

The Norwegian Government's strategy for cooperation with Poland



Norwegian Ministries

Published by:
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Public institutions may order additional copies from:
Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation
E-mail: publikasjonsbestilling@dss.dep.no
Internet: www.publikasjoner.dep.no
Telephone: + 47 222 40 000
Publication number: E-961 E
ISBN number: 978-82-8321-001-9
Print: Norwegian Government Security and Service Organization
05/2016 – Impression 1000

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Foreword

Over the past few decades, relations between Norway and Poland have been revitalised.

We cooperate and trade with each other, and increasing numbers of us work or study in each other's country.

Who would have thought 20 years ago that today Norway and Poland would be close allies and partners in NATO? Or that both countries would be part of the common internal market? Or that we would share a common external border through the Schengen cooperation?

The Government's clear ambition is to cooperate more systematically with countries of particular importance to Norway in our neighbouring areas, and to foster closer ties between Norway and these countries.

That is why the Government has drawn up a specific strategy for Norway's cooperation with Poland, which provides a basis for expanding ties between our two countries in a number of areas.

This strategy, which also contains an action plan, is a living document. This means that new topics and fields can be added as they become relevant.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs chairs the interministerial group that is responsible for following up the strategy and the action plan set out in it.

February, 2016

Børge Brende
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Elisabeth Aspaker
Minister of EEA and EU Affairs

I. Why a separate strategy for cooperation with Poland?

The Norwegian Government's Strategy for Cooperation with the EU 2014–17 makes clear that Norway is to play an active role in European cooperation and in developing new solutions to the common challenges Europe is facing. The Government will pursue an active European policy and will cooperate more systematically with EU member states of particular importance for Norway. It is therefore important that Norway takes an integrated, strategic and coordinated approach to its bilateral cooperation with Poland.

Poland has become an increasingly important partner for Norway. Following its peaceful, negotiated transition to democracy, Poland's political stability and high level of economic growth have in recent years been striking. Migration from Poland to Norway is high, and close to 100 000 Poles are registered as being resident in Norway. Norwegian students account for the third largest group of foreign students in Poland. High-level political visits between Norway and Poland are increasingly frequent. We share a common set of values based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Poland has a population of 38.2 million and is the sixth largest economy in Europe. Norway and Poland are engaged in wide-ranging business cooperation. Through Team Norway, an informal network of business sector actors, we have developed close cooperation with representatives of the business sector and other partners in Poland. Trade between our countries is on the rise. More than 300 Norwegian companies have established operations in Poland. The country is now the largest export market for Norwegian seafood and the most important market in Europe for Norwegian defence-related products. For Poland, Norway is both the largest market for equipment to the maritime industry and the largest supplier of equipment of this kind.

Poland is also an increasingly influential player in Europe, with clearly defined interests in areas of major importance to Norway. Poland has been a member of NATO for 16 years and during this time it has become an important country in the Alliance, with clear ambitions to further increase its influence. It is telling that when Jens Stoltenberg and Federica Mogherini took up their

top leadership positions in NATO and the EU respectively, they both chose Poland as the destination for their first foreign visit.

Due to its political and economic weight, Poland has acquired a leading role in Europe. Poland coordinates its positions closely with the other Visegrad countries, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Together, these states have as many votes in the Council of the European Union as Germany and France combined.

Poland has pushed for the EU to play a more active role in efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014, and has emphasised the need for the EU and its partners to stand united against Russia and its actions in Ukraine. Poland initiated the establishment of the EU's Eastern Partnership with the former Soviet republics Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The importance Poland gives to the Eastern Partnership and its close ties to Ukraine make it an important dialogue partner for Norway in our own work to promote stability and development in these countries.

Norway takes part in European cooperation through the EEA Agreement, the Schengen Agreement and its other agreements with the EU. The EEA Agreement is the foundation of Norway's cooperation with Europe and ensures the free movement of people, goods, services and capital as well as equal conditions of competition. Poland is the largest recipient of funding under the EEA and Norway Grants. The contacts and cooperation that have been established through the Grants scheme provide a unique starting point for further developing our bilateral relations and promoting Norwegian interests in Poland, in our neighbouring areas and vis-à-vis the EU.

