

## Debate in the British House of Commons, 20 July 1984

**Caption:** On 20 July 1984, the members of the British House of Commons debate the bill for ratification of the amendment to the Community treaties that provides for Greenland's withdrawal from the scope of application of the treaties. Discussions focus on the new relations between Greenland and the Communities and particularly on reciprocal rights in the area of fisheries and the absence of a formal procedure for the withdrawal of a territory from the Communities.

**Source:** Greenland (Withdrawal from EEC). UK Parliament,  
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## Greenland (Withdrawal from EEC)

HC Deb 20 July 1984 vol 64 cc671-83

*The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs  
(Mr. Ray Whitney)*

I beg to move, "That this House, while stressing the importance of maintaining continued close links between Greenland and the Community, recognises that the proposed change in the status of Greenland has wide support; and takes note of European Community Document No. 5064/84 transmitting legal texts providing for a change of the legal status of Greenland and fishery arrangements with regard to Greenland." In its fifteenth report the Select Committee on European Legislation recommended that the House should consider further the draft legal texts concerning the withdrawal of Greenland from full membership of the European Community and its addition to annex IV of the treaty of Rome, which lists the overseas countries and territories—OCTs—of member states. These texts were deposited with explanatory memorandum 5064 on 10 February 1984. The five draft texts, which are intended to be taken as one package, comprise: (i) the treaty removing Greenland from membership of the EEC and the European Coal and Steel Community and conferring OCT status on Greenland; (ii) the protocol to the treaty granting Greenland duty-free access to the Community market subject to a satisfactory arrangement on fish, and also making provision for any necessary transitional arrangements; (iii) a regulation providing for a framework fisheries agreement establishing the principles governing Community fishing in Greenland waters; (iv) a regulation providing for the introduction of a five year protocol laying down specific conditions for Community fishing in Greenland waters based on the principles set down in the preceding regulation; (v) a regulation laying down procedures under which the Community may act in the event of the overall agreement being disturbed.

Because of negotiating restraints at the time it was not possible to deposit the draft legal texts with the Select Committee sufficiently far ahead for a debate to be held before the texts were adopted by the Council. The Select Committee was most helpful over these difficulties and agreed that its recommendation for a debate need not delay adoption of the texts, which were subsequently adopted by the General Affairs Council in February and formally signed at the next General Affairs Council in March. Nevertheless, it is right and proper that the House should now have the opportunity to consider the wider implications of these arrangements and we are grateful to the Select Committee for its careful scrutiny on behalf of the House.

There are certain differences between the texts as deposited with the Select Committee and as finally adopted by the Council. In the first place, the Community agreed that the treaty amending Greenland's status should be extended to include Euratom as well as the EEC and ECSC.

Secondly, an additional article was added to the fisheries agreement text, which identifies the quotas set in the first implementing protocol and the way in which fish stocks develop, as constituting the reference base for fixing future possibilities.

Thirdly, in the protocol on Community fishing in Greenland waters, the Community eventually agreed to pay Greenland 26.5 million ECU—about £15 million—a year in order to maintain the existing Community quotas, an increase on the 18.5 million ECU

proposed in the draft as submitted to the Select Committee. I shall have more to say about that later.

It may be helpful to the House if I describe briefly the background to Greenland's desire for a change of status. The population of Greenland is 45,000, of which over 80 per cent. are of Eskimo origin. Greenland has been a Danish colony since 1721, but became an integral part of the kingdom of Denmark only in 1953, with the right to elect two representatives to the Danish Parliament.

The desire of the Greenlanders for greater local autonomy goes back to 1972 when the Greenland Provincial Council first requested self government. At that same time, in the referendum in which Denmark voted to accept membership of the European Community, 70 per cent. of the Greenlanders voted against membership. But as a part of the kingdom of Denmark—unlike the Faroe Islands, which already had home rule and remained outside the Community—Greenland was obliged to join the Community with the rest of Denmark. Later, following a referendum in January 1979 among the Greenlanders in which 70 per cent. voted in favour, a substantial degree of home rule was devolved upon Greenland. Subsequently, in the elections for the Greenlandic Assembly in April 1979, a party opposed to Community membership won a majority and followed this up in June 1979 by winning the single Greenland seat in the European Parliament.

The Greenlanders have objections to the application to Greenland of the Community regime. Apart from their view that fisheries—which account for half their exports—should be under Greenland's control, opposition to Community membership was seen as a logical extension of Greenland's long campaign for home rule.

