

WASHINGTON TIMES

1) Popular statesman – by James Morrison (diplomatic correspondent), 6. okt 1999

Iceland's Ambassador Jon Baldvin Hannibalsson, a man of wit and intelligence, has become a popular diplomat on Embassy row. But the longer he stays in Washington the more popular he is becoming in Iceland, too. „The less they see me, the more they love me“, he joked when informed that he has been named Iceland's greatest living statesman in an opinion poll. The irony is that Mr Hannibalsson departed Iceland in 1997 to assume his posting here after he suffered a political defeat in his Social-democratic party in 1995 and left politics.

In the poll ranking the most important Icelanders, in the last 1000 years, the Ambassador ranked second behind Iceland's 19th century independence leader Jon Sigurdsson.

„Unsurprisingly, Sigurdsson, who led the Icelandic independence movement in the 19th century against the Danes, snapped at 39%,“ said an Iceland news report on the poll this week“. What is more surprising, perhaps, is the number two choice“. Mr Hannibalsson was supported by 30.9% of the 1778 respondents to the poll.

Prime minister David Oddsson was the choice of only 13% of those questioned in the survey organised by the DV newspaper, Bylgjan radio, SS meat producers and Visir-online news service.

Mr Hannibalsson, a former foreign minister, finance minister and Social Democratic leader, is regularly described as „aggressive“, „controversial“ and – sometimes – „colorful“. Those are not the qualities normally associated with Icelandic politics, one diplomat said.

„In 1995 he staked his own fortune and that of his party in a big fight for having Iceland apply for European Union membership. He lost heavily“, said Sveinn Björnsson, the deputy chef of mission at the embassy. His adversaries politely offered him an exit from domestic politics – the ambassadorship in Washington.

Now he receives many letters from Icelanders, asking him when he is coming home.

2) The Vikings – by James Morrison (diplomatic correspondent), apríl 2000

Icelandic ambassador Jon Baldvin Hannibalsson is happy to explain the connection between Leif Eriksson, the discovery of America, democracy and NATO. For the erudite envoy, one is a continuation of the other, and this week is the perfect time to connect the medieval explorer and the transatlantic alliance. The Smithsonian institution tomorrow opens an exhibit titled „Vikings – the North-Atlantic Saga“ with Nordic ambassadors and the king and queen of Norway. Mr Hannibalsson in a speech prepared for delivery today at a meeting of the World Affairs Council in Norfolk, recounts the voyages of the man known to Icelanders as „Leif the lucky“. He recalls the early democratic institutions of Iceland and his small island's role as a bulwark of freedom during WWII and the Cold War, and as an advocate of the expansion of NATO to include the Baltic nations on Russia's border.

He says the Smithsonian exhibit will help to explain to Americans that Leif Erikson arrived in North America nearly 500 years before Columbus. The Vikings explored and established temporary settlements in parts of Canada.

„His land of birth, Iceland, can justly claim to have the longest established relationship between any European country and North America“, he says.

Mr Hannibalsson also notes that Iceland had established democratic government in the 10th century. It lasted nearly 300 years when Iceland was conquered by Norway. „It took us more than 600 years to restore the balance and regain independence“, he says.

Mr Hannibalsson notes, that Iceland, while officially neutral in WWII, cooperated with the allies, who established air and naval bases there. „Hitler had plans to occupy Iceland“, the ambassador says. „He knew that he who controls Iceland, controls the sea-lanes of communication across the Atlantic.“

Iceland became a founding member of NATO in 1949. „Since then it has been recognised that Iceland within the NATO alliance, is the physical embodiment of the transatlantic relationship, which since then has been – and remains – to this very day – the mainstay of the great democratic alliance of America and Europe“, Mr Hannibalsson says.

Iceland is now the major advocate for the admission of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and former Warsaw pact nations into NATO, despite Russian objections.

„A peaceful and prosperous eastern Europe does not pose any threat to Russia“, he says.