Strategic goals for Norway's cooperation with Poland:

- To expand political cooperation with Poland on foreign and security policy, and in particular on matters relating to European cooperation and NATO.
- To increase awareness and understanding in Poland of Norwegian interests and positions on important international issues, including EU/EEA matters, and to promote closer cooperation between Norway and Poland in international forums and institutions.
- To ensure strategic use of the EEA and Norway Grants as a basis for closer cooperation with Poland in areas where Norway has interests to safeguard.
- To strengthen Norwegian–Polish cooperation in the fields of energy, climate change and the environment.
- To facilitate increased trade and investment between Norway and Poland by supporting the efforts of Norwegian companies to invest in the Polish market, with particular emphasis on the areas of energy, defence-related products and seafood, and to work to secure better market access for Norwegian seafood.
- To increase awareness and knowledge of Norway and Norwegian policy in Poland. To reinforce and strengthen Norway's positive image in Poland.

II. How can we achieve these goals?

The action plan contained in this strategy has been drawn up with a view to achieving the strategic goals set out above. The plan focuses on 15 priority areas, and follows a fixed structure throughout. Under each of the priority areas, the plan states the primary objective, then gives background information, before the discussing the role of the EEA and Norway Grants in the area concerned (where relevant). As a living document, the plan will be updated as new topics and areas become relevant. It shows the unique nature of the EEA and Norway Grants as a bilateral tool, as well as the breadth of cooperation between Poland and Norway. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Embassy in Warsaw have an overall responsibility to coordinate and follow up the strategy, in consultation with the appropriate ministries.

III. Action plan



1. EUROPEAN POLICY

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Primary objective

The Government will work actively to promote closer cooperation with Poland on European policy, and will contribute to finding joint solutions to shared challenges in Europe.

Background

Poland has considerable influence in the EU, and has shown openness and a willingness to engage in dialogue with Norway on EEA, EU and Schengen matters.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Poland is the largest recipient of funds under the EEA and Norway Grants scheme, and has received a total of EUR 1.136 billion since it became an EU member in 2004.

The MoU with Poland on the use of the EEA and Norway Grants in the current period reflects Norwegian and Polish priorities. Priority sectors include environmental cooperation, climate change and energy, green industry innovation, the justice system, public health initiatives, research, civil society, and culture. These are described in more detail later in this action plan. Democratic values, the rule of law, and combating intolerance in Europe are cross-cutting considerations that are relevant for all programmes financed under the EEA and Norway Grants in Poland. A number of Norwegian institutions cooperate with Polish partners on the implementation of projects and programmes funded by the Grants scheme. The Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level under the scheme is an important foreign policy tool for further developing our cooperation with Poland in all thematic areas. The Norwegian Embassy in Warsaw plays a key role as coordinator and driving force for efforts related to the Grants, and works closely with the relevant Norwegian ministries, the National Focal Point in Poland and other relevant actors in Poland.

2. THE ARCTIC

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Primary objective

The Government will further develop and intensify its High North dialogue with Poland.

Background

The Arctic is important for Norway and for the world as a whole. Our presence and activities in the Arctic strengthen Norway's international standing as a responsible Arctic nation. We have vital Norwegian interests to safeguard in the north, relating to climate change and the environment, access to natural resources and trade routes, increased cross-border cooperation and cultural contact, and security and stability in our neighbouring areas.

It is crucial that the legal and institutional framework for the Arctic is maintained and respected. International cooperation and respect for the Law of the Sea promote stability and predictability, which are essential for maintaining low levels of tension in the region.

