

European Maritime Law Organisation

Dinner speech

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Speaking on this welcome dinner in the European Maritime Law Organisation is a great honour for me. Primarily because I am proud to have been associated with Gorrissen Federspiel since I left the Prime Minister office three years ago. Secondly – and more important – because the venue, you have chosen for EMLO's annual conference – Copenhagen – underscores the importance of Danish shipping, the crucial role, the maritime cluster has played in the creation of the Danish society – and continues to play. Even though the maritime sector nowadays accounts for

as little as 3.4 per cent of our domestic employment. The economic impact is much, much bigger.

Denmark is a small country, but a great maritime power. We have built our country and gained our prosperity through trade and interaction with the rest of the world. For decades – yes, for centuries.

1.040 years ago, a Viking known as 'Erik the red' first set foot ashore in a deserted East Greenland where he founded a Nordic settlement and culture that lasted for approximately 500 years. Almost simultaneously, the now-extinct Dorset people immigrated from north into the vast country, which for the previous 800 – 900 years probably had been completely uninhabited. The Thule people, from whom today's Greenlanders descends, immigrated a few hundred years AFTER Erik the red. The Nordic culture disappeared – the Thule people survived and had it all to themselves until

Hans Egede, a Norwegian priest, appeared and colonized Greenland 301 years ago.

In the lead up to the 300 years anniversary, someone overpainted the statue of Hans Egede in Nuuk, the capital of Greenland, with blood red paint. Hundreds signed a letter of protest claiming, “It is now time for this colonist to be taken down, so that the innocent Inuit who were murdered and enslaved by the Danes obtain justice“. A famous Greenlandic film director gave a very precise introduction on how this should happen: "Maybe we should just throw it into the sea on the 300th anniversary of Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland. It would be a nice resurrection of our society".

The anniversary came and went – but Hans Egede is still standing, looking towards the fjord – an eye catcher when you approach Nuuk by sea. Maybe due to calming words from – among others – a Greenlandic member of the

Danish parliament who argued that “you do not change history by removing the symbols”.

I agree.

I am a middle-aged, cisgender, white, male boomer (and therefore almost by definition excluded from saying anything about Identity politics) – it should be only this: Do not forget your point of departure as you are pursuing your dreams of tomorrow.

It is a matter of facts that Danish extension through history is the cause of this current identity conflict, but also the creation of Denmark as a modern welfare society – and the same goes for the rest of Europe.

We have gained a lot. Without Hans Egede we wouldn't have a North Atlantic Pier in Copenhagen with beautiful warehouses. Without our adventures in Danish Virgin Islands (now USVI) there simply wouldn't be a

royal palace in Copenhagen or an official residence for our Prime Minister for that matter. Central parts of Copenhagen are built on triangular trade with slaves, rum and sugar.

For the good and the worse, we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors.

161 years before Hans Egede's arrival in Greenland – in 1560 – King Frederik the 2nd erected the first Danish lighthouses on Skagen, Anholt and Kullen, and thereby created the basis for safe sailing. The following year he issued Denmark's first maritime law, regulating the relationship between the skipper and the ship-owner, the helmsman's duties and discipline among the crew onboard.

Truly, a long and strong history has shaped Danish shipping. It has been a catalyst for the development of Denmark as a merchant nation. It has made

Denmark rich, and in addition – and perhaps even more important – it has influenced our mind-set.

This is of course an unscientific claim, but I have no doubt that a glimpse of a Maersk container on a holiday trip to Morocco – and likewise the family anecdote about the grandfather who sailed the seven seas – has created an intuitive understanding among Danes that we all win from free trade and international division of labour.

Therefore, you cannot overestimate shipping's impact in our society. A small country, yes, but still a major international maritime player.

It makes me proud. Honestly. Not only from a personal perspective, but – even more important – because it proves that great ideas and visions can bring you far and pave the way for global *success* even though the original point of departure is a small Nordic country with less than 0,001 percentage

of the global population. So the small *can* beat the big – if you are determined. It is just a question about dedication, innovation, leadership and engagement. Danish shipping's achievements so far is a living proof of just that.

