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Aspects regarding Public Administration and Diplomacy of Iceland

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Abstract: *Public administration in Iceland has several unique characteristics and peculiarities that are related to small scale governance, high level of trust, decentralization and local autonomy, integration of digital technology, environmental focus, cultural influence, gender equality, resilience and crisis management, international cooperation. Icelandic diplomats focus on areas where the country can have a significant impact, such as environmental advocacy, human rights, and multilateral cooperation. Iceland's diplomacy is shaped by its unique geographical location, small population, and historical and cultural context. As a small island nation in the North Atlantic, Iceland has developed a distinctive approach to international relations that emphasizes neutrality, multilateralism, and environmental advocacy.*

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Introduction

According to the ancient manuscript Landnámabók, the colonization of Iceland began in AD 874, when the Norwegian chieftain Ingólfur Arnarson became the first permanent inhabitant of the island. (Tomasson, 1980) In the centuries that followed, the Scandinavians colonized Iceland, bringing with them thralli (slaves, or serfs) of Celtic origin.

The island was governed as an independent community by the local parliament, the Althing, one of the oldest still-functioning legislative assemblies in the world. After a period of turmoil, Iceland came under Norwegian rule in the 13th century. The formation of the Kalmar Union in 1397 unified the kingdoms of Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Iceland also entered with Norway in that union, but on its dissolution by the withdrawal of Sweden in 1523, Iceland came under Danish control. The Danish Kingdom introduced Lutheranism to Iceland in 1550. (Hjálmarsson, 1993)

Following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Iceland's struggle for independence took shape, culminating in the achievement of independence in 1918 and the establishment of the Kingdom of Iceland, with the head of state being the monarch of Denmark, a state with which he was in personal union. Personal union is the legal situation resulting when two or more different states have the same monarch, although their laws, borders and interests remain distinct. It differs from a political union and a federation, which are considered to be a single state.

During Denmark's occupation in World War II, Iceland voted overwhelmingly to become a republic in 1944, ending the last remaining formal ties with Denmark.

Iceland is a small state as defined by the small-state literature in traditional terms, i.e. as regards its population, size of GDP, military capacity and capabilities of the foreign service – the only exception could be its relatively large territory, both in terms of land and its exclusive fishing zone. The position of small states in the international system is characterized by vulnerability. (Þórhallsson, 2005) Small states are more vulnerable than large states in political, economic and strategic terms (Archer & Nugent, 2002; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997; Common-wealth Secretariat, 1985).

Public Administration in Iceland

Public administration in Iceland has several unique characteristics and peculiarities that distinguish it from other countries. These aspects are influenced by Iceland's small population, geographical isolation, and cultural values. Here are some of the key peculiarities:

Small Scale Governance

- *Population Size:* With a population of just over 370,000, Iceland's public administration operates on a much smaller scale compared to most other nations. This allows for more direct interaction between citizens and government officials, often leading to a more personalized approach to governance.

Local authorities in Iceland are considerably more responsive to citizen's demands than is compatible with the elitist theory (Kristinsson, 2009).

- *Close-knit Society:* The small population means that the public sector is more interconnected, with easier communication channels between various levels of government and citizens. This can lead to faster decision-making and more responsive public services.

High Level of Trust

- *Trust in Government:* Icelandic society generally exhibits a high level of trust in public institutions and government officials. This trust is a crucial element of public administration, fostering cooperation between the government and citizens.
- *Transparency and Anti-Corruption:* The high level of trust is partly due to Iceland's strong emphasis on transparency and low levels of corruption. Public officials are held to high ethical standards, and there are robust mechanisms for accountability.

Decentralization and Local Autonomy

- *Municipal Governance:* Iceland is divided into numerous municipalities, each with significant autonomy. These municipalities are responsible for many public services, including education, social services, and infrastructure. The decentralization allows local governments to tailor services to the specific needs of their communities.
- *Challenges of Decentralization:* While decentralization empowers local governance, it also presents challenges, especially for smaller municipalities that may struggle with limited resources. The Icelandic government has occasionally considered consolidating municipalities to address these issues.

Integration of Digital Technology

- *E-Government:* Iceland is a leader in digital governance, with a strong focus on e-government initiatives. Citizens have access to a wide range of public services online, from tax filings to healthcare services, which increases efficiency and accessibility.
- *Digital Society:* The high level of internet penetration and digital literacy in Iceland supports the widespread use of digital tools in public administration. This digital infrastructure is essential given the country's remote and sparsely populated areas.

