

Speech delivered by Reinhard Priebe at the Greenland seminar 'Greenland's approach to EU's Arctic Communication'

Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that the Greenland government has honoured us with its visit to Brussels today. On behalf of Commissioner Borg I welcome the opportunity given to a broad audience to get to know the Greenlanders and get a bird's eye view on the potential development of the Island. The Commissioner very much enjoyed his visit to Ilulissat in September 2008. It marked an important step in the EU's engagement with the Arctic States.

The Commission has in the meantime worked hard on the follow-up to the Arctic Communication and is looking forward to the Council Conclusions by the end of this year. Various research projects either directly target or include the Arctic Region. One example is the support within the context of the Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System. In another specific call research will focus on the quantification of climate change impacts on economic sectors in the Arctic. In the context of the environment the European Environment Agency is providing valuable contributions. DG MARE will itself organise a meeting with representatives from the indigenous people in the Arctic on how to give substance to a real dialogue. All of these activities reaffirm the close relationship between the EU and the Arctic Region.

I would today like to congratulate the Greenland population through Prime Minister Kleist on the constitutional developments in Greenland. The new steps towards self Governance are a landmark in the relationship between Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark and thus between Greenland and the European Union. Although Greenland decided in 1985 to leave the European Economic Community, I very much feel that the bodies separated, but not the hearts. Through your attachment to Denmark, but also through your special position as one of the overseas territories, the strong bond between Greenland and the EU remains. The two partnership agreements between us confirm this unique relationship and I will say some more about this later.

A close relationship, like the one between the EU and Greenland, results in many positive spin-offs, but inevitably also leads to some divergences of opinion. I acknowledge your strong views on the EU position regarding whales and the imports of products derived from seals. I am also aware of

the discussions on the imports of shrimps. We should discuss these issues openly. Covering them up will not help and will not do justice to the serious and legitimate concerns of the Greenland population and in particular of those whose livelihood depends on these products of the seas.

The previous speakers have addressed these issues. I will be brief. I have been following the debate on the trade in seal products for quite some time now. While we have well noted that the final result of the discussion on the Council Regulation did not please Greenland, I have to say that utmost efforts were made to take into account the Greenland's legitimate interests. I can also tell you that many other people were very disappointed for the opposite reason. They do not agree that the EU still allows the transit of seal products. They wanted a complete ban and they would have favoured a much less extensive exemption for the Inuit hunt than currently provided for in the Regulation.

I think that the final outcome is rather balanced, but I accept that views may differ. I accept also that some countries wish to challenge the Council regulation in WTO. However Greenland has an important choice to make. Do you wish to put your energy into continuing a continued legal debate? Or do you want to put your energy into giving the Inuit exemption a real meaning. I hope you will accept that my colleagues in the Directorate-General for Environment are keen to make it work. I understand that serious discussions with the Inuit will take place shortly.

As to the shrimps let me underline that the European Economic Community is built upon the principle of free trade. The essence of the European internal market is free trade. Both in multilateral and regional negotiations free trade has been a major demand from the European Union. The repercussions of free trade on individuals and specific regions were not always beneficial in the short run. Adaptation was difficult. It is for that reason the European Union continues to support its regions in accompanying the structural adjustments that will take place because of an increasingly global economy. Greenland has signed up to this WTO principle of free trade.

We have learned that in the long run the Union as a whole, its Member States and the regions benefited from this policy. I therefore understand your concerns for increased competition on the European market for shrimps. I hope on the other hand that you understand that in the progressive opening up of markets this was inevitable. To this end I would like to point out, that Greenland already today has one of the most generous trade agreements with the EU, and has been granted duty free quota free

access to the EU market since 1985 (which has given the fishing industry in Greenland a competitive advantage compared to 3<sup>rd</sup> countries!).

What we need to do now is to see where we can find common ground to make your industry more competitive. Alternatively we can look at possibilities to diversify those local economies particularly dependent on the shrimp sector.

This naturally brings me to the core of our partnership and the agreements we have between us. The joint declaration stipulates that the EU and Greenland will "*further strengthen the relationship and cooperation between the EU and Greenland, based on broadly shared interests, to the mutual benefit of their peoples, and to endow their mutual relations with a long term perspective*". It is that long term perspective and the shared interest I wish to emphasise today.

