



**Speech**  
**by**  
**the President of Iceland**  
**Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson**  
**at**  
**THE ARCTIC – TERRITORY OF DIALOG**  
**Salekhard**  
**25 September 2013**

President of Russia Vladimir Putin  
President of Finland Sauli Niinistö  
Distinguished participants  
Dear friends

It is indeed a great pleasure to return to Yamal-Nenets where during my State Visit in 2002, the first by a President of Iceland to Russia, we discussed the emergence of the Arctic as a new focus of regional and international cooperation. Subsequently, Governor Yuri Neyolov visited Iceland and became our partner in advancing the newly established Northern Research Forum, which furthered a comprehensive dialog among scientists, researchers, students, elected representatives and indigenous leaders on the evolution of the Arctic.

When the Russian Geographical Society brought its second international conference, The Arctic - Territory of Dialog, to Arkhangelsk two years ago, I emphasized in my address that whereas the Arctic had for centuries remained unknown, mysterious and isolated, throughout the Cold War one of the most militarised regions of the world and towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became an arena for constructive and positive cooperation among the eight Arctic states, the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are now making it the new global playing field, where countries in Asia, as well as continental European states, have arrived to advance their scientific, economic and political dialog.

A few months ago the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Kiruna confirmed this transformation, so now, in the coming years, more

than ten of the largest economies in the world will be represented in one way or another at the Arctic table.

As we move forward with these new partners, with wide-ranging issues coming up on the Arctic agenda, it is of the utmost importance to maintain the essence and established qualities of our cooperation, which both the Arctic Council and a multitude of Arctic organisations, institutions and associations have helped to develop.

Three of these are especially relevant:

First. To maintain the culture of an open dialog and informal style of deliberation and the enduring personal friendships and mutual respect which have made the Arctic Council and other Arctic venues so successful in recent years. When new partners arrive on the scene, perhaps used to more formalized and bureaucratic diplomatic encounters, it is important that they adjust to our productive and practical Arctic culture of achievements.

Second. The pre-eminent role of science and research in Arctic policy-making must be maintained. Knowledge, based on expert advice and scientific projects, has been the foundation of our decisions and a guiding principle in making Arctic cooperation so successful. The search for the facts and scientific evidence has been more important than displays of political and economic power.

Third. In the dialog within the Arctic Council, indigenous peoples, their organisations and representatives have been a significant part of the process, emphasizing an open and democratic approach to our common Arctic future. No other international cooperation among states has in recent years been so respectful of indigenous peoples, their traditions and interests.

These three dimensions have been of key importance in the success of Arctic cooperation and must be maintained effectively in the coming years. They are to some extent the “Arctic House Rules” which I am sure our new visitors and partners will gladly respect.

Russia has, since the foundation of the Arctic Council, provided constructive and positive leadership within the family of Arctic nations, a vision inspired by the importance of the North to the Russian people and the long Russian history of Arctic exploration and scientific expeditions. The Russian Geographical Society is a noble bearer of this tradition and has in recent years brought us together in an intensive dialog, highlighting the importance of preserving the Arctic environment, calling attention to

crucial issues created by an increasing economic activity, commercial traffic and resource utilisation within the Arctic region.

I take the opportunity here today to thank Russia, the Geographical Society and especially President Vladimir Putin for their positive engagement and constructive Arctic leadership in recent years. It has been of great significance to witness President Putin's commitment, expressed by his presence at the previous Arctic conferences in Moscow and Arkhangelsk and now again here in Salekhard. It provides an example which hopefully will be followed at the highest level in both the United States and Canada, in Washington and Ottawa, especially since those countries provide the present and the next chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

It has been particularly important for Iceland to share in this new Arctic partnership with Russia, both due to our long-standing friendship, celebrating this year the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between us, and to the significance of various scientific research projects. And also since our political and economic dialog has increasingly highlighted the utilisation of clean energy resources, particularly geothermal and hydro, in the Arctic regions of Russia. Contrary to the prevailing image in the global media, dominated by oil and gas, the Arctic has probably one of the largest reservoirs of clean energy in the world – hydro, wind, geothermal, tidal energy and other forms.

Icelandic participation in clean energy projects in Greenland and the feasibility studies for a new sea cable from Iceland to the United Kingdom, helping to stabilize the UK energy system, are also significant indicators of the new clean energy relevance of the Arctic and Northern regions.

When discussing the preservation of the sensitive Arctic environment, it is important to emphasize and understand the clean energy potential of the Arctic – in Alaska, Northern Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and other Arctic countries – and not let the debate be dominated by disputes over drilling for oil and gas.

Similarly, as we try to map out how to monitor the effect of the melting sea-ice and retreating glaciers on the water systems, the ocean resources, the fish stocks, the plants and vegetation, we can draw on our long-standing scientific cooperation.

Icelandic scientists, research institutions and universities have for decades monitored the implications of the accelerated melting of our glaciers, the largest in Europe, as well as the movements of fish stocks in

the North Atlantic Ocean, both around Iceland and between us and Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Norway.

The recent dispute over mackerel fishing should be a wake-up call for our awareness of how the warming of the Atlantic and the Arctic Oceans will change migration patterns, bringing new stocks to our waters and making others depart for even colder environments. Science and research will be a better guide to successful and sustainable fisheries than old-fashioned exercises in power politics and retaliation.

In the oceans, on the land, in the ice and the glaciers we see everywhere how the Arctic environment is changing faster than anyone predicted only a decade ago.

Furthermore, we are witnessing an equally rapid economic transformation of the Arctic. Last month Bremenports, the operator of the second largest container harbour in Germany, the Icelandic engineering firm Efla and local authorities in North-Eastern Iceland confirmed their commitment to explore the possibility of building a global Arctic harbour in Finnafjord, thus beginning preparations for increased traffic along the Northern Sea Route.

This year we also granted offshore licences to search for oil in what is known as the Dragon Area, which is shared by Iceland and Norway, the bidders including both Arctic and international companies.

Last summer Iceland became the first country to offer regular passenger flights and cargo shipping to all the Arctic countries through the operations of Icelandair and the shipping companies Eimskip and Samskip.

And next month the CEO of COSCO, the largest shipping company in China, will explain at the new Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik how China is preparing for a new era in global shipping when the melting of the Arctic sea-ice will connect Asia in a new way to America and Europe.

These are but a few of the examples illustrating how we now face a new reality in the Arctic and why it is of the utmost importance to integrate our commitment to a sustainable Arctic into every deliberation and decision-making process, making the traditional Arctic respect for the environment the cornerstone of all our endeavours.

I thank the Russian Geographical Society and President Putin for highlighting these concerns by hosting this dialog here in Salekhard and I invite you all to continue our discussions and cooperation by participating next month in the first Assembly of the Arctic Circle, a new venue for

wide-ranging dialog which will take place in Reykjavik, founded in partnership with my good friend and Arctic leader Artur Chilingarov and with strong support from the Russian Geographical Society and other Russian partners.

There we will be able to bring forward the important messages from Salekhard and inform those from other parts of the world who have newly taken an interest in the Arctic, that respect for the environment is an important Arctic heritage, brought to us by the people who have for centuries, or even thousands of years, lived in harmony with the Arctic's environment and its resources, maintaining traditions, customs and lifestyles by honouring the beauty and the contrasts of the region and teaching each new generation how nature can be our friend; a vision which must be the guiding principle of our common future.