Norway's Arctic policy and European policy are closely linked, and are key elements in the Government's foreign policy. The EU is currently developing its own Arctic policy, and it is important for Norway to follow this up in its bilateral contact with EU member states. The Government intends to continue and intensify Norway's Arctic diplomacy vis-à-vis important European allies. Poland is showing increasing interest in the Arctic. The Polish Academy of Sciences runs the Polish Polar Station in Svalbard. Research cooperation between Norway and Poland is currently being funded under the EEA and Norway Grants. Poland has been a permanent observer in the Arctic Council since its establishment in 1996, and also has observer status in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, which was established to promote peace and stability in the Arctic. Poland is a member of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being, which seeks to improve people's health and well-being in the Northern Dimension area.

At the request of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) presented in spring 2015 an extensive study of Polish interests in the

Arctic. Among its recommendations is strengthening Poland's already considerable polar research activities. The report also points out that increased activity in the Arctic could benefit the Polish fish processing industry, the ship-building industry and suppliers to the oil industry.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

The bilateral research programme supports a Polish-Norwegian research project related to the Arctic. Bilateral funds can also finance this type of activity.

3. SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY

Primary objective

The Government will further develop its security and defence dialogue and cooperation with Poland both at the bilateral level and within the framework of NATO.

Background

Over the years, Poland has become a key security policy player in Europe. Its increasing importance has been intensified due to developments in Russia in recent years and the conflict in Ukraine. Poland's geographical situation, the lessons it has learned from its history and its considerable engagement in security issues has strengthened its position and the role it plays in the security policy area.

Poland is very active in NATO, and would like to see a stronger security and defence policy engagement in the EU. It has gained a key position in NATO due to its size, its geographical situation, and its increasing engagement. As a neighbouring country to Russia (Kaliningrad), it has been natural for Poland to take a leading role in the group of countries in Central and Eastern Europe that want to see a clearer response to Russia and a stronger NATO footprint in the east. Poland often promotes these views together with the Baltic countries.

Poland is increasing its defence budgets, and has very ambitious modernisation and investment plans for its armed forces in the years ahead. It will host the NATO summit in July 2016, and has started drawing up the agenda for this event. A key ambition is to ensure that NATO's Readiness Action Plan has been fully implemented prior to the summit.

Increasingly, Norway shares security policy and military interests with Poland. We often take common positions in NATO, particularly on issues relating to the importance of collective defence, and Norway launched an initiative to increase focus on the Alliance's own territory and neighbouring areas in 2008. To a large extent, Norway and Poland have the same views on our neighbouring areas, Russia and Ukraine. The development of the partnership dimension is also important for Norway,

with particular focus on the participants in the Enhanced Opportunities Programme (EOP), Sweden and Finland. Poland is becoming increasingly interested in these aspects of the NATO cooperation.

At the bilateral level, it is important to continue our close defence and security policy dialogue in strategic areas. Political consultations between the Norwegian and Polish ministries of foreign affairs and ministries of defence have been established and will be continued. In addition, Norwegian actors have won important contracts for coastal defence systems and there is increasing Polish interest in the Norwegian defence industry. Today Poland is one of the most important export markets for the Norwegian defence industry. There is also potential for closer operational cooperation with Poland, and our cooperation in the area of defence-related products is growing rapidly.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

The EEA and Norway Grants are supporting research cooperation in the field of security policy between the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and its Polish counterpart PISM. In the light of the new security situation, it may be appropriate to use funds from the Fund for Bilateral Relations at National Level to support the further development of this cooperation.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY



Primary objective

The Government will strengthen its cooperation with Poland on the protection of democratic principles and the international and European human rights systems.

Background

The white paper *Opportunities for All: Human Rights in Norway's Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation*¹ emphasises that Norway's efforts to promote and protect human rights are to be integrated into all aspects of Norwegian foreign and development policy to ensure a clear and coherent human rights profile. Women's rights and gender equality are also to be integrated into our foreign and development policy.

As a member of the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, Poland takes part in the international efforts to strengthen the protection of human rights and democratic principles. Poland is also actively engaged in other

intergovernmental forums such as the Community of Democracies and the European Endowment for Democracy.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Democratic values, the rule of law, and combating intolerance are cross-cutting considerations in all programmes supported by the EEA and Norway Grants.