A second referendum on the membership issue was therefore held in February 1982, when the Greenlanders opted by a small majority — 52 per cent. — for withdrawal and asked to be granted associated status under the Community's OCT arrangements. Under the constitution there can be no withdrawal of Greenland without Danish approval, but the Danish Prime Minister had pledged to negotiate with the Community whatever new status the Greenlanders required. The Danish Government therefore submitted a memorandum to the Council in May 1982 designed to arrange that Greenland should cease to be within the geographical scope of the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community treaties and be added to the overseas countries and territories listed in annex IV to the EEC treaty.

In February 1983, in its opinion to the Council, the Commission confirmed that it favoured arrangements of the kind proposed by Denmark. But, as the treaties contained no provision for the withdrawal either of a member state or a part thereof, such as Greenland, the necessary arrangements had to be negotiated.

The subsequent negotiations continued for almost a year, focusing principally on working out acceptable arrangements for future fishing rights for the Community in Greenland waters.

In December 1983 the Council of Ministers agreed that the Council should work to a deadline which would enable Greenland to leave the Community on 1 January 1985, the date set by the Greenlanders for their change in status to take effect. The Commission therefore embarked on a series of bilateral discussions with member states in order to bring the negotiations to a conclusion. As a result of those efforts, the Commission was

able to submit draft legal texts to the Council. It is those texts which were laid before the Select Committee. Following the inclusion of certain textual amendments, the most significant of which I have described, the texts were finally agreed at the February Foreign Affairs Council and formally adopted at the March Foreign Affairs Council.

The agreement on fisheries has several interlocking elements which balance the interests of Greenland and those of the Community. Greenland for its part will continue to benefit from duty-free access to the Community market for her fish and fishery products in return for her commitment to a 10-year fisheries agreement with the Community. This does not, however, mean that the Community's fishing rights in Greenland's waters will end at the beginning of 1995. Provision has been made within the framework of the agreement for renewal for successive six-year periods. This approach provides a solid basis upon which both Community and Greenland fishermen can plan for the future.

[Mr. George Foulkes \(Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley\)](#)

The Under-Secretary of State has described how the agreement on fish is beneficial to the Greenlanders, on the one hand, and the Community as a whole, on the other. I think the hon. Gentleman will agree that the agreement is especially beneficial to German fishermen. How beneficial will it be to British fishermen? Will the hon. Gentleman admit that, in reality, it will be of no great benefit to them?

[Mr. Whitney](#)

The reality is that this is a fair agreement for British fishermen and fishermen from all member states of the Community. We believe that it is fair also for the Greenlanders. I shall return to that point in my concluding remarks. As I understand it, there will be no loss or damage to British fishing interests from this agreement, and our wider interests are likely to benefit.

It was considered that a longer period subject to a rigid structure would not allow for the inevitable changes which will occur as a result of biological and management induced variations in fish stocks and those changes in policy arising from economic and social factors within the fisheries sector and wider afield.

The protocol to the fisheries agreement sets the initial quotas for Community fishermen for the first five years. Taking into account catches by Greenland vessels, the basic quotas represent an overall level virtually equivalent to the quotas set by the Council of Fisheries Ministers for 1984 for all the major Greenland fish stocks. The Community is not being asked to alter its current fishing opportunities significantly. These quotas will be allocated between member states, including the United Kingdom, in accordance with the normal procedures and criteria, after deducting any allocations to Norwegian vessels. These last help to establish the balance between the reciprocal fishing possibilities of the Community and Norway which, as the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) knows, is an important element for our own industry

The agreement with Greenland also includes limited quantities for Faroese vessels under the Community's fisheries agreement with the Faroe Islands. All in all, the Community's fishing opportunities in west and east Greenland waters, including those quotas which may be allocated to Norwegian and Faroese vessels under the relevant

reciprocal fisheries agreements, amount to some 100,000 tonnes of cod equivalent—mainly cod, redfish, Greenland halibut and shrimps.

These opportunities are balanced by the annual payment to Greenland from the Community budget of 26.5 million ECU—about £15 million—to which I referred earlier.

*Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East)*

My hon. Friend has used the word "balanced". What is the value of the fisheries in Greenland waters which will continue to be available to EEC countries? Does my hon. Friend agree that the figure last year was about 60 million ECU? That is not balanced, but is an amount well in excess of the payment received.

