

*CONVENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND DENMARK, ETC.*

TREATY SERIES, No. 629

CONVENTION

BETWEEN

THE UNITED STATES AND DENMARK

39 Stat. 1706

CESSION OF THE DANISH WEST INDIES

SIGNED AT NEW YORK, AUGUST 4, 1916

RATIFICATION ADVISED BY THE SENATE, SEPTEMBER 7, 1916

RATIFIED BY THE PRESIDENT, JANUARY 16, 1917

RATIFIED BY DENMARK, DECEMBER 22, 1916

RATIFICATIONS EXCHANGED AT WASHINGTON, JANUARY 17, 1917

PROCLAIMED, JANUARY 25, 1917

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas a Convention between the United States of America and Denmark providing for the cession to the United States of all territory asserted or claimed by Denmark in the West Indies, including the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, together with the adjacent islands and rocks, was concluded and signed by their respective Plenipotentiaries at the City of New York on the fourth day of August, one thousand nine hundred and sixteen, the original of which Convention, being in the English and Danish languages, is word for word as follows:

The United States of America and His Majesty the King of Denmark being desirous of confirming the good understanding which exists between them, have to that end appointed as Plenipotentiaries:

The President of the United States:

Mr. Robert Lansing, Secretary of State of the United States, and His Majesty the King of Denmark:

Mr. Constantin Brun, His Majesty's Envoy extraordinary and Minister plenipotentiary at Washington,

who, having mutually exhibited their full powers which were found to be in due form, have agreed upon the following articles:

Article 1.

His Majesty the King of Denmark by this convention cedes to the United States all territory, dominion and sovereignty, possessed, asserted or claimed by Denmark in the West Indies including the Islands of Saint Thomas, Saint John and Saint Croix together with the adjacent islands and rocks.

This cession includes the right of property in all public, government, or crown lands, public buildings, wharves, ports, harbors, fortifications, barracks, public funds, rights, franchises, and privileges, and all other public property of every kind or description now belonging to Denmark together with all appurtenances thereto.

In this cession shall also be included any government archives, records, papers or documents which relate to the cession or the rights and property of the inhabitants of the Islands ceded, and which may now be existing either in the Islands ceded or in Denmark. Such archives and records shall be carefully preserved, and authenticated copies thereof, as may be required shall be at all times given to the United States Government or the Danish Government, as the case may be, or to such properly authorized persons as may apply for them.

ANNOTATIONS

1. **Real property.** Title to real property belonging to the [Danish] State Treasury prior to the 1917 cession passed to the United States pursuant to the terms of the Convention with Denmark. 1 V.I.Op.A.G. 40.

Article 2.

Denmark guarantees that the cession made by the preceding article is free and unencumbered by any reservations, privileges, franchises, grants, or possessions, held by any governments, corporations, syndicates, or individuals, except as herein mentioned. But it is understood that this cession does not in any respect impair private rights which by law belong to the peaceful possession of property of all kinds by private individuals of whatsoever nationality, by municipalities, public or private establishments, ecclesiastical or civic bodies, or any other associations having legal capacity to acquire and possess property in the Islands ceded.

The congregations belonging to the Danish National Church shall retain the undisturbed use of the churches which are now used by

them, together with the parsonages appertaining thereunto and other appurtenances, including the funds allotted to the churches.

Article 3.

It is especially agreed, however, that:

1) The arms and military stores existing in the Islands at the time of the cession and belonging to the Danish Government shall remain the property of that Government and shall, as soon as circumstances will permit, be removed by it, unless they, or parts thereof, may have been bought by the Government of the United States; it being however understood that flags and colors, uniforms and such arms or military articles as are marked as being the property of the Danish Government shall not be included in such purchase.

2) The movables, especially silver plate and pictures which may be found in the government buildings in the islands ceded and belonging to the Danish Government shall remain the property of that Government and shall, as soon as circumstances will permit, be removed by it.

3) The pecuniary claims now held by Denmark against the colonial treasuries of the islands ceded are altogether extinguished in consequence of this cession and the United States assumes no responsibility whatsoever for or in connection with these claims. Excepted is however the amount due to the Danish Treasury in account current with the West-Indian colonial treasuries pursuant to the making up of accounts in consequence of the cession of the islands; should on the other hand this final accounting show a balance in favour of the West-Indian colonial treasuries, the Danish Treasury shall pay that amount to the colonial treasuries.

