

Original Paper

Construction and Social Effects of Iceland's Immigration and Nationality Policy from 1944 to 1993

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Abstract

Iceland achieved full independence in 1944 and took charge of the immigration office. Because the island is far from the mainland and most people share the same ethnicity, coupled with the need for national unity in Iceland, a closed policy of ethnic immigration was imposed from 1944 to 1993. In the Cold War, Iceland's immigration system was based on nationality law, and the main features were a kinship-based naturalisation system, compulsory Icelandisation of names and prohibition of dual citizenship. The three systems worked together to form a management system with different ethnic areas, shared culture and the nation; they solved problems of entry, assimilation and identity. This paper will study the period from 1944 to 1993 using a historical institutionalist approach and will take into account the social changes and regional development of Iceland after the war. It is systematically introduced how the immigration policy was formed at that time and what dual historical effects it had on Iceland. Research shows that at this time, conservative policies were institutional arrangements taken by Iceland to protect its ethnic group and strengthen the basis of national identity amid unstable sovereignty, culture and economy. This system helped maintain social stability and cultural independence at the beginning of the founding of the country, but it also had problems such as a rigid population structure and a lack of human resources; therefore, policy adjustments were made after the 1990s.

Keywords

1944-1993, Iceland, immigration policy, kinship, name regulation, dual citizenship

1. The Context of Iceland's Immigration Policy from 1944 to 1993

Iceland's highly exclusive and ethnically-oriented immigration system from 1944 to 1993 was not the result of a single law, but rather an institutional outcome formed by the island's special geography and history, the needs of new nation-building after the war, changes in the economic environment, etc.

Compared with the diverse ethnic groups and open-and-inclusive immigration governance in continental Europe, Iceland's social, economic and political environment during the Cold War was very different; thus, its immigration policy focused on bloodline selection and cultural purification and was based on nationality exclusivity.

1.1 Geographical Isolation and the Formation of Iceland's Mono-ethnic Society

Iceland is located far away from other parts of the world in the North Atlantic; as a result, it has developed a relatively homogeneous society and has maintained the conservative post-war immigration policy for an extended period. Far from mainland Europe and surrounded by the sea, with poor transportation facilities, Iceland did not have any large-scale immigration before the modern era and maintained a closed pattern of population increase and cultural inheritance. In the early days of its independence in 1944, Iceland had a total population of just over 120,000, and the proportion of Icelanders was more than 99%. There were no indigenous minority groups, and the proportion of immigrants was less than 1%, so it was one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in Europe.

For thousands of years, Iceland has had a single language, a common Christian belief (such as post-war Lutheranism), a folk system and social morals, and distinct cultural divisions among the various groups. Unlike many parts of continental Europe, which have had continuous ethnic migration, cultural assimilation and so on over a long time, Iceland has not experienced large-scale foreign invasions or cultural construction. The sense of national identity and cultural pride among the general public is deeply rooted. In the traditional social consciousness of Iceland, "Icelandic" is not just a legal concept of nationality but also a deeply rooted ethnic identity that is connected to bloodlines, local culture and history. The arrival and blending of the foreign group are often regarded as a threat to ethnic homogeneity and will disrupt the existing social system.

Iceland has a very homogenous society, which means there is a lack of a long history of interaction and joint development for different ethnic groups; as a result, it has been extremely resistant to foreign cultures and immigrants. After achieving independence in 1944, the main idea among the people was to maintain the hard-won nation's independence, break free from Danish cultural influence, and build a new Icelandic national consciousness. Relaxed immigration policies and the integration of various ethnic groups would directly weaken the unity and cohesion of the nation. For a long time, there has been strong consensus among the public and a solid foundation of social support supporting the conservative immigration policies in Iceland from 1944 to 1993, such as bloodline selection, cultural assimilation and nationality exclusion.

