

"Greenland, Canada, and the United States: the Arctic Potential"

Speech by Greenland's Minister for Industry, Labour, Trade, Energy and Foreign Affairs,

Mr. Vittus Qujaukitsoq. The Arctic Circle Quebec Forum, Quebec City, December 12th 2016

Distinguished participants - Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to the Arctic Circle Quebec Forum.

First of all, I want to recognize the important leadership provided by former President Grimsson, not only in establishing the Arctic Circle in 2013 and bringing this forum to the regions of the Arctic, but more importantly for his efforts over 20 years of his Presidency in working with Greenland's leaders. For several generations of leaders in Greenland, President Grimsson has been more than a good neighbour. In President Grimsson, Greenland has had an advocate and an ally. An ally whom I am personally proud to call my friend.

Greenland had the honour of hosting an Arctic Circle Greenland Forum in May, earlier this year, so I know what an impact a Forum can have. At the Arctic Circle Greenland Forum we brought together Arctic indigenous and business leaders to talk about the type of developments we want to see in the Arctic for our regions and peoples. We had a particular focus in Nuuk in May on bringing indigenous leaders from across Alaska, Arctic Canada and Scandinavia together with Greenlandic and Icelandic business leaders to try and see how the increasing attention the Arctic is attracting internationally, can be transformed into real economic development for our peoples.

I think it is a very natural next step for the Arctic Circle to come to Quebec today with a shared focus on achieving and supporting sustainable development across our Northern regions.

In my intervention, I really want to try to focus your attention on something that has been troubling me for the past many years. It is the fact that despite Alaska, Arctic Canada and Greenland's geographical closeness, our shared Inuit heritage, the close cooperation between our respective capitals, there continues to be so little cooperation and economic exchange between our Arctic regions.

When I met Premier Couillard for the first time, in October 2015 at the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, I asked him why there is so little cooperation between Greenland and Quebec – despite all our similarities and our common culture and history, and I found that I was not alone in asking this question. Already then the Plan Nord was a comprehensive policy platform for development, providing answers for Quebec to the call for development of its

North. With the Plan Nord, Quebec has really put the economic development of its Northern regions on the agenda, in a way that embraces the aspirations and needs of Northern communities for securing sustainable livelihoods that allow people to live in dignity and at a standard of living we can be proud of.

Last month a new broad government coalition was formed in Greenland. The new coalition brings together mandates of 80% of the electorate. The central theme which brings together this very broad coalition, is a shared desire to substantially speed up Greenland's work towards achieving the economic foundations necessary for Greenland to achieve its independence from Denmark.

Since 2009, when Greenland successfully negotiated the terms of its future independence from Denmark, with the Danish State, we have been working towards the goal of Greenland's independence. This is why in 2010 Greenland assumed full legislative and executive powers regarding minerals and oil and gas resources in Greenland.

Seen from Nuuk, Greenland, the lack of attention to inter-regional economic development in the North-American Arctic has been due in part, to a general lack of attention paid by Washington, Ottawa and Copenhagen to our Arctic regions. Partly, it is of course very much related to the very different historical experiences of our regions.

With the current United States' chairmanship of the Arctic Council, many of us had high hopes that this could somehow change - that the rare attention of Washington policy-makers to the Arctic part of the United States and the potentials of this region, would awaken policy-makers to the huge opportunities that our regions offer in areas that include hydropower, minerals, water resources, oil, gas and our huge resources of fish and wildlife.

But with the end of the chairmanship approaching, these hopes were perhaps too optimistic. Instead of opening up our regions for development, we have seen a chairmanship focusing perhaps too much on the policies of the past - working to stop oil and gas development in the U.S. Arctic for example. The establishment of the Arctic Economic Council is a step in the right direction, but it has yet to prove its value by delivering results in attracting investments to the Arctic and providing real incentives for increasing cross-border economic development activities.