Environmental Focus

- *Sustainability and Environmental Protection:* Iceland's public administration places a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability, reflecting the country's reliance on natural resources like geothermal energy and fishing. Policies related to environmental protection, renewable energy, and sustainable development are central to public administration.
- *Climate Change Leadership:* Iceland is often at the forefront of global environmental initiatives, advocating for climate change mitigation and sustainable practices both domestically and internationally.

Cultural Influence

- *Consensus Culture:* Icelandic culture values consensus and dialogue, which is reflected in its public administration. Decision-making processes often involve extensive consultation with stakeholders, and there is a strong emphasis on reaching broad agreement before implementing policies.
- *Social Cohesion:* The homogeneity of Icelandic society and strong social ties contribute to a cohesive public administration system where policies are generally well-aligned with public values and expectations.

Gender Equality

- *Progressive Gender Policies:* Iceland is known for its progressive stance on gender equality, which is evident in its public administration. The country has implemented policies to promote gender equality in the workplace, including in government, and has one of the highest levels of female participation in politics and public administration globally.
- *Parental Leave and Family Policies:* Public administration in Iceland also emphasizes family-friendly policies, such as generous parental leave, which supports work-life balance and gender equality.

Resilience and Crisis Management

- *Natural Disasters:* Given its location, Iceland is prone to natural disasters like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. The public administration has developed strong systems for disaster preparedness and crisis management, ensuring swift and effective responses to such events.
- *Economic Resilience:* Iceland's public administration has shown resilience in managing economic crises, such as the 2008 financial collapse. The government's quick and decisive actions during crises have often been praised internationally.

International Cooperation

- *Nordic Collaboration:* Iceland collaborates closely with other Nordic countries, sharing best practices and participating in joint initiatives that enhance public administration. This cooperation often extends to areas like social policy, education, and environmental protection.
- *Global Engagement:* Despite its small size, Iceland actively participates in international organizations and is committed to global issues, such as human rights and sustainable development. Icelandic public administration often incorporates international norms and standards into its policies.

These peculiarities make Iceland's public administration unique, allowing it to effectively govern a small, dispersed population while maintaining high levels of trust, transparency, and responsiveness.

Public administration in Iceland is characterized by a strong emphasis on transparency, efficiency, and decentralization. Iceland's government operates under a parliamentary system, with the executive, legislative, and judicial branches each playing distinct roles. Here's an overview:

Executive Branch

President: The President of Iceland is the head of state, primarily a ceremonial role with limited powers. The President is elected by the people for a four-year term and can veto legislation, which then goes to a national referendum.

Prime Minister: The head of government is the Prime Minister, who is usually the leader of the majority party or coalition in the Alþingi (Parliament). The Prime Minister is responsible for overseeing the executive branch and implementing laws.

Ministries: The government is organized into various ministries, each headed by a minister who is responsible for specific sectors such as finance, health, education, and foreign affairs. These ministries implement policies and manage public services.

Legislative Branch

Alþingi (Parliament): The Alþingi is Iceland's national parliament and is a unicameral body with 63 members elected every four years through proportional representation. It is responsible for making laws, approving the budget, and overseeing the executive branch. Iceland has a long history of parliamentary governance, with the Alþingi being one of the oldest parliaments in the world, established in 930 AD.

Judicial Branch

Courts: The judicial system in Iceland is independent of the executive and legislative branches. The judiciary is responsible for interpreting the law and ensuring justice. The system includes district courts, the Supreme Court, and specialized courts like the Labour Court and Appellate Court.

Supreme Court: The highest court in Iceland is the Supreme Court (Hæstiréttur Íslands), which handles the most significant legal issues and appeals from lower courts.

Local Government

Municipalities: Iceland is divided into several municipalities (sveitarfélög), each with its local council. These councils are responsible for local administration, including education, transport, social services, and zoning. Local governments have a degree of autonomy but operate within the framework set by the national government.

Decentralization: Icelandic governance emphasizes decentralization, with local authorities playing a significant role in managing public services and resources.

Public Services

Iceland offers a comprehensive welfare system, including universal healthcare, free education, and various social services. Public administration in these areas is efficient and well-regulated, with a focus on equity and accessibility.

