

After having payed undivided attention to fishing for many years, Faroese society appears to be awakening to its natural advantage for maritime business in a broader sense, according to lawyer and legal adviser Annfinn V. Hansen.

SINCE THE RECENT revamp of the Faroe Islands International Ship Register (FAS), significant growth in the merchant shipping sector is fast becoming a real possibility for the Faroese. As the number of merchant vessels flying the Merkið ('The Mark' or 'The Banner') keeps rising toward an expected 100 within the next year, more maritime consultancies are lining up to serve an industry that has been up and coming for a long time in the North Atlantic archipelago.

Things can move very quickly in such a well interconnected microcosmos of less than 50,000 inhabitants. And since the country already has the infrastructure to support a large fleet of ocean going ships, the development of a full-fledged merchant shipping industry is seen to require relatively little time and effort.

Part of the reason is the deep-rooted maritime culture of the islanders, a substantial number of whom are sailors, either working on domestic or overseas fishing vessels or serving in international merchant shipping and related industries including offshore oil and gas.

"The Faroe Islands has long had a large number of trained professionals in the maritime industry," said Annfinn V. Hansen, one of the country's leading business lawyers.

"Traditionally the Faroese have been very good at creating opportunities and economic value from fishing and related



JENS KRISTIAN VANG

Annfinn V. Hansen, seated, with partner Djóni Thomassen; container ship Arnarfell (below).

MERCHANT SHIPPING INDUSTRY PRESENTS 'OBVIOUS OPPORTUNITY'

activities such as seafood processing and trade, but what is now happening is that people are becoming more aware of business opportunities found in the maritime sector from a broader perspective as fishing doesn't require much manpower today compared to earlier. To many people, this process is a natural extension of existing activities with the underlying understanding that it represents an obvious opportunity."

The challenge for the Faroese, according to Mr. Hansen, is to increase focus on the merchant shipping sector

and make sure they have the qualifications, skills, and competencies required.

"It doesn't take very much for a country like the Faroes to fully develop an ideal environment for this industry because this society is already in tune with it.

"The general level of education, the communications infrastructure, the proud maritime traditions, for example — these factors take us a long way although, clearly, we need to pay more attention to the management and

Ship registry and related services is one of the firm's specialties and Mr. Hansen has long been a well-known figure in the maritime business. As chairman of the Shipowner Association for Cargo Vessels, he's frequently consulted by national authorities and business interests, not least in questions of a legal nature.

"We handle a very broad range of business and legal cases," he said. "You may say that's the nature of the law business in the Faroe Islands. This country is much of a miniature model of the Scandinavian countries and you'll find virtually everything here that is found in those countries, albeit in much smaller scale. For that reason we have to be able to handle very large and complex cases that involve, for example, government agencies or the state; but the size of the market makes it impossible to specialize narrowly in, say, only one aspect of law. We have to be both specialists and generalists. But again, we have an extensive network of specialists in neighboring countries that we work with when necessary."

ALL LEVELS OF COURT: Mr. Hansen, who has been a lawyer since 1989 and is admitted to practice in Supreme Court, formed the law firm Hansen & Thomassen a few years later together with his colleague Djóni Thomassen, later to be joined by two more lawyers, Rannvá Ragnarsdóttir and Jens Andrias Vinther, both of whom are also partners in the firm.

In addition to shipping and maritime law, Hansen & Thomassen offer advice and legal representation in matters of ship finance and transactions, corporate finance and transactions, contract law, joint ventures and partnership agreements, industrial and intellectual property, mergers and acquisitions, mediation, and more.

"Foreign shipping companies looking to register their vessels in the Faroes

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Bankruptcy, Debt Collection, Real Estate Transactions, Criminal and Civil Litigation at any Faroese or Danish Court, Mediation.

receive business and legal advice according to their specific needs and requirements," Mr. Hansen added. "Fortunately, we haven't seen any major conflict as yet in connection with the FAS registry but that might have something to do with us and our clients being well prepared and thorough. Well, should it become necessary, we're admitted to practice at all levels of court in the Kingdom of Denmark."