4) The United States will maintain the following grants, concessions and licenses, given by the Danish Government, in accordance with the terms on which they are given:

a. The concession granted to "Det vestindiske Kompagni" (the West-Indian Company) Ltd. by the communications from the Ministry of Finance of January 18th 1913 and of April 16th 1913 relative to a license to embank, drain, deepen and utilize certain areas in St. Thomas Harbor, and preferential rights as to commercial, industrial or shipping establishments in the said Harbor.

b. Agreement of August 10th and 14th, 1914 between the municipality of St. Thomas and St. John and "Det vestindiske Kompagni" Ltd. relative to the supply of the city of Charlotte Amalie with electric lighting.

c. Concession of March 12th 1897 to "The Floating Dock Company of St. Thomas Ltd.", subsequently transferred to "The St. Thomas Engineering and Coaling Company Ltd." relative to a floating dock in St. Thomas Harbor, in which concession the maintenance, extension, and alteration of the then existing repairing slip are reserved.

d. Royal Decree Nr. 79 of November 30th 1914 relative to the subsidies from the colonial treasuries of St. Thomas and Sainte Croix to "The West India and Panama Telegraph Company Ltd."

e. Concession of November 3rd, 1906, to H. B. Hey to establish and operate a telephone system on St. Thomas island, which concession has subsequently been transferred to the "St. Thomas Telefonselskab" Ltd.

f. Concession of February 28th 1913 to the municipality of Sainte Croix to establish and operate a telephone system in Sainte Croix.

g. Concession of July 16th 1915 to Ejnar Svendsen, an Engineer, for the construction and operation of an electric light plant in the city of Christiansted, Sainte Croix.

h. Concession of June 20th 1904 for the establishment of a Danish West-Indian bank of issue. This bank has for a period of 30 years acquired the monopoly to issue bank-notes in the Danish West India islands against the payment to the Danish Treasury of a tax amounting to ten percent of its annual profits.

i. Guarantee according to the Danish supplementary Budget Law for the financial year 1908-1909 relative to the St. Thomas Harbor's four percent loan of 1910.

5) Whatever sum shall be due to the Danish Treasury by private individuals on the date of the exchange of ratifications are reserved and do not pass by this cession; and where the Danish Government at that date holds property taken over by the Danish Treasury for sums due by private individuals, such property shall not pass by this cession, but the Danish Government shall sell or dispose of such property and remove its proceeds within two years from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this convention; the United States Government being entitled to sell by public auction, to the credit of the Danish Government, any portion of such property remaining unsold at the expiration of the said term of two years.

6) The Colonial Treasuries shall continue to pay the yearly allowances now given to heretofore retired functionaries appointed in the islands but holding no Royal Commissions, unless such allowances may have until now been paid in Denmark.

Article 4.

The Danish Government shall appoint with convenient despatch an agent or agents for the purpose of formally delivering to a similar agent or agents appointed on behalf of the United States, the territory, dominion, property, and appurtenances which are ceded hereby, and for doing any other act which may be necessary in regard thereto. Formal delivery of the territory and property ceded shall be made immediately after the payment by the United States of the sum of money stipulated in this convention; but the cession with the right of immediate possession is nevertheless to be deemed complete on the exchange of ratifications of this convention without such formal delivery. Any Danish military or naval forces which may be in the islands ceded shall be withdrawn as soon as may be practicable after the formal delivery, it being however understood that if the persons constituting these forces, after having terminated their Danish service, do not wish to leave the Islands, they shall be allowed to remain there as civilians.

Article 5.

In full consideration of the cession made by this convention, the United States agrees to pay, within ninety days from the date of the exchange of the ratifications of this convention, in the city of Washington to the diplomatic representative or other agent of His Majesty the King of Denmark duly authorized to receive the money, the sum of twenty-five million dollars in gold coin of the United States.

Article 6.

Danish citizens residing in said islands may remain therein or may remove therefrom at will, retaining in either event all their rights of property, including the right to sell or dispose of such property or its proceeds; in case they remain in the Islands, they shall continue until otherwise provided, to enjoy all the private, municipal and religious rights and liberties secured to them by the laws now in force. If the present laws are altered, the said inhabitants shall not thereby be placed in a less favorable position in respect to the above mentioned rights and liberties than they now enjoy. Those, who remain in the islands may preserve their citizenship in Denmark by making before a court of record, within one year from the date of the exchange of ratifications of this convention, a declaration of their decision to preserve such citizenship; in default of which declaration they shall be

held to have renounced it, and to have accepted citizenship in the United States; for children under eighteen years the said declaration may be made by their parents or guardians. Such election of Danish citizenship shall however not, after the lapse of the said term of one year, be a bar to their renunciation of their preserved Danish citizenship and their election of citizenship in the United States and admission to the nationality thereof on the same terms as may be provided according to the laws of the United States, for other inhabitants of the islands.

