



**THE NEW NORTH:
THE PERIPHERY MOVES CENTRE STAGE**

**The Stein Rokkan Memorial Lecture
by
the President of Iceland
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**University of Bergen
17th March 2004**

Distinguished professors,
scholars, dear friends and colleagues

Stein was a son of the north, born on the Norwegian periphery, moulded by the lives of farmers and fishermen in the remote fjords and villages.

We were indeed both sons of the north. My home community in the western peninsula of Iceland preserved stories of the struggle against harsh winters and battles for survival.

When we met, forty years ago, there was certainly a difference in age and distinction, but we had both inherited a strong spirit from the people of the periphery. Stein was already a leading figure in the world of political science and sociology, both in Europe and across the Atlantic. I was only 21 years old, finishing my second year at the University of Manchester, studying a discipline which at that time did not even have a name in the Icelandic language. The Vikings and their descendents had preferred to practise politics and conflict rather than to analyse their causes and the prevailing patterns.

Stein had chosen a small restaurant in the suburbs of Manchester for our first meeting and offered me lunch. I can assure you that the culinary qualities of such places in northern England in the early 1960s left a lot to be desired, but we both had rural Nordic background and therefore we were used to eating what was at hand. This encounter changed my life. It was one of those moments that mark you forever; without it, my career would certainly have taken a different path.

Although I was still an undergraduate and had never engaged in political science research, Stein offered to fund my next summer in Iceland if I devoted myself to gathering data on the political system in Iceland and thus laying the foundation for the possible inclusion of Iceland into what was to become the Smaller European Democracies project.

I have often reflected on how this proposal demonstrated some of Stein Rokkan's most notable characteristics, attributes which made him such an influential pioneer and leader at a crucial time in the evolution of European political science.

First: his profound confidence in young people, his willingness to give them challenging tasks, to believe in their capabilities, to open avenues for their further learning, to galvanise the scientific field by bringing along a battalion of young researchers, devoting his time to helping them, encouraging them and to tying them together into a lasting network of cooperation. More than any other person, he created a community of European scholars which in the last decades of the 20th century provided both leadership and inspiration to a number of universities and research institutions in many different parts of the western world. Thus Stein Rokkan's spirit survived, despite his untimely death.

Second: he created new frontiers in the evolution of the discipline, was always initiating new visions, providing fresh analysis and formulating concepts which gave us new directions. In my case, he sensed that Iceland could be a valuable addition to the study not only of democratic evolution but also of the centre-periphery dimension; that it was of the utmost importance to bring the home of the oldest parliament and the most northern European country into the growing arena of the discipline.

Third: he always found some money – and I don't have to emphasise the importance of that capability to this distinguished audience. He was not only a world-class scholar but also one of the most successful scientific entrepreneurs I have ever encountered. His success, together with Robert Dahl and others, in securing financial backing from the Ford Foundation for the Smaller European Democracies project became another momentous factor in my life. Following our first summer of cooperation, Stein offered to fund my research into Icelandic politics in the following years and thus partly to contribute to the writing of my Ph.D. thesis on the evolution of the Icelandic power system, a contribution which ultimately led to the establishment of political science as a discipline in the University of Iceland in 1970 and shortly thereafter to the creation of its Faculty of Social Sciences.

Stein Rokkan was therefore a founding father of Icelandic political science, a contribution which we will always recognise and honour. But we still regret that he died before we could thank him in a fitting manner, which would have been to award him the first honorary doctorate in political science from the University of Iceland.

It is in this light that my journey to Bergen to give the Stein Rokkan memorial lecture is indeed a pilgrimage but also a privilege which enables me to honour a great scholar and a dear friend, a man who influenced my life more than most others; and I am deeply grateful to the University of Bergen for enabling me to pay my respect to Stein Rokkan's memory in this way; but also a little hesitant to accept an invitation to come again into the halls of scholarly excellence because my duties and responsibilities in recent years have not enabled me to be as alert as before to the most recent scientific fashions and nuances.

