



Lecture

by

the President of Iceland

Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson

**“GERMANY AND THE NEW NORTH:
A PARTNERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY?”**

University of Bonn

4 December 2002

Distinguished professors, scholars,
researchers and students
Ladies and gentlemen

The recent NATO Summit in Prague and pending European Union Summit in Copenhagen bear witness to the major changes that have taken place in Europe since the end of the Cold War. We all know how the unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the establishment of democracy and a market economy in Central and Eastern Europe have created a foundation for a new world order. This dramatic scenario has naturally exerted a very formative influence on dialogue and politics on the continent.

At the same time, however, extensive changes have also occurred in the Northern regions which have certainly been quieter and no so keen to capture the attention of the media. Nonetheless they have laid the foundation for a new cooperation between the United States of American and Russia with the Nordic countries in an influential role.

The political landscape in the North has been radically transformed. New international councils have been created dedicated to advancing cooperation in the North. A network of forums, research institutions and universities has been established in order to promote extensive dialogue among the nations and communities in the North. In many ways the region has become a fascinating political laboratory and a critical element in the new relationship across the Atlantic.

Germany has meanwhile understandably been preoccupied with the problems associated with break-up of the Eastern Bloc and with the need to expand NATO and the EU. Therefore the relevance of the developments in the north for the position of Germany in the 21st century has perhaps not been paid sufficient attention.

Germany has for centuries played an important role in the evolution of northern Europe and in many ways can be regarded as the bridge between the North and the continental countries. The closeness of Germany to Scandinavia and the Baltic States has given it a leadership role and history offers us many examples of how important the German connection has been for the northern countries. Furthermore, the close cooperation which has recently been consolidated between Germany and Russia makes it imperative for Germany to be actively aware of Russia's involvement in the new cooperation in the North.

During the second half of the 20th century there was very little interest in the course of events in the Northern Regions; they were primarily considered to be a status quo part of the world. The deep frost

of the Cold War somehow harmonised with the colder climate up north, so the end result was as uneventful as the never-ending wilderness of snow and ice where monotonous whiteness covered everything in all directions to the horizon.

Now, however, the Northern Regions have experienced vibrant changes, similar to the arrival of spring which breaks the ice covering lakes and rivers; suddenly there is movement everywhere and the newly released streams move forward with force and vigour.

New states and regional organisations have been created. For the first time in our history there now exists an interlocked network of organisations embracing the entire area from Russia across the Baltic States and the Barents Sea through the Nordic countries, over the Atlantic Ocean and Greenland into Canada and the United States of America.

Three regional organisations – the Baltic Council, the Barents Region Council and the Arctic Council – all of them created in the last decade and all gaining relevance and scope with each year that passes, are a clear demonstration of this political transformation; not only bringing into being new states and new territorial bodies within states, but also creating for the first time exclusive forums for cooperation between the Northern European states, Canada and the two most important states of the twentieth century, the United States of America and Russia.

Although the Baltic, Barents and Arctic Councils are all different in composition and purpose, they constitute together a new structural reality. They show how the end of the Cold War has fundamentally changed the political and economic landscape in the North. The federal structures of Russia, Canada and the United States have furthermore brought regional, provincial and state governments into significant cooperation with the smaller nation states in the Northern Regions. Thus an interesting form of regional and nation state cooperation in economic, social and political affairs is now being created. New entities have entered the framework of cooperation in the Northern Regions. In many ways the area can now be seen as a laboratory situation of how the old nation states and the regional, provincial and state governments within the federal structures can evolve intensive forms of international cooperation in the 21st century and thus transform the old traditional model of diplomatic exchange.

These structural innovations are further enhanced by the growing independence of both the Faroe Islands and Greenland, which, although formally parts of the Danish state, are increasingly taking power into their own hands and dealing independently with their neighbouring countries, for example Iceland and Canada. In addition it will be interesting to witness how Scotland, which for the first time in more than three hundred

years now has its own parliament and its own regional government, will develop its relations with neighbouring countries and regions in Northern Europe and Canada.

The foreign policies of the USA, Canada, Russia and the European Union have to some extent acknowledged these new realities in the Northern Regions and their importance for the evolution of Europe and the Atlantic relationship in the 21st century.