Transparency and Accountability

Iceland ranks highly in international transparency indexes. The government actively promotes transparency and accountability through mechanisms like the National Audit Office, which oversees public spending, and various anti-corruption laws and policies.

Challenges and Reforms

Like many countries, Iceland faces challenges in public administration, including managing resources efficiently, maintaining

transparency, and addressing issues related to decentralization. Recent reforms have focused on modernizing the public sector, improving digital governance, and enhancing public participation in decision-making.

Iceland's public administration system reflects its values of democracy, transparency, and social welfare, and it continues to evolve to meet the needs of its citizens.

Iceland is divided into regions, constituencies and municipalities. There are 8 regions used mainly for statistical purposes; district court jurisdictions also use an older version of the regional division.

Until 2003, constituencies for legislative elections were the same as regions, but through an amendment to the Constitution, they were changed to the current form of 6 constituencies

- Reykjavík North and Reykjavík South (regions of the city);
- South-West (4 non-contiguous urban areas around Reykjavík);
- North-West and North-East (the northern half, divided into two);
- South (the southern half, excluding Reykjavík and its suburbs).

In Iceland there are 74 municipalities that deal with local government, their duties being in areas such as schools, transport and zoning. These are actually Iceland's second-level divisions, as constituencies are only used for elections and statistical purposes (Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, 2020).

The internal political situation

Iceland was the first country in the world to form an all-female political party. Called the "Women's List" or "Women's Alliance" (Kvennalistinn), it appeared in 1983 with the aim of promoting the political, economic and social needs of women. Although it disbanded in 1999, merging with the Social Democratic Alliance, it left its mark on Icelandic politics: all major parties have a minimum quota of 40% for women. In 2011, Iceland ranked 2nd in the world for the strength of democratic institutions and 13th for transparency of government. The country has a high level of civic participation, with voter turnout of over 80%. The president is elected by direct vote for a 4-year mandate, without limit on the number of mandates. Presidential, legislative and local elections are held separately once every 4 years. The President of Iceland has a rather ceremonial and diplomatic role, but has the right to veto the laws voted by the parliament, and can subject them to a national referendum.

In 1980, Icelanders elected Vigdís Finnbogadóttir as president, the first woman in the world to be elected head of state by direct popular vote. She retired from office in 1996. The Head of Government is the Prime

Minister who, together with the Government, is responsible for the executive authority. The government is appointed by the president after the general legislative elections; this appointment is usually negotiated with the leaders of the political parties, who decide among themselves which parties can form the government and how to divide their functions, in order to have majority support in the Althing. Only after the party leaders reach a conclusion among themselves, or after a reasonable period of time has passed, does the president exercise this power and personally appoint the government. Iceland's governments have always been coalition governments, with two or more parties, with no political party ever gaining a majority in the Althing during the republican period. Parliament (Althing) has legislative powers. It is the oldest in the world, having been established in 930. It has a unicameral structure, the number of parliamentarians being 63, elected through a proportional voting system. (Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, 2020)

Iceland did not stop there: it was decided to draw up a new constitution that would free the country from exaggerated international financial power and virtual money. To write a new constitution, the citizens chose 25 residents from among 522 adults who were not part of any political party, but recommended by at least 30 other citizens. This document was not the result of the work of politicians, but was written on the Internet. The meetings between the 25 members of the commission were broadcast online, and citizens could send comments and suggestions, being witnesses while the Constitution took shape (Stan, 2022).

Aspects of International Icelandic Law

Iceland adheres to the principle of dualism with respect to the relation between municipal law and international law, Therefore, ratified international treaties do not assume the force of domestic law, but rather are only binding according to international law. The Supreme Court of Iceland has sought to interpret Icelandic law, as far as possible, in conformity with Iceland's international obligations. The Court has made several references to international obligations undertaken by Iceland, and it has interpreted both the Constitution and other laws in coherence with such obligations. Interestingly, these references include also instruments which have not been incorporated into Icelandic law, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The European Convention on Human Rights was incorporated into Icelandic law by Act No. 62/1994. Following its incorporation, its provisions can be directly invoked in court as domestic legislation. Other major human rights instruments ratified by Iceland, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and Convention on the Rights of the Child, have not been incorporated into Icelandic law (Mathiesen, 2019).

