

Dear Friends,

In just about four weeks – on **Tuesday 19 November** - Danish voters will have the opportunity to go to their local high school or community hall and cast their vote for the person or party they have decided to en-trust with the responsibility of being a member of their municipal and regional council. Elections for **98 municipal councils and 5 regional councils** will take place on that day, as it happens every four years on the third Tuesday of November.

DIPD believes that this offers an important opportunity to invite **partners from 10 of the countries** we work in, to observe and learn from the municipal and regional elections, because we consider the local level of our democracy to be important for our 'democratic culture'. This is where citizens – the voters – can most directly see how the resources they entrust the local politicians with are being used; this is where they can most directly hold them responsible for what politicians delivered, compared with what they promised during the campaign.

But in doing so, we are very careful to emphasize that the invitation to observe and learn is **not the same as trying to sell or export a particular model** for how a democracy works at the local level. On the contrary, we would like to engage our partners in a discussion of some of the many challenges local level democracy in Denmark are confronted with, just like democracies in other parts of the world experience it.

One such challenge is the **participation of citizens** in the municipal and regional elections. In parliamentary elections we are fortunate that close to 90% of the electorate decide to participate – while we have seen a downward trend in local elections, reaching an all-time low of around 65% in 2009. Will the downward trend continue? Or will the political parties be able to mobilize more people this time, including the young people?

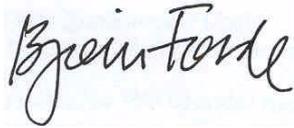
Another challenge is the **number of candidates** running for seats in the councils. The number is simply not good enough! Most councilors mention that the job has become more and more demanding, requiring more and more hours of work, and since they are not paid a decent salary, many potential candidates simply decide not to run. This is true for both men and women, but Denmark in particular needs to encourage more women to run for office.

There are more challenges to Danish democracy than the two just mentioned, and we look forward to having a productive dialogue with all of the **more than 50 partner representatives** from the 10 countries on these challenges. They are not unique to Denmark, but actually exist in most democracies to a larger

or smaller degree. So this is **not** a challenge where we have a '**magic Danish bullet**', but a global challenge where we can learn from each other.

In the weeks before Election Day on 19 November, we will do our best to present brief stories from the campaign trail that can provide our readers and partners with a taste of what the electorate are most concerned about; what political parties are ready to offer to get the support from the voters; how the local elections are linked to the national level politics; and much more.

Regards from

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bjørn Førde". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed over a light blue rectangular background.

Bjørn Førde, Director