Perhaps my hesitation in this respect can be counter-balanced by the ringside seat in the circles of political and international activity which my present position gives me, a seat which often enables me to witness whether the elephants are really dancing or if it is simply an illusion created by clever trainers.

Political thinkers have for centuries, ever since the days of Aristotle and Plato, been preoccupied by the nature of the state, of the republic, of the prince, by the foundation of democracy, by what creates a harmonious balance of power. Stein Rokkan had the daring and the insight to go against this intellectual establishment and bring forward emphasis on other factors, on the social and economic elements in nation building, on the significance of the centre-periphery structures. Perhaps because he was himself brought up on the periphery he could view the centre with fresh eyes; he never lost the inherent scepticism of those whose lives have depended on the forces of nature.

He was in, the words of Erik Allardt and Henry Valen, "the cosmopolite from the periphery, and his interest in the periphery was unmistakable – a trait which clearly relates to his own personal background in northern Norway". Allardt and Valen furthermore stated that "Rokkan's approach to the centre-periphery distinction was not only pluralistic; it was also heuristic. Rokkan's models are open and primarily designed as tools for generating new data and findings. They do not generally contain statements about specific causal relations, but they offer a language and, as one well could say, conceptual maps for discussing a great variety of diverging cases".

It is with reference to this essence in Stein Rokkan's contribution that I offer you here today a new perspective on the most peripheral of all peripheries, the northern-most part of the world, the Arctic Region and other parts of Russia, the United States, Canada and the Nordic countries, parts which have now become interwoven into an evolving and fascinating political system which I have sometimes termed "the New North". This is a system which deserves extensive study by social

scientists and offers, particularly to Nordic scholars, opportunities to make a strong impact in an arena which is, among other things, becoming an important pillar in the new Russian-American relations, an arena which in the last ten years has become a fascinating and innovative laboratory of political creativity, of new institutions and patterns of interaction, of new relations between nation states and regions and provinces in other states. This is a testing ground of different methods in dealing with the new Russia, a venue for a different look at human rights and the position and influence of indigenous peoples, for bringing to the forefront many projects of critical importance for the utilisation of global energy resources in the 21st century, for the protection of the environment, for assessing the threat of climatic change, for the transformation of international trade through the evolution of the Northern Sea Route and indeed for studies in many other significant fields.

It has long been a characteristic feature of the dialogue on international affairs that its themes tend to become entrenched in custom and tradition: viewpoints remain unchanged even for decades and our understanding of the world becomes routine.

In the second half of the twentieth century the Cold War created such divisions: the world was split into East and West, the arms race and the struggle to win zones of influence in other continents had a decisive impact on ways of thinking and the issues that were dealt with. Universities and research institutes devoted much of their energies towards examining and defining the conflicts that were labelled in these terms.

This division into East and West virtually dominated the world picture underlying all international conflicts and dialogue, until, almost in an instant, the Cold War was suddenly a thing of the past: the Berlin Wall fell, countries which had been under dictatorships took the right to independent and democratic self-determination into their own hands, the Soviet Union disintegrated in the space of a few years, old enemies became partners and allies, the balance of terror became undermined and, finally, Russia and NATO made a formal treaty on cooperation in the interest of peace.

It is perhaps understandable that, in all this turmoil and transformation in the course of roughly a single decade, we have had trouble finding our bearings and comprehending in full the opportunities that have opened up, how the new world-picture has presented the Nordic countries with a different status and enabled us to become dynamic participants, on independent terms, in forging the new relationship between Russia and North America.

The key to this new role for the Nordic countries lies in the changes that have taken place in the North since the end of the Cold War, how the region extending from Russia, across the Baltic and Scandinavia and from there via Iceland to Canada and the United States has acquired a new value and become the forum for a process of many-faceted political innovation which has now been formalized in councils of cooperation and dedicated to an extensive agenda.

