

Norway in Europe. The Government's work programme for cooperation with the EU

## Introduction

The work programme for 2019 follows up the Government's strategy for cooperation with the EU in the period 2018–2021. The strategy describes the Government's main priorities for cooperation with the EU and sets out its vision for Europe. One of the strategy's main messages is that Norway must contribute to the efforts to build a secure, free and economically strong Europe, where European countries take joint responsibility for addressing shared challenges. The work programme is an important tool in our work to achieve these goals. It sets out where we should target our efforts to promote Norway's interests and what we should do to safeguard our interests as effectively as possible.

The EEA Agreement is the most comprehensive international agreement to which Norway is a party, and Norway has a fundamental interest in safeguarding it. This year, it is 25 years since the EEA Agreement entered into force. The EEA Agreement gives Norwegian companies access to the internal market and ensures predictability and a level playing field. The Agreement has helped promote the lasting and balanced strengthening of trade and economic ties between the parties. Over the 25 years that have passed since the Agreement entered into force, we have experienced a period of almost uninterrupted economic growth and prosperity.

A new generation has grown up since 1994 when we entered into the EEA Agreement. This generation has no knowledge of a world without the rights and obligations guaranteed under the EEA Agreement. But many young people today – and admittedly many of the older generation too – are not sufficiently aware of the benefits of the EEA Agreement. This year, as we celebrate the Agreement's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one of the Government's goals is therefore to raise awareness of the EEA Agreement and to promote a fact-based and well-informed debate.

International cooperation is under pressure. This makes our cooperation with the EU on protecting and promoting a common set of rules more important than ever. Norway will safeguard the agreements it has with the EU, and will work with the EU to promote more, not less, binding international cooperation. Many of

our common challenges, such as climate change, irregular migration and transnational work-related crime can only be addressed through common European efforts.

The EEA Agreement provides the basis for cooperation with the EU in a wide range of areas, including the environment, research, education, health, consumer issues, civil protection and culture. It is important for Norway to safeguard the Schengen system and to continue to participate in the Schengen cooperation. The Government will work systematically to ensure that Norway's agreements with the EU continue to function well.

2019 is an important year for the EU too. A new European Parliament will be elected and a new European Commission will take office. Migration and internal and external security are still high up on the EU agenda. In the period leading up to the summer, the present European Commission will focus on delivering on its work programme, and towards the end of the year, the new European Commission will present its priorities. It is important for Norway to follow these processes closely so that we can safeguard Norway's interests in our cooperation with the EU in the best possible way.

The work to develop EU programmes for the period 2021–2027, as proposed in the EU's next long-term budget, will be important in 2019. EU programmes are an important tool for addressing the challenges Europe is facing. The Government will carry out a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the question of Norwegian participation in programmes of relevance to Norway.

Finally, 2019 will also be a decisive year in terms of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The Government is following the discussions between the EU and the UK closely, and we are preparing both for withdrawal with an agreement and for withdrawal without an agreement. Together with our EEA EFTA partners, we will maintain a close dialogue with the UK on future cooperation, with a view to safeguarding our interests as effectively as possible.

**Ine Eriksen Søreide**  
**Minister of Foreign Affairs**

## **A secure Europe**

The increasingly unpredictable security situation in and around Europe in recent years has led to greater awareness in the EU of the need to strengthen the Union's capacity to respond to internal and external security threats. This is reflected, for example, in the EU Global Strategy. It is in Norway's interests – both our security and our economic interests – to cooperate closely with the EU and the EU member states to strengthen European security and defence and further develop cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs.

### **Security and defence**

Cooperation with the EU in the field of security and defence is undergoing dynamic development, as reflected in a number of new initiatives, such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). Norway is seeking to participate as closely as possible in these initiatives.

In 2019, the Government will work to strengthen Norway's security and defence cooperation with the EU. This will involve further developing Norway's dialogue with the EU on security policy issues and enhancing coordination with the EU in this area, as well as strengthening Norway's practical cooperation with the EU. We will give priority to ensuring the effective exchange of information at an early stage of EU processes. This will make it easier for Norway to identify appropriate Norwegian contributions to EU civilian and military operations, in situations where Norway is well-placed to play a role.

The Norwegian defence industry is fully integrated into the European defence equipment market. In the light of the fact that the EU is now strengthening its cooperation in this area, it is important to ensure that Norway continues to have the necessary military capabilities and to safeguard the interests of the Norwegian defence

industry. In 2019, priority will be given to questions relating to Norwegian participation in the European Defence Fund (EDF) and in projects under the Preparatory Action on Defence Research (PADR) and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP).

The Government will also follow the development of the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), in particular the development of projects designed to strengthen Europe's military preparedness and opportunities for third countries to participate in these projects. The Government will consider whether Norway should seek to participate in projects of particular interest.

Norway considers it important that the EDF, PESCO and other EU initiatives in the area of security and defence are developed in an open and inclusive way vis-à-vis NATO and Allied countries that are not EU members. The Government emphasises that developments in the area of EU security and defence policy must complement NATO and must strengthen the transatlantic cooperation.

In 2019, the Government will therefore promote further dialogue and cooperation between the EU and NATO. The EU and NATO are working on a number of measures to strengthen their cooperation. Norway has emphasised the importance of ensuring that these measures are backed up by concrete actions. We will attach particular importance to efforts to improve military mobility in Europe and efforts to strengthen cooperation on countering hybrid threats.

In order to safeguard Norway's interests when it comes to our participation in EU defence cooperation, the Government will, in 2019, continue to give priority to maintaining close dialogue with Germany, the Netherlands, France, Finland and Sweden. The Government will follow the negotiations on the UK's future participation in EU foreign and security policy cooperation closely, and will consider any further opportunities this could open up for us.

