

# Boosted by electoral success, the Danish People's Party has adopted a more pragmatic line ahead of next year's general election in Denmark

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*Since it was founded in 1995, the Eurosceptic Danish People's Party (DPP) has steadily increased its support to become one of Denmark's largest parties. [Susie Meret](#) and [Ole Borre](#) assess how the party is positioning itself ahead of the next Danish general election in 2015. They write that having topped the vote in the country's European Parliament elections in May, the DPP is now pursuing a more pragmatic approach with the aim of effectively 'normalising' the party in the eyes of the Danish electorate.*

While the rise of [UKIP](#) in the United Kingdom and the [Front National](#) in France have made headlines across Europe, in Denmark the Eurosceptic [Danish People's Party](#) (DPP) has also enjoyed a year of electoral success. The European Parliament elections in May gave the party 26.6 per cent of the vote, far more than the [Social Democrats](#) (19.1 per cent) and [Venstre](#) (the Agrarian Liberals – 16.7 per cent), the two main leading parties in Danish politics since the turn of the century. The DPP also robustly increased their vote share from that achieved at the previous four general elections held since 2000, where the party polled between 12 and 15 per cent (12.3 per cent at the last 2011 election) and at the 2009 EP election, where the party got 8.5 per cent. What explains this success?

## The Danish People's Party and Euroscepticism in Danish politics

Denmark elects 13 MEPs to the European Parliament, with all seats assigned using a proportional system where the country is considered as a single constituency. As shown in the Table below, the DPP gained two extra seats from its result in the 2009 European elections, going from two to four elected MEPs. The party's most prominent candidate, MEP Morten Messerschmidt, alone received over 20 per cent of the total vote. Messerschmidt ran the campaign under the slogan 'More Denmark, less EU', clearly expressing the party's position toward the perceived antagonism between national sovereignty and EU political development.

The Social Democrats and Venstre lost one seat each; the same was the case for the [Socialist People's Party](#), which had been part of the government coalition from 2011 to 2013. The only government party to gain at the European election was the [Danish Social Liberal Party](#), which gained one seat. When results are grouped according to coalition blocks, the centre-right blue block registered a slight advantage. In this sense the EU election merely confirmed the general tendency of the polls over the past two years. However, one might have expected the blue block to have suffered from the effects of unpopular personal episodes, because at the time of the election Venstre's leader, Lars Lykke Rasmussen, was in a media storm, accused of using party money for personal purchases.

One explanation for the DPP's success is that Danish voters are becoming more Eurosceptic. To test this hypothesis, the Table below also shows two attitudes which were measured in the election surveys of 2007 and 2011: attitudes toward the EU and attitudes on whether globalisation has positive or negative effects for Denmark. In both cases, attitudes were measured on a five point scale from 'strongly positive' to 'strongly negative'. The Table shows the result of subtracting all of the 'negative' responses in these surveys from the 'positive responses' among voters for each party. A positive figure in the Table therefore indicates a positive attitude toward the EU/globalisation among that party's voters.

## Table: 2014 European Parliament election results in Denmark and party attitudes toward the EU and globalisation

Party	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Attitudes toward EU	Attitudes toward globalisation
Danish People's Party	26.6	4	-24	+3
Social Democrats	19.1	3	+27	+36
Venstre	16.7	2	+49	+45
Socialist People's Party	11.0	1	+18	+32
Conservative People's Party	9.1	1	+66	+70
People's Movement Against the EU	8.1	1	-	-
Danish Social Liberal Party	6.5	1	+62	+57
Liberal Alliance	2.9	0	+43	+47
<b>Total blue-block</b>	<b>55.3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total red-block</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

**Note:** The Table divides parties into a 'blue' (right of centre) block and a 'red' (left of centre) block, with each party's row coloured blue or red accordingly. The two total rows at the bottom show the total vote share and seats gained by each block of parties. The last two columns give an indication of the voters for each party's attitudes on the EU and globalisation, based on the five point scale outlined above: a positive number indicating positive attitudes toward the EU/globalisation and a negative number indicating the opposite. For more information on the parties see: [Danish People's Party](#), [Social Democrats](#), [Venstre](#), [Socialist People's Party](#), [Conservative People's Party](#), [People's Movement Against the EU](#), [Danish Social Liberal Party](#), [Liberal Alliance](#).

As shown from the last two columns, DPP voters stand out as having substantially more negative attitudes toward the EU and globalisation than voters for the other parties. This is, of course, hardly surprising for a nationalist and populist party: the DPP is also expected to oppose further European political integration and support tighter border controls. However, it is worth noting that the positions of the party on the EU and border controls have changed over the years. During the 1990s the party's platform was characterised by more extreme positions on the EU, as apparent in the party's motto: 'Nothing above, nothing beside the Danish Parliament'. This meant the rejection of all forms of EU decisions beyond the free market and the common safeguarding of nature. In addition, the party has demanded an immediate exit from the Schengen agreement.

However, since the DPP has supported the Venstre-Conservative People's Party governments, which were in office between 2001 and 2011, its position on the EU has become more pragmatic. The DPP has still at times advanced controversial policy proposals, such as the [re-introduction of border controls](#) in 2011 – a proposal which triggered a reaction from both Germany and the EU. Nevertheless in the past decade the party has undoubtedly strived for political recognition and normalisation, which have implied abandoning some of its more radical standpoints on EU matters. This has at times put the party in a difficult balancing act between the ongoing process of normalisation and its profile as a steadfast and uncompromising political party. However, the tension between the two has never really exposed the contradictions remaining below the surface of the party and its development in Danish politics.

The DPP's strategy can partly be discerned in the decision to ally itself with the [Conservative and Reformist](#) (ECR) group in the European Parliament, thus refusing to co-operate with the Front National's Marine Le Pen or UKIP's Nigel Farage. These decisions can best be understood as an attempt to avoid embarrassing alliances that could negatively impact upon the party and its process of normalisation. Previously in 2009, Morten Messerschmidt had [declared](#) that his party 'on a number of issues shares some common values and can certainly work together with the British Conservatives', albeit on that occasion the British Conservatives declared that the DPP was not welcome in the ECR group.

After the 2014 elections, however, twelve new parties followed the DPP in joining the ECR: among them the

Eurosceptic [Finns Party](#), and the German anti-euro party [Alternative für Deutschland](#). This year's electoral success and the course the party has followed in the aftermath suggest the DPP will continue to pursue a more pragmatic rather than ideological strategy with a view to the next Danish general election in 2015.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image: Christiansborg Palace, seat of the Danish Parliament, Credit: [tsajproject](#) (CC-BY-SA-3.0)*

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