During my State Visit to Russia earlier this year I sensed the positive interest which the leaders of Russia show towards increased cooperation in the North. From my very first meeting with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and throughout the dialogue with other leaders, ministers and governors it was absolutely clear that the Northern dimension is a prominent part of the Russian vision for the 21st century.

Last September Russia was the host to the second assembly of the Northern Research Forum which was founded in Iceland two years ago but initiated and planned through special Icelandic-Finnish cooperation which resulted from my visit to the University of Lapland in 1998. The Northern Research Forum brings together political leaders, business people, scholars and researchers, public officials and university students to discuss and analyse future cooperation in the North and draw lessons from the experience of recent years.

Among the issues discussed in Novgorod were:

- * Human capital in the North: Population movements, employment, traditional knowledge and applications of new technology, education, gender issues, transportation and communication.

- *Innovation in Northern governance, the future of regional institutions, the voice of the Arctic in global governance, sub-national governments in the North and concepts of security.

- *Business initiatives for a joint agenda in the North: experiences of different regions in international business, interaction between business and politics, barriers to entry, legislation with respect to foreign investment and current challenges for northern economies.

- *The lessons of history: The Vikings and the Novgorodians, East-West as it reflects the importance of historical crossings for current relations, North-South as it reflects past experience and research into new approaches.

At the first Northern Research Forum the Russians showed strong interest in this initiative and eagerly sought acceptance of their offer to host the second assembly, thus demonstrating their dedication to exploring new opportunities for positive and productive cooperation in the North. In addition to President Putin endorsing this northern cooperation in significant ways, two of the most forward-looking governors in Russia, Governor Prusak of the Novgorod region who has succeeded in drawing a great number of western business corporations to his home base, and Governor Neyolov from the gas-rich Yamal-Nenets region in Siberia, both played a leading role in the Novgorod meeting.

The many discussions I have had with Russian leaders in recent months have convinced me that the Northern dimension can be of fundamental importance in the new American-Russian relations, especially since both the Nordic countries and Canada can play a strong supportive role and the problems which have affected the European-Atlantic approach to Russia are almost entirely absent from northern cooperation. Russia is mostly confronted by restrictions and limitations with respect to European economic and defence organisations, but no such hindrances are present in the North. There the field is wide open for extensive and positive engagements.

Both the United States and Canada have also shown in recent years that they have realised the new importance of the North. The Government of Canada has formulated a special northern policy, a programme for action in the 21st century. The United States, after some initial hesitation about the establishment of the Arctic Council, is now eagerly embracing active cooperation in the North. During the Clinton Administration the President's old friend and Russian expert, Strobe Talbott, who held the second highest position in the State Department, saw through the North a wealth of opportunities for positively engaging Russia in a new network of cooperation. With the Republican Administration Alaska has gained additional significance and the Governor of Alaska, along with other leading figures and institutions of learning and research in the State, have demonstrated a strong interest in becoming a prominent partner in the new cooperation in the North.

All this gives the Nordic countries an opening to become significant players in international cooperation centred on the North, a cooperation which was completely unthinkable during the decades of the Cold War but now has become one of the most promising aspects of the new world order.

The President of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, and the Government of Finland showed during the early part of the 1990s that they realised that

these changes called for new action and new policies. On a Finnish initiative the European Union agreed to formulate a policy framework, the Northern Dimension, and thus signalled that within the framework of European cooperation in the 21st century a special emphasis had to be given to the North.

In order to facilitate such a development it is important that universities and research institutions give high priority to northern problems and concerns and thus provide a substantial intellectual backbone for the new partnership in the North.

Within the framework of the northern partnership there are many issues which urgently require active and consistent academic input, a need which would make the works of scholars and researchers highly relevant for international cooperation in the North.

Let me mention a few of these important areas of cooperation in the North which would strongly benefit from extensive academic input in the coming years.

*Management and utilisation of the rich natural resources in the North, both on land and in the oceans, including oil, gas, hydro and geothermal power.

*Economic progress through business partnerships, facilitated by investments in information technology and communications networks.