Iceland's Diplomatic Relations and Foreign Policy

Iceland's diplomacy is shaped by its unique geographical location, small population, and historical and cultural context. As a small island nation in the North Atlantic, Iceland has developed a distinctive approach to international relations that emphasizes neutrality, multilateralism, and environmental advocacy. Here are some key peculiarities of Icelandic diplomacy:

Emphasis on Peace and Neutrality

- *Non-Military Tradition:* Iceland has no standing military and has historically maintained a policy of neutrality. Instead, it relies on alliances, particularly with NATO, for its defense. This non-military tradition influences its diplomatic stance, often positioning Iceland as a neutral mediator in international disputes.
- *Peace Initiatives:* Iceland has been involved in various peace initiatives, promoting dialogue and conflict resolution. Reykjavik has hosted significant diplomatic meetings, such as the 1986 summit between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, which contributed to the end of the Cold War.

Strong Multilateral Engagement

- *Active Participation in International Organizations:* Despite its small size, Iceland is a proactive member of various international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), NATO, the European Economic Area (EEA), and the Arctic Council. Iceland's participation in these organizations allows it to influence global and regional policies, particularly in areas like human rights, environmental protection, and sustainable development.
- *Nordic Cooperation:* Iceland places a strong emphasis on cooperation with other Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland). This collaboration is evident in shared diplomatic efforts, regional security, and cultural initiatives.

Focus on Environmental Diplomacy

- *Climate Change Leadership:* Iceland is a leading voice in international efforts to combat climate change, reflecting its deep connection to nature and reliance on renewable energy. Icelandic diplomats advocate for strong climate policies in global forums, often highlighting the country's use of geothermal and hydroelectric energy as models for sustainable development.
- *Arctic Issues:* As an Arctic nation, Iceland plays a significant role in Arctic diplomacy. It advocates for sustainable development in the region, balancing economic interests with environmental protection. Iceland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council from 2019 to 2021 highlighted its leadership in this area.

Human Rights Advocacy

- *Gender Equality and Human Rights:* Iceland is renowned for its commitment to gender equality and human rights, both domestically and internationally. Icelandic diplomacy often emphasizes these values, advocating for women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and the protection of vulnerable populations in global forums.
- *Diplomatic Leadership:* Iceland has taken leadership roles in international human rights discussions, including sponsoring UN resolutions and participating in global campaigns against gender-based violence and discrimination.

Economic Diplomacy

- *Trade Relations:* Iceland's economy is heavily dependent on trade, particularly in seafood, aluminum, and renewable energy. Diplomatic efforts are focused on securing favorable trade agreements and access to markets, especially within the European Economic Area (EEA) and through bilateral agreements.
- *Tourism Diplomacy:* Tourism is a significant part of Iceland's economy, and diplomatic efforts often promote Iceland as a destination. The country's natural beauty, safety, and unique culture are highlighted in its international image, which helps boost tourism.

Limited Diplomatic Network

- *Small Diplomatic Corps:* Given its small population and limited resources, Iceland has a relatively small diplomatic corps with embassies in key locations. This necessitates a focus on strategic partnerships and multilateral diplomacy rather than widespread bilateral missions.
- *Diplomacy through Multilateralism:* Iceland compensates for its limited diplomatic presence by engaging robustly in multilateral organizations and

by forging strong alliances with other countries, particularly in Europe and North America.

Strategic Geopolitical Position

- *North Atlantic Location:* Iceland's strategic location in the North Atlantic has historically made it a point of interest for larger powers, particularly during the Cold War. While Iceland maintains its neutrality, it leverages its geopolitical position in negotiations, particularly in security and defense matters.
- *US-Iceland Relations:* The U.S. has had a significant presence in Iceland, particularly through the Keflavik Air Base, which was a key NATO installation during the Cold War. Iceland's relationship with the U.S. remains a central component of its foreign policy, particularly in security and defense.

Cultural Diplomacy

- *Promoting Icelandic Culture:* Iceland places a strong emphasis on cultural diplomacy, using its rich literary tradition, music, and arts to promote its national identity abroad. Cultural festivals, language programs, and artistic exchanges are often part of Iceland's diplomatic outreach.
- *Language and Literature:* Icelandic language and literature, including the famous sagas, are central to Iceland's cultural diplomacy. The country promotes its heritage through international events and cultural exchanges.