The Government intends to continue to use the EEA and Norway Grants to support fundamental European values such as democracy, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and gender equality.

Through the Grants scheme, Norway is the largest donor to civil society in Poland. Priority is given to human rights and democratic values. Several of the programmes in Poland have a clear human rights dimension, and cooperation in the field of human rights and democracy includes the Polish authorities. Fighting anti-Semitism and protecting Jewish heritage have been in particular focus.

1. Meld. St. 10 (2014–2015)

5. THE INTERNAL MARKET

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Primary objective

The Government will further develop Norway's cooperation with Poland with a view to promoting a well-functioning internal market.

Background

The Government will promote the development of a well-functioning internal market in line with Norwegian interests. Through the EEA Agreement, Norwegian businesses are ensured equal opportunities to participate and the same competitive conditions as all other countries in the internal market. This is of great importance for Norwegian businesses. Being able to participate in the internal market enhances the Norwegian business sector's competitiveness and its ability to take part in international markets. The internal market also facilitates more effective use of resources and provides opportunities for increasing value creation both in Norway and in Europe as a whole.

It is in Norway's interests that the internal market also comprises a common labour market. People who are

willing to cross national borders to find work help to boost employment and value creation both in Norway and in the rest of Europe. The Government will seek to ensure respect for the right of nationals of other EEA countries to enjoy the same working conditions as Norwegian employees. We will fight against social dumping and promote well-regulated employment conditions. We will also consider the implications of labour migration for the Norwegian welfare system. The goal is to maintain a welfare state that is sustainable while at the same time ensuring equal treatment for all EEA nationals.

Labour migration is another issue that is high on the EU's political agenda. The experience gained by Norway and Poland of labour migration within the EEA could provide interesting input to the European debate on this issue.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

A number of programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants in Poland are relevant for and contribute, directly or indirectly, to a well-functioning market. These are discussed in the descriptions of the various sectors.



6. THE BUSINESS SECTOR

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Primary objective

The Government will support Norwegian businesses' efforts to increase trade with and investment in Poland.

Background

Increased competitiveness and growth is one of the main priorities of the Government's strategy for cooperation with the EU. Trade with Europe boosts economic growth, makes jobs more secure and helps to ensure a good welfare state in Norway. In order to remain competitive, Norwegian companies must be innovative and constantly develop new products and better production methods. Norway cooperates closely with the EU and its member states on innovation, research and education.

Growth, competitiveness, research and innovation are important for both Norway and Poland. Through the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway is providing funding for green industry innovation, renewable energy and research. Our cooperation with Poland on research and innovation has been strengthened under the EEA and Norway Grants. The programmes create important arenas and opportunities for building relations both in the business sector and in academia. It is important to build further on this.

With its 38 million inhabitants, Poland is a major market in Europe. The country has enjoyed continuous growth since 1989, even during the financial crisis. Our trade in goods amounts to around NOK 34 billion per year, and is increasing. Our trade is balanced. Poland is Norway's ninth largest trading partner in terms of imports, and the tenth largest when it comes to exports. Our trade in services was worth around NOK 9 billion in 2013, and Norwegian direct investments in Poland amounted to some NOK 6 billion the same year. Poland is our largest export market for seafood, especially salmon. Large smoking facilities have been established in Poland. These purchase fresh, whole, unprocessed salmon from Norway for processing, and send this on to the European market for consumption. Estimates from the Norwegian Seafood Council indicate that Poland's domestic consumption of imported salmon amounts to 40 %, and that the per-

centage is increasing. Poland is also an important country for the Norwegian maritime industry, and there are extensive and longstanding ties between our countries in the areas of shipping, shipbuilding and recruitment of seamen. In addition, Poland has expressed an interest in cooperation with Norway on the forestry industry.

Today there are around 300 companies with Norwegian ownership interests in Poland. The number of enterprises with Polish interests that have recently been established in Norway is also considerable, for example in the construction industry. Closer cooperation with Poland is therefore extremely important for Norwegian value creation. In 2011, the Norwegian-Polish Chamber of Commerce was established on the initiative of the Polish Embassy in Oslo.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Innovation and green growth are important objectives for programs for green industry innovation and renewable energy. The private sector can also participate within the research program.