In November 2017, the European Commission presented a proposal to strengthen the existing EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which Norway participates in through the EEA Agreement. A key element of the proposal is the establishment of a dedicated reserve of operational capacities at EU level (rescEU) that can be deployed in the event of a disaster. The aim is also to make it easier to request support and utilise resources. In 2018, the Government worked to promote Norway's interests in this area through

dialogue with the EU institutions and cooperation with like-minded countries. The EU institutions reached agreement on rescEU in December 2018, and the proposal is expected to be formally adopted under the Romanian EU presidency at the beginning of 2019.

Cyber attacks against individual countries and across national borders are growing in scale and complexity, and pose a threat to information security in today's digital society. The Government is seeking to strengthen its ability to prevent, address and respond to challenges relating to cyber security. Norway participates in the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security (ENISA), and will follow the ongoing efforts to strengthen the Agency's mandate closely in 2019.

The EU is working to develop a new, reliable and secure satellite communications system to be used by EU institutions and the member states' authorities (GovSatcom). This may be organised as a separate programme in which it may be appropriate for Norway to participate.

In Norway, civil aviation infrastructure is also used by military aircraft. The Government has intensified its efforts to improve cyber security/ICT security in the aviation sector and will participate actively in the EU's efforts in this area in 2019.

### **Cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs**

It is in Norway's interests to promote common solutions to common challenges in the area of justice and home affairs. The Government will therefore maintain Norway's police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters with the EU, with a view to preventing, uncovering and combating transnational crime such as terrorism, cybercrime, violent extremism, human trafficking, drugs and people smuggling, and economic crime, as well as safeguarding the rights of victims. The Government will continue its work to promote the implementation of Norway's parallel agreement to the European Arrest Warrant, which was signed in 2006.

It is in Norway's interests that the EU continues to give priority to maintaining a high level of security, while ensuring that individuals' fundamental rights are safeguarded. In its efforts to combat terrorism and extremism, the Government will, in 2019, focus on participating in relevant forums, and we will follow the EU's efforts closely as regards

assessing the changing threat landscape, promoting information sharing, and countering extremist propaganda online, radicalisation and recruitment to organised crime.

In order to address the threat of terrorism Norway is facing, it is vital to maintain close cooperation with other countries' counter-terrorism units. EU member states can request assistance from each other's special intervention units in crisis situations where there is a serious direct physical threat to property, infrastructure, institutions or people, such as a hostage taking or kidnapping. The Government is seeking an association to the enhanced cooperation between EU member states' special intervention units in these types of crisis situations (ATLAS decision).

The Government will work actively to strengthen the common external border by maintaining and further developing Norway's participation in the Schengen cooperation. In 2019, the Government will continue to give priority to the implementation of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), as well as the implementation of the new Entry/Exit System (EES) for registering data on third-country nationals entering/exiting the Schengen area for a short stay. Priority will also be given to participation in the negotiations on a new Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard (Frontex).

Internal security can only be safeguarded if border, customs and police authorities have access to the right information at the right time. Norway makes use of, and contributes to the development of, the Schengen Information System. Norway is also seeking better access to Europol registers, in the first instance under our existing cooperation agreement. It may be appropriate to consider alternative arrangements if, for example, the possibility of concluding a different and overall more advantageous cooperation agreement arises in connection with the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

The Government considers it important that, following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, Norway's cooperation with the UK in the area of justice and home affairs should take place on the same conditions as EU member states, and that transitional arrangements agreed between the EU and the UK also apply to Norway. The Government will follow the negotiations between the UK and the EU on future cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs and will consider what consequences this will have for Norway's

cooperation with the EU in this area, as well as any opportunities this may open up for us.

The internet has made it possible to spread hate speech quickly across national borders, and can be used to plan terrorist attacks and to spread terrorism-related content. It can also be used to manipulate public opinion and spread misleading information (false news stories and internet trolling). The Government will play an active part in the discussion on European measures to make online platforms, including social media, responsible for the content they publish and for ensuring that any illegal content can be removed quickly.

Norway is negotiating a bilateral agreement on the transfer of sentenced persons with Serbia, and is conducting talks with Poland and Kosovo on the same issue. The Government's view is that Norway should in the long-term aim to adhere to the framework decision on transfer of sentenced persons, with a view to improving efficiency and reducing the need for bilateral agreements in this area.

Together with the EU and the EU member states, Norway will continue to support measures to combat criminal networks in vulnerable countries in North Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East. This includes measures to increase the capacity of these countries to strengthen border controls and combat smuggling and human trafficking networks.

## **Energy security**

A well-functioning, effective energy market – with adequate infrastructure and a predictable legal framework – is essential for ensuring security of energy supply and an effective climate policy in Europe. Initiatives to further develop the EU internal gas market and improve security of supply throughout the EU, including new gas infrastructure projects, may have implications for Norwegian gas exports. We are therefore following these developments closely. Clear signals about the future role of gas are needed for Norway and other exporters to make the necessary investments to maintain their deliverability. In the work to further develop the electricity market design rules, the Government has emphasised that prices should be allowed to vary according to supply, demand, and limitations on production and grid capacity. The Government has also emphasised that electricity market regulation must be limited to what is most

necessary and must provide for flexible implementation that takes into account the differences in the countries' national energy sectors.

## **Health**

Norway is at the forefront of efforts to reduce antimicrobial resistance in both humans and animals, and cooperates with the EU on addressing this health threat. Norway cooperates closely with the other Nordic countries in this area, and in 2019, the Government will give priority to following up the EU Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance and the EU's Animal Health Law.

Since 2018, Norway has had an emergency medical team (EMT) ready to be deployed to health emergencies. Within 48 hours, Norwegian health personnel and equipment can be sent anywhere in the world with a capacity to triage and treat up to 100 patients, including in Norway and the rest of the Nordic region. The Norwegian EMT is part of the European Medical Corps, which is designed to support and strengthen response to health emergencies by member states and the WHO. The work to evaluate these efforts will begin in January 2019. A national evaluation of the Norwegian EMT will be carried out in 2019.

