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Introduction

Greenland and the Faroes are autonomous jurisdictions within the Danish Realm, having undertaken a continuous process of extended self-determination in the post-WWII era. In both jurisdictions there are strong movements of secession and counter-secession, whose respective strengths are largely achieved through external relations.

This paper will first provide an introduction to the historical background and the formal relationship between the two jurisdictions and their metropolitan state. We will then extend the two cases with a description of how increased internal autonomy has evolved in a dynamic interaction with changes in international affairs. Whether the two jurisdictions may move towards full secession or new forms of unity is difficult to predict, but external relations keep on pushing at the formal structures and limits of the realm, which we will briefly reflect upon in the final section.

The Danish Realm

The Faroe Islands, Iceland and Greenland were originally Norwegian protectorates. They became parts of the Danish-Norwegian Kingdom from 1380 and Danish absolutism since 1661. After the Napoleonic War Norway was ceded to Sweden, while the three West Nordic countries remained Danish. They constitute a relatively strong region of culture as they also share the adoption of Christianity around the year 1000, the Reformation in the 16th century and many decades of a common Trade Monopoly. Iceland became a sovereign state in 1918 and a republic in 1944, while the Faroes and Greenland have taken a quite different route of autonomy.

While the Faroes were an integrated part of Danish absolutism, Greenland became a colony after 1721. The Faroes were therefore integrated into the particular Nordic county (*amt*) system that developed under absolutism, and became their own county in 1816. In 1852 the county became its own electorate, following the Danish track towards democracy. In 1948 the Faroe Islands received their home rule system, which is still in force but

with pragmatic changes in its principle and practice. In 1992, for instance, the Faroes gained full sovereignty over their own subsoil, and a declaration from 2005 describes the principles of how the Faroes are included in the foreign and security affairs of the Danish Realm.

Following the path of post-war decolonisation, Greenland received *amt* status (county status) in 1953 and its home rule system in 1979. In 2009 home rule law was replaced by a new Self-Government Act, which can be seen as a system between home rule and full independence. The Self-Government Act for the first time defines the Greenlandic people as a separate people according to international law. The act also defines Greenlandic rights to its own subsoil, principles for Greenlandic involvement in international affairs, and even some principles which will be constitutive if Greenland wants full independence.

The two autonomous systems provide Greenland and the Faroes with a high degree of “internal self-determination” (Seymour, 2011). This means that the two countries can make their own laws in areas that have been taken over from the state: they can levy taxes and are independent custom areas. In practice both countries today have taken over most areas which may be termed “internal”. Vital policy areas of the state such as currency, foreign policy, high courts and defence are solely under Danish jurisdiction.

Secessionism in the Faroe Islands

The establishment of its own *amt* institution in 1816, the permanent position of an Amtmand (county governor) and the establishment of a county council, the Løgting, in 1852 are important steps towards Faroese modernisation. Around the same time a cultural movement centred on the situation of the Faroese language began to grow among young Faroese students in Copenhagen. While the official language in the Faroes was Danish, the old Faroese language had survived in oral tradition. There was no written language, but the priest V. U. Hammershaimb (1819–1909) made a specific Faroese grammar in 1846, which still is the foundation of modern Faroese. The cultural movement arose among youngsters from the Faroese elite living in Copenhagen, which turned into a powerful national movement within the Faroes in the late 1880s. A national association (Føringafelag) was established in 1889 with the mission of getting the Faroese language back to its glory and can be seen as successful, since Faroese was officially accepted for use in churches and schools in the late 1930s and is today the official language, while Danish is thoroughly taught. Part of the story is also that the Faroe Islands during the latter part of 19th century transformed from a peasant community to a fishing community based on classical liberalism.

After the turn of the 20th century the Føringafelag was settled, and a party system started in 1906 with MPs starting the Unionist Party (Sambandsflokkurin) and the Home Rule Party (Sjálvstýrisflokkurin). In 1925 a Social Democratic Party (Javnaðarflokkurin) was established and in 1935 a corporate friendly conservative party was founded (Vinnuflokkurin, later Fólkaflokkurin [the People’s Party]). While the first two parties were divided along the unionism-secessionism line, the

two latter parties made the socioeconomic division visible in Faroese politics. The Social Democrats are unionists, while the People's Party is secessionist.

While Denmark in 1940 was occupied by German troops, English troops soon after arrived in the Faroes, making the two countries totally separate for years. The British accepted for the Løgting to receive some legislative power, the Faroese language was recognised for use in judicial affairs and even Faroese money was printed. The British also recognised the Faroese flag, which was a necessity for identifying Faroese ships transporting fish to the British mainland.

After the war it was clear that a return to the old county system was not an option, but no agreement was on the table. A chaotic negotiating process in the Løgting, and between the Løgting and the Danish government arose. Finally the Danish government enforced two options to be decided upon in a referendum. The first option only gave the Faroese parliament the power to make "*administrative regulations of legislative character*" regarding specific Faroese matters; a Danish state representative should lead the Faroese government. The other alternative was *full separation* (Sølvará, 2016: 65ff.).

