



**A Message
from
the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
to the Colloquium
*Quel Avenir Pour L'Arctique?***

**The French Senate
Paris, 3 April 2014**

Your Excellencies
Distinguished participants

It was a great a honour to receive the invitation to participate in your important dialogue but, due to obligations in my country, I am unfortunately unable to be with you in Paris.

In recent years I have been privileged to witness the growing interest of France in Arctic cooperation and host the distinguished statesman and Arctic representative Michel Rocard in Iceland. During my Official Visit to France last year, the Arctic was among the primary issues, discussed in my meeting with President François Hollande and in meetings with members of the Senate and the National Assembly. Furthermore, I had productive and informative discussions with distinguished French scientists and experts.

With a growing global interest in the Arctic, it is of utmost importance that the scientific, political, and economic engagement of France in the Arctic continues to grow.

Let us remember how recently, in historic terms, the modern world became familiar with the remote, vast, unknown northern regions.

For centuries, even well into the 20th century, the Arctic remained largely unknown except to the indigenous people who for millennia had made it their home. Then escalating military build-up across the northern regions, from Alaska to Murmansk, placed it at the heart of the Cold War confrontation, a no-go zone during almost the entire second half of that century.

Thus, in historic terms, compared to the thousand years of European and Asian civilizations, the Arctic as a territory of cooperation, of economic and political progress, is practically like a new planet; a region so young in global context that it is almost without parallel.

When the Arctic Council was established in the 1990s, the eight member states were still so hesitant in their endeavours that the mandate was very limited, mostly restricted to science and the environment; a rotating chairmanship and no permanent secretariat.

But the Arctic Council has matured, transformed into a successful instrument of treaty negotiations, wide-ranging agreements and practical endeavours. And even more remarkably: After the decision by the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting of last year, from now on more than half of the G-20 countries, including leading states in Europe and Asia, will in one way or another be at the Arctic table.

The Arctic, still remote and unknown at the outset of the 20th century, has now become a new global playing field where prominent economic and political forces of our times move gradually towards securing their long-term presence and interests.

It is in this context that the continuation of the active involvement of France is of particular importance. In my many meetings in recent years with Michel Rocard and other distinguished French representatives, scientists, experts, officials and political leaders, I have witnessed first hand how much France has to offer.

Through the newly established Arctic Circle, which held its First Assembly in Reykjavik last year, attended by over 1,200 participants from over 40 countries, France has multiple opportunities to advance its Arctic participation in addition to its role as an observer state in the Arctic Council.

At the First Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik last October, observer states like South Korea and Singapore presented in special plenary sessions their view of the Arctic, their contribution and particular missions.

I now take the opportunity to reiterate the invitation to France to do the same at the Second Assembly next October and thus join Japan and Italy which already have expressed such an interest. A special plenary session on France

would allow your strong delegation to communicate effectively your message to this large gathering of Arctic participants.

I hope that your dialogue in the Senate today at the *Quel Avenir Pour L'Arctique?* will lay the foundation for such a participation.

With friendship and profound respect,

Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
President of Iceland