

# Factsheet Denmark



The Queen gives her New Year address, New Year's Eve 2009. Photo: Keld Navntoft, Scanpix.

March 2010

## Queen Margrethe II 70 years

The Danish Queen celebrating her 70th birthday on 16 April 2010 is very popular. In her heart of hearts, she may well be looking back at her 38 years on the throne with satisfaction. If so, this is fully justified. Not only has Margrethe II reigned for longer than any other Danish monarch in the past century, but she has renewed the Danish royal house with a steady hand and handled difficult situations in such a way that the monarchy has not suffered. However, her greatest happiness must be to see that her succession is secure for two more generations.

### **From wilderness to park**

Queen Margrethe was born just after the German occupying power had taken control of the Danish territory on 9 April 1940. It was a dark time for the country

and many regarded her birth as a welcome light in adversity. Since then, she has frequently said that World War II established the conceptual framework in which she has seen Europe and therefore the conditions under which Denmark had to develop. In an address to the European Parliament in 1987, she tellingly compared the old Europe to a wilderness where all the plants fought each other for the light and went on to describe post-war Europe as an effort to establish a park with organised conditions so that “every kind of plant will thrive”.

### **French spouse**

She herself led the way towards this vision of a peaceful Europe. For centuries, the Danish royal house has had a Northern European, Lutheran horizon and generally married members of



The future Queen's first Sovereign in Council meeting, 1958.  
Photo: Allan Moe, Scanpix.



The Queen matriculates at Copenhagen University, 1959.  
Photo: Per Pejstrup, Scanpix.

royal houses of a similar rank from this region. Margrethe went against both traditions when she chose the French diplomat and count, Henri de Montpezat. They were engaged in 1966 and married in Holmens Church in Copenhagen on 10 June 1967. Their two sons were born within the next two years, Crown Prince Frederik in 1968 and Prince Joachim in 1969.

### University studies

Margrethe also signalled new times in other ways. She did so by adding university studies to her royal status. She enrolled at several Danish and European universities in the period 1960-1965. She passed the first year philosophy exam at Copenhagen University in 1960 and the same year went to the University of Cambridge to study archaeology, a subject which has interested her throughout her life. The following years, she pursued political science studies at Aarhus University, followed by studies at Sorbonne in Paris in 1963 and at the London School of Economics in 1965. In that way, she became the best-educated monarch in Denmark so far.

### Name carrying responsibilities

Margrethe did not become reigning Queen as a matter of course, for the Danish Constitution of 1849 only allowed male succession. This was changed by the adoption of the Act of Succession at a referendum in 1953. This allowed conditional female succession (changed in 2009 to equal access to the throne for both genders). The Act became relevant sooner than anyone had expected. In January 1972, the old Frederik IX died after a short illness and as the eldest of three daughters, Margrethe was proclaimed Queen under the name Margrethe II. The name carried responsibilities. Margrethe I united the Scandinavian countries in the Kalmar Union in 1397 and was famous for her wisdom.

### Popular anchoring

The young Queen was 31 when she succeeded to the throne. In one way, that was a great advantage for she understood the mood of the time. The 1970s had very little respect for the past and inherited traditions and the new monarch wished to continue the modernisation of



The Queen and the Prince Consort visit Greenland, 2000. Photo: Jørgen Jessen, Scanpix.

the royal house which her father had started. He was popularly known as the sailor king, partly due to his many years in the navy, partly because he always included a mention of "those at sea" in his New Year addresses. Margrethe did not have her father's down-to-earth nature, but she was analytically sharp, as already Prime Minister Jens Otto Krag noted in his diaries. She took the view that the royal house, despite its aristocratic nature, needed popular anchoring if it was to survive in the long term.

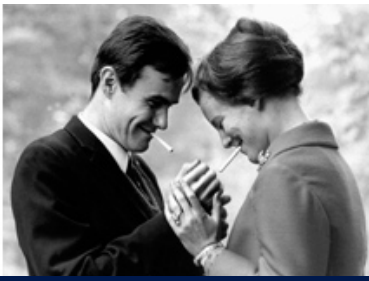
### Modernisation

An important step on the way was the appointment of former Social Democratic Minister Hans Sølvhøj as the new Lord Chamberlain. The Queen also slimmed down the official royal title and the royal crest was redesigned to match. In addition, it no doubt made a difference that Margrethe in the 1970s allowed herself to be photographed shopping in the streets of Copenhagen without an

expensive car and large entourage, walking on her own like an ordinary person. Like the equally famous photo of the policeman helping a duck with her ducklings pass a busy road, the snapshots became synonymous with Danish solidarity across old social boundaries and modern alienation.

### Press conferences

The press was the key to a new and more open communication with the population. Before Margrethe's time, the Danish royal house never held press conferences. The Queen changed that in her first year as a monarch, when she and Prince Henrik received 124 invited journalists from all over the world at Fredensborg Castle. Since then, many press conferences have been held both in Denmark and at the summer residence, Chateau de Caix in Southern France, which belongs to the Prince Consort. The Queen has also given numerous interviews, several of which have been



The Crown Princess and Henri de Monpezat as young lovers, 1967. Photo: Allan Moe, Scanpix.