During the second half of the 20th century there was a very little interest in the course of events in these 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 rush 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 Euro-Arctic 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 a political transformation which brings into being new states and new territorial bodies within states, but also creates 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 and brought our regions into key positions, influencing strongly the success of the new Europe and the stability of the Russian-American relationship.

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 has now been created. New entities have entered the framework of cooperation. 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 more 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.

Taken together, these developments have been so successful that they have already created an elaborate political system which we could call “the New North” – an effective, broad and elaborate framework of cooperation that has been institutionalised on at least four levels.

The first level consists of the three councils of international cooperation: the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Baltic Council.

The second level consists of the Northern Forum established at the initiative of the Governor of Alaska and embracing representatives of regions, cities and provinces from Russia, the Nordic countries, Canada and the United States – and facilitating cooperation across national boundaries.

The third level consists of the University of the Arctic – a network of over 50 universities and research institutions dedicated to creating and training an academic community devoted to furthering knowledge of the North.

The fourth level consists of the Northern Research Forum, which first met in Iceland in the year 2000, then in Russia in 2002 – and will assemble this year in Canada. The Northern Research Forum is in fact moulded on the ECPR experience, that remarkable network which Stein Rokkan and others established more than three decades ago. The purpose of the NRF is to facilitate a continuous and open dialogue amongst scholars, researchers, public officials, political leaders, business

entrepreneurs and cultural innovators, with special emphasis on giving young people access to the broad dialogue on the future of the North.

This four-level system presents an elaborate framework for the New North. It is at the same time formal and well established, yet also dynamic, democratic and open – allowing innovation, new thinking and initiatives to facilitate positive change. It opens up new avenues for economic and social progress, as well as cultural enrichment and an inspired democratic dialogue.

The core of the institutional framework in the New North is the emphasis on open dialogue and opportunities for participation by people from far and wide. The New North is therefore, in global terms, uniquely democratic. The Northern Forum, the University of the Arctic and the Northern Research Forum allow citizens and scholars, students and activists in cities and regions to come forward with ideas, propositions, suggestions, projects and plans. And, through the connections to the formal councils of international cooperation – the Arctic, the Barents and the Baltic Councils – these democratic currents of reform reach the highest levels of decision-making. Political innovation in the North has – within a single decade – produced a framework for cooperation that offers many opportunities for initiatives and progress which are no longer hindered by the boundaries of the old diplomatic rules.

Within the New North everyone can work with everyone else: Alaska can work with the Nordic nations; regions in Russia can work with independent states in Northern Europe; universities and research institutions can work directly with state representatives in the Arctic and the Barents Councils; ideas and proposals formulated in the open NRF process are presented to ministers and ambassadors. The possibilities are made unlimited, and in addition the institutions in the North give organisations of the indigenous peoples formal access to the decision-making process. Thus the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council and the Association of Indigenous Minorities in the Far North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation have been given the right to formal representation within the international framework of cooperation among the northern states.

In recent years, we have seen many examples of how this new model in the North is really working. Let me illustrate this with some examples from my own experience as President – examples that would have been unthinkable in previous times when the world was dominated by strict old rules stating what we could be done and what was forbidden. The New North is – in contrast – rich in opportunities for a new type of dialogue and cooperative efforts, which I have clearly and pleasantly experienced.

As President I have enjoyed productive relationships with a number of governors in Russia, e.g. the governors of the Novgorod and of the Yamal-Nenets regions and also the governor of Chukotka in the far eastern part of Russia resulting in strengthening ties to Iceland and cooperation within the Northern Research Forum.

I have actively explored the possibilities for Alaska to have a more active role in New North institutions by making a special visit to Alaska last August at the invitation of the Governor and, following that visit, by cooperating directly with the two Alaskan senators and representatives in the US Congress. Such close cooperation between a head of state and members of the legislature in another country does not fit the traditional model of diplomatic exchange, but it has been highly productive and successful. Let us not forget that Alaska is, in fact, the standard-bearer of the United States in northern cooperation and through Alaska's active involvement, the President and government in Washington are directly linked to the progress of the North. This is similar to how the Russian regions bring President Putin and Moscow into the decision-making process concerning the future of the North. Therefore, the New North framework is an important pillar in Russian–American relations in the 21st century.