7. COOPERATION ON RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

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Primary objective

The Government will strengthen cooperation between Norwegian and Polish universities, university colleges, research institutions, business clusters, researchers and research groups.

Background

Research and education constitute an important element in Norway's cooperation with the EU. Norway's contributions to the EU programmes for research and innovation, education, and culture will total around EUR 3.2 billion in the period 2014-2020.

The Government has drawn up a strategy for strengthening cooperation with the EU on research and innovation. Norway's long-term ambition is to become one of the most innovative countries in Europe. A major investment in research by both the public and the private sector will help to secure future jobs in a globalised world. Norway will never have the cheapest labour. This is why knowledge is our most important competitive advantage. Cross-border research cooperation also helps to raise the quality of Norwegian education and research, and to increase value creation and the competitiveness of Norwegian businesses.

Research cooperation between Norwegian and Polish R&D centres in both the public and the private sector and the development of stronger links between innovation and research are of strategic importance for both countries. Cooperation with Poland on research and innovation has been enhanced through the EEA and Norway Grants. It is important to build further on what has been achieved so far. Closer contact with Polish R&D centres at a strategic level can help to further improve the quality of Norwegian higher education and research, and can provide opportunities for innovation in both the private and the public sector.

Poland and Norway are already enjoying close cooperation under the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and there are good opportunities for even closer cooperation with Polish partners under the

new programme, Horizon 2020. Under this programme, researchers will be able to make use of partnerships that have already been established under the EEA and Norway Grants research programme.

There are approximately 1 500 Norwegian students at Polish universities, mainly studying medicine. Teaching in Norwegian is offered at the universities in Gdansk, Poznan, Warsaw, Torun and Szczecin. Norwegian students make up the third largest group of foreign students in Poland.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Under the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway and Poland are engaged in Europe's largest bilateral research programme (nearly EUR 100 million over the last ten years), and the main research centres in Poland and Norway have worked closely together during this period. The Research Council of Norway is the Norwegian programme partner.

8. CLIMATE AND ENERGY POLICY

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Primary objective

The Government will increase contact and cooperation with Poland in the area of climate and energy policy, with a view to promoting energy security and investment in research, environmental technology and infrastructure as well as contributing to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in Europe.

Background

Contributing to an ambitious climate and energy policy is one of the main objectives of the Government's European policy. During the transition to a low-carbon economy, we will promote Norwegian natural gas as an alternative to coal – which is a more polluting energy source – in Europe. Poland has also indicated that it is interested in closer cooperation with Norway on the role of forests in mitigating climate change.

It is challenging for Poland to balance the need to ensure economic growth with meeting its climate commitments. Poland is seeking understanding for the fact that it is highly dependent on coal, which is also a national resource. Nevertheless, Poland accepted the compromise reached at the EU climate summit on 23 October 2014, where the member countries committed themselves to a total emission reduction of 40 % compared with the 1990 level, through flexible mechanisms within the EU.

Polish-Norwegian cooperation on carbon capture and storage (CCS) has been given high priority for several years. In its CCS strategy, the Government sets out its intention that funding under the EEA and Norway Grants should be used to support European projects in this area. Polish-Norwegian cooperation on CCS is currently being supported, with around EUR 10 million distributed between seven research projects.

Energy security is important for Poland. The crisis in Ukraine has put energy security high on the European agenda. Like several other EU countries, Poland is very dependent on imports of gas, and Russia is the most important supplier.

Poland has been a driving force for the development of the European Energy Union, with particular focus on energy security and solidarity. Russian gas accounts for around 60 % of Polish gas consumption, but only around 10 % of the total energy mix. Oil accounts for around 25 % of the mix, and 93 % of this comes from Russia. The great expectations the Polish authorities had of the country's shale gas reserves have not been realised. There are plans for two nuclear power plants, but it is uncertain whether these will in fact be built. Poland has huge coal reserves, and is the second largest coal producer (after Germany) in the EU. Coal-based power production will continue in Poland for the foreseeable future, and is a clear political priority. However the industry is becoming less competitive.