1.2 Sovereign Independence and the Demand for Identity Construction of a Newly Established State

Iceland achieved statehood in 1944 and thus created its own immigration and national identity system. Since 1380, Iceland had been ruled by a union of Denmark and Norway and was not fully independent for a long time. At that time, the determination of nationality, population movement and management of foreign residents in Iceland were all governed by Danish law, and the island did not have self-governance. In World War II, Germany invaded Denmark. Then, the British and Americans took

control of Iceland. There was a lack of self-governance in the external jurisdiction of Iceland. In 1944, after a referendum, Iceland left the union with Denmark and was officially named the Republic of Iceland. The full sovereignty of legislation, the executive and the courts have been achieved. For this new regime, the main tasks to consolidate sovereignty and unify the people were to establish a nationality law independently and build a local immigration governance system.

Iceland has a small population, weak national power and a long history of dependence on other countries. For a new small country, its nationality system and immigration policies are used to manage the population and are also political symbols of national sovereignty and independence. At the beginning of its establishment, Iceland required a strict system of identity to create a clear distinction between “Icelanders” and “outsiders”; thus, it was hoped that a unified national consciousness could be fostered and the problem of identity confusion resulting from centuries of foreign rule addressed. A loose-grained immigration system would erode ethnic boundaries, spread the unity of the nation, and thus be harmful to the stability of the new nation. On the other hand, strict and exclusive immigration control would increase the proportion of the native population and thus strengthen the social foundation of the new regime.

Based on the above, Iceland implemented the Icelandic Nationality Law in 1952. The law built an all-round system of immigration and nationality administration and set up the three principles of kinship, name purification and nationality exclusivity. The law showed great consistency in the period of this study, and its basis of logic and fundamental system were not altered. A high degree of institutional stability met the new nation’s essential needs to consolidate sovereignty and build a national consciousness.

1.3 Low Immigration Demand Economic Model of a Single-Industry Structure

From 1944 to 1993, the industrial structure and economic system of Iceland were stable, and as a result, its restrictive immigration policy remained in place for a long time. For more than forty years after the war, the economy of Iceland has been based on fishing and farming. The traditional industries had a simple structure and were not yet mechanised. Therefore, Iceland used only its local labour force and did not have an economic reason to bring in a large number of immigrants. Fishing has been the main source of income for the people in Iceland for generations, and the labour force is entirely self-sufficient. Agriculture and animal husbandry were run by families, were small-scale enterprises, and had almost no labour shortages.

By the 1970s, Iceland had started to build the fisheries processing industry and the primary service sector. Iceland’s industrial upgrading was slow, its economic internationalisation was low, and the entire structure of industry had not changed much. Therefore, Iceland had very little demand for high-skilled workers and foreign labour. At that time, other Western and Nordic countries faced labour shortages in the recovery of their industries after the war and thus welcomed immigrants. Iceland did not have the economic need to relax its immigration policy, however. On the other hand, due to the lack of local job opportunities and a weaker social security system, the Icelandic government has always

aimed to restrict immigration and safeguard the livelihoods and welfare of its own citizens. Therefore, there have been fewer immigrants.

Iceland's economy is also relatively small and the market is relatively closed, so it is less appealing to foreign investment. Even in the absence of strict policy restrictions, the number of voluntary foreign residents has been small. As the economy does not require foreign workers, there will be no need to alter the restrictive immigration system. Thus, the three main immigration policies implemented between 1944 and 1993 were stable for a long time and did not change due to economic development.

1.4 Few Restrictions and a Closed Development Model of Nordic Regional Cooperation

The process of post-World War II Nordic integration had a small and weak effect on Iceland's immigration policy between 1944 and 1993 and failed to alter the country's conservative foundation. In 1954, the four Nordic countries set up a joint labour market system and began to introduce the free movement of labour among them gradually. However, due to caution about the small size of its domestic labour market and the desire for sovereign independence, Iceland did not sign the agreement initially and remained outside the Nordic network of free labour movement for a long time before officially joining in 1982. At that time, Iceland had a very strict policy on the free movement of labour, allowing almost no right for short-term workers from Nordic countries with similar backgrounds; it would never relax the standards for naturalisation or long-term residence.