Having said that I must admit that I only have very limited – if any – insight and knowledge about the core of the shipping business model. However, I can distinguish a success from a failure since I have experienced both in my political life – and I know a few things about being small in a big world. I mean – look at me! I am 1.72. The average height in this country is 1.82.

And it is not just a question about physical expression. My mom left school after seven grades. The text above my cradle in a social housing complex 58 years ago therefor was everything else than I should be the first in my family to attend high school, get an academic degree and end up being – at least until now – the only Prime Minister in my family. It is solely because I

was lucky to be born at a certain time in history in a certain place. In the mid-sixties. In Denmark. When the construction of the Scandinavian Welfare Model took off.

It was – and to a considerable extent still is – the land of opportunities. With free access to welfare benefits such as further education. With enormous social mobility and almost a government guarantee for achieving much more than your parents – in terms of ... yes, everything: Income, education level, standard of living. It was truly 'The Danish Dream'. Outperforming, in many ways, the American Dream.

It is not necessarily the entire truth any longer.

According to recent studies, the social mobility came to a standstill in Denmark almost a generation ago. First and foremost because we are facing many of the same problems and challenges as rest of Europe: Too many

youngsters – especially boys – left behind without basic skills to gain a foothold in life. Unsolved problems with integration of newcomers from other countries and cultures.

I remember the very first Turkish boy attending my school in fourth grade. It was exotic. When I started at high school we had 50.000 with and non-European origin, today there are more than half a million. One out of ten Danes. Many of them, the majority, are doing extremely well – and we could not survive without them – but we are still fighting with the aftermath of culture clashes.

For all these reasons, to many Danes – whether they are Danes my birth or option – have the feeling, that they are left behind at the platform when the train towards the future takes off. If you are in that position – left behind, looking at others moving fast – it is easy to question everything that has brought us here: Globalization, free trade, openness. The idea that it is

much better to build bridges to the rest of the world – to engage, to cooperate, to compete peacefully – than to build walls – to exclude and protect. To turn you back towards rest of the world. – That idea suddenly does not seem so obvious.

Leaving no one behind is the biggest challenge in our modern society. Reminding everybody about the simple fact that we have gained all our prosperity – accomplished all our achievements – due to global integration is of utmost importance. Especially in a time with war in Europe, with the aftermath of covid-19 not only attacking human lives but also sophisticated value chains and growing protectionism and nationalism.

When I was born, six out of ten lived in extreme poverty. Today it is one out of 10. When I was born, the infant mortality rate was almost 20. Today it is less than five. When I was born, the life expectancy age was 50. Today it is 70.

It has been nothing than progress, progress, progress. Jeopardizing these achievements would be the stupidest thing to do.

Running your shipping company is therefore not just running your business; it is a crucial contribution to upholding what we have gained and visualizing what we can achieve. If we so decide – and I think, we should.

I am not in a position to lecture you, how to tackle the emerging challenges in the shipping world, but I am totally convinced that Denmark – even though I have described a few scratches in the paint – is in a position to seize the opportunities. Due to lessons learned in the past, historical achievement and the values that constitutes our national character.

I am a politician. It comes with a tendency to exaggerate the problems when you are in opposition and the results when you are in office. But, honestly, if I take a step back and try to take a clinical and neutral look at

my country, we are actually doing pretty good. In comparison with most countries in the world. Denmark is not a perfect country, but it is definitely among the best.

In less than 200 years – which is absolutely nothing in e.g. a Chinese scale – we have changed our country from a rural and rather poor country at the outskirts of Europe to one of the most prosperous, most sophisticated and most digitalized countries within Europa and in the World.

For more than a generation we have proved that it is possible to delink economic growth from increased CO2 emission. We are in the forefront of green transition with the highest CO2 reduction targets in Europa and a good handful of big, global leading green tech companies. Setting new standards for sustainable living.

You can safely take a swim in the harbor of Copenhagen and drink water directly from the tap without risking your health.

We are listed among the best places to do business, the most transparent and least corrupted country and we are globally recognized for being the happiest people in the world – even though Finland actually took our number one position in that ranking recently (but don't tell the Danes – it will destroy our self-image).

