear that it will not negotiate with potential coalition partners on the issue. They can only influence other political issues, such as welfare, taxes and climate.

The result shows that the Social Democrats have succeeded in winning back voters. Namely those who voted for the right-wing populists in the last election. At the same time, the Social Democrats have lost voters to the Left and the Liberals. All in all, voters were drawn from right to left – and that was key to the left's overall victory.

What was the significance of the climate crisis in the election, which is currently mobilising many young voters across Europe?

The election campaign lasted about a month. In the last two weeks, the climate has become the most important issue in the election campaign – along with criticism of cuts in the public sector from the Left. Last but not least, the liberal centre (Radical Venstre) thematised the climate and achieved great success in doing so. Social democratic leader Mette Frederiksen also constantly addressed the climate crisis and called this election a “climate election” in her victory speech.

What does the election result mean for the formation of a coalition? Not all “red” parties support the Social Democrats' shift to the right in migration and asylum policy. So how likely is a left-wing alliance?

The negotiations will be very complicated. But a government headed by the Social Democrats is the most likely outcome. It’s beneficial for a left-wing alliance that the issue of climate is at the top of the agenda. The left parties are pretty much in agreement on that.

With regard to migration and asylum policy, the Social Democrats are likely to make a few concessions to the Left. But not to the extent that they fundamentally change their political course. This is supported by the majority of Danes. The Social Democrats did not follow the same hard rhetoric as the right-wingers here either, and it’s likely that a Social Democrat with a migration background will be appointed Integration Minister.

The right-wing populist Danish People's Party fell from around 21 per cent to 8.7 per cent, while the new, even more right-wing Stram Kurs party narrowly managed the Danish two per cent hurdle. How do you assess developments in the right-wing camp?

The extreme right wing has almost collapsed in Denmark. This is due to increasing Danish concern about Brexit and right-wing populism in Britain as well as the election of Donald Trump in the US. We could also see this trend in the European Parliament elections, where the result was clearly pro-European. At the same time, immigration into the EU has become much lower. A major point, however, is that in Denmark both centre-left and centre-right parties stand for a hard course of migration.

But there has also been a significant development in Danish political culture. Over the past ten to twenty years, both the centre-left and centre-right parties have increasingly moved away from "political correctness" held high by the media and intellectuals. The vast majority of politicians are consistently guided by what Danish citizens say in the surveys.

This interview was conducted by Joanna Itzek.



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