## **A non-toxic environment**

Environmentally hazardous substances and hazardous waste that are not handled properly pose a serious threat to future generations. In 2019, the Government will therefore maintain Norway's active engagement in the work to develop ambitious EU legislation on waste management and on the use and production of chemicals, including in the context of the preparation of the next European Commission work programme and the development of the new Environment Action Programme for the period 2021–2027. The Government will play an active role in further developing EU chemicals legislation and will seek to ensure that the EU maintains an ambitious chemicals policy.

## **Traffic safety**

The use of new technology, such as intelligent transport systems (ITS) and self-driving vehicles, can improve traffic safety and reduce the number of accidents. The Government is following up the EU's work in this area, including with regard to the testing of self-driving vehicles. Awareness-raising activities focusing on issues such as drugs and alcohol, the use of seat belts and vehicle inspections are also important for

improving road safety in Europe. Measures to ensure that vehicles are properly equipped and drivers have the necessary skills to drive safely on Norway's winter roads are a priority for Norway.

In May 2018, the European Commission presented a Strategic Action Plan on Road Safety, which sets out eight areas of action to improve traffic safety in the EU. The Action Plan is consistent with Norwegian legislation and practice, and Norway has good experience of working systematically in this way to improve traffic safety, for example through our national action plans for road safety. In spring 2019, the EU will present its road safety policy framework 2021–2030, which will describe the areas of action identified in the Action Plan in more detail.

### **Inclusive cooperation**

Norway will maintain its support for European countries that are seeking closer integration with European and Euro-Atlantic cooperation structures. This applies in particular to countries that have applied for EU membership and Eastern European countries that have entered into association agreements with the EU. The Government supports the EU's enlargement policy, which sets strict conditions for EU membership and supports the necessary reforms in the candidate countries.

Supporting further reforms to promote democracy, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and the development of a viable civil society and independent media is an important component of Norway's cooperation with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. The Government considers it important to support the efforts of these countries to become more closely integrated with the EU, including through economic cooperation and trade.

The Government is increasing its assistance to the Western Balkans to NOK 343 million in 2019. This funding supports reforms, and thus promotes integration with the EU and closer cooperation between the countries in the region. This is essential for promoting stability and security both in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole. Assistance provided by Norway is intended to promote good governance, the rule of law, and economic development with a particular focus on reducing youth unemployment. Norway's funding complements the funding provided by the EU and its member states. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia all receive support from Norway.

The EU and Norway share an interest in promoting a democratic and stable Turkey that is firmly underpinned by respect for human rights and the rule of law. It is in Norway's interests that Turkey and the EU have a good, constructive relationship. The Government supports closer European integration for Turkey and the active participation of Turkey in European and transatlantic institutions such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and NATO.

## **A free Europe**

Respect for individuals' fundamental rights and freedoms and for democratic rules and the rule of law is essential to ensuring lasting peace and stability in Europe. Developments in a number of European countries show that we cannot take respect for these values for granted. The Government will continue its close cooperation with the EU to defend our common values, which are so vital for promoting a free Europe.

### **Individual rights and freedoms**

The Government will work with the EU to protect the European Convention system, which safeguards citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms. The European Convention on Human Rights is the cornerstone of this system.

Freedom of movement across national borders is one of the most important rights set out in the EEA Agreement. The Government will defend the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the Agreement and will seek to ensure equal treatment of Norwegian citizens and other EEA citizens in Europe.

Discrimination has no place in a free society. Through the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway promotes the development of well-functioning societies by supporting social inclusion of vulnerable groups, equal access to education, work and health services, and the development of competent and responsible public institutions in the beneficiary countries.

The UK is due to leave the EU in 2019. The Government will seek to ensure that the rights of Norwegian citizens in the UK and of British citizens in Norway are equivalent to those agreed for British and EU citizens in the withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU. We are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with both the UK and the EU to see how this can be achieved.

As a Schengen member state, Norway supports the absence of internal border controls in the Schengen area. At the same time, the Government considers it important to be able to introduce temporary internal border controls of limited scope to safeguard internal security when necessary. In 2019, the Government will continue to work to ensure that amendments to the Schengen Borders Code are balanced and are in line with Norway's interests and needs.

### **The rule of law and a strong civil society**

Well-functioning states based on the rule of law are essential for safeguarding the individual rights and freedoms of all people – both women and men. An independent judiciary acts as a check on executive power, and plays a particularly important role in safeguarding the rights of minorities. Well-functioning, predictable states based on the rule of law are vital for promoting economic growth and development throughout Europe.

Together with the EU, the Government will seek to influence governments that are adopting legislative amendments and other measures that violate the principles of the rule of law, and undermine judicial independence and the European Convention on Human Rights. These efforts will be targeted towards countries where justice sector reforms are increasing political control over the judiciary. Norway will cooperate with other countries and with the EU in forums such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE to encourage countries to fulfil their obligations.

Through the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway promotes fundamental rights and democratic freedoms in the beneficiary countries. The Grants are used to foster active citizenship, empower vulnerable groups and strengthen the role of civil society. In addition, they support activities to promote cultural dialogue and raise awareness of diversity.

A strong civil society and independent media are prerequisites for a vibrant, well-functioning democracy. The Government will maintain its economic and political support for civil society in Europe, both within and outside the EU. The EEA and Norway Grants are an important tool in this context. The Government has made it requirement that all Norwegian funding for civil society in the beneficiary countries is managed by independent fund operators.

Under the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway is engaged in cooperation to build national capacity in the justice sector, including efforts to strengthen correctional services, the police and the courts, and bring them into line with European standards. Norway gives priority to cooperation with Poland, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria in this area.