The civil rights and the political status of the inhabitants of the islands shall be determined by the Congress, subject to the stipulations contained in the present convention.

Danish citizens not residing in the islands but owning property therein at the time of the cession, shall retain their rights of property, including the right to sell or dispose of such property, being placed in this regard on the same basis as the Danish citizens residing in the islands and remaining therein or removing therefrom, to whom the first paragraph of this articles relates.

ANNOTATIONS

1. **Federal Constitution, applicability.** Treaty between the United States and Denmark by which the Virgin Islands were acquired by the United States showed that the United States intended to have the Constitution apply to the Virgin Islands. *Richardson v. Electoral Boards*, D.C.V.I. 1936, 1 V.I. 301.

2. **Citizenship.** A person residing in the Virgin Islands on January 17, 1917, and on February 25, 1927, who did not preserve Danish citizenship by a declaration provided for in the Convention with Denmark of August 4, 1916, is a citizen of the United States by virtue of Act of Congress, February 25, 1927, ch. 192, 44 Stat. 1234. 1 V.I.Op.A.G. 11.

This article, concerning the rights of former Danish citizens, provides that these rights should not be abridged, provided such persons remain in the Islands. 2 V.I.Op.A.G. 200.

Former Danish citizens enjoyed no vested rights under this article except such as related to property, and therefore could not claim that neither the Legislature nor the courts could change the requirements for admission to the bar. 2 V.I.Op.A.G. 200.

Article 7.

Danish subjects residing in the Islands shall be subject in matters civil as well as criminal to the jurisdiction of the courts of the Islands, pursuant to the ordinary laws governing the same, and they shall have the right to appear before such courts, and to pursue the same course therein as citizens of the country to which the courts belong.

Article 8.

Judicial proceedings pending at the time of the formal delivery in the islands ceded shall be determined according to the following rules:

1) Judgments rendered either in civil suits between private individuals, or in criminal matters, before the date mentioned, and with respect to which there is no recourse or right to review under Danish law, shall be deemed to be final, and shall be executed in due form and without any renewed trial whatsoever, by the competent authority in the territories within which such judgments are to be carried out.

If in a criminal case a mode of punishment has been applied which, according to new rules, is no longer applicable on the islands ceded after delivery, the nearest corresponding punishment in the new rules shall be applied.

2) Civil suits or criminal actions pending before the first courts, in which the pleadings have not been closed at the same time, shall be confirmed before the tribunals established in the ceded islands after the delivery, in accordance with the law which shall thereafter be in force.

3) Civil suits and criminal actions pending at the said time before the Superior Court or the Supreme Court in Denmark shall continue to be prosecuted before the Danish courts until final judgment according to the law hitherto in force. The judgment shall be executed in due form by the competent authority in the territories within which such judgment should be carried out.

Article 9.

The rights of property secured by copyrights and patents acquired by Danish subjects in the Islands ceded at the time of exchange of the ratifications of this treaty, shall continue to be respected.

Article 10.

Treaties, conventions and all other international agreements of any nature existing between Denmark and the United States shall *eo ipso* extend, in default of a provision to the contrary, also to the ceded islands.

Article 11.

In case of differences of opinion arising between the High Contracting Parties in regard to the interpretation or application of this

convention, such differences, if they cannot be regulated through diplomatic negotiations, shall be submitted for arbitration to the permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague.

Article 12.

The ratifications of this convention shall be exchanged at Washington as soon as possible after ratification by both of the High Contracting Parties according to their respective procedure.

In faith whereof the respective plenipotentiaries have signed and sealed this convention, in the English and Danish languages.

Done at New York this fourth day of August, one thousand nine hundred and sixteen.

[SEAL]

ROBERT LANSING.

