

ICELAND

RECOGNITION BY THE UNITED STATES OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ICELANDIC REPUBLIC

859A.01/124

*Memorandum by the Chief of the Division of Northern European
Affairs (Cumming) to the Director of the Office of European Affairs
(Dunn)*

[WASHINGTON,] April 18, 1944.

MR. DUNN: On June 17, 1944 the full independence of Iceland will become a fact and an Icelandic Republic will be established. In my opinion, our present relations with Iceland due to the presence of our troops, et cetera, and our post-war interests, such as requests for naval and air bases in accordance with plans approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President, require that we take special notice of this occasion historic in Icelandic national life.

Mr. Morris¹ is urgently needed in Iran, I am informed by Mr. Alling,² and should leave Iceland at the earliest possible moment in order to get on his way to Tehran.

I suggest that:

(1) Mr. Louis G. Dreyfus arrange to be in Reykjavik at least a week or so prior to June 17.

(2) We recommend to the President that Mr. Dreyfus be appointed Ambassador on Special Mission for the purpose of showing the Icelandic Government and people our appreciation of their entry into the family of nations as a fully sovereign and independent republic.

(3) We arrange to have Mr. Dreyfus' credentials as Minister to Iceland addressed to the President of Iceland and that these credentials not be presented by Mr. Dreyfus until the ceremonies on June 17 which will be held in the open air at the ancient meeting place of the Icelandic Althing and at which, the Icelandic Minister³ tells me, the Icelandic Government will wish the American Minister to make the principal address by a foreign diplomatic representative welcoming the establishment of the Icelandic Republic.

If you approve of the foregoing, I shall work out the necessary details in consultation with Protocol and other interested divisions.

HUGH S. CUMMING, JR.

¹ Leland B. Morris, Minister in Iceland, assigned as Ambassador to Iran, March 21, 1944.

² Paul H. Alling, Deputy Director, of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs.

³ Thor Thors, Icelandic Minister in the United States.

S59A.01/126 : Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (Morris) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, May 5, 1944—9 p. m.
[Received May 5—8:05 p. m.]

171. The Legation has received from a confidential source the text of a message from the King of Denmark⁴ to the Icelandic Prime Minister. Local newspapers carried big headlines saying King asks postponement of separation of Iceland and Denmark and a brief news item says the request is based on the presence of foreign forces in both countries. Full text has not been released here and should be regarded as confidential for the present.

Text in translation follows:

"In conjunction with the reports which have come from Iceland concerning action by Althing and the Government concerning a change in form of Government, we wish the following communication brought to the attention of Iceland Government and people:

During all our reign it has consistently been our effort to advance the Icelandic people's welfare and in these years when war makes its deep imprint on the lives of people we have sought to follow the situation in Iceland and have carefully weighed our attitude toward the Icelandic people doing so with an eye to what might be gained for that country as a Scandinavian nation. The willingness to listen to the views of the people which Iceland's Althing and Government have always met with from us can obviously all the more be counted upon in this most important issue as to the future of the country. We may in the meantime on our hand feel it right to nourish the hope that final conclusions as to the future form of Government under which the bond between the Icelandic people and the King would be severed does not become an actuality as long as Iceland as well as Denmark is occupied by foreign powers. And we hold the firm conviction that it would bring little of good fortune to the fine brotherly spirit between these two Scandinavian nations which is uppermost in our mind, if this were to occur. We wish therefore that before the final action comes about you inform Iceland's Government and people that we, so long as the present situation obtains, cannot recognize the change in governmental form which Iceland's Althing and Government without consultation with us have decided upon. Given at our Palace Sorgenfri, the 2nd of May, 1944, (signed Christian R)."

MORRIS

S59A.01/130 : Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (Morris) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, May 9, 1944—noon.
[Received 3:40 p. m.]

177. Some further background on Danish King's message (see my 171, May 5, 9 p. m.) has come to light. When Danish Minister de

⁴ Christian X.

Kauffmann⁵ passed through Iceland April 29 he told the Norwegian Minister that at the Danish Minister's meeting in London Reventlow,⁶ Kauffmann and de Fontenay⁷ agreed to send a message to the Danish King via Sweden asking his opinion on the matter of Icelandic independence. This inquiry may have given rise to the King's message. People here thought de Fontenay was behind the message, but the Foreign Minister⁸ told me today that he and his colleagues do not share this opinion.