The Government also gives priority to efforts and cooperation under the EEA and Norway Grants to combat violence against women and domestic and gender-based violence. In 2019, Norway will further develop the interdisciplinary Synergy network, which was established in 2018, to strengthen cooperation between the beneficiary countries and Norwegian actors working to combat domestic and gender-based violence. The aim is to create a synergy effect, so that the combined impact of the projects supported by the EEA and Norway Grants is greater than the sum of the individual projects. Synergy network meetings were held in March and November 2018. The cooperation covers all parts of the criminal justice sector. The Norwegian authorities will provide expertise and share experience.

### **Respect for international law**

Norway supports the EU's efforts to defend the principle of respect for borders, the right to self-determination and a rules-based international order.

This includes the right of countries to determine the nature of their relationship with organisations such as the EU and NATO. The Government will consider aligning Norway with any new restrictive measures that the EU adopts in 2019, and will follow up our collective response to Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and other violations of international law in eastern Ukraine.

The law of the sea forms part of international law and gives Norway the exclusive right to manage the natural resources on the Norwegian continental shelf and in Norway's maritime zones. One example is Norway's exclusive right to exploit the population of snow crabs on the Norwegian continental shelf, and regulate catches of the species. The Government expects the EU to respect the fundamental principles of the law of the sea, and in 2019 will continue to communicate its position to EU institutions and member states, with a view to ensuring that there is a common understanding of these principles.

## **Culture and cultural cooperation**

Norway supports EU efforts to promote Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity, the common European cultural heritage and the development of the cultural and creative sectors. At a time of great change and major challenges, culture, cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue have a particularly important role to play, both socially and economically. Cultural cooperation and cultural contact across national borders help to raise awareness of our common history and values, promote a common European identity, and strengthen the sense of being part of a common European space. This in turn enhances security, social inclusion and active democratic citizenship.

The European cultural heritage is a common resource of huge importance. Through the EEA, Norway participated in the European Year for Cultural Heritage in 2018 and took part in a number of EU programmes aimed at supporting the protection, conservation, innovative use of, and promotion of Europe's cultural heritage. Europe's cultural and creative industries contribute to innovation, value creation, employment rates and economic growth.

## **An economically strong Europe**

Economic strength is essential if we are to be able to safeguard our security, promote our values, and maintain a sustainable welfare-based society. Developments in the EU are extremely important for the Norwegian economy. The EU is our most important trading partner. Through the EEA Agreement, our economies are closely integrated, we cooperate in a growing number of areas, and we have a common financial market. The Government is therefore following economic and political developments in the EU closely.

### **Open, rules-based trade**

In 2019, it is 25 years since the EEA Agreement entered into force. The EEA Agreement extends the four freedoms to Norway. Over the last 25 years, the EEA Agreement has ensured that barriers to trade in goods and services between Norway and the EU in the areas covered by the Agreement have been kept to a minimum. Common rules for state aid and competition, combined with common standards and requirements for goods

and services and uniform enforcement of the rules, ensure much-needed predictability and a level playing field for companies operating in the EEA.

The EEA Agreement is important for Norway, for Norwegian jobs and for Norwegian citizens. In 2019, the Government will therefore continue to safeguard the EEA Agreement, and will work systematically to ensure that it continues to function well. This is in the interests of both Norway and the EU.

The Government will do its part to ensure that new EU/EEA legislation is in line with Norway's interests and priorities. Norway will make use of any opportunities to participate at an early stage in EU processes, and will draw on the wide range of contacts developed between Norwegian actors and European partners.

One of the key features of the EEA Agreement is that it is a dynamic agreement. New, relevant EU legislation is incorporated into the Agreement on an ongoing basis to ensure homogeneity of legislation throughout the EEA. Delayed incorporation of new legislation into the EEA Agreement creates uncertainty and extra work for the affected parties.

The Government has intensified the efforts to reduce the backlog of EEA-relevant legislation that has not yet been incorporated into the EEA Agreement, in cooperation with our EEA/EFTA partners and the EU. We will continue this work in 2019, with a particular focus on legislation relating to the financial markets. A large backlog had developed as a result of the prolonged negotiations on how to incorporate the legislation establishing the EU financial supervisory authorities into the EEA Agreement. In addition, the EU has adopted a large number of far-reaching legal acts relating to the financial markets. Given the nature of the EEA Agreement, there will always be some delay between the adoption of EU legislation and its incorporation into the Agreement. Recently, there has been close and constructive cooperation between the EEA/EFTA countries and the EU on reducing the backlog. This has produced results, and the rate of incorporation was faster in 2018 than in previous years. The Government is giving priority to maintaining close dialogue on this issue and will work to further reduce the backlog in 2019.

The EU and Norway have a common interest in defending and further developing the international trade system. We want to maintain and strengthen the multilateral trade

regime, and will cooperate with the EU with a view to achieving this, for example in the World Trade Organization.

The Government attaches importance to ensuring that the UK's withdrawal from the EU does not have negative consequences for cooperation in the internal market. The Government will seek to ensure that arrangements are put in place for Norway that are equivalent to any withdrawal and transitional arrangements agreed by the EU and the UK, in areas that are covered by the EEA Agreement. In Norway's ongoing dialogue with the UK, top priority will be given to the rights of Norwegian citizens, air transport and other areas where clarification is urgently needed.

Around two-thirds of Norway's seafood exports go to the EU. Customs duties on imports of a number of important Norwegian seafood products to the EU are still high, there are higher import duties on processed products, and the import quota system is complex. All this has the effect of limiting trade with the EU and restricts opportunities to process products in Norway. The Government will therefore give greater priority to promoting free trade in seafood with the EU.

