



Hard or soft power? Greenland's stance in the international scene

Description

Greenland's first official mention dates from 1053, as Pope Leo IX decided to commend the territory to Bishop Adalbert¹. Its territory (2.1 km²) is equivalent to the size of New Guinea, Borneo and Madagascar reunited², thus being the world's largest island³. It is also the second-largest ice sheet⁴. The population is estimated at 56,000 inhabitants, mainly Inuit. The capital is Nuuk, with 17,600 inhabitants⁵. Internal and external transportation takes place by sea or air, as the country does not have a road system⁶.

It is strategically located in the Arctic (500 miles from the North Pole) and the North American continent, between North America, Russia and Europe⁷. Thus, the island was an Allied bastion during World War II and during the Cold War⁸.

Its international significance⁹ is growing in the global fight against climate change, the increasing recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of natural resources. As for those¹⁰, the region is notorious for its fisheries sector. Moreover, it gathers 10% of global freshwater. Greenland ranks as the 3rd world's reserve in uranium, being also a potential key supplier for rare-earth metals.

These elements are so important for Greenland that controversy about mining rights created a political crisis in 2021. In December, the former Siumut government had presented the Kuannersuit Mineral project for thorium, uranium, and rare-earth elements mining¹¹. Inuit opposition party threatened to boycott its application while the democrat party left the government, thus leading to the dissolution of the Parliament and to extraordinary polls in April 2021. The electoral process that followed was labelled as "*Greenland's Rare-Earth Election*"¹² by the international press; it produced a major political shift and voting saw a higher turnover than usual.

As Head of State, Denmark's Queen, Margrethe II, and her government also rule over Greenland, where a High Commissioner represents them¹³. The Danish Parliament keeps two seats for Greenlandic members, occupied by the two largest parties in Greenland. Denmark is also Greenland's principal supplier and trade partner¹⁴.

After a referendum in 2008, Greenland's Home-Rule Act of 1979 was transformed into the more comprehensive Self-Rule, a legislation that allows for a large autonomy, despite the Executive role of the High Commissioner. Elected every four years, Greenland's parliament counts on 31 members that work in 13 committees¹⁵. It chooses a Prime Minister, known as the Premier. The island has its government, the Naalakkersuisut, appointed by the Premier and composed, on average, of 10 members.

The territory displays several sovereignty symbols such as its hymn, flag, and post office¹⁶, and four representation missions abroad. Additionally, revenue from mineral resources belongs to Greenlandic authorities¹⁷. The island left the

European Economic Community in 1985. In 2003, the Itilleq Declaration defined the possibilities for Greenland to act at the international level. Nowadays, Greenland's foreign policy is based on the Danish Constitution, the Self-Rule Act, and custom practices¹⁸.

The Self-Rule Act also opens¹⁹ the door²⁰ for a negotiated secession²¹ based on a: “*explicit statement that the people of Greenland will decide on Greenland independence.*”²² Established already in 2017, a Constitutional Commission²³ is currently discussing the possibilities for its political future, including free association with a third country.²⁴

This paper will present the legal framework and Greenland's steps towards more autonomy since the Cold War. After, it shall examine the island's relationship with key countries such as the United States. The third part of this text will describe the regional position of Greenland in the Arctic, while the last will analyse its particular ties with the European Union. The conclusions will underline key features of Greenland's paradiplomacy (...)

You will could download the complete publication in february, when “Paradiplomacy in Europe...” release

¹ Tomala, M. (2017). The European Union's Relations with Greenland. *International Studies. Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal*, 20(1), 31–46. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ipcj-2017-0015>

² Zellen, B. (2021). High Stakes in the High North: Alternative Models for Greenland's Ongoing Constitutional and Political Transformation. *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*. Seen on December 2021, at <https://nome.unak.is/wordpress/volume-16-no-2-2021/new-double-blind-peer-reviewed-article-volume-16-no-2-2021/high-stakes-in-the-high-north-alternative-models-for-greenlands-ongoing-constitutional-and-political-transformation/>

³ Escach, N. (2019) « Nuuk : un modèle groenlandais de métropole arctique ? », *Nordiques* [En ligne], 37 | 2019, seen on December 7th 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/nordiques/432> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/nordiques.432>

⁴ Garcés De Los Fayos, F. (2014, May). Greenland: The challenge of managing a key geostrategic territory (DG EXPO/B/PolDep/Note/2014_16 PE 522.332). European Parliament. Directorate-General for External Policies Policy Department [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2014/522332/EXPO-AFET_SP\(2014\)522332_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2014/522332/EXPO-AFET_SP(2014)522332_EN.pdf)

⁵ Bra?ka, T. (2018). Greenland – from Autonomy to (In)Dependence. *Przegl?d Strategiczny*, 11, 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2018.1.8>

⁶ Denmark – Other Areas in the Kingdom of Denmark. (n.d.). International Trade Administration | Trade.Gov. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/denmark-other-areas-kingdom-denmark>

⁷ See above

⁸ Ackrén, M., & Jakobsen, U. (2014). Greenland as a self-governing sub-national territory in international relations: past, current and future perspectives. *Polar Record*, 51(4), 404–412. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s003224741400028x> p. 412

⁹ Bra?ka, op.cit, p.107

¹⁰ Escach, op.cit.

¹¹ Meyer, op.cit.

¹² See above

¹³ Garcés de los Fayos, op.cit., p. 6

¹⁴ Bra?ka, op.cit, p.120

¹⁵ Hofverberg, E. (2021, July 12). FALQs: Greenlandic Autonomy, Government Formation, and Mineral Resource Policy | In Custodia Legis: Law Librarians of Congress. Library of Congress Blog. Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2021/07/falqs-greenlandic-autonomy-government-formation-and-mineral-resource-policy/>

16 Bra?ka, op.cit, p.109

17 Bra?ka, op.cit, p.121

18 The Legal Frameworks – Naalakkersuisut. (n.d.). The Government of Greenland (1). Retrieved December 8, 2021, from <https://naalakkersuisut.gl/en/Naalakkersuisut/Departments/Udenrigsanliggende/Naalakkersuisuts-udenrigspolitiske-kompetencer/De-juridiske-rammer>

19 Zellen, op.cit.;

20 Naalakkersuisut The Government of Greenland (2). Retrieved December 7th 2021, from <https://naalakkersuisut.gl/en/About-government-of-greenland/About-Greenland/Politics-in-Greenland>

21 Escach, op.cit.;

22 Bra?ka, op.cit, p.112

23 <https://ina.gl/udvalg/lovpligtige-og-staaende-udvalg/forfatningskommissionen/?lang=en>

24 Work on Greenland's Constitution drafting restarts. (2020, May 21). Nationalia. Retrieved December 11, 2021, from <https://www.nationalia.info/brief/11313/work-on-greenlands-constitution-drafting-resumes>

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