There is general regret that the King was so ill-advised as to comment at this late date thereby injuring his personal status. The opinion seems unanimous that his message will not affect the outcome. Moderate and inactive people feel that Icelanders were also at fault, that they could have kept the King informed and saved his dignity, rather than handling the matter with political rudeness which makes the King feel he is being overthrown. In this connection the Foreign Minister told me in March of this year, after the Althing resolution to hold a plebiscite had been agreed to, that the Icelandic Government sent a message through its Legation in Stockholm to its Legation in Copenhagen to inform the Government and King of this fact and received a report that the message had been delivered but no acknowledgment from the King or Danish Government was received.

MORRIS

859A.01/127 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (Morris)

WASHINGTON, May 11, 1944—8 p. m.

166. Your 171, May 5, 9 p. m. The Danish Legation here has informally expressed to us its regret at the action of the King. On May 10 the Danish Minister called on Thor Thors and gave him a note which reads substantially as follows:

"The Minister of Iceland is informed that he is free to report to his Government that Minister de Kauffmann and Legation Counselor Brun have declared to him that they deeply regret the message from His Majesty the King to Iceland and that they are convinced that the statement contained in the message can only be occasioned by the fact that the King owing to the German occupation cannot have formed a clear idea of all the circumstances. They entertain no doubts that the Danish people when they are free to form an opinion and to speak will understand all these circumstances which determined the decision made by Iceland."

⁵ Henrik de Kauffmann, Danish Minister in the United States.

⁶ Count Reventlow, Danish Minister in the United Kingdom.

⁷ F. le Sage de Fontenay, Danish Minister in Iceland.

⁸ Vilhjalmur Thor.

Thors was asked to transmit the statement to the Icelandic Government with the request that it be treated as confidential and not published.

The attitude the Danish Legation here has maintained with respect to the Icelandic independence movement is described in its *pro memoria* of January 13 which was transmitted to you as enclosure to instruction no. 70, of February 4.⁹ A copy of this document was also forwarded to the King of Denmark. (Your 177, May 9, 12 noon.)

HULL

859.01/201

The Department of State to the British Embassy

AIDE-MÉMOIRE

The Department of States refers to the Embassy's *aide-mémoire* no. 261, May 9, 1944,¹⁰ in regard to the attitude which the British Government proposes to adopt in respect to the establishment of the Republic of Iceland.

As regards the first factor mentioned in the *aide-mémoire*, the Department of State concurs in the view of the British Government that no legal difficulty exists in recognizing the Icelandic Republic. Iceland has, in fact, been an independent state since 1918 and, further, has endeavored, so far as circumstances have permitted, to carry out the severance of its relations with King Christian X in accordance with the provisions of the Act of Union¹¹ between Iceland and Denmark.

As regards the attitude previously adopted by this Government, it will be recalled that in 1942 representations, similar to those made by the British Minister at Reykjavik in 1941, were made to the Icelandic Prime Minister with a view to dissuading Iceland from abrogating the Act of Union at that time.¹² In making such representations, the Icelandic Prime Minister was informed that this Government recognized that the proposed unilateral abrogation of the Act of Union and change in form of the Icelandic Government were decisions which, in principle, must be taken by the Icelandic people in accordance with their own desires and needs. The Icelandic Minister in Washington was subsequently informed that this Government had no objection to the adoption by the Althing of a resolution declaring that Iceland should become a Republic in 1944.

⁹ Neither printed.

¹⁰ Not printed.

¹¹ Danish Law of November 30, 1918; for text, see *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. CXI, p. 703.

¹² For text of note delivered to the Icelandic Prime Minister August 20, 1942, see telegram 268, August 18, 1942, 9 p. m. to Reykjavik, *Foreign Relations, 1942*, vol. III, p. 17.

It will also be recalled that paragraph two of the Agreement between the United States of America and Iceland for the defense of Iceland by United States forces, effective July 1, 1941,¹³ stipulates that "United States further promise to recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland and to exercise their best efforts with those powers which will negotiate the peace treaty at the conclusion of the present war in order that such treaty shall likewise recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland."

As regards the general question of expediency, the Department of State concurs in the view of the British Government that it would be most inadvisable to withhold recognition from the Republic of Iceland. The American Minister will therefore be appointed as the special representative of the President of the United States with personal rank of Ambassador for the ceremonies to be held on June 17, 1944, in connection with the establishment of the Republic of Iceland and will thereafter be accredited as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the President of the Republic to be elected by the Althing on the same date.

