

Greenlanders vote for more independence from Denmark

On 25 November 2008 an overwhelming majority of Greenlanders voted for more independence from Denmark. The referendum took place after Denmark and Greenland had established a Commission for the reorganisation of Greenland's self-government in 2004. The "Grønland-dansk selvstyrelsekommission" was mandated to discuss an extended "home rule" for Greenland. The Commission submitted its report earlier this year, including a proposal for a law on Greenland's self-government.

The strengthening of self-government is met with support in both Nuuk and Copenhagen. With the positive outcome of the referendum in Greenland the legislative proposal on self-government will be discussed by the Danish parliament in February 2009 and a respective law is expected to enter into force in mid-2009. The extended self-government is based on the principle of self-determination under International Law and will leave the decision whether Greenland should be independent or remain part of the Danish kingdom to the people of Greenland. Another important change will be that Greenland's "landsstyret" will be able to take over responsibilities concerning the criminal justice system and the administration of justice.

As two unique island communities Åland and Greenland have many commonalities. Greenland is an integral part of the kingdom of Denmark since 1953 and was granted self-government in 1979. Since then Greenland has been a strong autonomy. Greenland's economy is mainly defined by the fishing industry. In fact, the protection of the local fishing industry was the decisive reason for Greenland's termination of EC membership in 1985. Greenland is populated by roughly 57.000 people, 88% of which belong to the Inuit. With the new law on self-government both, Danish and Kalaallisut will be recognized as official languages in Greenland.

Sarah Stephan, research assistant