Iceland, other Nordic states cast an eye towards EU

In October last year Iceland suffered the most severe economic crash of any country during peacetime. It went from having one of the highest standards of living to virtual bankruptcy and it reversed Reykjavik's long standing opposition to EU membership. This fact was in evidence on 25-26 February when MPs from Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Norway debated the economic crisis and its impact on their relations with the rest of Europe with MEPs.

The first "Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum" was a step towards getting lawmakers involved in strengthening ties and re-examining opportunities.

"Make an application!"

Bulgarian Liberal Bilyana Raeva chairs of the European Parliament's delegation with the West Nordic Council, which takes in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands. She said these countries are "a part of Europe" and "we share not only borders, but also resources, economic interests, environmental and climate change issues."

On the issue of Iceland joining the EU she was unequivocal: "Iceland would be one of the best members of the European Union. It would be one of the best contributors in terms of knowledge and new technology. It has one of the best fisheries management in the world and is advanced in the use of geothermal energy."

In an interview with the website, she urged Iceland and the Faroe Islands to "be proactive! Make an application, let's see where the difficult items are and let's discuss them one by one."

One of the Icelandic MPs who attended the Brussels meeting, Christian Democrat. Karl Matthiasson, told us that more and more people in his constituency "were talking about the EU".

"With the financial crisis, people in Europe have lost money, but we became bankrupt as a whole nation...Our self-image has been smashed and that strengthens the idea of becoming an EU member."

"Relationship with the EU a dilemma"

The Faroes are a self governing part of EU country Denmark, but are outside the EU. Kári P. Højgaard, leader of the Faroese Independence Party and one of the 36 members of the Faroese parliament, said, "support for full independence from Denmark has always been a 50-50 situation on the Faroe Islands. Our relationship with the EU is a dilemma. If the Faroe Islands ever became a part of the EU, we would represent a very tiny part of the population (47,000). The easiest way would be to enter through Denmark, but then we would be a small minority of a country."
He went on: "Fish feeds our country and represents 90% of our exports. If all the big decisions are made in another country, we fear the consequences. Iceland has the same dilemma and just look at Greenland, which decided to leave the European Community back in 1984 for this reason."