Only a few in the political elite actually believed that a vote for full separation was possible. But the home rule and independence groups had already grown stronger before the war, and during the war years a great deal changed around self-reliance. First, the Løgting received legislative power after the British occupation. Next, the war was the second in a few decades in which Denmark was not able to defend the interests of the kingdom in the north Atlantic. Third, from an economic point of view the war years had been beneficial. Fourth, during the census campaign a group of secessionist intellectuals, mainly outside the party system, produced informative material and wandered around the islands claiming full sovereignty. The surprising result for the political elite was that the referendum resulted in a small majority for full independence (50.7% against 49.3%).

The first reaction from Denmark was that the result should be respected, but then the result was questioned by unionists and the Danish government as well. It was claimed that the referendum was consultative only, and that the 4.1% of invalid votes should be taken into consideration. After a majority of the Løgting had actually passed a declaration of Faroese sovereignty, the legality of the Løgting doing so was questioned, followed by the King's dissolution of the Løgting. A new election was called for with a more unionist-friendly assembly, resulting in the establishing of the Home Rule system in 1948. Disappointed secessionists founded the Republican Party (Tjóðveldisflokkurin), which has since then been the focal point for the most convinced secessionists.

The Home Rule Act divides the future relations between the Faroes and Denmark into two areas: special areas and common areas. Special areas are those matters the Faroese government can claim control over when it wants to do so. Common affairs can only be taken over after negotiations and subsequent approval by the Danish government. Outside the Home Rule Act are key areas like the court system, currency, defence and foreign affairs. These areas are considered to be matters of

the kingdom, and hence they may not be taken over. In general we can say that the home rule system opens up an independent internal system of government. When the Faroese parliament takes over an area, the area is subject to Faroese law and government. The first law the Faroese parliament passed was a Government Act, followed by the takeover of key political and economic areas (e.g., tax levying and the fisheries) (Hovgaard and Johansen, 1993: 65f.).

After years of “home rule”-oriented governments, the first secessionist government was established in the years 1962–1966. This was a government between the People’s Party, the Republican Party and the Home Rule Party, but it actually never made any decisive step towards secessionism. The main reason for this was disagreement about financing transfers of power; probably also the fact that the Danish state made heavy investments in the Faroese welfare system. As a consequence of the Home Rule Act, the Faroese could themselves decide not to follow Denmark into the EC in 1973. Generally, the 1970s and 1980s were years of progress in the economy and Faroese Home Rule took over substantial social welfare areas.

A deep economic and social recession appeared around 1990 and the Danish government interfered in internal Faroese matters, which was one of the main reasons deep conflicts in the Faroese-Danish relationship appeared. Secessionism turned out to be the key political agenda in a second secession coalition government from 1998 to 2002. Three parties out of four on the secessionist side of the parliament – the Republicans, the People’s Party and the Home Rule Party – formed the coalition. Negotiations about sovereignty were taken up with the Danish government, and a referendum was put on the government agenda. The referendum was never completed for one main reason: the parties could not come to terms with the economic conditions posed by the Danish government during the transition phase. The Danish government offered a four-year block grant, while the Faroese delegation had hoped for a much longer period. The most radical action the second secessionist government managed was to decrease the yearly block grant from Denmark by one-third.

Today nearly all policy areas of the Home Rule Act have been taken over by the Faroese parliament. In the early 1990s the government even took over ownership of the subsoil, a policy area earlier expected to be non-negotiable. Family and inheritance law will soon be taken over, which will be the last field of the larger areas mentioned in the Home Rule Act.

Aquaculture and tourism have made the Faroese economy more diversified, but it is still largely tied up with the catching, production and sale of fish. While also hit by the 2007–2008 financial crises the economy has been extensively growing since around 2010 with per capita GDP levels expected to be as high as or higher than in Denmark. After being out in the political opposition most of the years since 2002, the Republicans managed to join a new government led by the Social Democrats and a recently established secessionist party, Framsókn (Liberals). Although the government has taken some steps to decrease dependence upon Danish transfers (which today only count for a few percentage points of GDP), and has declared a referendum on a Faroese constitution, it does not have secessionism as an objective.

Secessionism in Greenland

In 1721, the Lutheran missionary Hans Egede arrived in Greenland to re-Christianise what he thought would be survivors from the Old Norse settlements. However, these settlements were no longer in existence. Egede then turned to Christianising the local population, the indigenous Inuit people. Greenland had since 1721 been considered a trading colony, where the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company (KGH) regulated all commerce to and from Greenland, a system which functioned until 1950 (Ackrén, 2014). Even the country's administration was in the hands of KGH until 1912. By the mid-1900s, the Royal Greenlandic Trading Company had also gained social and administrative functions in Greenland.

During the Second World War, Greenland was under US protection. In 1953 Greenland became a county (*amt*) in the Danish Kingdom (Dahl, 1986), which meant that the colonial era had come to an end, but a post-colonial period started as new investments and new developments were made by the Danish state. This led to some important changes in Greenlandic society. Heavy social and economic changes appeared during the 1950s and 1960s, while the living standards in Greenland were enhanced and new housing and infrastructure were built, and the health sector was improved as well.

