Lessons to Be Learned on Autonomy and on Human Rights from the Faeroese Situation Since 1992

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1. Why Study the Faeroese Case and the Danish Autonomy Model?

Sovereignty discussions and constitutional questions have been on the world agenda the last years. Some states transfer decision making to a supernatural level and this is followed closely by the medias and take the headlines in the newspapers. However, at the same time there is a struggle for more sovereignty and independency resulting in an increased number of states and in an increasing number of autonomies. This development is not put on the front pages of the newspapers although it is an important characteristic of the world development of our time.

After World War I the number of states were 51. Today the number is close to 200 with a heavy increase since World War II. More than a fourth of the states are ministates, defined as states with a population of less than 1 million. After World War II the only ministates were the six well known ministates of Europe. It means that the increase in the number of ministates has been extremely strong.

The number of autonomies is unknown but is normally estimated to be at a level about 500 worldwide. Also for autonomies a heavy increase in the number has taken place.

To summarize; this development implies that there in all present and future ministates and autonomies is a vivid interest in knowledge of the economic, social and political performance of existing autonomies and ministates.

The autonomies are based on different autonomy models. One of those is called the Danish autonomy model. This model was in an early form in function for Iceland until Iceland fifty years ago decided to become a ministate. Today the model per se is in function for the Faeroe Islands and for Greenland and elements of it have been integrated in other autonomy models.
A short characteristic of the model is the following: (1) it is a pragmatic model; (2) it is future-oriented by focusing on income flows (i.e., transfer payments, mainly in form of block grants and income creating activities) and not on stock considerations (subsurface rights, ownership etc.); and (3) it is a cooperation model (autonomy not given by constitution or by international agreement. And the autonomies have two ordinary member seats of the Danish Parliament).

The model has internationally been considered extremely successful and well-functioning. This evaluation has been based on two facts. Firstly, the Greenlandic experiences. The Danish modernization policy of Greenland started 1950 and in 1979 Greenland got home rule. During the last 15 years Greenland has been able to take over all functions mentioned in the Home rule Act and to continue the development of a modern society with increased weight on internationalization to a degree that Greenland has become an ideal for the fourth world peoples.

Secondly, the very positive international judgement of the Danish autonomy model has been based on the Faeroese experiences. Iceland, being a ministate and the Faeroe Islands, being an autonomy, have been compared. It has been noticed that a high living standard, self-determination and self-government and care taking of own cultural and social values could be realized almost equally in a ministate and in an autonomy model, which was not even legally secured by Constitution or by an international agreement.

Denmark has been called the most friendly former colonial power of the world.

2. What Is the Faeroese Case?

The Faeroese case is an economic catastrophe and a political crisis visible from October 1992, deepened by Danish political advises and requests and still without any real Danish political consciousness and responsibility for finding a solution although the Faeroe Islands are part of the Danish Kingdom.

The economic catastrophe is seen by (1) gross domestic product has decreased by 20–25%, (2) unemployment increasing from nil to 20%, (3) mass emigration of especially young families and highly educated persons, implying a net emigration on 5000 persons out of the former population on 48000, (4) municipalities going bankrupt, (5) by no investments, and (6) the financial sector mainly functioning as an enormous debt administration.

The political crisis was seen by the Faeroese politicians' total paralysis and by their accept of Danish dictates up to the first ever held election out of schedule which took place in July 1994 resulting in half of the homerule