

# Greenland and Faroe Islands seek statehood

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Greenland is moving towards recognition as a largely sovereign country within Denmark, spurred by President Trump's attempts to incorporate it into the United States.

Along with the Faroe Islands and a Swedish-speaking part of Finland, the territory is involved in a plan to grant it equal status with other Nordic nations in the region's chief political forum.

The two Danish territories, which already govern most of their affairs outside foreign and security policy, are seeking a new settlement with Copenhagen that would grant them more of the trappings of statehood but fall short of outright independence, at least for the time being.

Nordic officials said the talks had been prompted by Trump's aggressive manoeuvres towards Greenland and the advent of a predatory great-power rivalry in the High North, where Russia and China have also been flexing their muscles.

A large majority of the 57,000 Greenlanders share an ambition to ultimately break away from Denmark but that goal has receded as a result of Trump's threats, according to diplomats from across the region.

The Faroes, with a population of 55,000, have a stronger economic basis for independence than Greenland but have traditionally been more ambivalent about a full-scale divorce.

That is changing as even the territory's Unionist party, which forms part of the new Faroese coalition government, has agreed to pursue a "completely new model" for relations with Denmark.

Officials say consensus is building for a first step under which Greenland, the Faroes and the Aland Islands — a mostly autonomous and Swedish-speaking region within Finland — would gain "equal participation" with the other countries in the Nordic Council, the region's joint political forum.

A commission of diplomats from each of the five Nordic states and the three territories started work on the practicalities in mid-April.

On paper, this would be a relatively modest procedural update, giving the Greenlanders, Faroese and Alanders national delegations of their own instead of them forming part of the Danish and Finnish blocs, as they do at present.

However, one Faroese official said the symbolism of their country presenting itself to the world on an equal footing with the other Nordic states would mark an important shift and a stepping stone to national representation in other multilateral bodies, including the Olympic Games.

Ville Vayrynen, a centre-right Finnish MP who is also president of the Nordic Council, said the outbreak of geopolitical turmoil in what had

historically been a "low-tension" region had galvanised co-operation between the "eight countries".

The bigger prize for Greenland and the Faroes is an overhaul of their constitutional place within Denmark.

Diplomatic sources said the Faroese had put out feelers to Copenhagen in recent months but the talks had not really taken off and were effectively frozen as Denmark goes through the longest limbo of coalition negotiations on record after its election in March.

Heini i Skorini, an international relations scholar at the University of the Faroe Islands, said the question of independence had temporarily been put on hold but the territory's political parties, including the Unionists, were unanimously frustrated with the present arrangement.

The Unionists "have again and again emphasised that we are not satisfied with the status quo and wish for more inclusion and more competencies when it comes to foreign affairs, including independent membership in various international organisations," he said.

One much-discussed model would be a so-called compact of free association. This would involve Greenland and the Faroes becoming fully independent with Denmark's consent but also ceding to the Danes preferential rights over issues such as military deployments.

The US has similar deals with several South Pacific island states and has contemplated offering Greenland a pact along these lines.

Other options include the status that Iceland enjoyed from 1918 to 1944, as an independent state freely associated in a personal union with the King of Denmark; and the arrangement that the Cook Islands have with New Zealand.

Behind the façade of Nordic comity, there is also a certain amount of exasperation. Some officials question whether Greenland has enough state capacity to take on any more international duties, noting that its government has sometimes appeared overwhelmed.

Others are frustrated that the intra-Nordic reforms are not more sweeping and ambitious at a time when the region's delicate diplomatic system has been so abruptly upset.

The old Cold War model of "Nordic balance", a studiously undramatic patchwork of Nato members, neutrals and overlapping trade blocs, has been cast aside over the past four years. Sweden and Finland have entered the military alliance, Iceland has announced a referendum on applying to join the European Union and Norway has also tilted towards EU membership.

For the first time, there is a serious prospect of all five countries being united under both the EU and Nato, where they could collectively wield considerable clout. Many figures would like to see the Nordic states pool more of their thinking, especially on defence.