Adaptive and Pragmatic Approach

- *Flexibility in Alliances:* Iceland's small size and limited resources necessitate a flexible and pragmatic approach to diplomacy. The country often adapts its foreign policy to align with changing global dynamics, ensuring its interests are protected without being tied to rigid alliances or positions.
- *Crisis Management:* Iceland has demonstrated adaptability in crisis situations, such as the 2008 financial crisis, which had a significant impact on the country. Icelandic diplomacy during and after the crisis focused on rebuilding international confidence and securing economic recovery.

These peculiarities reflect Iceland's unique position in the world, balancing its small size and limited resources with a proactive and values-driven approach to diplomacy. Icelandic diplomats focus on areas where the country can have a significant impact, such as environmental advocacy, human rights, and multilateral cooperation.

The Danish-Icelandic Union Act, an agreement signed with Denmark on December 1, 1918 and valid for 25 years, recognized Iceland as

a completely sovereign state in personal union with Denmark. The government of Iceland established an embassy in Copenhagen and asked Denmark to handle Iceland's foreign policy. Danish embassies around the world began to fly two coats of arms and two flags: of the Kingdom of Denmark and the Kingdom of Iceland.

Iceland, a member country of the UN, NATO, EFTA and OECD, maintains diplomatic and commercial relations with practically all countries of the world, but its ties with the Nordic countries, with Germany, with the United States, with Canada and with other NATO countries are particularly close. Historically, due to cultural, economic and linguistic similarities, Iceland is a Nordic country, and participates in intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms through the Nordic Council.

Iceland is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), which gives it access to the European Union's single market. It is not a member of the EU, but in July 2009 Iceland's parliament, the Althing, voted to apply for EU membership and officially submitted its application on 17 July 2009. However, in 2013, opinion polls showed that many Icelanders opposed membership; after the 2013 elections, the two parties that formed the new government - the center Progressive Party and the right-wing Independence Party - announced that they would organize a referendum on EU accession.

Iceland's foreign policy is determined by its status as an island country, its geographical location in the Arctic Region and the precariousness of its internal resources. All this argues Iceland's concern for international maritime law, the predilection for cooperation with the Scandinavian states, the USA, Canada and Russia in various formats of regional cooperation, covering the fields: economy, ecology, security, the exploitation of living resources of the sea and marine ecology. Joining the United Nations in 1946, Iceland is also one of the founders of NATO in 1949. In 1970, Iceland was admitted to the European Free Trade Association (EFTA/EFTA). In October 1991, Iceland and the other EFTA/EFTA members completed negotiations with the EU and formed the European Economic Area (EEA/EEA). Iceland is also a member of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and an associate member of the Schengen area since 2000.

Iceland is active within the UN, affirming the need to reform the organization. It is an important provider of technical and financial assistance, both multilaterally and bilaterally. International cooperation for sustainable development and an emphasis on the peaceful resolution of disputes are also core elements of Icelandic foreign policy. The relationship with the EU On July 16, 2009, Iceland addressed to the Swedish Presidency the request to join the EU, arguing its request through its membership in the European

continent, the need to expand the country's security and ensure long-term economic stability. In 2013, Iceland's accession negotiations to the EU were delayed and subsequently suspended, the objective of accession to the EU being currently abandoned. (Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, 2020)

Iceland is actively involved in the work of international institutions as well as in bilateral co-operation with other states. The role of the foreign service is to maintain reliable international contacts, safeguard Iceland's interests and make sure that its voice is heard in international fora. Through its accession to international conventions, the international legal framework and courts Iceland assumes obligations and at the same time enjoys rights which can be of major significance for the nation's well-being.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs pursues Iceland's interests abroad, whether this involves ensuring rights to sustainable resource exploitation or promoting responsible environmental and climate policies. Guided by the interests of Icelandic industry, consumers and individuals, its efforts focus on maintaining access to international markets and promoting free trade. Marketing campaigns abroad are supported and Icelandic culture and arts are promoted in Icelandic embassies throughout the world.

Iceland is known for its peaceful and collaborative diplomatic relations, being an active member of the international community. Although a small nation, Iceland has a significant international presence, particularly in multilateral organizations.

