

## Premier Kuupik Kleist

### Speech at the Seminar on Greenland and the Arctic, Greenland's approach to EU's Arctic Communication, October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Brussels.

#### Greenland as an Arctic window for Europe

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to see such an interest in Brussels towards Greenland and to present my views at this seminar.

Greenland is centrally located in the Arctic and also central when it comes to the European Union's engagement in the Arctic. From a European perspective, Greenland is central due to our ties with Denmark and our special history with our EEC membership as part of the Danish accession in 1972 and our withdrawal from the EEC in 1985 with the special conditions granted at that time. These special conditions have been the leading principles for our cooperation in the past 25 years.

25 years ago Greenland was in the very early stages of Home Rule – or limited autonomy - which was introduced in 1979. Back then Greenland was defining its new political position and administrative role. Today 30 years after the introduction of Home Rule we have this year introduced our new system of Self Governance, which opens up for a range of areas where Greenland can now decide over its own affairs. Self Governance also describes the process and sets the terms should Greenland one day wish to choose independence. The Self Governance Act entered into force on June 21<sup>st</sup>. On this date, the Greenland Home Rule Government became the Government of Greenland.

With self governance we want the society to be engaged in a continued economic and cultural development which one day will lead to political independence. Domestically this engagement will be developed through a strong commitment and forward-looking investment in education. And this will be done in an open dialogue throughout the self governance process. The dialogue will be open in order to engage the people of Greenland in creating a common future.

**Commitment and education** are also two key words when it comes to the relationship between Greenland and the European Union.

Looking back on the Greenland position in the opening of the negotiations for a renewal of the fisheries agreement in 2005, Greenland decided to focus on the education sector in the new and comprehensive agreement it would enter into with the Union, in order for the modern Greenland to secure future generations and commit to sustainable economic development.

In August 2006 the President of the European Commission, Mr. Barroso came to Greenland to sign the Greenland Programming Document along with the then Greenlandic & Danish Premiers. This event mirrored the importance of the Union's engagement in Greenland and Greenland's role as an engaged partner and recipient of budgetary support to develop its human resource potential.

Since 2007 we have worked together in implementing what Mr. Barroso and my predecessor signed. It has been and still is a learning experience, in which we learn by doing. I believe that we are genuinely committed to fulfill our part of the agreement and that the most important administrative procedures are now in place. We look forward to the continued development of our partnership.

Looking forward, I would like to see the relationship between Greenland and the European Union as one of partnership and friendship.

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And I believe that partnerships and friendships are best when based on a dialogue and commitment to listening to each other's wishes. Therefore it is with interest that I have read the European Union's Communication on the Arctic. In it, it is stated that: (and I quote)“ In view of the role of **climate change** as a “threats multiplier”...**environmental changes** are altering the **geo-strategic dynamics** of the Arctic with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests calling for the development of an EU Arctic policy. On the whole, Arctic challenges and opportunities will have significant repercussions on the life of European citizens for generations to come. It is imperative for the European Union to address them in a coordinated and systematic manner, in cooperation with the Arctic states, territories and other stakeholders.” (unquote).

Greenland as an Arctic Overseas Territory of the European Union and as Denmark's Arctic Window with an Arctic population finds this reference very relevant.

I want to make a comment about the focus on climate change, the environmental changes and the geo-strategic issues.

In terms of **climate change**, Greenland is presently working jointly with the Government of Denmark on a model for incorporating Greenland into a new international agreement while at the same time taking into account our development needs. Greenland has looked into how other Overseas Countries and Territories have tackled climate change issues with their EU member state. How they have considered their need for development in the commitments the member state have made towards the fulfilment of the Kyoto protocol. Which alternatives have been considered to the post Kyoto protocol and how these have been addressed.

As you will be aware, all of the Overseas Countries and Territories have specific features in common, in terms of natural assets, vulnerability and location. OCTs generally also face unique challenges in accessing mechanisms to combat threats of an international nature.

We know that global warming and sea level rise will continue, even if concentrations of greenhouse gases were to be stabilized. Adapting to the consequences of climate change for the OCTs will require a tailored solution, a solution which addresses our common vulnerability, our challenges, our responsibilities and our capacities and also our future needs including sustainable economic development.

Greenland - like other OCTs - calls for a global ambitious agreement on climate change for the period beyond 2012. However, Greenland has two special characteristics, first of all, our levels of economic and industrial development are very low compared to European countries, and secondly, Greenland possesses near-unlimited energy resources in the form of hydropower, which can reduce global emissions if industrial development takes place in Greenland instead of elsewhere.

**Environmental changes** are visible and happening in Greenland. Some are felt very negatively, as they have effects on the ecosystems of the Arctic.

Overall, climate change is challenging traditional subsistence hunting practices throughout Greenland, and could lead to huge changes in our fisheries sector as the ocean currents and temperatures adapt.

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There are also positive consequences as well. The change in sea temperatures will possibly bring back an important species, the cod. The biologists claim it will naturally bring back the cod that has disappeared from our waters since a decade. However we still need to see the economic implications concerning the cod.