The free exchange of goods is an important feature of the internal market. The European Commission has presented proposals to amend current legislation on market surveillance and mutual recognition of goods (the Goods Package). The aim of the Goods Package is to make it easier for companies to sell their products in other EEA countries, while ensuring that consumers can be confident that the products they buy are safe. In 2019, Norway will follow up these legislative proposals, which it is proposed will enter into force in 2020.

A number of the road transport proposals in the EU Mobility Package have major implications for Norwegian interests. This includes for example the revision of the rules on road charging and the rules on market access and cabotage. The Government will promote fair conditions of competition in the transport sector and will work actively against the liberalisation of the cabotage regulations. A compromise was reached on the social dimension of the package at the Transport Council meeting on 3 December 2018, while the European Parliament adopted its position on 4 April 2019. Norway's positions are being presented both directly to the EU institutions and through our participation in the Road Alliance, a group of Western European countries working together to combat social dumping, unfair competition and fraud in the road haulage market.

In the area of railways, work is continuing to enable the implementation in Norwegian law of the set of legal acts in the EU's Fourth Railway Package, with a view to presenting a proposition to the Storting requesting its consent to this package of legislation. This is dependent on sufficient progress being made in EFTA and in the EU.

In 2019, the Government will seek to cooperate closely with the EU on promoting consumer protection in the digital economy, including by providing input on the proposals to modernise EU consumer protection rules in the New Deal for Consumers package. The Government will also continue to work to ensure that the revised directive on the sale of goods that is to be adopted in spring 2019 is formulated in such a way that it will be possible to maintain the Norwegian rules on a five-year guarantee period for products that are meant to have a long lifetime.

The EU has recently adopted a new Animal Health Law, new legislation on official controls in the food sector, and new rules on organic production and labelling of organic products. In 2019, the Government will follow the European Commission's work to draw up implementing legislation for these three regulations closely. The Government will also follow the ongoing evaluation of EU legislation on plant protection products and pesticides residues.

The European Commission has presented a number of legislative proposals aimed at enhancing the safety and efficiency of maritime transport. This includes amendments to the legislation on reporting formalities for ships arriving in and/or departing from member states' ports. Norway already has a well-functioning national system for mandatory notifications from vessels. The Government is working to ensure that Norway's needs are safeguarded as far as possible under the new EU system, to avoid a situation where Norway has to adopt a more complex and less user-friendly system than the one we have today.

In 2019, the Government will follow the work to revise the EU's rules on state aid, including the rules on regional aid and group exemptions, through ongoing dialogue with the European Commission and the EU member states. The current rules are well adapted to the challenges facing Norway's regions, and ensure that the regional investment aid scheme, which is targeted towards rural districts, and the scheme for differentiated employers' national insurance contributions can be maintained. The

Government's aim is to ensure that these schemes can be continued under the EU's new rules.

In 2019, the Government will continue to support the work the EU is doing to make it more difficult to avoid tax and thus reduce the tax base. We will also continue to follow closely the EU's efforts to promote effective and correct taxation of enterprises that offer digital services in the internal market. Although the EU's secondary legislation on taxation is not included in the EEA Agreement, the provisions of the EEA Agreement on free movement and the ban on state aid form the framework for the development of Norwegian tax legislation.

The Government will continue to put forward proposals for and advocate the development of sound tax legislation in the EEA. We will communicate our views, both in connection with specific issues and in connection with the ongoing work to develop EU tax legislation, with a view to promoting fair and effective tax systems.

### **Safe and effective capital and financial markets**

The Norwegian financial sector plays an important role in ensuring that Norwegian companies have access to capital. Under the EEA Agreement, the Norwegian financial sector is fully integrated into the EU internal market. This makes it easier for Norwegian companies to gain access to capital.

Since the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, there has been a marked increase in the number of legislative measures relating to the financial sector proposed by the European Commission. The EU is still considering a number of legislative proposals in this area. These include further legislation to strengthen banks, new rules to improve fairness and transparency in online platform trading, and a legislative package on sustainable finance to make the financial sector greener. In the coming years, the EU will also carry out evaluations of legislation that has already been adopted, and will make any necessary amendments.

The European Commission has presented a number of legislative proposals relating to the capital markets. The Government is following developments in this area closely. We will seek to be actively involved in the various processes, and will prepare positions and provide input aimed at safeguarding Norwegian interests. Norway will highlight the

importance of risk-sensitive rules and the principle that similar rules should apply to activities that present similar risks. This is important for preventing the development of 'risk bubbles' in certain sectors, and for ensuring that the same regulatory principles apply to similar types of activities.

The Government attaches importance to financial stability. Financial stability and a country's capacity for economic growth are closely linked. In our dealings with the EU, we will stress the importance of national flexibility when it comes to the development of legislation and requirements to address financial stability risks, including capital and liquidity requirements. The aim is to make sure that national requirements can be adapted to some extent to the economic situation in the country in question.

In 2017, the European Commission presented a series of proposals aimed at strengthening the European system of financial supervision. In 2018, a further proposal was made to reinforce the role of the European Banking Authority (EBA) in the fight against money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2019, the Government will seek, together with the other EEA EFTA countries, to safeguard the balanced approach achieved in the EEA adaptations adopted in 2016.

#### **Protection of people reporting on irregularities and breaches of Union law**

In the spring of 2018, the European Commission proposed a directive that lays down common minimum standards for the protection of workers and other people who report breaches of EU law in a broad range of areas. This includes areas such as financial services, terrorist financing and money laundering, public health, environmental protection, public procurement, food safety, protection of privacy and personal data, consumer protection, and animal health and welfare.

The purpose of the proposed directive is to provide enhanced protection against retaliation for whistleblowers. It requires companies of a certain size to establish internal reporting channels, and it sets requirements for how the competent authorities should receive and deal with reports and for the provision of information about reporting channels and procedures. The directive is currently being considered by the European Parliament and the European Council. The Government is following this work closely.