In 1970, Iceland became a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and thus joined the European regional economic system. It has always followed the rule of limited openness under the premise of sovereign independence and retained full autonomy over immigration and nationality. The Pluralist and Inclusive ideals of European integration had not significantly changed the main institutional system during the Cold War. The Nordic countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway have been actively reducing immigration restrictions in the process of promoting regional integration; Iceland, which is an island country and has strong policy autonomy, has not changed this relatively closed system of population movement for a long time.

Before 1993, there were many more migrants around the world and European Union expansion. Iceland has been able to reduce the impact of the above reasons on its own borders by exercising its sovereignty and is also geographically convenient. At that time, the many international multilateral systems had relatively few restrictions on immigration management for small, homogeneous countries such as Iceland. Therefore, before the 1993 European Economic Area Agreement (EEA) required the free movement of people, Iceland's exclusive immigration system did not need to be changed. The area and the world were relatively mild; therefore, for a long time between 1944 and 1993, Iceland's cautious immigration policy has not been severely constrained and is thus stable.

2. Structure and Details of Iceland's Main Immigration System (1944-1993)

From 1944 to 1993, Iceland had a system of immigration and nationality based on the 1952 Icelandic Nationality Law. Generally speaking, the three parts of the system are the identity screening, cultural

assimilation and sovereignty definition. First, the rule of kinship controlled nationality access at its origin and strictly screened the ethnic origins of immigrants. Secondly, according to the law, immigrants had to adopt Icelandic names to facilitate their cultural assimilation and eliminate the division between the ethnic group at home and abroad. Finally, prohibiting dual citizenship has also clarified the country of origin in the sense of legal sovereignty and promoted immigrants to better identify with the country. The three systems worked together and, one after the other, formed a whole management chain. This was the main content of Iceland's immigration policy during the Cold War, and it is one of the most typical institutional features that distinguish Iceland from other Nordic countries.

2.1 Lineage-based Access to Nationality Acquisition

From 1944 to 1993, Iceland did not have a birthright citizenship system and thus used only direct blood ties to grant citizenship or immigration; it was a closed system based on kinship. This rule has been the same all along. It was the first institution in Iceland to select and manage immigrants to promote ethnic unity in the small country through "ethnic priority and local focus".

According to the 1952 Icelandic Nationality Law, citizenship will be determined by direct descent, and it is not based on the place of birth. There are three such cases: First, for children born in wedlock, if the mother is an Icelandic national, the child is granted Icelandic citizenship; or, if the father is an Icelandic national and the parents are legally married, the child can also obtain Icelandic citizenship. Secondly, for children born out of wedlock whose mother is a foreign national, they are granted citizenship upon registration by the legal father; the parents do not need to obtain a marriage certificate (if born abroad, an application to the Ministry of Justice is required). Third, in the case of humanitarian protection, abandoned infants in Iceland who cannot be proven to have foreign ancestry will be given Icelandic citizenship.

Immigration and citizenship have been more restricted than those based on kinship. For almost half a century after the war, Iceland had very strict restrictions on foreign immigrants without Icelandic ancestry. Ordinary immigrants (non-Nordic and without native Icelandic ancestry) were generally not eligible for citizenship, regardless of how long they had lived in Iceland, how much wealth they had accumulated or contributed, etc. Iceland only has a small number of citizenship routes for two groups: first, overseas residents with direct Icelandic ancestry and their descendants; their application process is relatively simple and the success rate is higher; second, citizens of other Nordic countries; due to similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, they can apply for citizenship after living here for a long time, but the requirements for this application are still much stricter than for those with Icelandic ancestry.

