

### **The EU and Greenland: will the seesaw find a balance?**

Since the 1950s, the major Greenlandic political parties have formulated independence as their primary political goal (Ahlness, 2020). The foundation of this claim for independence is strong Greenlandic identity. Specifically, this identity is perceived to be mutually exclusive of the Danish identity: one identifies as Danish or Greenlandic (Gad, 2009; Grydehoj, 2016). The goal of becoming independent has become omnipresent within Greenlandic society, which led to the extensive discussions within the country of achieving independence. (Ahlness, 2020). The answer to the how and when questions hinge on the development of Greenland's economy. Specifically, Greenland heavily relies on the block grants it receives yearly from Denmark. In order to form an independent economy, Greenland must find a source of income to replace the block grant and establish a system that functions independently from Denmark (Grydehoj, 2016).

Greenland is in a unique geographical position, located between Europe, the United States, and Russia. Moreover, the island contains highly demanded raw materials and rare earth metals (Ackrén, M., & Jakobsen, 2015). Because of these two factors, several nations, such as the US and China, have taken political steps to strengthen their ties with Greenland. In this essay, I will argue that the EU should support the independence of Greenland. Firstly, I will outline how Greenland has not secured strong partnerships with the U.S. and China, which has limited its economic tools. Secondly, I will outline how the relationship between Greenland and the EU has developed in an unfavorable way for Greenland. Lastly, I will argue that supporting and facilitating Greenland's claim for independence is necessary for the EU to establish a good and long-lasting relationship with Greenland.

Thus far, Greenland has yet to succeed in establishing strong economic or political alliances. Greenland is highly dependent on Danish funds, and especially the block grants it receives (Grydehoj, 2016). This economic dependency is the big obstacle between Greenland

and independence (Grydehoj, 2016). Greenlandic politicians are well aware that the island must seek new partners to replace the Danish support if they want independence (Walt, 2021). Slowly but steadily, potential partners are arriving, such as the United States and China (Tomala, 2017). Historically, the relationship between the U.S. and Greenland lies in military cooperation, with Greenland allowing a U.S. military base on their soil (Kobza, 2015). Currently, the U.S. presence in Greenland seems to be mainly focused on limiting Chinese influence in Greenland but neglects significant economic investment in the area (Walt, 2021). One of the reasons for China's investment in Greenland is because of the island's minerals (Kobza, 2015). However, China also sees potential in the new trading routes that are surfacing in the Arctic due to climate change (Ackrén & Jakobsen, 2015). It is apparent that despite efforts on both sides, the cooperation between Greenland and China is still very limited.

Equally, the relationship between Greenland and the EU still remains delicate. At the beginning of the 21st century, the relationship mainly evolved around cooperation in the fishery. However, in the past decade, more moves have been made toward a strategic alliance (Kobza, 2015). For example, in 2006, the "Joint Declaration on partnership between the European Union, Denmark, and Greenland" was signed, the first joint document that reached beyond fisheries. The document can be seen as a sign of intent from both the EU and Greenland to build a sustainable relationship between their economies, politics, and culture (Tomala, 2017). However, despite this symbolic document, the EU has taken a rather cautious approach to its ties with Greenland (Kobza, 2015). Communication between Greenland and the EU has been slow and is marked by tedious bureaucracy – a Brussels classic – significantly slowing down processes (Tomala, 2017). Although Greenland has achieved a more meaningful role in the EU's foreign policy (Tomala, 2017), the EU has not sufficiently committed to the relationship. One might say that the EU is more focused on maintaining the

relationship as it is right now rather than building a stronger one. The relevant question here is whether the EU is not succeeding at establishing a closer relationship with Greenland or if it is simply not ready to establish such a relationship.

Although the US, China, and the EU have certainly recognised Greenland as a future ally, the emphasis lies on the future, and more steps still need to be taken. Needless to say, it is essential to the EU to maintain a strong partnership with Greenland. The Greenlandic raw materials and rare earth metals will help the EU to become less dependent on China, and the new trading routes that may emerge due to climate change open up new opportunities for the EU. Moreover, since multiple powers recognise Greenland as a potential ally, the EU needs to recognize its relationship with Greenland and retain its influence in the Arctic area. In order to achieve such a strong partnership with Greenland, the EU must use its political influence to support and facilitate Greenland's independence from Denmark. The EU has a close connection with Denmark as an EU member state and thus can attempt to exert influence on the Denmark - Greenland relation. This influence cannot be replicated by the US or China, or any other powers, as they are not part of the close-knit web that is the European Union. Moreover, by supporting and potentially facilitating Greenlandic independence, the EU shows that it sees Greenland as a mature and equal partner and treats it as such.

The one obstacle here is that research shows that the EU, until now, has had little influence on the Danish Arctic policies (Larsen, 2021). Possibly the reason for the EU's hesitant policy towards Greenland is Danish opposition to Greenlandic independence (Kobza, 2016). However, Denmark is not entirely against an extensive EU presence in the Arctic (Larsen, 2021). Greenland may just be an excellent reason for the EU to start a conversation with Denmark, and further define its role in the Arctic.

In conclusion, Greenland is becoming increasingly important in global politics and economics. Because of this, Greenland has received attention from various nations that aim to

build their relationship with the island. However, as of now, solid partnerships have yet to form. However, similar to the other nations, the relationship between Greenland and the EU remains precarious. In order to show Greenland its full support, the EU must take a position in the discussion on Greenland's independence from Denmark. This way, the EU can give Greenland the political support no other power can give it and kick off a strong future relationship.

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