

The Foreign Affairs Committee





The appointment and composition of the Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is one of the Folketing's 24 standing committees. It comprises 17 members and 11 deputies. A chairman and a vice-chairman are elected among the committee's members. Members and deputies take part in the work carried out by the committee on an equal footing. However, only members are entitled to vote in connection with such matters as submitting reports.

The Folketing chooses members for the committees at the beginning of the sessional year or after an election. Parties are roughly represented in the committees in proportion to their size in Parliament, but when the committees are formed the parties often make agreements with the aim of getting as many members as possible on the committees.

The Foreign Affairs Committee's field of responsibility

A committee's field of responsibility corresponds by and large to that of a ministry. The Foreign Affairs Committee therefore deals with matters that are primarily related to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Traditionally the tasks of the committees are focused on Danish development aid, but in 1997 the committee's authority was extended so that it is now involved with Danish security and foreign policy in a broader sense. The reason for this a desire to provide the Folketing with the opportunity for a more comprehensive treatment of general foreign



policy issues via the Foreign Affairs Committee. The extension of authority should also be seen in the light of development policy as an integral element in overall foreign policy and security policy.

The committee therefore has a natural interface with the Foreign Policy Committee. Although the interface with the Foreign Policy Committee is in a certain sense fluid, the two bodies are concerned with different aspects of foreign policy issues. In accordance with the Constitution the government must consult the Foreign Policy Committee on matters with a more comprehensive foreign policy scope. As a general rule, the Foreign Policy Committee deals with ongoing, current foreign policy issues. The Foreign Affairs Committee, on the other hand, deals with general foreign policy issues on the basis of a broader perspective which often seeks to illustrate the connection between the security and the development policy aspects. In addition to this the Foreign Affairs Committee handles a number of concrete development policy issues, including the government's proposals for strategies with regard to areas and countries.

Typical examples of this are:

- overall Danish development strategy for cooperating with developing countries,
- country strategies for cooperating with the Danish programme cooperation countries,
- issues regarding aid to countries in Central and Eastern Europe, and
- strategies connected with Danish measures under the Environment, Peace and Stability Framework.

Interfaces can also arise in relation to other committees such as the European Affairs Committee, The Finance Committee or the Defence Committee in connection with e.g. joint development policy in the EU, relation to appropriation applications which deals with the aid to the developing countries, or international measures carried out by the armed forces.

The Foreign Affairs Committee's tasks

Similarly to the other standing committees in the Folketing the Foreign Affairs Committee has two main tasks. The first involves

DANISH DEVELOPMENT AID

Development policy is an integral part of foreign and security policy and development aid is therefore an active tool in the efforts made by Denmark to achieve foreign policy objectives. The Folketing's parties have therefore traditionally prioritised comprehensive, effective measures in the development aid area, which is reflected in the high level of Danish development aid.

Danish measures are fairly equally distributed between bilateral and multilateral aid. The Foreign Affairs Committee carries out an ongoing check on the government's implementation of development aid in connection with both the bilateral and the multilateral areas.

reading bills and proposals which fall into the committee's field of responsibility. The second involves an ongoing control of the government's policies. In this connection it is the responsibility of the Foreign Affairs Committee to keep control of the Minister for Foreign Affairs' administration of the government's foreign affairs policy, implementation of new legislation etc. But other fields may also fall within the committee's area, such as the sphere of responsibility of the Minister for Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs in matters concerning the connection between refugee and development issues.

The main features of the committee's performance of these tasks and the means

and/or tools the committee can use in this connection are described below.

Bills and Proposals for Parliamentary Resolution

The general political debates take place in the Chamber of the Folketing and this is also where formal decisions are made. However the preparatory work in connection with all decisions takes place in the Folketing's committees.

A Bill is read three times in the Chamber of the Folketing, whereas a Proposal for a Parliamentary Resolution is read twice in the Chamber. Between these readings in the Chamber of the Folketing the committees scrutinise the Bills or Proposals thoroughly.

In concrete terms this means that a Bill or a Proposal on foreign, security or development policy is referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee for a committee reading after the first reading in the Chamber of the Folketing.

When a Bill has been referred to the Foreign Affairs Committee for a reading it is put on the agenda of the next committee meeting. In this connection, and to the extent possible, the committee establishes a timetable for reading the Bill in the committee.