*Mr. Whitney*

We must see how this works in practice. I believe that the balance is struck by taking account not only of the fisheries but of the payment's relevance to the Community budget and the general relationship that Greenland will have with the Community. The Community's annual payment to Greenland during the first five years of the agreement, for which initial quotas have been set, will not vary unless fish stocks increase and the Community takes up any Greenland offer of additional quotas.

Built into the fisheries agreement are consultation procedures concerned with the functioning of the agreement. Should consultations fail to resolve any difficulties in the operation of the agreement, recourse may be made to the internal procedure provided for in the implementing regulations. This "safeguard clause" procedure allows for urgent action to be taken by the Commission in the first instance. Such action may take the form of adjustment or suspension of the trade arrangements for Greenland fish and fish products to protect Community markets from disruption. At the request of one or more member states the Commission's decision may be referred to the Council, which may amend or cancel the decision. This special procedure to safeguard the Community interest is similar to the arrangements that already apply to the bulk of imports into the Community from most third countries.

We naturally regret the Greenlanders' decision but we respect it. We believe that, taken together, the package negotiated between Greenland and the Community is a fair and balanced one, in which the interests of the Community and of the United Kingdom are adequately safeguarded.

*Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)*

Like the Minister, the Opposition welcome the opportunity to debate the withdrawal of Greenland from the European Community. We also welcome the suggestion of the Select Committee that the matter should be debated on the Floor of the House.

I am very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) is present, because I know that he has taken an interest in the matter. I am also pleased to see the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) who, from his earlier intervention, would seem to be here to represent the interests of the Greenlanders. No doubt he will have the opportunity later of speaking for himself.

On 1 January 1985, when all the Parliaments of the Community agree to the withdrawal of Greenland, the Community will lose half of its land area. On my way here this

morning I was wondering what Oscar Wilde might have put into the mouth of Lady Bracknell about the way in which the Community had neglected its responsibilities by enabling half of the land area of the Community to be lost. Nevertheless, as the Minister said, there are in Greenland only 45,000 people—a very small percentage of the population of the Community. However, I would caution any hon. Member — I suspect that the hon. Member for Southend, East might be one of those needing such a caution — about using the withdrawal of Greenland from the European Community as any kind of precedent for the withdrawal of a member state.

Greenland is not a member state of the Community, but, as the Minister rightly said, is and will remain part of the kingdom of Denmark, which will continue to be a member state of the Community. Greenland, as an autonomous part of the kingdom—and one which, as the Minister said, achieved home rule in 1953, having been a colony since 1721 — would provide a rather awkward precedent if it does provide one, for the hon. Member for Southend, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow if it were to be used. It would not be a precedent for the withdrawal of a whole member state, but it might be used as a precedent for the withdrawal of a small autonomous part of a state if that were granted, or sought and achieved, home rule during the course of the state's membership of the European Community.

As the Minister rightly said, it was a Left-wing home rule movement in Greenland which sought and ultimately achieved Greenland's withdrawal from the European Community. With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, it would be the kind of argument that might be sustained by some of his opponents in Blackburn, West Lothian, rather than by some of our supporters in Blackburn, Lancashire, if I may use his own argument against him. [Interruption.] Although the Opposition do not consider it to be a precedent, we must face the fact of the withdrawal, but, unlike the Minister, who regretted Greenland's decision, we would not use the word "regret". We accept and respect the decision of Greenland.

We must accept the fact that Greenland's relationship with the European Community has been an uneasy one. As part of the kingdom of Denmark, it has been a member of the European Coal and Steel Community, yet it has neither coal nor steel. Its membership has served merely to provide high steel prices in Greenland. It has been party to the common agricultural policy, yet there is no farming in Greenland. I am sure that even the hon. Member for Southend, East would agree with that. The CAP has served merely to provide Greenlanders with high food prices.

[Mr. Teddy Taylor](#)

But the hon. Gentleman will accept that Greenland had a coal industry until recently.

[Mr. Foulkes](#)

I accept that. It is not my information, but if the hon. Gentleman assures me of it, I shall accept it. I am sure he will agree that Greenland has no agriculture, so the CAP is not relevant, but merely provides the country with high food prices.

Most difficult and uneasy of all is Greenland's membership of Euratom. As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow will know, the Greenlanders are passionately anti-nuclear, yet as members of Euratom they have been forced to mine and develop their uranium.

