

Dear friends,

First of all I want to congratulate you with your annual meeting and thank you all for inviting me here. It is a pleasure to be here with you.

I can hopefully give you some glimpse into the politics in Iceland and into the political experience that we in my party, The Left Green Movement, have gone through since it's foundation in 1998.

You all know of course that politics, just as life itself, is a road often full of surprises and uncertainty and it sometimes looks and feels like a rollercoaster-ride.

And our road in the Left Green movement for those 20 years has been a road of defeats, but also of victories.

These days and weeks we commemorate that 10 years have passed since the Economic Downfall in 2008, both in Europe and in the US.

In Iceland, we look back to that time and to the following years and recall what has been our most difficult period in recent times.

Iceland nearly faced a total bankruptcy when 3 of our 4 banks went bankrupt overnight, our country's Treasury's debts plummeted all of a sudden, unemployment rates increased from almost nothing up to 19% in few days and the Icelandic National Hospital faced immediate medicine insecurity. Those were times of uncertainty and fear.

Iceland became the first western country in decades to ask the International Monetary Fund to come in with an economic rescue-plan. The IMF had then primarily been assisting developed countries where severe poverty, serious corruption issues and lack of infrastructure and economic disasters had to be dealt with.

And the Icelandic People were shocked, ashamed and angry and the people lost all faith in the fundamental institutions, the economic system, the Parliament and in the politics and politicians. We saw massive demonstrations for the first time. A new government was formed and took over 2 months after the Crash, and for the first time in 30 years and for the second time in 70 years, the Conservative Party was out of government. We had formed a left-wing government with the Social Democrats that was in power for the next 4 years until 2013. And the task was big: to clean the house and raise the country up on its feet again. And that was quite a task.

But it matters who is in charge and the fact that these political parties were in power did certainly matter. They accentuate on the defense of social issues, the health care system and welfare system in times of austerity and painfully necessary cut-downs. At the same time we established the most advanced environmental policy up until then in Iceland, and managed to make way for unemployed people to go to school and facilitate them to get some more education while they were unemployed. And we put the gender issues on the political map and increased the importance of the gender issues in policy making.

But times were still very difficult for too many people in Iceland in the aftermath years of the Crash. And still is, 10 years on. And the politics haven't regain the people's trust.

During those years, my party suffered from internal dispute and heavy opposition in the Parliament took its toll, and just before the election in 2013 my party had fallen from around 22% in the elections in 2009 to around 3% in the polls. Bold decisions had to be taken, and shortly before the elections my party changed the leadership. It was a brave decision, we received around 10% in the elections 2013 but after all the hard work we had done and all the work we accomplished we of course wanted more rewards. So we have been there my friends.

The old, bad political parties took over in 2013. The boys who had ruined the house with too many and too loud parties, walked right back in again. But after only 3 years in government, it was revealed that both the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister had been in the Panama Papers, avoiding to pay tax in their own country that they governed! Mass demonstration was held in Iceland, and we had early

elections in December 2016. Left-Green Movement did better now with 15,9% and went into governmental discussions but without any success. 3 other parties formed a government that collapsed 9 months later because of a scandal that one of the parties did not want to be a part of. Again we had election in October 2017 and now we got 16,9% and became the second biggest party in the Parliament. we started coalition discussions with Social Democrats, The Pirate party and the Center Party. But ended up forming a government with the Center Party and the Conservative Party. That was a decision not without a struggle, since the Conservatives are on the opposite side of almost all our issues and have been involved in all the major scandals in recent years. The decision was put into a vote in our party and 20% of the members voted against going into this kind of governmental coalition and 2 members out of 11 in of our Parliamentary Group voted openly against the decisions. One of them is standing right here. But the democratic decision was made by the party and now our chairman, Miss Katrín Jakobsdóttir, is Iceland's prime minister and we also have the Minister of Health and Minister of Environmental Issues. I wish them of course all the best in their work and I know they will always try to do their very best in putting emphasis on social values and green issues. It will be very hard work with these partners, and even if I don't agree with the decisions on forming a coalition government with these parties, because my view was to form a more progressive government, I of course wish them all the best. And this is where I come to the compromising part of politics. As you all know, politics are also about compromising to get to a solution. It may not be 100% what we want, but that is seldom the case in life itself. But despite the necessary compromising fact in politics, we must keep our focus on the goal. The goal of making our society better now and for the future generations. And it has seldom been as vital and urgent as know dear friends.

We live in time of changes and in times of democratic uncertainty. Both in Europe and in the USA. We should embrace criticism and the need for reform, and we should embrace a good, thorough and respectful debate, but let's not make way for exclusion, extremism or hate.

And we, members of green parties must be focused on being a strong and important part of the resisting force to this often terrifying development that populism and extremism is. Both in regional politics and in national politics.

We must stand together to be a part of the resisting force to the backlash of democratic values and human rights that we see every day against people fleeing war torn places and seeking for international protection. We must be a part of the resisting force against the backlash of feminism that we see in some European countries like Hungary, Poland and the Balkan countries.

And we see the result of the good and important work of green parties in Europe of today; I see it so often it in my work as a Vice President of the European Council's Parliamentary Assembly. We witnessed the Green Party Members in The European Parliament who managed to get a unified condemnation against the politics of the Prime Minister of Hungary. We have observed how the Swedish Green Party have put the environmental issues and feminism on the agenda in a coalition government in Sweden for the last 4 years.

Dear friends, green politics with feminism, open democracy, human rights and solidarity and ecological issues, are finally becoming more mainstream politics than before and we must raise the values of green politics as high as we can. If we stand together and focus on what unifies us, we can do that in every level of the politics.

Good luck to you all !

*Rosa Björk Brynjólfsson*

*Wien, 22.09.2018*