Iceland's kinship-based citizenship is a result of the anxiety that the small ethnic group will be wiped out. Iceland has a relatively small population of just over 100,000 at the time of independence and has had little growth since then. At that time, the government and the people in Iceland were in general agreement that a large number of immigrants without family ties would disrupt the unity of the nation. Compared with the more open system of birthright citizenship, kinship-based citizenship can conduct a

pre-screening of immigrants at the point of entry to prevent deep mixing among ethnic groups and thus maintain the absolute dominance of the Icelandic nation. From 1944 to 1993, the system achieved the goal of national purity in Iceland. At that time, the number of foreign nationals who naturalised was very small, and Iceland had a homogenous population.

2.2 Mandatory Icelandic Name Assimilation Regulation

Names are directly related to the culture and ethnicity of a country. From 1944 to 1993, they have been used by the Icelandic state to promote the cultural assimilation of immigrants and preserve traditional Icelandic culture. Iceland has a different system of names than most other countries in Europe. Icelanders do not have the traditional, fixed family surname; instead, they uniformly use the Viking naming system, which is derived from the father's or mother's name (ending in "-son" for men and "-dóttir" for women). It is a typical example of Iceland's cultural autonomy and history. To promote the cultural homogeneity of the country, "Icelandisation of Names" was made a mandatory requirement for entry and residence in Iceland. Before the legal system was revised in the mid-1990s, it had not yet been introduced.

The restriction on names did not appear after the war but rather strengthened and extended the 1925 Name Law. As early as 1925, Iceland had already introduced laws prohibiting its citizens from taking new foreign surnames. After gaining independence in 1944, Iceland fully applied this principle to immigration and naturalisation; it was then officially stipulated that one must "change one's name to obtain citizenship", and foreign nationals applying for Icelandic citizenship are required to give up their original foreign surnames in principle according to the law. They must select a new name from the officially approved standardised name list that is in line with Icelandic spelling and grammatical declension, and must strictly follow the native patronymic system.

The Icelandic government has set up an independent name committee that is responsible for the review and regulation of names in the implementation stage. The assimilation logic of the system for all immigrant groups is the same. Whether they are culturally similar Scandinavian immigrants or non-Skáravía immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Americas, all must give up their original surname system for the purpose of obtaining an Icelandic name. It will also continue the family line. The descendants of naturalized immigrants should also use names in line with Icelandic tradition to avoid having foreign culture in their lineage.

From 1944 to 1993, which is the period under study, the mandatory Icelandicisation of names was very stable and strict. The basic idea of the Icelandic government's management was to have a large number of diverse and mixed names that could clearly show ethnic divisions and thus undermine the unity of local culture. Given that Iceland has a very small culture and population, a unified name symbol would be a low-cost and highly efficient way to maintain national independence and create a single cultural identity. It was not officially abolished until the legislative adjustment of 1995. Therefore, in the period under study of this paper, the mandatory name assimilation policy was fully and intensively enforced.

2.3 Prohibition of Dual Nationality

The prohibition of dual nationality is a fundamental rule stipulated in the Icelandic Nationality Act of 1952, and it is also one of the concentrated expressions of Iceland's efforts to maintain the exclusivity of nationality sovereignty and the uniqueness of national identity between 1944 and 1993. Besides the system of kinship and name order, there is also another legally stipulated institutional barrier to the restrictive immigration policy in Iceland.

According to the provisions of the 1952 Act, strict rules on nationality were set in the legal text of Iceland. First of all, there is the rule of automatic loss of citizenship: if an Icelandic national voluntarily applies for and is granted foreign citizenship, they will automatically lose their Icelandic citizenship. Secondly, there is the principle of renunciation: foreign immigrants applying for naturalisation must, in principle, give up their original citizenship; however, if the laws of their country of origin do not permit renunciation, there will also be special exemptions in the law. Thirdly, there is the rule of adult restriction: Individuals with dual citizenship due to reasons such as overseas birth who have never lived in Iceland before the age of 22 will automatically lose their Icelandic citizenship upon turning 22 unless they obtain special permission.