## **A well-regulated labour market**

It is important to ensure that it is easy for citizens of EEA countries to apply for jobs and invest in Norway, and for Norwegians to do the same in the other EEA countries. The free movement of people throughout the EEA is of crucial importance to the Norwegian economy.

The Government supports the principles set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights: equal opportunities and equal access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. The Government's goal is to ensure that new and updated legislation is compatible with Norway's welfare model and the institutionalised cooperation between the social partners and the national authorities.

Transnational work-related crime, in the form of undeclared work and other criminal offences, prevent the labour market from functioning properly. In 2017, the Government proposed to the EU that closer cooperation should be established at European level on combating work-related crime. This initiative is being followed up in Norway's political dialogue with the EU and its member states, and in a number of specific projects in 2019.

The Norwegian Labour Inspection Authority is entering into operational cooperation with the labour inspectorates in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. The aim is to strengthen cooperation on specific cases and share knowledge of good practices. The projects are being financed by the EEA and Norway Grants.

The Government is seeking to ensure that legislation relating to the road transport sector is designed to reduce opportunities for fraud and misuse of the rules relating to social rights and road safety. Norwegian authorities are following up developments in this area in part through the Road Alliance. In addition, the Norwegian authorities will seek to enhance coordination with supervisory authorities in other EU/EEA countries.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Transport have entered into dialogue with the authorities in the Netherlands. The aim is to investigate the opportunities for closer international cooperation on control practices in the road transport sector. Participation in the Euro Contrôle Route could be a good way of enhancing coordination in this area, and Norway will explore this further in 2019.

The labour inspectorates in the Nordic countries are cooperating on developing methods to combat work-related crime and are sharing knowledge and information on their efforts in this area. This project is receiving financial support from the European platform against undeclared work. Estonia and Latvia will join the project when it is extended for the period 2019–2020.

The European Labour Authority (ELA) is being set up to promote fair labour mobility. It will support member states in dealing with matters involving workers who are living in a country other than their country of citizenship, including with regard to the rules on labour mobility, the posting of workers, and social security coordination. The ELA will also help to strengthen efforts to combat undeclared work. Key focus areas are cross-border coordination and information exchange. The ELA will not be a forum for resolving cross-border disputes, but will be able to mediate in such cases at the request of the parties to a dispute.

The Government has welcomed the intentions behind the initiative to establish the ELA as part of the effort to strengthen European cooperation to fight work-related crime. At the same time, Norway has expressed its view that the ELA should respect national competences, and should not be able to take decisions that are binding on the EEA/EFTA countries. The Government considers it important to ensure that Norway will still be able to participate actively in the various arenas for cooperation that the European Commission has proposed bringing together under the ELA, for example in the area of social security.

The Government will seek to influence EU decision-making processes relating to the revision of the rules on social security coordination, so that it is possible to restrict the export of social security benefits through the indexing of benefits to the conditions in the country in question, including purchasing power differences.

Reducing youth unemployment and fighting poverty are priorities for the EEA and Norway Grants scheme, and the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Youth Employment has been established to help combat youth unemployment in the beneficiary countries, as well as in Spain, Italy and Ireland. Projects under the Fund started up in the autumn of 2018. A Fund for Regional Cooperation has also been set up under the EEA and Norway Grants. Applications for financing under this Fund will be considered in 2019.

The Government also launched the Global Fund for Decent Work and Tripartite Dialogue under the EEA and Norway Grants scheme in 2018, and calls for project proposals have now been issued.

### **A forward-looking business sector**

The transition to a greener, smarter and more innovative society will require knowledge, creativity and the ability to think outside the box. Our cooperation with the EU on education, research and innovation will be vital to our success.

In June 2018, the European Commission presented its proposal for the EU's next framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe. The Government has provided input on a range of issues in connection with the work to develop Horizon Europe, with a view to ensuring that the framework programme is in line with Norwegian interests and priorities as far as possible, while also giving added value for Europe. The Government has worked actively to make sure that Norwegian research communities will be able to participate in Horizon Europe based on the provisions in the EEA Agreement, and has emphasised that research relating to the oceans, carbon capture and storage, and hydrogen should be given greater priority in the new programme. In 2019, the Government will continue its efforts to influence and participate in the further development of Horizon Europe.

In May 2018, the European Commission presented its proposal for the EU's next programme for education, training, youth and sport, Erasmus. To a large extent, the programme will be a continuation of the current Erasmus+ programme. In Norway's view, it is positive that the main focus will still be on mobility, and that the programme is to be made more inclusive and flexible. However, Norway would like to see closer links between Erasmus and Horizon Europe, and clearer priority given to early childhood education and care. In 2019, the Government will continue to contribute to the development of Erasmus.

The Government will maintain Norway's cooperation with the EU on increasing knowledge about the oceans and about sustainable value creation in the ocean-based industries. Within the framework of our dialogue on ocean affairs with the European Commission, the European Commission and Norway will continue to share information

on a regular basis. Norway will participate in European Maritime Day in Portugal in May 2019, which will focus on blue entrepreneurship, innovation and investment. In 2019, the Government will continue to follow up the European Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy (DSM strategy). The EU plans to draw up a new strategy to replace the DSM strategy after 2020. The Government will follow this process closely, and will contribute to the development of the new strategy. The Government will also cooperate closely with the EU on developing new legislation and a new framework for future-oriented technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain technology.

The Government will continue to follow up the EU's programmes for cross-border electronic services (Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Telecom and ISA<sup>2</sup>), in line with the national strategy drawn up for this work by the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (DIFI) and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. The Government is also considering participation in the EU's proposed Digital Europe Programme, which is due to run from 2021 to 2027. The Programme will build on the EU's DSM strategy and will support digital transformation in the broadest sense. The EU programmes CEF Telecom and ISA<sup>2</sup> will end in 2020, and the main elements of these programmes will be continued as part of the Digital Europe Programme.