The EU targets mean that 15 % of the Polish energy mix should be from renewable sources by 2020, and 11.3 % by 2013. The percentage of renewable energy is increasing, but so far the increase has not been rapid enough for these targets to be reached. A bill that will provide economic incentives for producers to supply green energy at a low price is therefore being debated in the Sejm (the Polish parliament).

Poland's geopolitical position makes it an interesting partner in terms of European developments in the field of energy. Despite its high dependence on fossil fuel, energy efficiency measures are being introduced and renewable energy is being developed. Norway is a relevant and competent partner for Poland in the field of energy. Cooperation in this area can also provide opportunities for exports of energy and related products from Norwegian companies. It is natural to consider these opportunities in the context of our overall efforts to promote green growth and a low-emission society in Europe. The EEA and Norway Grants are being used to stimulate a transition to cleaner energy in Poland.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

The grants stimulate transition to cleaner energy in Poland through among others the programs for energy efficiency and renewable energy and green industry innovation.

9. BIODIVERSITY AND POLLUTION CONTROL

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Primary objective

The Government will intensify its contact with Poland in the field of biodiversity and pollution control with a view to promoting integrated management of natural resources and a green economy.

Background

Under the EEA and Norway Grants, there has been extensive cooperation on environmental monitoring and inspection to increase Poland's capacity to implement EU and national legislation. This has produced good results. In the field of biodiversity, Norwegian and Polish institutions have worked together on the economic valuation of ecosystems and the implementation of the EU Biodi-

versity Strategy. Norway and Poland have previously enjoyed close cooperation on the development, implementation and follow-up of the criteria for sustainable forest management through Forest Europe.

10. JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS POLICY

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Primary objective

The Government will further develop and strengthen its cooperation with Poland in the field of justice and home affairs.

Background

Norway participates in key aspects of EU cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs, of which the Schengen cooperation is the most important. As Schengen member states, Norway and Poland are both part of an internal free-travel area with a common external border.

The fight against transnational organised crime requires close cooperation with European countries. The Government wishes to strengthen police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters with the EU. The goal is to be better equipped to combat the networks that organise criminal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, labour market crime, crime for gain, and the distribution of child pornography.

Poland is an important partner in Europe and in the Schengen cooperation, not just in terms of the movement of people, but also in terms of cooperation on asylum and migration policy and the fight against transnational crime, such as drug trafficking.

Poland and Norway are both Schengen member states with responsibility for the external border. Together with other countries on the outer rim of the Schengen area, Poland and Norway take part in the Ministerial Forum for Member States of the Schengen Area with External Land Borders, which promotes shared interests and enhances cooperation at both operational and political level.

Poland and Norway also take part in the Baltic Sea Task Force on Organised Crime, which involves cooperation at both operational and political level.

The headquarters of the EU's border management agency Frontex are in Warsaw, and Norway has provided an expert to this office. Frontex plays a key role, and is an important partner, in the management of

Schengen's external borders, which include the sea, land and air borders. Norway is seeking to increase the participation of Norwegian experts in Frontex.

Against a backdrop of a high level of mobility, a large number of Polish people living in Norway, and the fact that several Norwegians are living in Poland, the Polish and Norwegian authorities cooperate on a number of legal issues. It is important to maintain a good dialogue and effective cooperation between the two countries' authorities, as well as ensuring close legal cooperation on both civil and criminal cases, as well as child abduction cases, extradition cases and transfer of sentenced persons.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Under the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway is providing a total of EUR 40 million to strengthen the Polish justice and home affairs sector. The programmes include exchange of expertise between the Norwegian and Polish bodies in the courts administration and correctional services.

Labour market crime is increasing, also across borders. Closer cooperation between Norwegian and Polish authorities on monitoring and control is important to address this challenge. The EEA and Norway Grants can be used to develop cooperation in this area.