In terms of the system of institutions and governance efficiency, due to the administrative and technical circumstances at the time of the Cold War, an effective and flexible cross-border verification network for Iceland could not be formed. It is based on the constraint of identity registration and self-reporting instead. The Nordic countries' treaties on nationality are primarily to promote naturalisation and assimilation in the region, but they do not have a cross-border regulatory system. However, there has never been a legal path to dual citizenship in Iceland at present. After the administrative verification of dual citizenship, it will be legally deemed that one has lost their citizenship and forfeited related rights. The two types of governance logic under the single-citizenship system in Iceland are sovereignty and nationhood. In terms of sovereignty, as a young, small-population independent country, having a single nationality will avoid the problem of multiple jurisdictions and conflicts in national loyalty caused by various national groups. In terms of nationhood, it will increase the sense of belonging among the people of Iceland. In conjunction with the policies of bloodline selection and cultural assimilation, it has successfully maintained the absolute leading position of the local ethnic group and the cultural unity of society during the period of sovereignty consolidation in the Cold War.

3. The Multi-dimensional Social Impact of Iceland's Immigration Policy from 1944 to 1993

From 1944 to 1993, Iceland's conservative immigration policy was based on kinship, culture and nationality, and it was a systemic choice made in light of the national situation and to ensure the survival of the nation. At that time, the government put forward the following policies to help Iceland rebuild and develop its society after the war. However, with the passing of time, this highly exclusive system gradually showed its shortcomings and began to restrict the growth of the population, economy and society. In general, the effect of Iceland's immigration policy at that time was two-fold. It had

achieved the basic goals of maintaining national survival and social stability, but it had also formed many developing contradictions that would later be addressed by policy adjustments after the 1990s.

3.1 Consolidation Effect on the Survival of the Nation and Cultural Independence

From 1944 to 1993, Iceland's conservative and restrictive immigration policies have been the main institutional support for maintaining national purity, cultural independence and social order. This was also a necessary foundation for the small country to resist the external shock and live on. Many European countries faced social problems such as ethnic conflict, cultural fragmentation and identity differentiation after the large-scale migration of people from various parts of the world following World War II. For half a century, Iceland has had a very unified national system and culture, and its social stability and national unity have consistently been at the top of the Nordic countries.

First, due to the rule of kinship, a large number of people from other ethnic groups did not come to Iceland at that time; thus, the population of Iceland remained largely homogeneous. At that time, the proportion of officially registered foreign residents in Iceland was less than 2 per cent of the total population, and the number of naturalized foreigners was very small; the absolute majority of native Icelanders had not changed. Given the relative homogeneity of the population, there were not many conflicts between ethnic groups over resources and power. It enabled Iceland to maintain social stability in the face of numerous changes after the war and created a good internal environment for the development of the economy and the construction of the nation.

Second, mandatory Icelandicisation of names has been applied at the level of public symbols and law to protect Iceland's unique culture for the immigrant community. The names, language and folk culture in Iceland are all very distinctive, but due to its relatively small scale, they have been damaged by dominant foreign cultures. Through the compulsory name change system, naturalised immigrants gave up their foreign cultural marks in the course of their official life and could fully engage in local culture; their descendants were also included in the traditional culture of Iceland. Between 1944 and 1993, there was no serious decline in culture or language in Iceland. It has retained the original national culture and, although fully independent from the cultural system of its former colonial power for a long time, has also constructed its own independent culture.

Finally, there is no dual nationality to strengthen the sense of belonging to the country. The newly independent Republic of Iceland needed to create a common national consciousness in order to survive. The single-citizenship system did not have the problems of ambiguity and divided loyalty caused by multiple identities. It promoted a shared sense of the nation among all the people and strengthened national unity to support the new government. In the critical period of consolidating sovereignty from 1944 to 1993, this conservative immigration policy met the survival needs of Iceland's small ethnic groups and achieved some positive results, such as protecting the nation, inheriting culture and society, etc.