1. Relations with the United States

Iceland and the United States have a close relationship, especially from a security perspective. During the Cold War, Iceland was an important ally of the US and NATO due to its strategic location in the North Atlantic. The US maintained a military base in Keflavík until 2006.

2. Relations with the European Union

Iceland is not a member of the European Union (EU), but is part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Schengen Agreement. This allows Iceland to participate in the EU's internal market and have a say in certain economic regulations. Iceland started EU accession negotiations in 2010, but these were suspended in 2013.

3. Relations with the Nordic countries

Iceland maintains extremely close relations with the other Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland). These countries collaborate within the Nordic Council and share similar cultural and political values.

4. Relations with Russia

Relations between Iceland and Russia are complex, especially in the context of tensions between the West and Russia. Although Iceland supports EU sanctions against Russia, fisheries cooperation in the Barents Sea remains an important aspect of bilateral relations.

5. Relations with China

Iceland was one of the first European countries to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1956. In 2013, Iceland became the first European country to sign a free trade agreement with China, highlighting the economic importance of this relationship.

6. Participation in international organizations

Iceland is a member of several international organizations, including NATO, the Council of Europe, and the UN. Iceland is also known for its commitment to issues related to human rights, climate change and environmental protection.

Overall, Iceland's foreign policy is oriented towards multilateralism, collective security and international trade, with an emphasis on close relations with its traditional allies and economic partners.

Diplomatic and Cooperative Relations between Iceland and Romania

After the anti-communist Revolution in Romania, Iceland became a close partner of Romania and a supporter of our country's integration into NATO. Romania's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has led to the strengthening of relations between the two allied states.

Romanian-Icelandic bilateral relations are governed by an important development potential, including within the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area. The political dialogue included the visit at the level of heads of state in 2007 and the visit of the Icelandic Minister of Foreign Affairs to Bucharest in 2012.

Diplomatic Representation

Iceland and Romania maintain diplomatic relations characterized by mutual respect and cooperation, though the interactions between the two countries are relatively modest compared to Iceland's relations with some of its larger partners.

On May 16, 1956, diplomatic relations were established between Romania and Iceland at the level of a legation, which were elevated to the level of an embassy on December 31, 1963.

2021 marked the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

After 1989, Iceland became a close partner of Romania and a supporter of our country's integration into NATO. Romania's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization led to the amplification of relations between the two allied states.

Key Aspects of Iceland-Romania Diplomatic Relations:

Establishment of Diplomatic Relations:

Iceland and Romania established formal diplomatic relations on October 20, 1956. Since then, the two countries have engaged in various forms of bilateral cooperation.

Bilateral Cooperation:

Cooperation between Iceland and Romania includes areas such as trade, culture, education, and tourism. Although the economic exchange is not very large, there is potential for growth, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, where Iceland has considerable expertise.

European Context:

Iceland and Romania cooperate within the framework of European institutions and agreements. Although Iceland is not a member of the European Union, it is part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Schengen Area, which allows for cooperation with Romania on economic and security matters.

Multilateral Engagement:

Both countries are members of international organizations such as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and NATO, where they collaborate on various global issues, including security, human rights, and environmental protection.

Diplomatic Presence:

Iceland does not have an embassy in Romania; its embassy in Vienna, Austria, is responsible for diplomatic relations with Romania. Similarly, Romania does not have an embassy in Iceland, and the Romanian embassy in Norway covers diplomatic matters related to Iceland.

Cultural and Educational Exchanges:

There are cultural exchanges between Iceland and Romania, though these are more limited compared to relations with other European nations. Educational exchanges, such as through Erasmus programs and scholarships, also play a role in the bilateral relationship.

The diplomatic representation of Romania in Iceland is provided by the Embassy of Romania in Copenhagen and the Honorary Consulate of

Romania in Reykjavik. The diplomatic and consular representation of Iceland in Romania is provided by the Embassy of Iceland in Poland and the Honorary Consulate of Iceland in Bucharest.

The political-diplomatic dialogue between the two states can be exemplified by visits at the level of heads of state (for example, in September 2007, the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, visited Romania) and visits at the level of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (in January 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Össur Skarphéðinsson, visited Romania)(Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, 2020).

