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Arctic Circle Student Briefing

Arctic Circle Student Briefing Greenland and the Arctic

October 2021

Greenland and the Arctic

The 2021 Arctic Circle Assembly took place in Reykjavik October 14-17. The program offered a wide range of interesting topics. Topics related to Greenland sparked particular interests among participants due to the variety of panels and discussions on topics related to Greenland. Greenland had speakers from all levels of the society participating in panels and discussions. It was obvious to participants that Greenland is an actor in the Arctic whose geopolitical significance has grown quite rapidly in recent years. Less than a month prior to the Arctic Circle Assembly, the launch of a new Arctic Circle Mission Council called "Greenland and the Arctic" was announced. "The aim is to improve the engagement with Greenland by bringing together people who are active in issues of importance to Greenland". Greenland's increased participation in the Arctic Circle can be linked with Greenland's autonomy in 2009 and increased power over own foreign relations. In 2005, Denmark passed an Act that gave full powers to the Government of Greenland to negotiate and conclude agreements in cases that relate solely to matters related to Greenland. Greenland had since 1979 gained and exercised foreign policy de facto but the Act meant that this practice became recognized law.

Greenland did not only have participants from Greenland but also from their diplomatic missions abroad. Inuuteq Holm Olsen is an expert on Greenland foreign policy who serves as the Head of Greenland Representation to the EU in Brussels. Prior to that he served as Head of Representation at the Greenland Representation at the Danish Embassy in Washington. Together with Sara Olsvig, from the University of Greenland, he presented the work of the Greenland Constitutional Commission whose work is to draft a new constitution for Greenland. This presentation took place on the 14th of October and both Olsvig and Olsen took questions from the audience.

Less than a month prior to the Arctic Circle Assembly, Iceland and Greenland signed a joint declaration on increased co-operation between the two countries. To those who attended the panels on Greenland, it became apparent that not only has Greenland's significance in the Arctic increased rapidly in recent years, it will most likely continue to do so in the coming years. In June this year, the Kingdom of Denmark decided to give Greenland a seat at the table at the Arctic Council. Denmark is not in the Arctic and the only reason for why Denmark has a seat in the Arctic Council is because of Greenland. Giving Greenland a seat at the table was therefore long overdue. This will result in a greater and more central role in the Arctic Council. It will therefore be very interesting to follow Greenland's participation in Arctic politics in coming years.