The Department of State also concurs in the view that, so far as possible, it would be advisable to avoid giving offense to the susceptibilities of the people of Denmark, in general, and the King of Denmark, in particular. It had therefore hoped that King Christian X, in his capacity of King of Iceland, would, despite the difficulties of his position in Denmark, find it possible to interpose no objection to the proposed action of his Government and people in Iceland. However, the King of Denmark for reasons which are not entirely clear transmitted a message to the Prime Minister of Iceland which has occasioned a certain amount of resentment in Iceland. The Department of State regrets that King Christian X felt impelled to take such action, which, however, in fact may have been taken under German duress, but considers that the previously-determined decision of this Government to recognize the establishment of the Republic of Iceland is in no way affected thereby.

With respect to the general attitude to be taken by the American Minister at Reykjavik and the various agencies of this Government, it is proposed that the Republic of Iceland will be cordially welcomed as the latest addition to the family of nations. In so doing, care will be taken not to give offense to the people and King of Denmark.

The Department of State agrees in the general line proposed by the British Government that the matter of the abrogation of the Act of Union should be treated as a Danish-Icelandic question and the

¹³ For text, see Department of State Executive Agreement Series No. 232, or 55 Stat. (pt. 2) 1547; for correspondence regarding negotiation of this agreement, see *Foreign Relations*, 1941, vol. II, pp. 776 ff.

fact that the protection of Iceland by British and, subsequently, American forces has no bearing on the matter. Commentary will, so far as possible, be confined to an explanation of the background with little or no discussion of the legal questions involved and the procedure followed by the Government of Iceland in severing its ties with the Danish Crown. Every effort will be made to avoid any remarks or statements which might suggest that a dispute exists between Iceland and Denmark on this question.

WASHINGTON, May 20, 1944.

859A.01/124 : Telegram

*The Secretary of State to the Ambassador in the United Kingdom
(Winant)*

WASHINGTON, May 28, 1944—5 p. m.

4259. Following is a summary of Reykjavik's 222, May 26, 9 p. m.¹⁴ to the Department :

The British and Soviet Ministers and the American Chargé d'Affaires have agreed to ask two separate appointments with the Foreign Minister for May 30 in order to express to him orally the felicitations of their governments on the results of the plebiscite and to assure him that the Republic of Iceland will be welcomed into the Family of Nations. They will also ascertain whether the Foreign Minister considers a further expression to be desirable such as a call on the Regent and delivery of a brief address of good wishes. The Chargé adds that similar action will probably not be taken by the representatives of Norway, Denmark and Sweden who appear to be drifting into a bloc which may withhold recognition.

We are telegraphing Reykjavik ¹⁵ that we approve of the individual calls on the Foreign Minister but have added that, unless specifically suggested by the Foreign Minister, we think that it would be inadvisable to call on the Regent for the following reasons :

(1) Such a step would not only accentuate the divergence in attitude between representatives in Reykjavik of the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the Scandinavian States on the other, but also might supply fuel to the German propaganda contention that we and the British have been instrumental in bringing about the severance of the Act of Union.

(2) It would tend to render somewhat anticlimactic the June 17 ceremonies at which the chiefs of the diplomatic missions to Iceland are to deliver formal addresses of welcome.

We are requesting the Chargé to bring these observations to the attention of his British and Soviet colleagues as well as to the Foreign

¹⁴ Not printed.

¹⁵ Telegram 195, May 28, 5 p. m., not printed.

Minister should he himself propose a call on the Regent. Should the British and Soviet Ministers insist on carrying out the original procedure, our Chargé may, in his discretion, associate himself with them.

Please inform the Foreign Office of the foregoing.

HULL

859A.01/155

The Icelandic Minister (Thors) to the Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, June 1, 1944.

SIR: I have the honor to inform you that the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Reykjavik has instructed me to convey the following message to you:

According to a treaty concerning the Union between Iceland and Denmark dated November 30, 1918 each contracting party could demand immediately after the end of the year 1940 that the treaty be revised three years later. Each contracting party could decide onesidedly that the treaty be cancelled unless otherwise negotiated before the expiration of this three years period. In order to cancel the agreement in this way two thirds of the members of the Althing had to vote for the cancellation. In addition to this at least three fourths of all voters should participate in a plebiscite out of which again three fourths should also vote for the abrogation.

On May 17, 1941 the Althing passed unanimously a resolution in which it was stated that Iceland would not renew the treaty. Furthermore another resolution was also passed, unanimously stating that Iceland should become a republic as soon as the Union with Denmark had been formally cancelled.

The passing of these resolutions was immediately communicated to the King and the Danish Government through diplomatic channels.

On February 25, 1944 the Althing unanimously with votes of all the members passed a resolution regarding the abrogation of the Icelandic-Danish Union Act from 1918 and on March 8 the Althing passed also unanimously with votes of all the members a constitution for the Republic of Iceland.

The plebiscite for the cancellation of the Union Act and for the assent of the Republican constitution took place during May 20-23, 1944.