*The evolution of political systems in the North, including the strengthening of international councils such as the Arctic Council, the Barents Region Council and the Baltic Council, and extension of active cooperation between nation states in the regions and sub-state institutions such as provincial, local, regional and state governments in Canada, Russia and the United States. This cooperation across the boundaries of diplomatic protocol has provided a wealth of new opportunities in the North and in recent years has made the region a fascinating political laboratory.

*Legal issues concentrating on the rights of indigenous peoples, cultural and human rights and land ownership.

*The enhancement of cultural cooperation, including artistic exhibitions, musical events, film festivals, publishing and theatre, as well as the important task of language retention and the preservation of traditional patterns of social interaction.

*The growing importance of human health and the need to address the problems of suicide, homicide and inter-family violence.

*The impact of globalisation on the North, including the growing presence of multinational cooperation and the critical role of the North for the global system.

In addition there is the protection of the Arctic marine environment, especially the fight against the pollution of the oceans, the conservation of Arctic flora and fauna with emphasis on biodiversity and sustainable use, the assessment of the impact of climate change on the Arctic region and the conceivable reaction to such changes, and the prevention of environmental disasters caused by nuclear waste and the vast nuclear arsenals which are still kept in the northwestern part of Russia.

When Iceland recently took over the presidency of the Arctic Council we declared that among our emphases in the coming years would be scientific and technological cooperation through increased networking between scientists and research institutions. The aim is to build on existing international organisations and programmes working with issues such as sustainable agriculture, communications, tourism, construction and the use of natural resources. We will also promote collaboration between funding agencies and research councils of the member states of the Arctic Council in order to facilitate joint financing of research programmes and projects. Emphasis will be given to developing existing cooperation between the European Union and North America in order to link educational and research institutions dealing with Arctic research. In addition, high priority will be given to strengthening circumpolar and cross-disciplinary monitoring to help us to determine and analyse environmental changes in the Arctic. The aim is increasingly to integrate monitoring of biodiversity and the assessment of pollution, climate change and other environmental, social and economic factors in the North.

These diverse tasks present universities and research institutes with a wealth of challenges to rise to in the years to come, and thereby to exert a considerable influence on the content and evolution of the new partnership in the North which Russia, the United States, Canada and the Nordic countries have created.

An overview of these developments also raises the important question of the extent to which Germany will become actively engaged in the evolution of the new North. Through its membership of the Baltic Council Germany is concretely involved and within the European Union Germany can also influence how the Union will implement its Northern Dimension programme in the years to come, how that policy framework will lead to concrete results and whether it will be actively maintained in

the face of the extensive problems associated with the enlargement of the Union.

Germany has in fact many venues for becoming actively involved in the evolution of the North. The increasing role which regional governments within Russia, Canada and the United States play in northern cooperation also offers possibilities for the respective Northern German Länder to become actively engaged in these affairs.

I am convinced that both the Nordic countries and the Baltic States would welcome an enhanced contribution from Germany in dealing with the multitude of challenges so prominent in the North, many of which are of critical importance for international cooperation on, for example, environmental, nuclear, energy and climatic issues. Such involvement by Germany would also certainly deepen the relationship with Russia and introduce new elements into the dialogue with the United States and Canada.

Historically Germany has been an important northern partner and throughout the centuries my country has benefited from cooperation with the northern parts of Germany in particular. In previous times German merchants created the most effective trade network in the northern regions and the intellectual and cultural influence of Germany on the northern states is in many ways a key to understanding our historical evolution.

Throughout the centuries Germany has been a significant northern player and it is therefore only logical that the 21st century should lead to extensive partnership between Germany and the new North.

I hope that German universities and research institutions will become actively engaged in analysing the challenges facing the northern regions and how they impact on international cooperation and global evolution in the 21st century. I can assure you that such active academic involvement by German scholars and researchers would be highly welcomed by the intellectual communities in the North.

A positive German engagement through a partnership with the new North, strengthened by substantial intellectual input, would certainly help to further many of the tasks which I have briefly outlined here today.

I thank the University of Bonn for the opportunity to bring these perspectives to your attention and I hope that the coming years will bring us a consolidation of the partnership between Germany and new North.