3.2 The Problem of an Old Population Structure and Lack of Human Resources

Although it has been successful in maintaining stability, the exclusive immigration system in Iceland

from 1944 to 1993 has also created a serious structural problem of demographic decline and limited the development of society over the long term. Although there were strict policies of bloodline-based entry, cultural assimilation and nationality exclusion at that time to protect the local community, they also completely shut off a regular path for the entry of foreign residents. Therefore, the rise in Iceland's population has been due to an increase in the birth rate only; its population structure is fixed, and it will be unable to cope with future demographic changes on its own without external assistance or adequate capacity.

Although it benefited from a high birth rate and the baby boom after World War II, which doubled the total population of Iceland from about 130,000 in 1944 to approximately 260,000 in 1993, the very small population base still cannot meet the demands of large-scale production in modern society. Since immigration cannot provide a structural advantage, this model of population growth is endogenous; therefore, the social labour supply will be very sensitive to changes in the local population and will set the stage for a concentrated outbreak of the aging crisis in the future. In addition, there are strict naturalisation conditions that make it difficult for foreign workers to plan for a long life abroad and naturalisation, so the main labour force is highly mobile and cannot be transformed into a strategic human resource reserve for social stability in Iceland.

Since the 1970s, the fisheries processing, tourism and modern service industries in Iceland have gradually developed. Due to the growth of this industry, there are now shortages of all kinds of labour and high-tech talent. As a result, the country's immigration policy is not meeting the new demands for labour in the new-era industry. Foreign workers without Icelandic ancestry have difficulty obtaining long-term residency, and at the same time, highly skilled professionals do not have the motivation to live in Iceland for extended periods due to strict naturalisation requirements and limited rights. The structure of labour shortage will limit the development and progress of its economy. Therefore, Iceland's economy has been dominated by the traditional resource-intensive industries of fishing for a long time and has made little progress in industrial diversification and internationalisation, thus failing to improve the fundamental weakness and resilience of its economic structure.

The prohibition on dual citizenship has also made it more difficult to retain high-end talents who are needed for the development of our country. From 1944 to 1993, some young people and professionals in Iceland sought better lives abroad and left the country. Due to the restriction imposed by the single citizenship law, after obtaining foreign citizenship, one automatically lost their Icelandic nationality and was thus disconnected from the domestic human resources and capital cycle. As a result, there has been a two-way outflow of talent and capital from Iceland and an increased distance from other Nordic countries in some high-end industries. Finally, Iceland has been in a system of decline to some extent due to its small population, the departure of skilled workers, and weak industrial diversification.

3.3 Lack of Social Diversity and Accumulation of Latent Ethnic Conflicts

Although the aim was to maintain social order, the long-term policy of single-ethnicity rule and forced assimilation also led to a closed-off, conservative development mode of Icelandic society from 1944 to

1993. Due to a lack of social diversity, it was much slower to internationalise and integrate with other regions of the Nordic countries than other regions, at the same time leading to gradual ethnic divisions and setting the stage for structural problems in the process of social changes later on.

Under the strictness of institutions, Icelandic society has had no natural integration of various ethnic groups and cultures for a long time. Public governance, the education system and social culture are all built on indigenous ethnic culture and do not have adaptation and buffering mechanisms for multiculturalism. As a result, the general public has had only a shallow understanding of various cultures, and for a long time, the social governance system has been based on a “single-ethnic” path, lacking the administrative experience and governance ability to manage complex immigrant societies. Compared with Denmark and Sweden, which started to shift towards multicultural integration governance in the 1970s, Iceland did not have such a strong sense of diversity in its single culture until 1993, and the development of inclusive awareness among the general public in the public sphere was relatively slow.