The final figures on the voting are not yet at hand from all the electoral districts but there is no doubt that they will hardly cause any change in the final result.

The vote is as follows. The number of voters who have participated is 72,640 which equals 97.86% of all the voters. A total of 70,725 or 97.36% have voted for the cancellation of the Union Act, while 370

or 0.51% have voted against it. There were 1545 or 2.13% blank and void votes.

In the vote about the constitutional change of the Government 69,048 or 95.06% voted for the change while 1042 or 1.43% voted against it. There were 2550 blank and void votes which equal 3.51%.

The people of Iceland have thus in an entirely free plebiscite fully assented to the resolution passed by the Althing concerning the cancellation of the Union Act and for the re-establishment of a Republic in Iceland.

The Althing has been summoned to convene on June 10 to pass the final decision on the abrogation of the Union Act and the re-establishment of a Republic of Iceland.

Such a decision it is planned will lead to the inauguration of the Republic on June 17.

Accept [etc.]

THOR THORS

859A.01/169a

The Acting Secretary of State to Diplomatic Representatives in the Other American Republics, Except Argentina and Bolivia

WASHINGTON, June 5, 1944.

SIRS: The people of Iceland in a plebiscite held on May 20-23, 1944, voted overwhelmingly in favor of a Resolution passed by the Althing on February 25, 1944, to abrogate the Act of Union between Iceland and Denmark of December 1, 1918, and the Constitutional Bill passed by the Althing on March 8, 1944, providing for the establishment of a republican form of government. In taking this action, Iceland, so far as circumstances have permitted, has carefully observed the provisions of the Act of Union relating to its abrogation.

Both the United States and British Governments consider that the change in form of the Government of Iceland in no way affects the recognition they have previously extended to that country, and they propose to accredit their Ministers at Reykjavik to the first President of the Republic of Iceland who will be elected by the Althing on June 17, 1944, the date on which the Republic will formally come into being.

In connection with the recognition of Iceland, the following commitments made by the Government of the United States are contained in paragraph two of the Agreement between the United States of America and Iceland for the Defense of Iceland by the United States Forces, effected July 1, 1941:

"The United States further promise to recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland and to exercise their best efforts with those powers which will negotiate a peace treaty at the conclusion

of the present war in order that such treaty shall likewise recognize the absolute independence and sovereignty of Iceland.”

The President has designated the Honorable Louis G. Dreyfus, Jr., the American Minister to Iceland, as his Special Representative with the personal rank of Ambassador to attend the ceremonies to be held in Iceland on June 17 in honor of the establishment of the Republic.

Since Iceland may itself notify the Government of the other American republics of the change in its status, you are requested orally to inform the appropriate authorities of the Government to which you are accredited regarding the attitude adopted by this Government with respect to the establishment of the Republic of Iceland. In your discretion, you may add that although Iceland has given no indication that it desires to be classified as an American republic, preferring to consider itself as lying outside both the European and American Hemispheres, it is felt that the Government of Iceland would be gratified to receive on the day of the establishment of the Republic messages from the other American republics welcoming the Republic of Iceland into the family of nations.

Very truly yours,

EDWARD R. STETTINIUS, JR.

859A.01/155

Memorandum of Conversation, by the Acting Secretary of State

[WASHINGTON,] June 5, 1944.

The Icelandic Minister, Mr. Thor Thors, called upon me this afternoon at his request to hand me the attached note¹⁶ relative to the treaty between [*concerning*] the Union of Iceland and Denmark. I inquired from the Minister as to the reaction of the Danish people to this action. He stated that the King of Denmark had sent a wire requesting the Icelandic Government not to take the step until after the war. He further stated that Minister Kauffmann feels this was done under pressure of the Nazis and that they feel confident that there is no question that the free Danes of the world have been happy to see the step taken and are confident that the people of Denmark will state their approval after liberation.

E[DWARD] S[ETTINIUS]

859A.01/156a : Telegram

The Acting Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (Morris)

WASHINGTON, June 10, 1944—10 p. m.

221. The House of Representatives unanimously passed this morning a concurrent Resolution expressing the congratulations of the Con-

¹⁶ Note dated June 1, p. 990.

gress to the Althing on the establishment of the Republic of Iceland. The full text of the Resolution will be telegraphed ¹⁷ to you after it has been voted by the Senate.

STETTINIUS

859A.01/164 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister in Iceland (Dreyfus ¹⁸)

WASHINGTON, June 15, 1944.

