

Greenland and the European Community

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Résumé: Le Groenland et la Communauté Européenne.

En 1982, les Groenlandais décidaient par référendum de se retirer de la Communauté Européenne. Leur choix s'appuyait sur la volonté de préserver leur autonomie contre les éventuelles limitations qu'imposerait l'appartenance à la Communauté. Le retrait fut planifié dans une entente de gré à gré et prit effet en février 1985. Évidemment, les liens avec l'Europe ne furent pas coupés pour autant. Le Groenland et la Communauté Européenne ont redéfini de nouveaux rapports, compte tenu entre autres du fait que l'Europe constitue le principal marché pour le poisson groenlandais, et les relations entre eux continueront d'évoluer en fonction des réalités politiques et économiques.

Abstract: Greenland and the European Community.

In 1982, Greenlanders decided in a referendum to get out of the European Community. This political choice was motivated by the apprehension that membership in the Community would impose undesirable limitations on Greenland's autonomy. Termination of membership was mutually agreed on and came into effect in February 1985. However, links with Europe were of course, severed altogether. New arrangements, acknowledging the fact that Europe is the main export market for Greenland fish, have been negotiated and the relationship between Greenland and Europe will evolve according to economic and political factors.

It has been of the utmost importance to the recognition of Greenlanders as a people that we have always been in clear majority within a well-defined geographical area — an island — which possesses the further advantage of being located two thousand miles from the country of our former colonial masters. Unlike our fellow Inuit in Canada, the Same in Northern Scandinavia, the Basque and many other indigenous people of this globe, we have never had to deal with the problems of fuzzy demarcations.

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On this account it has also to some extent been possible to avoid the unpleasant and difficult task of defining who is a Greenlander and who is not. The Home Rule agreement is not an agreement honoring or even referring to the collective rights of the Inuit population, but rather a law concerning everyone living permanently within the geographical entity of 840 000 square miles known as Greenland, including the Danish minority of 20 per cent. Consequently, the Danes living here have voting rights and are eligible for the Greenland Assembly according to the same rules as the rest of the population.

The closest attempt of an ethnic or racial definition was made in the 1960s when a wage system discriminating between "persons born in Greenland" and "persons born outside Greenland" was introduced. Although on the surface maintaining a geographical definition, the system in reality distinguished between people of Inuit origin and ethnic Danes.

In other words, from a legal point of view, the rights and powers of the Home Rule Agreement were not granted to us as a people or ethnic group, but as the inhabitants of a certain landmass.

Giving us autonomy within most areas except those related directly to foreign policy, defence, the police, and the judicial system, Home Rule in Greenland was introduced in 1979. The process towards greater self-determination indirectly received a great boost by referendum in October 1972 about membership in the European community, EC. Being an integral part of the Danish realm at the time, we had, in fact, negligible influence on the outcome and had to submit to the overall result in spite of a negative island vote of 70 percent. The perceived injustice of having been forced to join the EC involuntarily started a process towards greater self-determination, leading to the introduction of Home Rule and, in 1985, withdrawal from the EC.

In the years after 1972 the EC invested 10-25 million dollars a year in infrastructure and education in Greenland; but the positive image thus purchased was undermined by West German trawlers fishing illegally off Greenland and disagreements over fishing quotas.

In 1977, the Danish prime minister at the time, Anker Joergensen, declared that once Home Rule would have been introduced the government in Copenhagen would not wish to force upon Greenland any particular association with the EC — although he also made it clear that he would prefer Greenland to maintain its membership.

In a referendum taking place in Greenland on February 23, 1982, a majority of voters chose to say *naqqa* ("no" in Greenlandic) to continued affiliation with the EC. Although regretting the outcome, Prime Minister Joergensen kept his promise. During the following years, his government loyally assisted Greenland in the negotiations, pressuring reluctant EC commissioners and diplomats who hoped that by dragging their feet and increasing the financial support to Greenland, they might yet be able to persuade the rebellious inhabitants of the world's largest island to change their minds.

Part of the reason for EC's reluctance seemed to be fear of setting a precedent. It would be the first time in the history of the Community that it was faced with a possible diminution, and it was clearly difficult for EC's member countries to understand why Greenland wanted to give up what seemed to them a profitable and unproblematic relationship with Europe.

Our main reason for wanting to terminate the membership was a desire to gain full control of the renewable resources of the sea which constitute more than 80 per cent of

Greenland's export earnings and its major occupation. It seemed unfair and humiliating that Greenlandic politicians had to go to Brussels to bargain with the EC about the right of local fishermen to catch cod and shrimp off their own coastline.

Another significant, but more emotional argument for leaving the EC was a feeling that Greenland has little in common culturally and geographically with the countries constituting the emerging European superpower. Being a small people with an ethnically very different background compared to the rest of the community, membership was seen as a potential threat to our identity.

While EC membership and a development towards creation of a European superstate clearly would impose limitations on Greenlanders' possibilities of self-determination, the situation may be just the opposite for some other ethnic groups. I understand that the Basque minority in France and Spain see the gradual removal of national borders in Europe as a positive development because it is increasing their possibilities of being recognized as a distinct people on an equal footing with the French and the Spanish.