Proclamation of the Queen of Denmark, 1972. Photo: Aage Sørensen, Scanpix.

expanded into actual books. Television channels have often visited her castles and sent reports from them. The royal house launched a website in the early 1990s.

### Touring the country

The openness towards the media coincided with regular touring throughout Denmark and within the Danish realm, to the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Every summer, the royal yacht Dannebrog weighed anchor and took the Queen and the Prince Consort to Danish towns and regions to open exhibitions, mark anniversaries or grace other local events. This practice marked a continuation of previous monarchs' view of representative tasks. The Faroe Islands and Greenland in the North Atlantic were also included. The Queen herself speaks Faroese and when visiting the Faroes has shown a truly royal understanding of the importance of getting to as many islands as possible to ensure that nobody felt overlooked

or forgotten. Greenland, which is well-known for its special relationship with the royal house, was a greater challenge as large parts of the country are very inaccessible. In 1982, the royal yacht was stuck in the ice off the coast of Greenland. Four years earlier, the Queen had the task of handing Greenland the Act granting the country greater independence in the form of Home Rule. However, this arrangement has not reduced the monarch's popularity in Greenland. The close relationship with Greenland has been maintained by Crown Prince Frederik, for instance in the form of his months-long sleigh ride across the ice cap in 2000, which was by no means risk-free.

### New Year addresses

The Queen has created a special connection with her people through her New Year addresses. The addresses were introduced by Frederik IX in 1959, but his daughter has displayed a special talent

for refining them. It is a difficult art, as the Queen must be above party politics and cannot or must not express opinions of a political nature. Nonetheless, she has managed to give the addresses a form which makes people look forward to them and listen to their Queen every New Year's Eve, for instance by formulating them as reflections on the human condition. Her addresses in the mid 1980s, exhorting the Danes to behave decently in inter-human relationships, are particularly memorable.

### Denmark's identity

The Queen's 50th birthday in 1990, her Silver Wedding in 1992 and the 25th anniversary of her accession to the throne in 1997 became unprecedented manifestations of the good relationship between the Queen and the nation, as always expressed through pomp and circumstance, but also with intensive media coverage. The Social Democratic Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen



The Queen is celebrated on her 69th birthday, 16 April 2009. Photo: Keld Navntoft, Scanpix.

## Queen Margrethe II will be 70

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The Queen makes decoupages for "The Wild Swans", 2009. Photo: JJ Film.

promised the monarchy his complete support and wrote that the Queen is "an important part of Denmark's identity". In opinion polls, 85 per cent were in favour of the monarchy. By comparison, there were as many republicans as supporters of the monarchy when Margrethe II became Queen. The royal family now receives more media exposure than any other Danish family. This also applied in 2004, when it experienced its first divorce in recent times, which at a deeper level threatened its nature of role model. However, Margrethe unsentimentally announced that divorces are part of today's family pattern and the royal family was no exception, as it is not above its time, thus turning the solidarity with her people into a strength.

### Artist

Throughout her life, the Queen has had a special relationship with the arts. Over the years, she has also dared to express herself artistically, despite her role.

The positive reception has helped. She has worked within many genres. Her chasubles for Fredensborg Church in 1976 resulted in several commissions for Danish cathedrals. In 1977, she published book illustrations for Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings", continuing with the native Nordic mythical world ("Regnar Lodbrog", 1979 and "Bjarkemål", 1982). In 1987, she designed costumes for a television version of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep". Actual stage designs followed with "A Folk Tale" at the Royal Theatre in 1991. Her first solo exhibition was in 1988. Since then, she has exhibited in many countries, first in the Nordic region from 1989, later on the Continent from 1994 and eventually outside Europe, most recently in Mexico in 2010. In 2001, she designed the altarpiece for Skei Fjellkirke in Norway. Her most recent major commission was in 2009, when she provided decoupages for a film version of

Hans Christian Andersen's "The Wild Swans".

### Smoker

As an internationally travelling representative of Denmark, the Queen has encountered and seen most of the world. She has been personally affected by today's globalisation, as both her sons found their wives on the other side of the world. The Crown Princess has her roots in Tasmania. A probably unforeseen consequence of the internationalisation has been a new kind of equalisation of the rules of public behaviour. The Queen, who has smoked since her youth, never used to distinguish between private and public behaviour in this respect, but in recent years her personal freedom has been restricted by the standardisation of the role model across national borders. The Crown Prince's description of his mother on her 60th birthday as "a role model for the European reigning family" has caught up with her like a boomerang.

### Quick-witted retort

The Queen has never concealed that her Christian faith is very important to her. In a classic way, she has united a Christian outlook with a humanistic education. In addition, she is famous for her quick-witted retorts, even in difficult situations. When the Chairman of the Communist party in 1973 during the formation of a government visited "madam", he asked the apolitical and inexperienced monarch whether she had followed the election campaign? "Yes, indeed, from A to Z," replied the Queen, thus cleverly turning the election letters of the parties into a familiar saying.

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