230. Department's 221, June 10. The following is the text of the Concurrent Resolution on Iceland which has just been passed unanimously by the Senate:

"WHEREAS the people of Iceland in a free plebiscite on May 20 to 23, 1944, overwhelmingly approved the constitutional bill passed by the Althing providing for the establishment of a republican form of government; and

WHEREAS the Republic of Iceland will be formally established on June 17, 1944: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate (the House of Representatives concurring), That the Congress hereby expresses to the Icelandic Althing, the oldest parliamentary body in the world, its congratulations on the establishment of the Republic of Iceland and its welcome to the Republic of Iceland as the newest republic in the family of free nations."

HULL

859A.01/6-1744

Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State

[WASHINGTON,] June 17, 1944.

The Minister of Iceland called at his request and proceeded to hand me a communication in writing, a copy of which is attached.¹⁹ I congratulated and felicitated his people and his Government on the new change of government and the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic. I elaborated on every form of good wish for the people of Iceland under the new Republic.

C[ORDELL] H[ULL]

859A.01/6-1744

The Icelandic Minister (Thors) to the Secretary of State

WASHINGTON, June 17, 1944.

SIR: Acting under instructions from my Government and with reference to my note June 1, 1944 I have the honor to inform Your Excellency as follows.

¹⁷ Telegram 230, June 15, *infra*.

¹⁸ Louis G. Dreyfus, Jr., presented his credentials as Minister to Iceland, June 14, 1944.

¹⁹ *Infra*.

At a meeting in the united Althing on June 16, the following resolution was passed unanimously with the votes of all members of the Althing:

the Althing resolves to declare that the Danish-Icelandic Union Act from 1918 is cancelled.

Immediately thereafter the Althing equally unanimously resolved that the constitution of the Republic of Iceland shall enter into force on Saturday, June 17, 1944 when so declared by the President of the united Althing at a meeting in the united Althing.

The President of the united Althing has at two o'clock p. m. today at a meeting in the united Althing at Lögberg declared the entering into force of the constitution of the Republic of Iceland and thereby the Republic of Iceland has been re-established.

Then the election of the President of Iceland took place and Mr. Sveinn Björnsson was elected President. Immediately thereafter he took oath of office and entered upon his duties.

Accept [etc.]

THOR THORS

859A.01/161 : Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (Dreyfus) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, June 21, 1944—9 a. m.

[Received 1:08 p. m.]

269. Text of Danish King's message received June 17 (see my 267, June 18)²⁰ given by confidential source in translation paraphrases as follows:

"Though I regret that my connection with the Icelandic nation has been severed under present circumstances, I wish to express my best wishes for people of Icelandic nation and the hope that ties binding Iceland to other Scandinavian nations will be strengthened."

DREYFUS

859A.01/6-2144

The Minister in Iceland (Dreyfus) to the Secretary of State

No. 5

REYKJAVIK, June 21, 1944.

[Received June 28.]

SIR: I have the honor to enclose copies of remarks²⁰ exchanged by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and myself, as Dean of the special representatives, at a dinner given to the President by the Icelandic Government at the Hotel Borg.

²⁰ Not printed.

Several times during the celebration of June 17 high officials, including the Foreign Minister, mentioned to me and members of the Legation staff their appreciation of the part played by the United States in leading the way in the appointment of special diplomatic representatives. The Department's initiative in this regard has produced very fruitful results.

Vilhjalmur Thor is a great friend of the United States and as Foreign Minister is of invaluable assistance in maintaining most satisfactory relations.

With regard to the second paragraph of the Foreign Minister's remarks, reference is made to my telegram no. 266, June 18.²¹ As stated therein, the Russian Government is the only Government with a diplomatic representative here which has not publicly expressed good wishes for the Icelandic Republic.

My remarks, which were apparently very well received by the Icelanders, were translated into Icelandic, and were broadcast from the dining hall during the dinner.

Respectfully yours,

LOUIS G. DREYFUS, JR.

859A.01/164 : Telegram

The Minister in Iceland (Dreyfus) to the Secretary of State

REYKJAVIK, June 21, 1944.

[Received June 21—1:20 p. m.]

271. Speaker of joint Althing yesterday read joint resolution of Congress transmitted in Department's 230 June 15. He said Althing was greatly honored as the United States was the first power to support the re-establishment of the Republic and the first to appoint a special Ambassador for the occasion. He said Althing and nation were very grateful and he would on behalf of the Althing send United States Congress a message of thanks.²² Communists were only members of Althing who did not rise to show their agreement.

DREYFUS

²¹ Not printed.

²² For text of message conveyed to the American Legation at Reykjavik through the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs in a note dated June 22, 1944, see Department of State *Bulletin*, July 30, 1944, p. 126.