

Small States Regional Cooperation

Iceland

Name of Presenter:

Pia Hansson

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Regional Cooperation - Introduction

- Iceland has its closest relations with the Nordic countries, the European Union and the United States
- Under Danish rule – sovereignty 1918 – independence 1944
- Neutrality hindered membership of the League of Nations
- United Nations membership 1945
- NATO membership – one of the founding members – 1949
- Occupied by the UK 1940
- US took over in 1941 – before officially entering WWII

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Regional Cooperation: History

- First Icelandic embassy opened in Copenhagen 1920
- Embassies opened in London and Stockholm in 1940
- Consulate-general in New York in 1940 and embassy in Washington D.C. in 1941
- The Icelandic foreign service grew very slowly at first but representation picked up speed in the 1990's as the country's self-confidence grew
- Still, Iceland relies on Nordic cooperation and co-habitation in foreign missions – such as in Berlin – due to its limited size

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Nordic Cooperation

- The Nordic cooperation is the world's oldest regional partnership. Helsinki 1962
- The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are the main forums for official Nordic co-operation, which involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.
- The Nordic Council of Ministers is the forum for inter-governmental co-operation, the Nordic Council for inter-parliamentary co-operation.
- The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation are responsible for the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Nordic co-operation is based on the "Helsinki Treaty", which stipulates that the co-operation ministers assist the prime ministers in the coordination of Nordic issues.
- The Nordic Council is run by a presidium consisting of elected parliamentarians from all of the Nordic countries. The members discuss topical issues and the future of Nordic co-operation with the prime ministers once a year at a summit meeting held during the Session of the Nordic Council.

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Nordic Cooperation

- The Nordic Prime Ministers announced their vision for Nordic co-operation on 20 August 2019: Our vision is that the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers must serve this purpose.
- **A green Nordic region** – together, we will promote a green transition of our societies and work towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable circular and bio-based economy.
- **A competitive Nordic region** – together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility and digital integration.
- **A socially sustainable Nordic Region** – together, we will promote an inclusive, equal and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchange and welfare.

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The Nordics and Baltics

- The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) is a regional co-operation format that includes Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden.
- Under NB8, regular meetings are held of the Baltic and Nordic countries' Prime Ministers, Speakers of Parliaments, Foreign Ministers, branch ministers, Secretaries of State and political directors of Foreign Ministries, as well as expert consultations where regional issues and current international topics are reviewed.
- A formal co-operation agreement between the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly was signed in 1992.

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European cooperation

- Iceland is closely connected to other European countries in a historical, political, and a cultural sense. Although Iceland is not a member of the European Union (EU), its relation to the EU is mainly based on the EEA Agreement, which came into effect in 1994. The member states of the European Union (EU) are Iceland's most important economic partners and the majority of Icelanders working and studying abroad, do so in Europe. The Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA Agreement) is therefore a vital part of Iceland's foreign policy.
- In essence, the EEA Agreement unites the EU member states and the three EFTA EEA states (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) into one single market governed by the same basic rules. These rules cover the so-called four freedoms: free movement of goods, capital, services and persons, and competition rules.

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European cooperation

- In April 2018 the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs published a report introducing various steps being taken to improve the implementation of the EEA Agreement. They include:
 - The steering group on the implementation of the EEA Agreement will be given new terms of reference.
 - The EEA unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs will be enabled to retain staff with expert knowledge and relevant experience in EEA matters for a longer duration.
 - A program will be made for informing the public at large about the long-term advantages of Iceland's participation in the EEA.
 - And more...

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West Nordic Council

- The West-Nordic Council is a parliamentary cooperation between Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, formed in 1985
- The Council's main objectives are:
 - To promote West Nordic (north Atlantic) interests.
 - To be guardians of north Atlantic resources and north Atlantic culture and to help promoting West Nordic interests through the West Nordic governments – not least with regards to the serious issues of resource management, pollution etc.
 - To follow up on the governments' West Nordic cooperation.
 - To work with the Nordic Council and to be the West Nordic link in Nordic cooperation.
 - To act as the parliamentary link for inter-West Nordic organisations, including Arctic parliamentary cooperation

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Arctic Council

- Established in 1996, the Arctic Council is composed of eight Member States: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. In addition, six organizations representing Arctic indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants
- Iceland chairs the AC 2019-2021 and the program for the Chairmanship reflects Iceland's commitment to the principle of sustainable development and refers to the necessity of close cooperation between the states and peoples of the region and beyond.

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Conclusion on regional cooperation

- Regional cooperation is deemed to be highly important to Iceland.
- Nordic cooperation tops the list. Now at the time of COVID-19 the Nordic foreign ministers are consulting with each other and although the countries are not responding in the same way they are united in maintaining a strong dialogue and focusing on the region as a whole.
- EEA membership is considered vital to Icelanders although EU membership remains highly unlikely. Iceland's European integration is nonetheless substantial and includes for example Schengen membership.