11. HEALTH AND CARE

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Primary objective

The Government will strengthen its cooperation with Poland on public health and help to reduce health inequalities.

Background

It is natural that an important EU country like Poland should continue to be a priority partner in the area of health. Besides, Poland is one of the main countries of origin of migrants to Norway, and we depend on Polish labour in several sectors. The concept of preventive healthcare is relatively new in Poland, and thus the transfer of Norwegian expertise is valuable. Strengthening preventive healthcare and improving public health in Poland will benefit Norway and the Norwegian health system. A good standard of public health is also vital for economic growth and important for fighting poverty. Investment in the health of children and young people

is particularly important. This area is of strategic importance for further development in the EEA, and is therefore also in Norway's interests.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Cooperation with Poland in the health sector will be increased under the EEA and Norway Grants. EUR 76 million has been allocated to health efforts in the present funding period, divided between two programmes. In this cooperation, it has been a priority for Norway to reduce health inequalities by strengthening the public health services through system-based measures and measures targeted at specific groups with a high risk of disease. Preventive health measures, including measures to prevent alcohol and tobacco problems, and efforts to reduce mental health problems and chronic and infectious diseases, are important given the increase in mobility between the two countries.

12. FAMILY POLICY, INCLUDING CHILD WELFARE

Primary objective

The Government will seek to improve information about its gender equality and family policy, build competence and enhance cooperation with Poland in this field.

Background

There is interest in Poland in Norwegian gender equality and family policy. Child welfare is also an area where Poland would like closer bilateral contact.

Poland is one of the countries where the Norwegian child welfare services have been in focus in recent years. This has been due to individual cases where the child welfare services have taken over care of Polish children in Norway against the wishes of their parents. This is not an extensive problem. Of the 13 869 children with a Polish family background who were under 18 and living in Norway as of 1 January 2013, only 25 were under the care of the child welfare services against their parents' wishes (2.1 %). However, such cases often arouse strong reactions. It can be difficult for people from other countries to understand that the state can intervene in a family in this way, and feelings can run high.

The child welfare services are subject to strict confidentiality rules, and it is not therefore possible to provide information on individual cases. This makes dialogue difficult, and can also make it difficult to get factual information across. Serious misunderstandings about why the child welfare services have had to intervene in individual cases are often spread in the media and the public debate. In fact, it is not the child welfare services that decide whether a child is to be taken into care; it is the relevant county social welfare board that does so. The Norwegian system is decentralised, and may seem complicated to people from countries with different structures and lines of authority. In Norway, the central government authorities cannot intervene in the work of the local child welfare services or the decisions of the county social welfare boards, which have independent authority to make decisions on child welfare cases, and this fact is very difficult to get across. This has created challeng-

es for Norway's reputation and the management of our bilateral relations.

Norway's accession to the 1996 Hague Convention on parental responsibility and the protection of children in July 2016 will provide opportunities for broader cooperation on cases involving children with links to both countries. Poland is already party to the Convention. In this connection, there will be a need for enhanced knowledge and mutual understanding of the child welfare systems and gender equality and family policies in the two countries.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Several programs under the EEA Grants are relevant to the field, including on civil society, domestic violence and various justice programs.

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13. CULTURAL COOPERATION

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Primary objective

The Government will promote cultural understanding and cooperation with Poland.

Background

Norway and Poland have enjoyed longstanding cultural cooperation especially in the areas of music and literature. A large number of Norwegian books have been translated into Polish, and several Norwegian films have won acclaim in Poland. Norway and Poland have also cooperated in the field of cultural heritage in recent years.

Art, culture and creativity can contribute to growth and development in both economic and non-economic terms. Cultural cooperation with Poland can create synergies in other political and business-related areas, and can help to build Norway's reputation in Poland. Cultural cooperation can also promote cultural understanding and tolerance, as well as valuable exchange of knowledge and skills. Moreover, creative and cultural enterprises create jobs and contribute to value creation.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

Under the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway is helping to preserve and promote Polish cultural heritage. This co-

operation also involves Norwegian experts, and among the benefits is mutual competence-building. Under the Grants scheme, Norway is also supporting Polish-Norwegian cooperation on promoting the arts to a broader audience and enhancing cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

In recent years, cultural exchange between Norway and Poland in a wide range of genres has been considerably strengthened under the EEA and Norway Grants. Bilateral cooperation in this area has helped to develop networks and foster exchange of knowledge between the Polish and Norwegian cultural sectors.