We respect the decision of the Greenlanders in their referendum and we understand their position particularly because the Faroes, having achieved their independence or autonomy in relation to Denmark, were in different circumstances.

Perhaps unlike what I suspect the hon. Member for Southend, East will say, the Opposition would like to congratulate the Greenlanders on the deal that they have obtained for their withdrawal from the Community. Our Government could learn a thing or two from the way in which the Greenlanders have achieved a great deal in the negotiations. One commentator unfavourably referred to the Greenlanders, in their negotiations with the European Community, as men in oilskins and hairy sweaters negotiating with smooth Eurocrats. On the Opposition's assessment, the men in oilskins and hairy sweaters have done a lot better than those in pinstripe suits from Whitehall as well as the Prime Minister in her stridency.

What the United Kingdom has achieved in the budget negotiations — I am sure that the hon. Member for Southend, East will not disagree with me—is a limited deal of limited duration which will have to be renegotiated after a few years and provides much less than we demanded, without any real reform of the CAP or of the budget, which we demanded. Ultimately we are paying more through our value added tax contributions. That is a pretty poor deal achieved by our diplomacy, yet the men from Godthab and Copenhagen achieved a great deal more — a 10-year deal automatically renewable every six years thereafter.

Perhaps this is the answer which the Minister should have given to his hon. Friend. Greenlanders have free access for the fish that they catch and all other products to all the Community markets, which is a valuable concession. Best of all—I do not think that this is a trivial amount — during the negotiations the Greenlanders upped the amount from 18.5 million to 26.5 million ecu—more than £15 million according to my calculations, but I am open to correction. That is £300 for every man, woman and child in Greenland, which is not a bad deal. In addition, there is £300,000 a year from the European development fund. The Minister and some of his colleagues might like to take a trip to Godthab to find out how the Greenlanders did that, so that the next time round we know how to get a better deal out of the Community.

Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity of this debate on the contraction of the Community to comment on the prospects for expansion, especially in relation to Portugal, whose prospects of accession may well have deteriorated as a result of the Fontainebleau deal.

In an earlier debate my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked about the accession of Spain. Perhaps I could pursue that specifically in relation to Euratom.

*[Mr. Deputy Speaker \(Mr. Harold Walker\)](#)*

Order. The motion refers to Greenland, not Spain. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will confine his remarks to Greenland's membership of or secession from the Community.

Mr. Foulkes

I accept everything that you say, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I merely hoped that as Greenland was leaving the Community and Spain was hoping to enter it you might allow me to ask about the difficulty that might arise if Spain becomes part of Euratom without having signed the non-proliferation treaty. It would certainly be most helpful if you would allow the Minister to comment on that.

The deal obtained by Greenland from the EEC should be a great lesson to the British Government. Central to the agreement is the deal on fish, which we feel is not good for Britain. The Germans are grumbling, but they still have a substantial fleet of long-range vessels and their quotas will remain roughly the same. The Greenlanders have achieved a very good arrangement. Like the Icelanders, they will have control of their own fishing arrangements, which will no doubt help them as much as it has helped the Icelanders. In addition, they will have access to Community markets, including United Kingdom markets.

Perhaps the Minister will seek advice on this so that when he replies to the debate he can tell us whether there is any way in which the agreement will help the United Kingdom fleet as I understand that our fleet has contracted so much due to the common fisheries policy and to the policies pursued by the Government that we shall be unable to take advantage of the deal with Greenland. In other words, we do not have the resources to fish in their waters, but our markets will be open to them as well as to the Germans and the rest.

We wish the Greenlanders well after 1 January 1985. My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) endorses and approves this view. We wish the Greenlanders well in their new relationship with the Community and we look forward to co-operating with them in their new role and status.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East)

It is depressing, to say the least, to note that, although a great many hon. Members were present an hour ago to discuss secretarial and motoring allowances for Members of Parliament, only five of us have remained to debate the withdrawal from the European Community of the second largest island in the world. As the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) rightly said, Greenland also represents half the land mass of the Community, although the number of people involved is small.

I have four specific questions. First, my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that, judging from the papers that he and the Department kindly made available to us, the formula adopted to arrange Greenland's withdrawal from the EEC is a highly complicated one. There is a very good reason for that. There is no clear procedure in the treaty for the withdrawal of a part-member state or indeed a member state. In view of our experience with Greenland, is there not a case for saying that the Common Market should consider its rules and treaties with a view to providing a clear arrangement for the withdrawal of member states which wish to withdraw, if other member states agree?