The government has over a number of years given a high priority to education. I believe that this is a wise choice as education is one of the main drivers for a diversified economy that is less vulnerable to external shocks. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the yearly contribution by the EU to Greenland as a result of the partnership agreement goes entirely to the Greenland Education Programme. Education is knowledge. Knowledge is growth and growth is economic independence. Within the European Union education and training are also pillars of the efforts to increase the Union's competitiveness. Already today we are witnessing an active and increasing participation of Greenland in EU horizontal programmes such as the research and innovation programmes, life long learning programmes etc. This is highly encouraging and underlines the many synergies and potentials we share in our cooperation and in our common pursuit for growth and welfare for our citizens.

The partnership agreement includes more sectors than education. I refer to mineral resources, energy, tourism and culture, research, food safety. Even though these sectors may not benefit from a financial transfer they are equally relevant. Greenland is participating in new European research projects on climate change impact on health and Arctic marine ecosystems. We will learn later during the seminar about the developments in terms of oil and gas. I hope we will also have the opportunity to talk about the exploitation of the mineral resources. There are furthermore exiting developments in terms of the production of aluminium. Sustainable tourism will offer new opportunities. Greenland will have many opportunities to develop a number of economic sectors.

At the same time Greenland has the challenge to find the human resources necessary to avail of the opportunities nature is offering. Will it be possible

to find the work force for all these activities? There may be an influx of non Greenland and non-Danish labour. How will you deal with the integration of such newcomers? In addition, like in many other EU Member States, Greenland is confronted with the problems of alcoholism and social exclusion. Are there parallels with certain parts of Europe where policies and actions have been developed to tackle these issues? In other parts of Northern Europe international co-operation is offering us tangible results in this same field. I refer in particular to the Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Well-being, which has successfully mapped needs and provided policy platforms in our search for suitable remedies. The Commission would like to find synergies between its programmes applied in the same sector.

I mention all these issues, not because I can provide an instant solution. I mention them to highlight the potential for joint efforts directed towards Greenland's future. I was therefore very pleased to see that within the Commission the colleagues from the Directorate-General for Development have offered to intensify the dialogue with Greenland on all these points. Discussions on all these issues with the Greenland Government and the population of Greenland should provide a sound basis for a continued partnership on an equal footing. This is also reflected in the joint exercise between the Commission, Denmark and Greenland on the mid term review of the partnership agreement that is presently launched and will be concluded by mid 2010.

Even though I have mentioned various potential areas of cooperation, the Commission wishes first and foremost to find out what the issues are that you think can be further developed. By increased dialogue we will be able to better explore the mutual benefits our partnerships brings along, but also enable us to tackle issues where opinions might differ and try to reach a common position.

My DG wishes to contribute to this dialogue. You are aware of the mid-term review of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement. Two comments on this. Firstly the original fear that fishermen from the EU would move in and rob Greenland of all its fish have so far no been the reality. EU fishermen do not even use the entire quota available under the agreement. I understand that the review of the partnership will very much position itself in the context of the increased economic opportunities for Greenland. While obviously having to stay within the remit given by the partnership agreement, the financial assistance can be used for a variety of purposes. I consider this agreement to be a very positive cornerstone of our close and historical relationship.

The recently emerging Integrated Maritime Policy also place Greenland in the heart of EU interests. The Communication on the EU and the Arctic was the first Communication covering a sea basin, including of course its lands and people. The Communications on the Baltic and the Mediterranean followed this year. I do not think that this is the moment to go into too much detail on this Communication. I would however like to emphasise one element, the dialogue with the indigenous population. This proposed action should not just be hollow words. DG MARE will therefore organise an ad-hoc meeting with relevant partners in January 2010 to discuss what should be included in such a dialogue. Again, we are seeking your views.

The development of the relationship between the EU and Greenland should not take place in splendid isolation. The recent step you have made towards self-rule can only reap its maximum benefit if the EU, Denmark and Greenland work together. I have experienced the Danish as ardent defenders of the Greenlandic interests in Europe. We should benefit from this to jointly work on the common agenda, of which I have tried to sketch some elements.

Prime Minister, I hope you will find the European Union as a friend of Greenland on your visit today and tomorrow. Above all I wish that we put all our energy in what binds us and not in what divides us. Your initiative for this seminar today is a great start. I thank you again for your invitation to the Commission.