Travel conditions

Iceland has fully implemented the Schengen Agreement of 25 March 2001, which abolished checkpoints and internal border controls. Foreign nationals visiting Iceland must have valid travel documents or ID cards accepted for border crossing. To be valid, a travel document or identity card of non-EEA / EFTA citizens must: be valid for at least 3 months after the date of departure and have been issued within the last 10 years. EEA / EFTA citizens' travel documents must be valid for the duration of their stay in Iceland. Romanian citizens can travel to Iceland based on their identity card.

VISAS

Iceland joined the Schengen states on March 25, 2001, an agreement between 26 states to eliminate common border controls on the movement of people and facilitate the transport and movement of goods across these borders. All persons requiring visas, who do not hold a valid Schengen visa in their travel document, must apply for a visa at the embassy/consulate before traveling to the Schengen area. Visas can be granted for business travel, tourism, personal reasons (family and friends), official visits, short-term studies and for political, scientific, cultural, sporting or religious events. Residence permit Foreign nationals, other than EEA / EFTA nationals, who intend to stay in Iceland for more than three months must apply for a residence permit at the Immigration Directorate. EEA / EFTA citizens do not need a residence permit. They must register their right of residence in Iceland at the Iceland Register. Family members of EEA / EFTA citizens must apply for a residence card at the Immigration Directorate (Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, 2020).

Improving diplomatic relations between Iceland and Romania could involve several strategic initiatives focused on enhancing cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Here are some potential approaches:

1. Strengthening Economic Ties

Trade and Investment: Both countries could explore opportunities to increase trade and investment, particularly in sectors where they have complementary strengths. Iceland, for example, is a leader in renewable energy (especially geothermal energy), while Romania has a growing technology sector. Encouraging business delegations and trade missions could foster direct connections between companies and investors.

Tourism Promotion: Promoting tourism between the two countries could lead to increased cultural exchange and economic benefits. Joint tourism initiatives or agreements to promote each other's tourist attractions could help in this regard.

2. Enhancing Cultural and Educational Exchanges

Cultural Programs: Organizing cultural events such as film festivals, art exhibitions, and music performances in both countries can help increase mutual understanding and appreciation. Additionally, supporting cultural diplomacy initiatives can strengthen the soft power of both nations.

Educational Collaboration: Expanding educational exchanges, such as student and faculty exchange programs, joint research projects, and scholarships, can build long-term ties. Universities in Iceland and Romania could establish partnerships for collaborative research, especially in fields like environmental science, renewable energy, and technology.

3. Boosting Diplomatic Engagement

High-Level Visits: Encouraging high-level official visits between the two countries, including visits by heads of state, government ministers, and parliamentary delegations, could help strengthen bilateral relations. Such visits often lead to the signing of agreements and the launching of new initiatives.

Establishing Honorary Consulates: While embassies are not present in each country, establishing honorary consulates in key cities can enhance diplomatic outreach, provide consular services, and promote economic and cultural ties.

4. Collaborating on Regional and Global Issues

Environmental and Climate Initiatives: Both Iceland and Romania are committed to addressing environmental challenges. They could collaborate on initiatives related to climate change, sustainable development, and environmental protection, leveraging Iceland's expertise in renewable energy.

Cooperation in Multilateral Forums: The two countries can work more closely within international organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Council of Europe. By aligning their positions on key global

issues, they can amplify their influence and strengthen their diplomatic relationship.

5. Enhancing People-to-People Connections

Diaspora Engagement: Engaging with any Icelandic or Romanian communities living in each other's countries can help build grassroots ties. These communities can serve as bridges for greater cultural and economic exchange.

Language and Cultural Learning: Promoting language and cultural studies related to each other's countries could foster greater understanding and interest. For example, offering Icelandic language courses in Romanian universities or vice versa could be a unique way to build cultural ties.

6. Joint Ventures and Innovation

Collaborative Innovation Projects: Iceland and Romania could launch joint ventures in fields such as technology, renewable energy, and environmental sciences. Creating a bilateral innovation fund or encouraging partnerships between startups and research institutions could foster innovation-driven relations.

By focusing on these areas, Iceland and Romania could significantly enhance their diplomatic relations, creating a more robust and mutually beneficial partnership.

While Iceland and Romania do not have highly prominent or extensive diplomatic ties, their relationship is cordial and cooperative, with opportunities for further development, particularly in economic and cultural areas. Both nations engage primarily through multilateral frameworks and maintain a positive diplomatic relationship.

