



The spotlight was on Greenland and Iceland at Ciné ONU - UNRIC's monthly film screenings – for "Last Days of the Arctic" in Brussels on 15 January. The film tells the story of Icelandic photographer RAX (Ragnar Axelsson) who has covered the changes that climate change has brought to the inhabitants of these two islands.

After the film Ragnar Axelsson participated in a debate in front of a full house at the Goethe Institut in Brussels with researcher Dr. Damien Degeorges of the Arctic Policy and Economic Forum and Lida Skifte Lennert, the Head of the delegation of Greenland to the EU.

The debate, which was moderated by UNRIC's Arni Snævarr, focused on the retreat of the Greenlandic glaciers and the melting of the ice in the Arctic Sea which will, at the same time, challenge the century-old traditions of the Greenlanders and open new opportunities in mining and extraction of oil and gas.

[Link to the trailer of the Last Days of the Arctic](#)

Greenland is an autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark and is four times the size of France but has a population of only 58,000. Greenland has already secured control of its natural resources in a new treaty with Denmark and could become an independent nation if benefits from potential mining and oil and gas extraction secure financial independence from Denmark.

Greenland is believed to have a wealth of minerals as well as off shore oil and gas reserves. The European Union and China have shown interest in "rare earths" which are important for new "green" technologies.

Up to 3,000 Chinese workers are expected to be allowed to work at a new Aluminum Plant in Greenland.

Minister Counsellor Lennert says that Greenlanders are not afraid of the interest of the 1.3 billion strong Chinese. "We want to lead sustainable development and we have been out marketing our resources internationally," she says. "Now that our possible international partners have reached out to take part in our development, what is important here is that they want to take part in our development on our terms. We set the conditions and they apply the conditions."

The photographer Ragnar Axelsson, says that while understanding Greenland's interest in seizing their opportunities he shares the worries of the traditional hunters of seeing their many thousand year-old traditions disappear. "The hunters of the North are a dying breed. This is the twilight of their society," Axelsson says.

Dr. Damien Degeorges points out that there is considerable geopolitical interest for Greenland which is demonstrated in the fact that in the last few months Greenland's Prime Minister Kuupik Kleist has met such luminaries as the President of South-Korea , the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton and EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso. Last, but not least, the Arctic and Greenland are understood to have been high on the agenda in the state visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to Denmark in 2012.

"As Greenland moves towards possible independence and is located at the centre of this new frontier of international relations, it is not a surprise that major powers look at this territory with so many strategic assets," says Dr. Degeorges.