With a new administration taking office in Washington in January 2017, I am actually very optimistic for the near future of our region. The President-elect has made very clear that he wants economic development for America; he wants to focus on what serves the interests of Americans best and he will not pander to special interest groups that want to stop economic development in the North. For the sake of our Arctic region, I sincerely hope that the President-elect will choose as Secretary of State, an outstanding individual with a comprehensive experience from the private sector. This will be of benefit to our region.

If this does happen, this new U.S. administration has the opportunity to really make a positive difference in the lives of people living in the U.S.' North. And this can have positive implications for Northerners also in Canada and in Greenland, if we succeed in creating increased regional cooperation.

In Greenland we share our Inuit language with languages across Arctic Canada and Alaska stretching across the Bering Strait into Siberia. This is the heritage, that reminds us of the migrations that took place thousands of years ago, which populated Greenland in successive historical waves. During the 1970s a political movement of Inuit across North America, led to the creation of today's Inuit Circumpolar Council. But this political movement, although a powerful force in shaping political developments within Greenland, has failed to develop more economic interaction in our shared region.

What does Greenland do, to foster this type of inter-regional development I am talking about, and why is it not happening by itself if the economic case is sound?

First of all, the Arctic is not economically, logistically or in any other respect one region. We are several regions with different legal and judicial traditions and frameworks. This is why the eight Arctic Council states are not necessarily the right forum to really advance inter-regional economic development. The five Arctic Coastal States are also not one region, in any practical sense, other than in collectively managing the Arctic High Seas, in fisheries and in the competing continental shelf claims to be determined over the coming years. In both cases, the driving role of capitals Copenhagen, Washington D.C. and Ottawa have hampered more than helped, in creating actual regional cooperation delivering results to Arctic citizens.

The Arctic Circle Assembly and its regional Forums, actually provide just such a platform, allowing for the types of exchanges, which are not possible in the formal settings of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Five Coastal States.

To advance, we also need to look much more at particular regional contexts. As an example, during these years, Greenland and Iceland are establishing cooperation in a number of areas, that will radically change Greenland's access to the rest of the world and the rest of the world's access to Greenland.

For the past three hundred years, all shipping, transport and later airlinks from Greenland have gone to Europe through Denmark. None have gone to our neighbors - Canada or the U.S. - to the West. This is being changed. Earlier this year, our Royal Arctic Line concluded a very ambitious joint venture agreement with Iceland's Eimskip which combined with our major container-port construction in Nuuk, will enable Greenland's shipping links to go both East to Iceland and to the main ports in Europe, as well as West to Canada and the United States.

Similarly, Iceland's Air Iceland has over the past five years opened up Greenland to air transport from the whole world through Keflavik International Airport. Starting from nothing,

Air Iceland today serves 6 destinations in Greenland. Before this the only international connection to Greenland was through Copenhagen in another continent across the Atlantic.

What needs to be done next?

In Greenland we have vast resources of minerals and offshore oil and gas. In the minerals sector, which is the most promising new sector to supplement our reliance on high-quality seafood exports, it is Canadian - and Australian companies – that are pioneering developments.

At the same time, one of our main two global seafood companies - Royal Greenland - is actively looking to invest in the Canadian seafood sector. Our companies in this sector are big players, with Greenland being the largest cold-water shrimp exporter in the world.

In Greenland, scientists are also conducting world-class ice-sheet research with literally hundreds of research projects ongoing, financed by the U.S. National Science Foundation and with Canadian universities also very active in this area.

My Government last year negotiated a decision to radically upgrade Greenland's airport infrastructure, which will allow Greenland to trade, travel and develop like other regions of the world. Because in the Arctic, I see very clearly, that our primary barriers are physical.

Once, our container-port in Nuuk and the joint venture agreement between Royal Arctic Line and Eimskip is fully implemented, Greenland will be linked to North America for trade in goods at a level never tried before.