During the reading in committee the Bill is reviewed and discussed. The committee may often meet several times before the reading has been completed. In connection with reading in committee the committee can seek information, etc., in several different ways, which are all regulated by the Folketing's Rules of Procedure.



Christiansborg Palace – seat of the Danish Parliament



Bourkina Faso. Photo: Heine Pedersen, loan from Danida

The committee can:

- Put questions to ministers
- Call in ministers for consultation
- Receive deputations

Questions are addressed to the minister to whose field of responsibility the Bill belongs, i.e. as a rule the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The questions are usually submitted for a written response. However, the

committee can also call in the minister for consultation, i.e. the minister is asked to meet the committee in order to answer questions orally. During a consultation, the committee and the minister can enter into a dialogue proper on the Bill or Proposal in question.

During the reading in committee of Bills and Proposals the committee often receives inquiries from the public or organisations.



The meeting room of the Foreign Affairs Committee decorated with paintings by Per Kirkeby

These inquiries are either presented to the committee in writing or orally, in what is known as an »audience« with the committee. In the latter connection permission must be applied for to appear as a deputation and present points of view orally to the committee. During an »audience« the committee can ask questions of the people who appear, but the members of deputations are not permitted to ask questions to the committee members.

When the committee has completed its reading of a Bill or Proposal it issues a report.

A report contains an account of the work carried out by the committee on a Bill or Proposal as well as of any amendments it has made. The report must at minimum contain the parties' attitudes to the Bill and to any amendments. The report also contains a list of the appendices distributed



during the committee's reading of the Bill. Over and above this the report may contain copies of relevant committee material such as responses from ministers to questions from the committee which may be of relevance to an interpretation of the Act.

A Proposal comes in for a second reading in the Chamber when a report has been issued. The committee decides when it will issue a report, but in practice time must be allowed to ask questions and obtain answers, hold consultations, receive deputations and to clarify the matter politically before further action is taken.

After the second reading in the Chamber of the Folketing votes are cast for any amendments and then for the Bill itself. Where a Proposal is concerned the final Proposal is voted for. Where a Bill is concerned this can then go direct to the third reading or be referred to another reading in committee if there are members who request this. In such a case the committee will either issue a supplementary report on the Bill or make an oral recommendation in the Chamber of the Folketing.

All Bills and Proposals become void at the end of the sessional year (the day before the Folketing opens on the first Tuesday in October). If the proposers wish a Bill to be read during the new sessional year it must therefore be reintroduced.

The Folketing's control of the government – »the ordinary aspect« of committee work
Over and above reading Bills and Proposals the committees can take up other issues for

discussion and treatment. This is the »ordinary aspect« of committees, i.e. that the committees keep a check on the government on an ongoing basis. In this way the Foreign Affairs Committee continually follows the Minister for Foreign Affairs' administration of his field of responsibility, i.e. the implementation of the government's foreign policy and his compliance with Acts and authorisations adopted by the Folketing in connection with foreign policy.

During the exercise of this control function the committee has the opportunity to:

- Put questions to ministers
- Call in ministers for consultation
- Hold »theme meetings«
- Hold hearings
- Receive deputations
- Visit institutions, etc.



The Chamber of the Danish Parliament

A number of the above-mentioned possibilities have already been described in the section on Bills and Proposals for Parliamentary Resolution above. In addition the committee can hold theme meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs during the course of the year. At such theme meetings the committee has an opportunity to discuss the main

political subjects with the minister within the field of its responsibility. Experts and others may be called in to present their knowledge and views to the committee.

In order to obtain a greater insight into and knowledge of a given area the committee can also decide to hold a hearing to which

PROGRAMME COOPERATION COUNTRIES AND COUNTRY STRATEGIES

The Foreign Affairs Committee has an influence on the general and concrete organisation of Danish development aid policy.

The selection of programme cooperation countries, i.e. those countries that are the principle recipients of Danish development aid, is carried out on the basis of a number of criteria which have been approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee. Among these are:

- The country's social and financial stage of development and development needs
- The extent of aid from other donors
- The opportunity for a dialogue on the promotion of sustainable development with the focus on the poor
- The opportunity to promote respect for human rights
- The opportunity to integrate the aspect of gender into development work
- Previous Danish experience of cooperation
- If the items listed above have been fulfilled the opportunity to promote the participation of the Danish business community in the development work is also included in deliberations on the choice of countries.