A new and future-oriented common regulatory framework for electronic communications (the European Electronic Communications Code), together with a new regulation establishing the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC), have recently been adopted by the EU. The European Electronic Communications Code modernises the existing legislative framework, and is intended to stimulate competition as a driver of investment, increase access to and use of high speed networks throughout the EU, strengthen the internal market, and strengthen consumer rights.

The new European Electronic Communications Code will form the basis for our national regulatory measures in the area of electronic communications. Member states now have two years to implement the new legislation in national law. In 2019, the Government will work to ensure the swift and effective incorporation of this legislation into the EEA Agreement, while also seeking to ensure that Norway is able to participate in a satisfactory manner in BEREC.

The Government will also start work on amending Norway's Electronic Communications Act and its associated regulations.

The Government will follow up legislative proposals designed to ensure that non-personal data (data that cannot identify individuals) can be stored and processed freely in the EU/EEA. We will also follow up the European eGovernment Action Plan and the revision of the Directive on the re-use of public sector information (also known as the 'PSI Directive'). Norway is at the forefront when it comes to the sharing of non-personal data, and is also leading the way as regards the registration of business enterprises and digital dialogue with the business sector. Norway's experience in this area is sought after by the EU.

The collaborative economy and digital platforms are opening up new opportunities. At the same time, there is a need for regulation to ensure a level playing field for competition. It is important that legislation in this area is adapted to technological developments, so that Europe can compete with countries such as the US and China. In 2019, the Government will continue to follow up issues relating to the collaborative economy in its dialogue with the EU.

The European Commission is working to establish a common regulatory framework for the use of unmanned aircraft, or drones. The aim is to stimulate economic growth and promote job creation in a number of sectors. In addition, the proposed framework could help to make transport and data collection more effective. In 2019, the Government will continue to participate actively in the development of the common regulatory framework for drones, in line with Norway's drone strategy.

The cultural and creative sector contributes to innovation, economic growth and job creation. The Government considers it important that this sector is able to develop, grow, and increase its exports. At the same time, we must make sure that creators of original material are paid for the use of their work, by ensuring copyright protection, so that responsible investments can be made in the development of art and cultural products. The Government will follow the EU's work in this area through ongoing dialogue with EU institutions, participation in the EU programme for culture, Creative Europe, and through the work of Norway's national experts in the European Commission.

The Government will seek to ensure that the ongoing reform of EU copyright rules strikes the right balance between the rights of copyright owners and the public's need for information, knowledge and access to cultural resources. The Government considers it particularly important to safeguard the Nordic extended collective licensing system. We intend to continue our close cooperation with the other Nordic countries in this area.

Norway supports, and is engaged in, the EU's efforts to put urban issues higher up on the political agenda. Oslo has been chosen as European Green Capital in 2019. The EU has several urban programmes, and Norway is participating in a number of these. One of them is the Urban Agenda for the EU. Under this programme, Norwegian cities are participating in broad partnerships in a number of areas: circular economy (Oslo), climate adaptation (Trondheim), public procurement (Larvik) and sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions (Stavanger). In 2018, partnerships were established in the areas of security in public spaces and culture/cultural heritage. The participation of more Norwegian towns and cities is being considered. Norway is also taking part in cooperation on research and innovation that aims to address major societal challenges facing European cities.

In the period 2021–2027, Interreg Europe, the EU's programme for enhancing cross-border social and economic cohesion through regional cooperation, will promote innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Norway's participation in Interreg Europe gives us access to the EU's regional policy and the programme provides an important arena for addressing regional policy challenges that require cross-border European cooperation. In 2019, the Government will follow, and participate actively in, the work to develop legislation and programmes in this area through ongoing dialogue with both EU institutions and EU member states.

## **A responsible Europe**

The Government will promote a sustainable, long-term and equitable policy at the European level to address common challenges relating to climate change, resource management, and migration.

## Climate change and energy

Norway has undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 % by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, and has communicated this to the UN as Norway's contribution under the Paris Agreement. The Government is seeking to fulfil its climate commitment jointly with the EU. Norway, Iceland and the EU have agreed to start the formal process of finalising the text of an agreement on joint fulfilment of the 2030 climate commitment. An agreement of this kind with the EU will provide the framework for Norwegian climate policy in the period up to 2030, but Norway will decide the substance of the policy that is needed to fulfil its climate commitments. A joint fulfilment agreement between Norway and the EU will not cover legislation relating to the implementation of the EU's other 2030 targets, such as the renewable energy and energy efficiency targets.

The Government has indicated that the joint fulfilment agreement could be incorporated into Protocol 31 to the EEA Agreement on cooperation outside the four freedoms. The next step is for the EEA EFTA countries to formally submit the draft text of the final agreement to the European Commission. The agreement must be approved by the Council, the Storting (Norwegian parliament) and the Althingi, (Icelandic parliament) before it can enter into force. The aim is to finalise the agreement text during the spring of 2019.

The conclusion of an agreement on joint fulfilment of the 2030 emission reduction commitment will mean that Norway will have to relate to relevant parts of the 2030 climate and energy framework. Norway is already participating in the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS). Under a joint fulfilment agreement, non-ETS sectors will also be included in our climate and energy cooperation with the EU in the period 2021–2030. This will mainly cover emissions from transport, agriculture, buildings and waste management, but will also include non-ETS emissions from manufacturing and the petroleum sector. A joint fulfilment agreement will also cover the EU's Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation. The basic principle is that Norway will follow EU rules on the same basis as EU member states.

Further developing Norway's close energy cooperation with the EU is a priority for the Government. The Energy Union encompasses a number of EU initiatives in the area of energy and climate policy. The EU's aim is to make energy supply secure, affordable and climate friendly.

