

# **PRESENTATION**

## **EU AMBASSADORS**

**16 June 2014**

### **Few comments on Foreign Policy issues**

#### **Introduction**

- Welcome to Iceland to those of you residing outside Iceland.
- Pleasure for me to be with you all here again.
- As many of you may recall, one year ago I addressed with you important Foreign Policy issues of the, then, new Government, in particular the EU Accession process.
- Today I wish to brief you on the latest developments in that field and our European policy priorities in general.
- I will also touch upon the situation in the Ukraine.
- Before going further into the topic, let me once again underline that it is very important for this Government to maintain our strong relationship with the EU.

#### **The Accession process**

- Since we met one year ago we have finalised the assessment on the EU accession process as it was presented in the government's policy platform. We have presented the assessment to parliament and debated in detail the government's proposal of withdrawing the EU application.
- At the end of the day the proposal was not voted on with other pressing matters more at hand such as the government debt relief . Technically,

this means that such a proposal would have to be re-tabled for the next parliament.

- My personal view is clear. I am ready to table the proposal again if necessary.
- Furthermore, in line with the policy platform of the government, no work has been undertaken regarding the accession process and we do not attend meetings or other events that we are invited to as a candidate country. The simple reason being that we do not consider ourselves as one.
- The question then is regarding the EU info centre funded by IPA, with clear message from the government there is no reason to prolong the only IPA funding left in Iceland. The expectation is therefor that EU info centre should close its doors sooner rather than later
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### **Iceland and the EU**

- I believe that it is important to repeat what I told you last year. The government's agenda on Europe is positive.
- Through the EEA we enjoy very close and dynamic relations. We participate in the Single Market and through Schengen we are part of the large area of Europe without internal borders. We share the same interests and views in security and defence matters. We are like-minded in almost all Foreign Policy issues and work closely together in international organisations.
- Exactly because of this we have recently formulated our policy priorities on Europe where we emphasise the importance of continued close relations with the EU based, in particular, on the EEA.
  - We take measures to strengthen the functioning of the EEA Agreement both regarding adoption of new aquis and on timely implementation.

- We look into ways to strengthen our role early in the process of preparing EEA legislation.
- During the autumn I will present an assessment of the main interests linked to the EEA Agreement.
- New examples continue to illustrate our close relations under and beyond the EEA. Here I would like to highlight two concrete examples:
  - Iceland's participation in the joint fulfilment of commitments in the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.
  - Iceland already takes part in the Emissions Trading Scheme, as part of the EEA Agreement
- Another example is the field of aviation where Iceland fully applies the EU's aviation law and is a fully integrated member of the single European aviation market.
  - As a logical step in line with overall EU external aviation policy Iceland has recently asked to join *all* agreements of this kind, in a joint effort with Norway. The Commission has consulted the members states and has decided that it will on a systemic basis propose to partner countries that Iceland and Norway could accede to these agreements.
  - It must be mentioned that an important precedent was set in 2009 with the accession of Iceland and Norway to the Open Skies Agreement between EU and USA, which is perhaps the most comprehensive agreement of this kind.
  - On this basis, we look forward to join many more of EU's Open Skies Agreements with third countries.

- Let me also briefly mention the ongoing exercise between the EU and the USA, our two most important trading partners, on trade and investment the so called TTIP.
  - Given the close relations of Iceland and the other EFTA countries with the EU and across the Atlantic it is very important to be able to follow this process with close consultations with the Parties.
  - The EFTA countries have already had two such rounds with the US but none with the EU – there we have to rely on informal channels and a very brief summary in the EEA Council. It is worthy of mentioning that here, the US is conducting a much more open policy than the EU.
  - The outcome will have direct impact on the EFTA countries regardless of possible accession to the final Agreement. It will have an obvious impact through the EEA.
- And finally as regards the Common Foreign and Security Policy the topic of the day continues to be Ukraine.
  - I want to reiterate that the Government has been very firm in our condemnation of Russia's illegal actions in Ukraine.
  - The annexation of Crimea is clearly in breach with international law. It is unacceptable that any country – let alone one of the permanent members of the Security Council – takes measures like the ones Russia has done in Ukraine.
  - I have myself visited Kiev twice in the last months. The second trip was made in March, following the events in Crimea.
  - I wanted to show my solidarity with the Ukrainian people and to become more familiar with the situation on the ground. I met with political leaders, both from the Government and the opposition, civil society representatives, as well as representatives from the OSCE (and resident ambassadors, from Sweden and Switzerland).

- Our position on the events in Ukraine are fully in line with the positions of other western states, including by the EU.
- We have fully aligned with all the EU sanctions imposed on Ukrainian and Russian individuals since the crisis started.
- We were among the nations that contributed personnel to the initial monitoring mission by OSCE states in March.
- We have contributed financially to the ongoing OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and one of our most experienced officials, Ambassador Stefán Haukur Jóhannesson, is currently a team leader for the OSCE in Kiev.
- And we plan to do more. We will contribute additional personnel to the OSCE mission and to the NATO reassurance measures.
- Furthermore, we have offered the Ukrainian government to provide assistance on developing opportunities in geothermal utilisation.
- Looking ahead I am hopeful that President Poroshenko will make progress in calming tensions and embarking on the necessary reform that Ukraine so desperately needs.

### **Closing remarks**

- Dear friends.
- From all of this you can see that we continue to follow ambitious and broad policy priorities on European issues.
- All of this only confirms our close relations even though the Accession process as we knew it under the previous government is not there anymore. Our relations with Europe are based on the solid foundations that have always existed between us, especially in the last two decades where we have been a part of the internal market. It is from that solid

foundation that we want to venture into new areas and further build our relations.

- This is the message I would ask you to bring home: Iceland has a positive European Agenda, based on mutual benefits, honesty and trusted relations. We want to extend our cooperation with the EU as far as possible and we are open to address any new fields in that context.
- Enjoy your stay in Iceland and looking forward to see you all again tomorrow.