Similarly, with the upgrade of our airport infrastructure over the coming years, it is only a matter of time, before we reestablish our first airlink to Canada or the United States run commercially by a Canadian or American operator. The sooner this happens, the better.

Physical links create opportunities. And physical barriers in our region, have for too long kept us apart.

But why stop here? In the North American Arctic, we share a military commitment to protect our continent. We have military bases across our region, but with different set-ups and arrangements.

In Alaska, Alaska Native Corporations service U.S. military installations to the extent that these Corporations have become some of the most important economic players in Alaska today. Some of these Native Corporations have built up expertise that is also used to service U.S. military bases overseas, in particular in running bases, but also in cleaning up abandoned military sites. I don't see why Alaska Native Corporations should not also work in Greenland, in cooperation with Greenlandic companies, in servicing bases and cleaning up abandoned military sites.

But creating links is also about more than physical infrastructure. We need to talk together. From Nuuk to Quebec. From Nuuk to Ottawa and from Nuuk to Washington. This is why in 2014, Greenland opened its diplomatic Representation to the United States in Washington D.C. This Representation is our second Representation overseas, with our first Representation to the European Union in Brussels next year celebrating its 25th anniversary. In 2015 our Head of Representation became accredited also to Canada.

We started our Representation in Washington D.C. with one person. By the end of this year, we expect to have four people employed in Washington D.C., working to create permanent links between Greenland and Canada and the United States.

In 2013, Iceland also opened its consulate in Nuuk, Greenland, which was a very significant development. Iceland's Consul-General is the first permanent diplomatic presence posted in Greenland since the end of World War II.

I would like to issue this invitation to the incoming US administration, to look afresh at our region. Look at the economic potentials that our Arctic regions hold.

In Greenland we are open for business. Why not envisage having an American and a Canadian permanent diplomatic presence in Nuuk within the coming four years, to make sure that the potentials are fully developed?

Many of you in the audience today will not be aware, to what extent the United States has already been instrumental in the development of the modern Greenland that exists today.

The story of the U.S. military in Greenland – similar to our push today to create physical and diplomatic links – is a story of opening up. When Greenland was cut off from Denmark in 1941 with the occupation of Denmark by Germany, Greenland entered into a defense agreement with the United States of America on its own.

During this period, the U.S.' Consulate-General in Greenland was opened, bases were constructed along the coast. And Greenlanders experienced for the first time, a world beyond the Arctic that was not the colonial power Denmark.

The American period in Greenland, is remembered by Greenlanders as a period of great promise, of innovation, of commercial development with mining activities, and of friendship with our American allies.

In our Arctic societies we need to educate our children and youth, and we also have to be able to afford taking care of our weaker and older citizens. Just like in any other society. We do not want to develop in order only to get rich in material terms. We want to develop in order to sustain ourselves and take care of our people. This is why it is imperative for my Government, that we create new income opportunities in a sustainable manner.

In terms of new sectors of interest for greater cooperation in the North American Arctic, the Greenlandic minerals sector is important. The first ruby and sapphire mine is now coming on-stream. We will probably also see the first loads of the industrial product anorthosite shipped to customers next year, in a project where the European Investment Bank is co-financing. Other mining projects are also near handing in applications for the extraction of minerals.

Greenland also has an abundance of clean fresh drinking water, ice and biological resources, and we now have legislation in place, which will form a good framework for initiatives to export clean fresh water, ice and biological resources.

In all areas we are open to partners from abroad.

I hope here today, that my invitation to our American and Canadian partners to participate even more actively in developments in Greenland is received and hopefully acknowledged.

It would be a great result if we as a group, could come up with even more ways in which we can work together. Why only fisheries and mining and research? Why are we not working more together in other sectors. My invitation to collaborate, in principle covers all areas. Because I think there is so much more we can do to work to promote a sustainable development of our Arctic region.

The United States and Canada have always been important to Greenland. But there is potential for so much more, if we work more closely together.

With these words, I wish you all a useful debate.

Qujanaq – Thank you.