In terms of farm land, in southern Greenland, farmers are beginning to exploit a differentiated production where it is our goal to be able to support the entire country with our own products. Today this is far from the situation. Commercial cultivation of vegetables has increased since the year 2000. And the interest in developing farming is there, however we still need imports for many more years. All imports are transported via Denmark by ship or plane – which leads to my next point on the **geostrategic dynamics**.

The melting of the polar ice as a consequence of global warming is creating more activity in our area and is changing the geostrategic position of both Greenland and Denmark. Latest figures show that within 20 years the North Pole will be ice free in the summer half of the year. This is an issue that Denmark and Greenland are in close dialogue about, as future engagement of the Danish Command in Greenland is vital for patrolling and assisting the increased activity in the Arctic area. We have agreed to monitor the development of traffic and activity in the Area and that this must be taken into account when defining what the future risks are or can be. In terms of risk in the area, cooperation with our neighbours is vital. Cooperation with the European Union could certainly be of interest as the Union holds the largest merchant fleet in the world which could be a user of the Arctic searoutes, as these open up to North-East Asia and beyond. As such this issue could be central to the commercial interests of the Union, the Arctic States and others. We are discussing these issues not only at bilateral level with the other countries in the Arctic, but also within the Arctic Council.

Let me now focus on issues relating to the **Arctic Council**. The Council is a unique body as it represents both States and Permanent Participants, the indigenous peoples of the Arctic.

Denmark and Greenland hold the Chairmanship of the Council at the moment. The Council gives guidance in Arctic matters, such as environmental regulations on oil and gas exploration and exploitation and on the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the decision making processes. I welcome the EU's wish to learn more about the Arctic Council and I have therefore also welcomed its application for observer status at the Council.

Greenland welcomes the Union's interest in the Arctic, but I would here like to comment on two important issues of concern to us, namely; **financial implications of future cooperation and culturally important aspects in political cooperation**.

I must also say that there are political issues where we as Arctic peoples do not agree with the European Union's position, and indeed there are areas where we consider European Union policy to unduly interfere in Arctic affairs. I call it interference because the discussion politically as well as in the civil society in Greenland raises many emotions. It is sometimes felt that the Union approaches the Arctic lifestyle with an attitude that limits our international possibilities. In terms of Greenland, let me be specific on the concerns.

Regarding the **trade ban on sealskin**; seals in Greenlandic waters are not endangered. They have been hunted sustainably by Greenlanders for their fur, meat and bones for centuries. We do not

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understand how a sustainable catch on seals can lead to restrictions on the sale of seal products. The Greenland seal hunt and sealskin sales can be categorized as a “small scale trade” and “small scale economic activity” which is based on sustainable hunting.

I am well aware of the Inuit exemption which is supposed to protect the sealskin trade of Inuit communities; however as in Europe the focus in Greenland is on the effects of a trade ban, which have been that all sales have stopped. Our markets overseas have been destroyed. The Inuit exemption, yes we asked for it and yes we got it. However this does not open up for the European trading market on sealskins, which is now, following the political process and a biased public debate completely dead.

We are currently advising the European Union on how to develop an implementation regulation on the Inuit exemption that will not impose extra and unnecessary burdens on our administration. I find it therefore logical that the implementation and administration of it should be financed by the European financial mechanisms.

We believe that all restrictions on trade should be based on sustainability criteria only.

Regarding **Shrimp exports**, which make up more than half the value of our exports; we also find it hard to understand, and we cannot accept the fact that the European Union with one hand, in an agreement which allows us preferential conditions - zero customs duties for our shrimp exports to the Union - now following a very recent decision, with the other hand allows the same product from third countries the exact same conditions. It is our belief that the preferential treatment has been neglected. Production costs for Greenlandic shrimp are higher than for their counterparts elsewhere in the region. We are trying to develop a sustainable economy in balance with nature, and keeping prices of utilities at a realistic level in relation to cost is part of this policy. If we had been consulted earlier in the process on this new measure we could have explained the background to our resistance to the current shrimp proposal.

We want to look forward and we want to be a relevant **Arctic Frontier for the European Union**. We have historical ties and historical links.

My proposal today is, let us work together for a genuine partnership. Let us help you in understanding the Arctic ways of life – let us show you what is counterproductive in this regard and let us look forward with a positive mindset.

Greenland has stressed that the European Union's active participation in the Arctic Council work should help to provide for a more reasoned approach to Arctic issues, such as understanding the importance of protecting traditional lifestyles, the role of marine mammals and human development issues.

I strongly believe that the economic development of our country needs foreign investment, in terms of capital and also in terms of human resources. The European Union can be an important partner and player, not only when it comes to fisheries and education but also in terms of research, transport and energy, climate change and cooperation on the international arena.

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We do have a long way to go, you have 495 million European citizens to persuade whereas we have only 56.000 Greenlanders in comparison. However, at the same time we also have a landmass which can almost cover the entire European continent and a location which is now increasingly becoming a geostrategic centre of the world's attention. If Europe is ready to listen to our concerns Greenland could become your Arctic window.

Ladies and gentleman, let me end my speech today, by expressing the conviction that we can work together to overcome past differences, and the ambition that we will further develop our unique partnership in the years to come. We share a common concern for the Arctic!