The Common Market seems to be becoming more controversial, and may face a major crisis towards the end of the year. That being so, is it right that the treaty should treat all member states as if they were in a prison from which there is no way out? The

complexity of the formula which we have been obliged to adopt in order to enable Greenland to leave the Common Market shows the need for a clearer procedure.

I can think of no other international agreement from which withdrawal is so complex and difficult. Indeed, in this case, withdrawal seems to be almost impossible in law. Even bearing in mind the difficulty, within the treaty, of enabling a member state to withdraw, does the Minister feel that overseas territory status is the right answer? Most of the overseas territories are former or current colonial territories which are not yet independent. Greenland is not in that position.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary must be aware that a number of practical problems arise in connection with countries with overseas territory status. I can provide an example from Southend—a long way from Greenland. Under the arrangements for reciprocal medical treatment, if someone breaks a leg in Southend's high street while visiting this country and goes to Southend hospital, the hospital is now obliged to ask him where he comes from. If he is an overseas visitor, the hospital must charge a rate of, I believe, about £90 a day. However, if the answer to the question, "Where do you come from?" is "Guyana" the hospital then has to ask, "Which part of Guyana?". If the man comes from what was British Guyana, he will have to pay £90 a day. If he comes from French Guiana, he will automatically get free treatment because French Guiana is an overseas territory of France and is regarded as part of the EEC. Similar ridiculous situations arise in a number of other instances.

Does the Minister feel that it is wise to create more overseas territories — particularly bogus overseas territories — when to do so creates so many silly anomalies? I have drawn the attention of the Foreign Office to the anomalies connected with Guyana. The situation is an outrage.

There are also problems in connection with the fishing arrangements. We are continuing to pay the Greenlanders every year in recognition of the fish which Europeans—mainly the Germans — are securing. Britain will be paying a substantial part of the sum, but sadly, it is the Germans who will catch the fish.

Is this arrangement really favourable for the Greenlanders? The fish that they are giving up to the Germans are worth about 60 million ECU a year at 1982 prices. That is much more than the amount secured in compensation for them.

What guarantees are the Greenlanders to have? The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley applauded the fact that the Greenlanders had a guaranteed right to get their fish into the Community tariff-free. However, the Government have supplied a statement—the translation of a letter—issued in Brussels on 17 February this year. Page 5 lists factors to be considered.

Among them are: "on Greenland's side:" "—the advantages yielded by preferential access to the market for fishery products. These advantages depend on the potential export volume and on the preferential margin actually granted as compared with the rates accorded competing non-member countries". It would be helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister could clarify whether Greenland gets completely free access for its fishery products or whether there are reservations, as seems to be suggested in the Common Market paper. I refer to the advantages that depend on preferential access. Even that advantage depends on potential export volume and a preferential margin being granted.

My fourth question is extremely important. We must ask ourselves why the Greenlanders want to leave the Community. I have read quite a lot about the arguments during the referendum, and it appears that the major factor was that the Community rules were consistently being broken. For example, the fisheries agreement, which the Greenlanders thought provided some protection, was being driven through by German and other Community fishing vessels which disregarded them. It is understandable that the Greenlanders felt outraged. As my hon. Friend will be aware, in February 1980, two German trawlers that were fishing illegally were captured and their skippers were fined in Nuuk. That is just one example of many complaints that arose during the referendum campaign which elicited the response from the Greenlanders, "Why on earth should we carry on with these agreements when they are not being abided by?" Throughout the campaign, much emphasis was put on examples of abuse by the Community — especially German fishermen — of fishing licences within Greenland's 200-mile economic zone, which was then part of EEC waters.

Is my hon. Friend worried about the serious anxiety that we might cause more and more disagreement in the Community because agreements are not being applied? Britain is well aware of what is happening in the steel industry. Under a Common Market agreement, we have halved the number of people who are employed in the steel industry, yet it appears that other member states have given little more than promises. Indeed, the Italians are increasing their steel capacity, despite an agreement for substantial contraction. I believe that we shall have the same problem with the milk regulations that we debated recently. I know that we shall abide by those agreements but it is becoming clear, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food rightly said, that there is a real danger that other member states will not. I wonder whether Greenland's decision to withdraw because agreements were not being observed properly might lead to a major problem which could lead to a further rise of anxiety in Denmark, where there is a substantial movement to withdraw.

