

# A GIANT LEAP TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

*With an all-new Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Faroe Islands moves decisively to integrate into the international community, setting out to open representation offices in New York, Moscow and Geneva—and to attract immigration to the islands.*

**I**MMEDIATELY AFTER taking office in February 2008, the newly formed coalition government of the Faroe Islands did something that no previous government of the country had ventured to do: establishing a Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

With the increase in activities already apparent in the former Department of Foreign Affairs under the Prime Minister's Office, the creation of the new Ministry should come as no surprise—however, said one of the officials who moved office: “This could be a very significant step for the Faroes... It may indicate a new level of maturity in terms of geopolitical awareness.”

So we asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself, Högni Hoydal, to expand on the significance of his new office. He said: “In brief, the idea behind establishing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to help prepare the Faroes to become an independent and equal partner in the international community—and a place that attracts more people.”



For the uninitiated—especially those hopelessly fascinated by the level of independence and initiative already so evident in the Faroes—this may give pause for a thought.

The Minister's statement is clearly in line with the philosophy of the national independence movement, a movement which has fought for a century with the conviction that in order to realize its full potential, Faroe has to gain full sovereignty. And 48,000 is still an exceedingly small population, even if the relatively stable number may impress a few people scattered across the Northern Periphery area. In other words, Mr Hoydal stressed the importance of influencing population development to

reverse a subtle emigration trend that has surfaced in recent years.

He then addressed the state of dependency that characterizes the Faroes in most areas of foreign relations, traditionally a subject of political controversy. It used to be a tug of war as much between the independence movement and its counterpart at home, the loyalists, as between the Faroes and Denmark. However, there's a growing consensus across partisan lines that the Faroes as a country has to make its own plans more proactively, whether or not this is within the Kingdom of Denmark.

Regardless, one may argue, there are bound to be numerous steps that the Faroes will have to take in order to

*Minister of Foreign Affairs Högni Hoydal in front of Tinganes offices; view of Tinganes, from Tórshavn's Eastern Marina (bottom left).*

Faroes into a center from which to act and conduct our business through direct, dynamic, international cooperation in all fields.”

“This is in my opinion the most crucial factor in stimulating population growth,” Mr Hoydal said.

He also referred broadly to multilateral and bilateral institutions, membership in international organizations, free trade agreements, cooperation across borders in the areas of education and scientific research, transnational labor market and health care coordination.

“At this point, our priorities are focused on extending the Hoyvík Agreement to encompass other countries in the North Atlantic region, EFTA [European Free Trade Association] membership, a four freedoms agreement with the EU, and independent participation in organizations such as the WTO [World Trade Organization], UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization], and the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development].”

develop its presence on the global scene, like any other young nation. But again, more and more Faroese reason that you can't expect another country to do what's essentially your job—they have issues of their own to deal with.

Said the Minister: “We recognize that the precondition for modern development and progress—social, economic, cultural—is direct international cooperation without intermediaries.”

“With the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” he added, “we want to build the infrastructure needed for us as a people to be able to rise above the mental, political and commercial position of periphery. So we're going to extend the infrastructure that is required to develop the

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Mr Hoydal said that the Faroese Government has plans to open representation offices or missions in places of prominence, including New York, Moscow and Geneva, to complement today's Representation Offices in London, Brussels, and Copenhagen.

He touched upon several related topics such as the need to forge a Faro-

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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Faroese Government, is responsible for the establishment of a cohesive foreign policy for the Faroe Islands, and to oversee, administer and coordinate matters relating to foreign affairs.

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ese foreign policy platform, take part in development aid, promote exports, and strengthen competitive identity.

“I have no doubt that the geopolitical awareness of the Faroes is growing. Nonetheless, our political system has until now been kept in a vacuum, where political resources have been spent on looking inward with others taking care of foreign affairs. Removing political barriers for international cooperation is a key issue.”