The main difference between us and the Basque is that we, as mentioned above, live within a well-defined area — an island — where we constitute a clear majority of the population.

Being a former colony, we have had our share of bad experience with regards to centralistic supranational authority. As was the case in 1972, we feel no desire to replace the yoke of Brussels. When looking at global development "from the top of world" it looks like a great paradox: some politically-based unions are falling apart while others are being created. One of the lessons of history, as I see it, is that no ideology is strong enough to replace national identity.

The EC was not completely assured about the sincerity of our desire to terminate the membership until the Danish government on behalf of Greenland, made a threat of unilateral withdrawal. In Brussels it was finally understood that we meant business, and an agreement, generally viewed as being quite generous to Greenland, was concluded. Taking effect from February 1, 1985, it reduced the EC to less than half its previous geographic size.

As is almost always the case in international relations, the EC simply acted to serve its own best interests. When bureaucrats and diplomats in Brussels realized that their preferred solution — *i.e.* the continuation of Greenland's full membership — was not in the cards, they did not fulfill the threat they had made during the negotiations of leaving us to our own devices without any economic support from the EC. Instead, they chose to secure the closest economic ties possible under the circumstances.

A main reason for this apparent change of mind was clearly Greenland's military importance. Positioned midway on the shortest route between the United States and the Soviet Union, it was seen as being in the long-term interest by the West to maintain friendly relations with us. Giving us a favourable agreement with the EC was considered a small price to pay security being considered infinitely more important than fish.

Although such a threat was never made by Greenland, there was a fear in Europe that we might seek to compensate for lack of support from the EC by selling fishing rights to non-EC nations. East Germany, the Soviet Union and other countries of the eastern bloc would have been likely to make bids, possibly also claiming "historic rights" because of their presence off Greenland before the declaration for a 200-mile fishing zone in 1977. During the Cold War there was a definite fear among Western nations that the "other side" should gain any kind of foothold in Greenland.

In order to avoid this perceived risk, our wish to be accorded a so-called Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) status with the European community was fulfilled, putting Greenland in the same category as several former colonies of European countries such as the Dutch Antilles, Brunei and New Caledonia. To put it the popular way, we were no longer a member of the EC nuclear family, but had changed our status to that of a distant cousin.

As was the case with the law on Home Rule, the EC agreement made no reference to ethnicity; it was purely and simply an agreement between Denmark/Greenland and the European Community and contained no reference to the "collective rights" of the Inuit population. In fact the indigenous aspect of our culture has not influenced our position internationally very much — except, perhaps, with regard to whaling. The International Whaling Commission has allotted special quotas for Greenland in spite of general world-wide ban on hunting the large sea mammals, specifically referring to our traditional "subsistence culture".

Beside giving us limited access to EC funds, the agreement contained a protocol granting fish products duty-free access to the EC-market. This favoured status was, however, explicitly contingent upon the conclusion of an agreement between the EC and Denmark/Greenland granting EC member states satisfactory access to the fishery zones of Greenland. This access was secured in five-year fisheries agreement which awarded the Home Rule authority a fixed annual amount equal to about 27,5 million dollars for these fishing rights — approximately the sum that we had received in EC aid before terminating the membership. Now expiring at the end of 1994, the fisheries agreement was extended by another five years. Whether another extension will be possible is an open question. Oddly enough, Greenland's position internationally was weakened in some respects by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end to the Cold War. Our importance to the defence of the Western world has greatly diminished, perhaps making the EC less favourably inclined to our wishes. At the same time, funds are becoming more scarce as the EC is faced with the enormous task of supporting the transition to a market economy in the former Soviet Union and countries in Eastern Europe.

Duty free access to the European market — which constitutes about 80 per cent of our export market — has put us at an advantage compared to some of our closest competitors such as Norway, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Canada. If we lose some of our privileges and if Norway becomes a full member of the EC the competition will be very tough.

In the summer of 1992 we have opened our own representation in Brussels. This should not be interpreted as an indication that we wish to become full members again. The fact is that we are quite happy with the current arrangement which we still regard as superior to being an integral part of the EC. We simply want to have our own representative in our most important market so that we can have more direct access to information and be better informed about what sort of association is possible with the EC in the future. This is not to be seen as a result of dissatisfaction with the Danish foreign service which has been taking care of our interests until now. We just want to get our information first-hand without any sort of filters between the sources and the Home Rule authority.

Even though we are not members anymore, we are still very much dependent on the EC as a market, and we need to have the best possible information available prior to the negotiations about a new fisheries agreement.

I expect that the future negotiations are going to reveal the true nature of our relationship with the EC — whether Greenland is strictly regarded as a business partner or whether we are also perceived to be a friend and ally who deserves favourable treatment. In my experience the purely economic considerations tend to prevail while the fact that we are an indigenous people with a very special dependency on the sea and its resources does not receive very much recognition.