There is special focus on Africa when making a choice of countries to cooperate with and there are nine programme cooperation countries in Africa, whereas there are four programme cooperation countries in Asia and two in Central America.

The Foreign Affairs Committee also takes part in an ongoing dialogue with the Minister for Foreign Affairs on political developments and on Danish aid measures in the programme cooperation countries.

The Foreign Affairs Committee is involved in the preparation of country strategies for Danish development aid in the cooperating countries, and it finally approves country strategies.



Tanzania 2001. Photo: Ernst Tobisch, loan from Danida

it invites a number of speakers. A sub-committee is normally set up to organise a hearing and its members draw up more detailed guidelines for the hearing, while the committee's secretariat is responsible for its practical organisation.

The committee can also decide to visit institutions and organisations in order to clarify certain working areas and activities.

Meetings of the Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee holds meetings approximately twice a month in addition to any theme meetings and hearings. Before each meeting an agenda is sent to the com-

mittee's members and deputies as well as to the party secretariats and the press.

Meetings of the Foreign Affairs Committee are usually closed. No minutes are taken at the meetings, but a confidential record is kept in which the decisions made by the committee are entered.

If a theme or a consultation issue is considered particularly suitable for reading at an open meeting the committee can decide to hold such a meeting. In that case the committee establishes a procedure for holding the meeting, including whether to allow audio and TV recordings. However, an open consultation meeting will always be recorded on a CD-ROM.



The Riding Ground, the Colonnade

The Foreign Affairs Committee and the EU

The European Affairs Committee provides the government with a negotiation mandate in advance of the government's participation in meetings of the Council of Ministers in the EU, and also keeps a check on the government's EU policy. However, there is a growing tendency for the Folketing's other committees to involve themselves with EU issues. The Foreign Affairs Committee receives notes on new EU proposals on an ongoing basis, as well as copies of initiatives and proposals of relevance to the committee's work which are discussed in the European Affairs Committee. As a general rule the Foreign Affairs Committee has a consultation with the Minister for Foreign Affairs in advance of Council meetings on development aid, at which the minister gives an account of the items that are on the agenda of the Council meeting.

International cooperation

International cooperation naturally plays an important role for the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Every six months a meeting is held on development aid policy for the chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees from the EU countries as well as from candidate states, and for representatives from the European Parliament. The meetings are held by the country holding the EU Presidency. Current development aid policy issues are discussed at the meetings and there are debates regarding how the national parliaments can strengthen their influence within the area.



The purpose is to strengthen parliamentary cooperation and to establish personal contacts between members from other parliaments around the world. Strengthening cooperation with other parliaments is therefore an issue which is always given high priority, not only under the auspices of the EU, but also in an international context. The Foreign Affairs Committee often receives visits from members of governments, members of parliaments, senior government officials, and representatives of ethnic minorities, etc., from all over the world, as well as from various international organisations. Over and above this the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee often attend larger conferences on foreign policy issues.

It is important for the committee members to be well informed with regard to international developments and therefore be better able to perform their tasks and exercise influence on and control over the government's foreign policy line. In this connection ongoing contact and dialogue with other players in the international area is an important element, and the same applies to the

committee's journeys abroad in connection with attending meetings and conferences and visiting other countries, including developing countries.

The Foreign Affairs Committee secretariat

The Foreign Affairs Committee secretariat is placed organisationally in the Folketing's Parliamentary Department.

It is the task of the committee secretary to advise the chairman and the committee's members on the organisation and performance of committee work. The advice includes the practical organisation of committee work, obtaining information for the committee or the committee members, and the preparation of the committee's reports or accounts. The committee secretary also helps to draw up questions from the committee and the Bills and other decisions that the members of the Folketing wish to introduce. Finally, the committee secretary is responsible for planning and carrying out the committee's study trips and other travel activities.

THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE - STUDY TOURS

Similarly to all other committees the Foreign Affairs Committee goes on study trips each year, arranges hearings, and visits, and attends conferences. All activities that the committee itself plans and arranges with the help of the committee secretariat.

Over and above this the Foreign Affairs Committee has a special role to play. It must keep a check on the government's handling of development aid. Each year the committee takes a longer journey with the special purpose of inspecting Danish development projects. The journey therefore traditionally takes the committee to a country or region in the third world.

Photo: Heine Pedersen, loan from Danida



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