There is a lesson to be learnt from the Greenland episode and the fact that membership of the EEC is becoming less popular throughout the Community, as was demonstrated clearly in the recent elections for the European Assembly. The ridiculously low poll in Britain was similar to a turnout for a parish council election on a wet Tuesday. People are fed up and apathetic about the EEC, as they believe that they are being taken for a ride and that the rules are not being implemented. In view of the unfortunate circumstances facing the EEC and Greenland's decision to leave, I wonder whether we should look to Iceland and the Farnes for guidance. The European Free Trade Association has enjoyed remarkable success. That organisation is appropriate for Greenland and other comparable countries. Instead of constant disputes such as we have in the EEC which drive countries against each other, the opposite is true of EFTA. Members of EFTA work together peacefully and harmoniously, simply on reducing trade barriers. I believe that the secret of its success is that it does not spend money. There is no EFTA common agricultural policy, social policy or regional policy. It leaves such decisions to member states. That works extremely well. We can learn from the Greenland episode that whereas we have squabbles between the British, the French and the Germans about the distribution of resources — those squabbles will get worse as we increase resources — EFTA achieves harmony and friendship by concentrating simply on reducing trade barriers.

There are many complex rules comparable to the ones on fishing which affected Greenland and led to its withdrawal. The other organisation has no intention of trying to create a giant Euro super state, as do some Euro bureaucrats, including British ones. We

should try to adjust the EEC to being a non-spending organisation. It should not be an organisation which tempts the Government to become involved in silly Socialist schemes, which the country rightly rejects. We could at least ensure that we shall not have a series of documents such as this one, which will cause other members of the Common Market to seek to withdraw.

We must learn from the Greenlanders' decision to withdraw from the EEC. They withdrew because they were fed up with having agreements broken. We must look to the future of the EEC and see whether we can achieve more than we are achieving to prevent countries such as Greenland from withdrawing. Instead of giving more money to the Common Market, as the Minister will shortly ask us to do, it might be better if we asked ourselves why the Community wants to spend money.

We should also ask ourselves whether it is helpful to friendship and co-operation between European states to go ahead trying to get so-called union in that way. There would be far more harmony at the Community if we had a sensible organisation of countries, which sought to reduce trade barriers and to increase political co-operation, and thereby to increase harmony.

I hope that the Minister will consider the bureaucratic aspect, which also infuriated the Greenlanders. We have more than 12,000 civil servants and about 10 languages in the EEC. In EFTA there are 70 civil servants based in Geneva and they operate in one language.

We wish Greenland well, hope that it will continue to prosper and develop, and that relations between Greenland, the United Kingdom and the EEC will be satisfactory. I hope that we shall learn a lesson from the Greenlanders' decision. They pursued it thoroughly and effectively and they now have an opportunity to get away from the nonsensical bureaucracy and silly businesses of the EEC. We should learn from that and try to adjust and amend the EEC so that countries will not want to leave it.

*Mr. Whitney*

I am happy to agree with the final comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that we should continue to work for the adjustment of the EC so that no country will wish to leave it. That is precisely what we are debating today. This debate is a manifestation of the flexibility which the EC has achieved, and continues to achieve, and which enables it to accommodate the particular circumstances of Greenland.

My hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that I believe that the flexibility to leave is not one which we should seek to enjoy or employ, because it would be against the interests of the British people. Therefore, the parallel which he sought to draw and which wandered far from the shores of Greenland does not stand up to serious scrutiny.

I shall deal, first, with the precise questions raised by my hon. Friend before I return to the points made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who covered broader territory. My hon. Friend asked for a set of rules for leaving the Community, but that would be an unnecessary waste of resources and negotiating power. My hon. Friend complained, with some justification, about the number of bureaucrats employed by the Community. I am sure that he would not wish more time to be taken up by amending rules and rewriting the treaties so that member states could leave the Community.

No member state has any intention of leaving the Community, and none of the peoples has any intention of asking their Governments to leave it, as support for the Community makes clear. I agree that the turnout for the European elections was disappointing, but the recognition in Britain and in all member states that it would make no sense to leave is widely and deeply held. My hon. Friend is ploughing a lonely and increasingly narrow furrow.