And we have managed to redistribute the wealth and prosperity among all citizens to such a degree that Bernie Sanders always refers to Denmark as a model society while Donald Trump compares us with Venezuela. None of that is true – but it is true that we are, in comparison with all OECD-countries, among the most equal societies.

It comes with a price. The highest tax burden in Europa and by far one of the biggest public sectors in the free world (and a lot of 'red tape').

Nevertheless, if you flipside the coin, you will find free access to education, healthcare, elderly care, heavily subsidized childcare. Opportunities for everyone, not just the few.

Like the bumblebee, we fly – although, theoretically, it should not be able to do so.

That is why “Denmark punch above its weight” as Obama repeatedly put it when I met him on several occasion in my first term as Prime Minister from 2009 – 2011. It made the Danes and me proud. Years later – in my second term – he used the same expression at a State Dinner in the White House. Not exclusively about Denmark, but about all the Nordic countries.

According to Obama not only Denmark, but also Sweden, Norway, Finland

and Iceland are punching above their weight. For a moment, it left me disappointed, but just for a moment – I am still any less proud.

For three reasons.

First and foremost because we *are* an integrated part of Scandinavia. Our way on living – our society model so to speak – is basically developed in cooperation and peaceful competition with other Nordic countries. We introduced the freedom to move people, capital, goods and services between our countries decades before anyone even thought about ‘a European single market’.

Secondly because our global impact *is* a collective effort. Values such as women’s emancipation, human right, equality, work-life-balance, justice, sustainability, responsibility for the vulnerable are shared, Nordic values.

Each of the Nordic countries is small, but together we are a considerable force.

The president acknowledged it, when he in front of the press corps joked and asked the rhetorical question: “Why don’t we just put all these small countries in charge for a while?”

This remark in some ways encapsulated the White House summit with the Nordic leaders. I cannot claim that we have a proven concept solving all global and human problems, but we have definitely indicated parts of the solutions.

Thirdly and lastly – and most important in this context – he hinted the reason for our success by mentioning the Danish priest and philosopher Grundtvig who – some 170 years ago – established the Danish folk high

school tradition and thereby introduced 'the secret ingredient in the Danish recipe'.

Take it easy. I will soon conclude and do not intend to give you a lecture on that specific topic even though it is fascinating. How Grundtvig build a chain of schools around our country and invited non-educated farm workers to study – not craftsmanship or concrete, professional skills, but basically LIFE. Poetry, the purpose of life, self-esteem, values. 'Everyone can do something – no one can do everything'. The balance between the individual and the community.

It is probably *the* most important initiative in the development of the modern Danish society. The invention of the secret ingredient: Trust among people. Social cohesion. Inclusiveness.

Core values on which we have built this country.

Based on that we have avoided fake news, populism, heavy conflicts between employees and employers. Instead, we have developed a kind of conversational democracy where cross-party cooperation is the main rule, not an exception. That is why we did not have yellow jerseys in our streets when we raised the retirement age and linked it to the life expectancy age. That is why we – in times with Brexit and disintegration – still have strong public support behind our EU-membership, international cooperation and free trade. That is why the humble bee still flies.

There is a saying, that when the winds of change blow, some build windbreaks – other build windmills. In Denmark, we have chosen the windmills!

Literally built on our former shipyards, we have developed a world leading offshore windmill industry – and if we do not miss our visiting time, we now

have a window of opportunity to combine the past, the present and the future.

We *could* expand our renewable energy capacity – move from setting goals to achieving goals – and create a north European Power-X adventure where we big scale converts green molecules to green electrons and thereby make a considerable contribution to greening the global shipping industry. It *could* be among the outcomes from the general election earlier in November. I hope so. If that happens, I would be even more grateful to Gorrissen Federspiel who allowed me to take a couple of year's absence from active politic. It enlightened and energized me – and convinced me to give it just another shot to run again with the aim to fulfil a dream of a cross-party majority government in Denmark. The negotiations are still ongoing, but it *could* happen ...

If there is just one take-away from this speech – and I am not sure that that is the case, but it is up to you to judge – it must be this: It is all about people. Trust among people. Purpose driven leadership.

Do not forget your point of departure as you are pursuing your dreams of tomorrow.

I wish you a safe and successful journey.

Thank you for your attention.