The cooperation on cultural heritage is also promoting employment, business development, and sustainable development for local communities. Norway is helping to safeguard our common European cultural heritage through the EEA and Norway Grants.

Norway is taking part in the EU's programme for the culture and audiovisual sectors, Creative Europe, for the 2014-2020 period. Partnerships under the EEA and Norway Grants may provide a basis for applications to Creative Europe.

14. REGIONAL AND LOCAL COOPERATION

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Primary objective

The Government will seek to strengthen cooperation between local and regional authorities in Norway and Poland, including cooperation in regional councils.

Background

The topic of how municipalities work with European issues is a good starting point for cooperation between Norwegian and Polish municipalities. So too is our countries' approach to Horizon 2020. Contact between Norwegian and Polish local authorities has been strengthened under the EEA and Norway Grants, and there is potential for even closer ties. In 2012, the cities of Trondheim and Krakow entered into an MoU on cooperation on various municipal services, and cooperation in the areas of research and higher education, culture and business.

Polish and Norwegian counties and regional authorities take part in the Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC). The BSSSC was formed to promote regional interests to national authorities and the EU. It has close ties with the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), which is a strategic partner. The BSSSC is working to further develop cooperation in the Baltic Sea region, and takes active part in the interregional cooperation under the EU, including the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. There are opportunities for concrete cooperation projects between Norwegian and Polish local authorities within this framework.

There is considerable maritime traffic in the Baltic Sea, with some 2 000 ships in these waters at any time. Regional cooperation on emergency preparedness and sustainable management of the sea is therefore important. The Baltic Sea is already classified as a Sulphur Emissions Control Area (SECA), and there are plans for its classification as a Nitrogen Oxide Emissions Control Area (NECA). The legal limit for sulphur content in bunkers was reduced to 3.5 % as of 1 January 2012, and will be further reduced to 0.5 % from 1 January 2020.

Poland and Norway are both members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and Poland is chair for

the period 1 July 2015 – 1 July 2016. Poland has indicated that it will extend the scope of the CBSS's work during its chairmanship, and that the environment and blue growth will be key focus areas in the time ahead. This is of great interest to Norway, as we have long experience of environmentally friendly shipping, and can thus take active part in this work.

Poland is a major partner in the European territorial cooperation programme INTERREG through the neighbourhood programme for the Baltic Sea region INTERREG III B, which also involves Norway. Norway provides EUR 6 million through the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation's budget to this programme. The main priorities are research, technology development and innovation, sustainable use of resources, transport infrastructure and capacity-building. Norwegian regional authorities are also taking active part together with actors from other countries in projects to strengthen regional development in the Baltic Sea region.

The role of the EEA and Norway Grants

In addition to the program for local and regional development, there is a wide range of programmes that touch upon regional and local cooperation, particularly within municipal cooperation.

Primary objective

The Government will promote Norway as a strong and reliable partner in the various sectors described in the action plan.

Background

Strategic communication is vital for promoting the objectives set out in this action plan. Communication is important in order to change people's view, attitudes and behaviour. The cooperation and synergies arising from

efforts in the various sectors covered by this plan will contribute to the impression Norway makes and to our reputation. It is therefore important that communication activities in this context both underpin the strategic goals set out above and promote Norway's image in line with the Ministry's manual on strategic communication. Defining the key target groups and making use of modern communication tools will be crucial elements of this work.



IV. The way ahead

The action plan is to be followed up systematically. This will involve all the affected ministries, and an interministerial steering group will meet once a year. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will chair the steering group, and will maintain regular contact with the other ministries on the follow-up work.

