

► HENDRIK DANE

Opening address

German-Icelandic Fisheries History: Aspects of the Development since 1945

Scientific Symposium Accompanying the Opening Ceremony of the Fisheries Memorial in Vik
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It may sound strange, but in my eyes the Goethe-Zentrum is a better place to host a seminar on fishery relations between Germany and Iceland than any museum or university hall. The simple reason is that throughout the centuries of our bilateral relations, *culture and fish were the stable basis* on which these relations were founded. I should therefore like to thank both the Goethe-Zentrum and the Deutsches Schifffahrtsmuseum Bremerhaven – and here I want to mention especially Dr. Heidbrink – as the competent organizers of today's event, along with the many private persons who gave their wholehearted moral and financial support.

Ladies and gentlemen, we celebrate this year – 2002 – the 50th anniversary of official diplomatic relations between our two countries. But it is quite clear to all of us that our relations date back to much earlier times. I have already mentioned that fish was a stable element which tied us together. But is that really true? If we look into this matter more closely, we will notice that it was especially fishery around which extreme tensions between our two countries revolved. After all, it was the extension of the Icelandic Exclusive Fishing Zone which finally led to the almost complete disappearance of German fishing vessels in the Nordic oceans. And that led in turn to substantial unemployment and, consequently, to harsh private and public reactions in Germany. On the other hand, I should also like to mention that recently, when a German fish processing company went bankrupt, it was taken over by an Icelandic company, and the German employees of that company were happy that it was an Icelandic firm and not someone else who bought their company. The employees were extremely well aware of the fact that Icelanders are experts at fish and understand the fish business. The employees therefore felt that their company was in the right hands. These two examples are, so to speak, the famous two sides of the same coin. And I can repeat: Yes, fish has been and still is a stable element in our bilateral relations.

I do not hesitate to say that we are very pleased by the fact that the seminar approaches the important subject of our fishery relations in the scientifically appropriate manner. We are still close enough to the difficult times of the last century to relate our studies to personal testimony, while on the other hand the difficulties took place long enough ago to develop impartial analysis and objective reports on all the different developments. In my opinion it is also quite helpful to have the Icelandic-British fishing relations included in the studies, as we fished together in the same disputed fishery zones and were confronted with the same restrictive Icelandic decisions.

I am convinced that we will now witness a very interesting seminar. I would like to express my warmest thanks to the scientists and their assistants for the time and hard work they have dedicated to bringing about meaningful results. I also welcome all the participants of this seminar who are here to listen and, hopefully, to participate actively in the forthcoming discussions.

And with these expectations I declare the seminar officially opened.