Through my participation in the general meetings of the Northern Research Forum, my active and ongoing dialogue with its leading participants, and attendance at the Northern Forum in St Petersburg – meeting regional leaders, governors, mayors and other distinguished representatives of people living all over the North – I have benefited from a broad and stimulating dialogue, an experience that heads of state could not enjoy in previous times.

I have referred here to a few examples of my own experience in recent years and more could certainly be given; together they demonstrate how the New North has been transformed and how we have many different opportunities for effective and productive cooperation.

Let me list here briefly some potentials of the North that need to be examined, analysed and explored.

First: The North is extremely rich in energy resources. It harbours about a quarter of the world's untapped energy reservoirs, reservoirs of oil, gas, hydro and geothermal power. The management and utilisation of these resources is one of the most important future tasks in the North.

Second: The development of the Northern Sea Route would link North America, Europe and Asia in a new way, dramatically transform commerce, communication and business opportunities and create a new

dimension in the global economy, similar to what the Suez Canal did for world trade more than a century ago.

Third: The assessment of human development in the North, establishing an overview of sustainable development and identifying the factors that affect the well-being of the inhabitants. This is the main priority of the present Icelandic chairmanship of the Arctic Council. The focus is on social, cultural and economical progress and how they relate to sustainable development and the use of natural resources in the region. The conclusions of this wide-ranging project will be submitted in the form of an Arctic Human Development Report later this year.

Fourth: The need to strengthen scientific and technological cooperation through increased networking between scientists and research institutions. The aim could be to build on existing international organisations and programmes and to promote collaboration between funding agencies and research councils of different states so as to facilitate joint financing of research programmes and projects.

Fifth: In addition, high priority must be given to strengthening circumpolar and cross-disciplinary monitoring to help us to determine and analyse environmental changes in the North. The aim is increasingly to integrate monitoring of biodiversity and the assessment of pollution, climate change and other environmental and social and economic factors. The North is probably the most critical arena on the globe where the threat of climatic change can be most effectively monitored and where the possibility of a radical transformation of the ocean currents' conveyor belt can best be assessed.

Sixth: To study the evolution of political systems in the North, including the strengthening of international councils such as the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Baltic Council, and the 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 and the various organisations of indigenous peoples. 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.

Seventh: To analyse legal issues concentrating on human rights, on the role of indigenous peoples, on cultural rights, on land ownership and on the developing of the new discipline of Arctic law.

Eighth: The impact of globalisation on the North, including the growing presence of multinational corporations and the critical role of the North for the global system.

The list could be longer, but these topics indicate a wealth of opportunities for a productive dialogue and analysis within the framework of the New North where the United States, Russia, Canada and the five Nordic countries – Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland – have committed themselves to constructive partnership in the coming years.

In order to facilitate such analysis, it is important that universities and research institutions in our countries give high priority to northern issues, problems and concerns and thus provide a substantial intellectual backbone for this new partnership in the North. Already there are important contributions in this respect from the academic community in Finland, Iceland and the other Nordic countries, but much more needs to be done. There is still not sufficient awareness of how important the North has become for our countries; intellectual activity is still dominated by the old dimensions which I mentioned at the beginning of my lecture.

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.

I am sure that if Stein Rokkan were still with us, he would be at the forefront of these endeavours, welcoming the challenging tasks of analysing how the transformation of the northern periphery into a laboratory of political creativity deserves the central stage of our attention.

In homage to a great scholar and a dear friend, a mentor and a founding father of modern social science, I urge the community of scholars in Bergen and elsewhere in the Nordic countries to establish a prevailing leadership in this field, to explore the nature of the New North and its relevance for global evolution. Such a journey would be in the true spirit of exploration which inspired Stein Rokkan and made him such a great man.