Trade Exchanges

Against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the value of Romanian-Icelandic trade was EUR 4 million, down 36% compared to the same period in 2019. Exports were EUR 3 million, down 44 .1% compared to 2019, and imports of Icelandic products totaled EUR 1 million, up 11.17% compared to 2019, ensuring a positive balance of EUR 2 million, down from the same period in 2019, when the balance commercial totaled EUR 4.27 million.

In the year 2021, the total trade was 6.7 million EUR, of which exports 6 million EUR and imports 0.7 million EUR. According to the latest available data, as of October 31, 2022, the total volume of bilateral trade was EUR 10.57 million (exports - EUR 10.2 million, up by 174.67% compared to the same period in 2021, and imports - EUR 0.37 million, down 33.88% compared to the same period of 2021).

According to the data registered at the O.N.R.C., on September 30, 2022, 75 commercial companies with Icelandic capital were registered in Romania, with a total subscribed capital expressed in foreign currency of USD 39.93 million, ranking 45th after investment in foreign currency.

Sectoral Cooperation

Through the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland grants, together with Norway and Liechtenstein, non-refundable financial assistance to Romania. In the period 2009-2014, Romania benefited through this mechanism of funds in the amount of EUR 190.75 million. For the period 2014-2021, the funds allocated to Romania through the EEA Financial Mechanism amount to EUR 275.2 million.

The main areas eligible for funding through EEA grants 2014-2021 are: (1) Innovation, research, education and competitiveness; (2) Social inclusion, youth employment and poverty reduction; (3) Environment, energy, climate change and low carbon economies; (4) Culture, civil society, good governance and fundamental rights; (5) Justice and Home Affairs.

Conclusions

Iceland, a Nordic island nation, has a distinctive approach to public administration and diplomacy, reflecting its small population, strong democratic traditions, and strategic geopolitical position.

Iceland operates as a unitary parliamentary republic. The country's public administration is centralized, with most administrative functions handled at the national level by various ministries. Local governments, consisting of municipalities, are responsible for local services like education, planning, and social services. However, due to Iceland's small size, these local governments have limited autonomy compared to those in larger countries. The Icelandic government is divided into ministries, each headed by a minister responsible for specific areas such as finance, education, health, and foreign affairs.

Iceland has a strong emphasis on transparency and anti-corruption within its public administration. The country consistently ranks high on international indices measuring government transparency and the absence of corruption.

The Icelandic civil service is relatively small and is known for being efficient and responsive, in part due to the country's small population, which fosters close interaction between the government and citizens.

Iceland faced significant administrative challenges following the 2008 financial crisis, leading to reforms aimed at strengthening regulatory

frameworks, particularly in the financial sector. Ongoing reforms focus on enhancing digital governance and streamlining public services, leveraging Iceland's high levels of internet penetration and digital literacy.

Iceland's location in the North Atlantic between Europe and North America gives it strategic importance, particularly in security and Arctic affairs. It is a founding member of NATO, despite having no standing military.

The country plays a crucial role in transatlantic relations and has historically been a bridge between Europe and North America, exemplified by hosting the 1986 Reykjavík Summit between U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

As an Arctic nation, Iceland is deeply involved in Arctic diplomacy, focusing on environmental protection, sustainable development, and peaceful cooperation in the region.

Iceland is a member of the Arctic Council and often advocates for the rights and interests of smaller Arctic states, emphasizing sustainable use of resources and indigenous peoples' rights.

Iceland is an active participant in international organizations such as the United Nations, where it advocates for human rights, gender equality, and climate action. The country has a strong commitment to multilateralism, often aligning with other Nordic countries on issues like peacebuilding, development aid, and environmental protection.

Iceland promotes its economic interests abroad through free trade agreements and participation in international economic organizations. It is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the European Economic Area (EEA), which allows access to the EU's single market. The country also focuses on sectors such as sustainable fishing, renewable energy, and tourism, using diplomatic channels to promote these industries globally.

Iceland maintains strong bilateral relationships with neighboring countries in Europe and North America. The U.S., Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom are among its most significant partners. The country has recently been expanding its diplomatic and economic ties with emerging markets in Asia and the Middle East.

Iceland's public administration and diplomatic efforts reflect its unique position as a small, yet strategically important nation with a commitment to democracy, transparency, and international cooperation.

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