*Mr. Teddy Taylor*

Had there been a clearer way for member states to depart, we would have saved much expense, bureaucracy and unnecessary meetings to try to reach a formula to enable them to leave. Does my hon. Friend agree that if the treaty had made the position clear, there would have been a great saving in time, meetings, bureaucracy and negotiations?

*Mr. Whitney*

Nations are seeking not to leave but to join the Community, which creates understandable problems for us. But they are problems for the future. We must concern ourselves with accession to the Community. There is no demand, except from a small and decreasing minority of British people and from a few people in other member states, to leave the Community. This arrangement for Greenland and its relationship with Denmark has given rise to the need for special provision, and we should congratulate the EC on demonstrating such flexibility. Membership of the OCT was carefully considered, and it was decided that that would be the appropriate mechanism to maintain a link with the Community without maintaining Greenland under the full Community regime. We have found an appropriate balance, taking into account all the factors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East compared French Guiana with the former British Guyana. As he knows, the constitutional positions are fundamentally different, hence the differences in treatment of French Guianese citizens arriving in hospitals in Southend and of citizens of the independent and sovereign state of Guyana.

The Community has made a good deal on access to fish products. The value will depend upon how much Greenland can export to the Community, which could increase as the fishing industry develops, and on the tariffs applied to other third country exports such as cod and shrimps—the tariffs that Greenland would have to pay if it had no preferential access. Of course, the tariffs will vary according to the products.

My hon. Friend's major point about the observance of Community agreements by member states is not well taken. There have been problems in the observance of steel quotas and other agreements, which my hon. Friend would be only too happy to raise. This is a question of making the Community work better. None of us would claim that it is in a state of Utopian perfection. We recognise that there is a job to do. The turnout for the European elections was disappointing, although I am glad to say that the balance of seats was very satisfactory. Some small gains were made by the Labour party, and I understand that, in its present parlous state, Opposition Members had to welcome them as a victory.

*Mr. Deputy Speaker*

Order. I have heard about Spain, Guyana, steel, and now the European elections in

Britain. It is a long way from Greenland. I hope that the Minister will turn his eyes northwards.

Mr. Whitney

I shall do my best to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley would also like to return to Greenland's pleasant shores or icy mountains.

I was a little confused by the hon. Gentleman's reference to Lady Bracknell, but I was glad that he recognised the rights of Greenland to withdraw. He mentioned his respect for Greenland's position. That is exactly the word that I would use. Her Majesty's Government respect it.

The hon. Gentleman claimed that the Greenlanders had a good deal, and he tried to make play with how much more the Greenlanders had achieved than we had. Let me emphasise that the negotiators from the British side obtained a deal with which we are extremely satisfied and which offers us a very good arrangement with our partners in the Community. It gives us all a chance now to go forward along the lines that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out so that we can complete the common market. It means that we can give our industries the opportunities and the market of which they must take advantage and develop co-operation between member states in new areas, including defence and security.

The example of Greenland is by no means one for us to follow. Our future is in the Community, as are the interests of our people. We recognise the pressures—

Mr. Foulkes

Before the Minister sits down, I hope that he will answer my question about British fishermen. I have asked it twice already. I ask it a third time. What benefit will British fishermen get out of it, or am I right in asserting that they will get no benefit?

Mr. Whitney

I thought that I had answered that question already. The United Kingdom quotas in Greenland waters are preserved. But I should point out that last year our fleet did not manage to catch the fish available to it. It may be that our fishermen have little expertise in this type of fishing. By this arrangement, the balance between member states has not changed. I accept what the hon. Gentleman said about German fishing. But it so happens that the fishing opportunities off Greenland are more important to Germany than to the United Kingdom. This reflects the historic interests of the member states in that fishery. The United Kingdom quotas in Greenland waters agreed under the common fisheries policy have been protected.

The route that Greenland has chosen is not one for the United Kingdom. But we respect the motives which led the Greenlanders to take the decision that they did. We wish them well and hope that the new arrangements which have been settled will work to the advantage of the Greenlanders, of the Community as a whole, and, of course, of the United Kingdom.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved, "That this House, while stressing the importance of maintaining continued close links between Greenland and the Community, recognises that the proposed change in the status of Greenland has wide support; and takes note of European Community Document No. 5064/84 transmitting legal texts providing for a change of the legal status of Greenland and fishery arrangements with regard to Greenland."*