There were some political movements back in the 1940s – a Nazi-group in Sisimiut, a communist party in Qullissat, and a Greenlandic Social Democratic Party existed in 1955. These parties were not long-lived. The first real political party, the Inuit Party, was formed in 1964 as a protest party against the Danish treatment of Greenlanders in Greenland. The movement started in Copenhagen amongst well-educated Greenlanders, who saw their country from abroad and opposed how the Danish administration was functioning in Greenland (Ackrén, 2015). The Inuit Party considered that Greenlanders should be seen as a separate people according to the principle of self-determination, since they had their own culture, language and traditions. Another aim was to liberalise the business industry. The party was, however, not very successful and a few years later it ceased to exist.

When Denmark became a member of the EC in 1973, Greenland was forced to join, since it did not have the same rights as the Faroe Islands. Greenland had its own referendum, in which the majority (about 70%) voted against membership (Gad, 2014). This triggered the debate about Home Rule, which was implemented in 1979. Thereafter Greenland had a new EC referendum, which resulted in withdrawal from the EC in 1985. Instead, Greenland became an OCT (Overseas Country and Territory) within the EC (Gad, 2014). Other issues triggering a “new political movement” in the early 1970s were Denmark giving licenses to international oil companies to explore Greenlandic waters and the fact that many European fishing vessels were entering Greenlandic waters.

Particularly, the left of centre party Siumut (Forward), established in 1975–76, played a crucial role in mobilising against Danish rule. Siumut, with the centre-right Atassut (Solidarity), established in 1978, and the leftist Inuit Ataqatigiit (Inuit Community) established in 1976, all pressed for Home Rule negotiations. A home rule commission with Greenlandic

and Danish politicians was finally established, and the Home Rule Act was agreed upon and accepted in Greenland in a referendum in 1978. Faroese home rule was the key model.

From 2000 a new commission for self-government was established to evaluate the first 20 years of home rule. The political parties were also eager to develop the country in the direction of more autonomy. The commission realised that Greenland needed extended autonomy in various areas, and a new agreement with Denmark was entered into in November 2008. At the referendum a clear majority of the Greenlandic people voted in favour of the new Self-Government Act (75%). The Act was implemented on June 21st 2009 (Ackrén, 2015). In the preamble the Greenlandic people are defined as a people according to international law with the right to self-determination. This means that Greenland can secede from the Danish Realm in the future if the population has the will to do so. The preamble also states that equality and mutual respect should be held between Denmark and Greenland and that the agreement is between equal partners (*Lov om Grønlands Selvstyre*).

The largest change between the Home Rule Act of 1979 and the Self-Government Act of 2009 relates to economics and natural resources. The block grant is now fixed at DKK 3.4 billion (about €42 million) according to 2009 prices. A yearly adjustment is made in relation to inflation. Natural resources are now in the hands of Greenland, and Greenland has also received a bit more room for manoeuvre in international relations.

Since the latest election (2014) five parties are represented in parliament, Siumut (social democrats), Inuit Ataqatigiit (Inuit community; left) and Partii Naleraq (Compass needle; left-conservatives) which constitute the coalition, while the other two parties; Demokraatit (Democrats; social liberals) and Atassut (Solidarity; right-conservatives) are in opposition. Siumut, Inuit Ataqatigiit, Demokraatit and Partii Naleraq all lean towards independence, while Atassut leans towards unionism with Denmark. The government is working to develop a Greenlandic constitution, while the political discussion is between those who opt for a kind of associate statehood with Denmark and those who favour complete independence.

Secessionism and its external dynamics

Although starting at different periods of time, secessionism in the Faroe Islands and Greenland is largely influenced by external relations. In both cases protests started in Denmark amongst native intellectuals influenced by international cultural and political movements, and in both cases WWII had a great influence. The developments in Iceland have always provided a “role-model”, especially for Faroese secessionists.

In the Greenlandic case the establishment of political parties came later, primarily as a result of the decolonisation process during the 1960s and 1970s. On another note indigenous movements became a new political force in several parts of the world, which also may be seen as a result of Greenlandic political awakening.

Both regions have developed their home rule during times of self-governance, and how far it is possible to actually stretch the home rule/self-government is an ever-present question. The pro-independence government in the Faroe Islands back in 1998 did for instance come up with a White Book and worked on a proposal for a constitution. Today both countries are at work on constitutions of their own, and a referendum on a Faroese constitution has been declared for 2018. A possible date for a Greenlandic referendum is still left unknown. The main difference between the island regions is that the Faroe Islands are more economically prepared for independence, but the political will is hesitant; on the other hand, in Greenland there is a clear political will, but the economy is not in order.

In small island jurisdictions as Greenland and the Faroes, politics usually swing between secession and counter-secession movements, but processes of globalisation, including the intensified geopolitical and economic interests in Arctic development will keep pushing forward new limits and strategies for the two jurisdictions in international affairs and challenge their position within the Danish Realm (Eythórsson and Hovgaard 2013; Eythórsson and Hovgaard, forthcoming).

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