[SEAL]

C. BRUN.

And whereas in giving advice and consent to the ratification of the said Convention, it was declared by the Senate of the United States in their resolution that "such advice and consent are given with the understanding, to be expressed as a part of the instrument of ratification, that such Convention shall not be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said Church may have an interest, nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said Church, beyond protecting said Church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties;"

And whereas it was further provided in the said resolution "That the Senate advises and consents to the ratification of the said Convention on condition that the attitude of the United States in this particular, as set forth in the above proviso, be made the subject of an exchange of notes between the Governments of the two High Contracting Parties, so as to make it plain that this condition is understood and accepted by the two Governments, the purpose hereof being to bring the said Convention clearly within the Constitutional powers of the United States with respect to church establishment and freedom of religion;"

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And whereas this condition has been fulfilled by notes exchanged between the two High Contracting Parties on January 3, 1917;

And whereas the said Convention has been duly ratified on both parts, and the ratifications of the two Governments were exchanged in the City of Washington, on the seventeenth day of January, one thousand nine hundred and seventeen;

Now, therefore, be it known that I, Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States of America, have caused the said Convention to be made public, to the end that the same and every article and clause therefore may be observed and fulfilled with good faith by the United States and the citizens thereof, subject to the said understanding of the Senate of the United States.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington this twenty-fifth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and seven-
[SEAL] teen, and of the Independence of the United States of America the One hundred and forty-first.

WOODROW WILSON.

By the President:

ROBERT LANSING,
Secretary of State.

DECLARATION.

In proceeding this day to the signature of the Convention respecting the cession of the Danish West-Indian Islands to the United States of America, the undersigned Secretary of State of the United States of America, duly authorized by his Government, has the honor to declare that the Government of the United States of America will not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland.

ROBERT LANSING.

New York, August 4, 1916.

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[Exchange of Notes mentioned in Proclamation.]

[*The Secretary of State to the Danish Minister.*]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
WASHINGTON, January 3, 1917.

SIR:

I have the honor to inform you that the Senate of the United States by its resolution of ratification has advised and consented to the ratification of the convention between the United States and Denmark, ceding to the United States the Danish West Indian Islands, with the following provisos:

“Provided, however, That it is declared by the Senate that in advising and consenting to the ratification of the said convention, such advice and consent are given with the understanding, to be expressed as a part of the instrument of ratification, that such Convention shall not be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said church may have an interest, nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said church, beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties. And provided further, that the Senate advises and consents to the ratification of the said Convention on condition that the attitude of the United States in this particular, as set forth in the above proviso, be made the subject of an exchange of notes between the Governments of the two High Contracting Parties, so as to make it plain that this condition is understood and accepted by the two Governments, the purpose hereof being to bring the said Convention clearly within the Constitutional powers of the United States with respect to church establishment and freedom of religion.”

In view of this resolution of the Senate I have the honor to state that it is understood and accepted by the Government of the United States and the Government of Denmark that the provisions of this Convention referring to the property and funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands shall not

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be taken and construed by the High Contracting Parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish West Indian Islands, or in which the said church may have an interest nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the management of any property belonging to said church, beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said Convention, in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties.

I trust that your Government will in a formal reply to this communication accept this understanding as to the meaning and construction of the provisions of said Convention in accordance with the foregoing resolution of the Senate.

Accept, Sir, the renewed assurances of my highest consideration.

ROBERT LANSING

Mr. CONSTANTIN BRUN,

Minister of Denmark.

[*The Danish Minister to the Secretary of State.*]

THE DANISH LEGATION

WASHINGTON, D. C.

January 3rd, 1917.

SIR:

In reply to your communication of this day concerning the relation of the United States to the rights of the Established Church in the Danish West Indies and to the provisions referring to this point in the convention between the United States and Denmark ceding to the States the Danish Westindian Islands, I have the honor to state that it is understood and accepted by the government of Denmark and the Government of the United States that the provisions of this convention referring to the property and funds belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish Westindian Islands shall not be taken and construed by the high contracting parties as imposing any trust upon the United States with respect to any fund belonging to the Danish National Church in the Danish Westindian Islands or in which the said Church may have an interest nor as imposing upon the United States any duty or responsibility with respect to the man-

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agement of any property belonging to said church beyond protecting said church in the possession and use of church property as stated in said convention in the same manner and to the same extent only as other churches shall be protected in the possession and use of their several properties.

It will be evident from the above that the Danish Government accept the understanding as to the meaning and construction of the provisions of the said convention in accordance with the resolution of the United States' Senate concerning the question of the rights of the Church in the Islands.

I have the honor to be, Sir,
with the highest consideration,
Your most obedient and humble servant,

C. BRUN.

The Honorable

ROBERT LANSING,

Secretary of State of the United States.