At the same time, with the formal signing of the Nordic Common Labour Market Agreement in 1982, the flow of people in the Nordic countries started to affect Iceland significantly. A part of the skilled workforce in the Nordic countries and a small number of non-Nordic workers started living in Iceland permanently. Although restricted by the strictness of nationality laws, this group was relatively small in absolute numbers; however, they were legally considered “residents rather than citizens” and lived on the outskirts for a long time. Immigrants from non-Nordic areas are typical representatives of this phenomenon, and due to the absence of full political rights and protracted institutional neglect, they struggled to form a sense of belonging with society. In addition, the mandatory Icelandicization of names and strict cultural assimilation policies greatly damaged the original cultural identity and emotional ties of the immigrant community; they have been deprived of cultural freedom and are in a state of identity confusion in public life, which has fostered hidden cultural friction.

In the early 1990s, with the gradual increase in the number of foreign residents, the long-suppressed contradictions that had developed under the stable system began to show in some areas of public life, and at the micro level, the occurrence of cultural barriers and rights disputes increased. The government and educational institutions in Iceland gradually realized that the old system of forced assimilation was no longer suitable for a country with a large number of ethnic groups, but at that time, changes were very slow. The closed and conservative immigration system started to be temporarily out of step with the trend of internationalisation in social development, and the demands of society for policy relaxation and institutional reform have been growing continuously.

3.4 Institutional Barriers to Regional Internationalisation

From 1944 to 1993, the conservative and closed-border immigration system of the country has gradually become an institutional constraint on the long-cherished ideal of deep foreign integration in the process of growth of regional cooperation and globalisation. The main trend of post-World War II Nordic regional cooperation and the European free trade area is the free movement of people, capital

and factors of production. At the level of the foundation, the system of kinship-based screening, forced assimilation and nationality exclusivity in Iceland is not in line with the general trend of regional openness and inclusivity, and thus has reduced its foreign exchange and international cooperation to some extent.

In light of the Nordic regional cooperation, a good system for immigrants and nationals in Iceland has increased the cost of adaptation to institutionalised regional cooperation. Before the official signing of the Nordic Common Labour Market Agreement in 1982, Iceland had been out of touch with the labour integration of the region for a long time; and even after joining the framework in 1982, some rigid laws in Iceland, such as mandatory name assimilation, have not yet been abolished and thus act as an implicit barrier to deep cooperation in cross-border talent exchange. Compared with the open-ended approach of the Nordic countries to actively reduce immigration restrictions and attract talent from all sectors in the region, Iceland has institutional barriers that lead it to be more introverted and cautious about integrating into the multi-faceted and integrated system of the region.

At the same time, with the start of globalisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, ideas of international governance based on “non-discrimination”, “free movement of people across borders”, and “standards for the protection of human rights” gradually spread in Europe. Mandatory name assimilation, the sole prohibition of dual citizenship, and a rule of entry based solely on kinship in Iceland have gradually attracted the attention of European human rights bodies and regional multilateral organisations; thus, this country has begun to enjoy some attention from the public and compliance pressure. This closed system of identity governance has restricted the free movement of labour and capital in the process of globalisation, and it has also started to have a negative effect on Europe’s image abroad. Under the rule-driven pressure of the external multilateral mechanism and in conjunction with the European Economic Area Agreement (EEA), signed by Iceland in 1992 and implemented in 1994, it was one of the reasons for the gradual reduction of policies and reform of institutions in Iceland after 1993.

4. Finally

The period from 1944 to 1993 was the establishment and stable operation stage of Iceland’s current immigration and nationality system. At that time, Iceland based its conservative immigration policy system on the 1952 Icelandic Nationality Law and adhered to the principle of citizenship by blood; furthermore, it imposed mandatory Icelandicised name requirements and prohibited dual citizenship. The origin of the system can be traced back to the isolation of Iceland, its uniform ethnic and social structure, as well as the new country’s need for sovereignty construction and the old single-economy model. It was a reasonable institutional choice for a small, homogeneous nation-state during the Cold War to protect itself, strengthen sovereignty and conserve culture.

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