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The EU recently adopted the Clean Energy for All Europeans package, (sometimes referred to as the 'winter package'), which contains the revised Renewables Directive, the revised Energy Efficiency Directive, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the Governance of the Energy Union Regulation, as well as four pieces of electricity market legislation. These legal acts will follow the normal procedures in the EEA EFTA legislative process.

The ongoing work on the EU's 2050 long-term strategy for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions will be an important topic in 2019. The strategy outlines the transformations required across all sectors of the economy and society to achieve the transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050, and will have implications for climate and energy issues that are of vital importance to Norway. Norway has provided input to the public consultation on the strategy, and will follow, and contribute to, the various initiatives that are being developed in connection with the strategy.

The Government will follow the development of the Energy Union closely in 2019. We will actively promote Norwegian interests in the work to develop a well-functioning European energy market and will share Norway's experience of the integrated Nordic electricity market.

While the Norwegian electricity sector is already virtually emission-free, many EU member states are now in the process of replacing coal and nuclear power with renewable sources of energy. The transformation of European energy supply opens up opportunities for Norway to take part in the shift to greener energy production and energy use in the rest of Europe. Norway will maintain and further develop its role as one of the world's leading energy nations, particularly as regards renewable energy.

Norwegian gas currently accounts for around a quarter of the EU's gas consumption. By replacing coal with gas, it will be possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve local air quality. Gas can also serve as a back-up for intermittent renewable sources. In recent years, there has been greater focus in the EU on hydrogen, and the possibility of producing hydrogen from natural gas coupled with carbon capture and storage (CCS) has been put forward as a virtually emission-free alternative. This is also mentioned in the EU's long-term strategy.

The EU is a key market for Norwegian energy companies, which are both investing in and making deliveries to new projects. For example, Norwegian expertise from the offshore oil and gas industry is being used in new markets such as offshore wind power.

Through the EEA and Norway Grants scheme, Norway cooperates extensively with a range of EU member states in the field of climate and energy. The Norwegian Environment Agency and the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate are involved in projects in a number of Central and Eastern European countries, in areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, the transformation of the energy sector, and climate change adaptation.

The Government will take steps to promote the development and use of cost-effective, carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology. This work will include urging countries that have not yet adopted the relevant amendment to the London Protocol to do so, so that a key legal barrier to transporting CO<sub>2</sub> across national borders is eliminated. Any full-scale CCS solution developed in Norway must also lead to technological advances internationally. Norway maintains a close dialogue with the EU on this issue, with a view to providing a basis for transfers of technology in Europe.

The transport sector is the largest source of non-ETS emissions in Norway. The Government's ambition is to halve emissions from the transport sector by 2030. The Government has set a number of targets for zero-emission vehicles for 2025 and 2030. Among other things, by 2025, all new passenger cars and light vans are to be zero-emission vehicles and all new local buses are to be zero-emission vehicles or run on biogas. This will require the development of new technology. The Government would like to see more stringent European emission requirements for cars, vans and heavy vehicles, as this would help to reduce emissions.

The Government will continue to promote innovation that can help create a greener transport sector, such as the development of autonomous and electric vehicles. Norway is already at the forefront in this area and may therefore be an attractive partner for the EU, for example within the framework of the Green Growth Group, a network of EU countries that are advocating an ambitious climate policy.

The Government will also promote the development and use of alternative fuels, such as electricity, biofuels and hydrogen.

## **Management of natural resources**

In cooperation with the EU, the Government will continue to pursue a policy that ensures a good balance between conservation and use of natural resources, and that promotes clean oceans and sustainable use of natural resources.

It is positive that the EU is developing its own integrated maritime policy. Norway will work with the European Commission to enhance knowledge of, and raise awareness of the importance of, the seas and oceans among EU member states.

The Government will give particular priority to the preparations for the Our Ocean conference, which will be held in Oslo in autumn 2019, and the Prime Minister's role as co-chair of the international High-level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy in the run-up to the UN Ocean Conference in 2020. Norway and the EU are now considering working together to develop an integrated system for registering and monitoring progress on fulfilment of the voluntary commitments made by countries and other actors prior to the conference.

The EU is also showing great interest in the Arctic, and the Government supports the EU's application for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. The EU is a major actor in the field of research on the Arctic. The EU's Arctic engagement makes it even more important for Norway to share its knowledge with EU institutions and member states about conditions in the region and the opportunities to be found there. We highlight the fact that this is not merely a remote and desolate area, but also home to vibrant local communities and towns that need sustainable business development and good living conditions. We also emphasise that Norway has long experience of managing natural resources in the Arctic in a way that takes account of environmental, social and business considerations.

Norway supports the work being done in the EU's Arctic Stakeholder Forum, and the investment priorities proposed by the Forum. The Forum's work is carried out in consultation with local actors in the Arctic region. The involvement of political authorities, the population, the business sector and in particular young people in the Arctic is vital. The current European Commission has announced that it will present a report on the Arctic to the new European Commission. Norway will follow the work on the report, with a view to promoting sustainable social, economic and environmental development in the Arctic.

Norway cooperates with the EU on the management of joint fish stocks and on efforts to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Norway's overall ambition is to ensure sustainable fishing that provides a basis for a high, stable yield from fish stocks. The Government will follow up the agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in the central Arctic Ocean and strengthen research cooperation. The agreement is important for the management of the sea areas around the North Pole and contributes to global efforts to combat IUU fishing.

Norway will maintain its dialogue with the EU aimed at highlighting the importance of the work to combat transnational organised crime in the global fishing industry. It is important that we make Norway's position on this issue clear, and in our dialogue with the EU, we must seek to ensure that the EU understands both the background and the aims of Norway's policy in this area.

The UK's withdrawal from the EU means that it will be necessary to establish tripartite cooperation between Norway, the EU and the UK on the management of fish stocks, both those managed jointly and those managed individually. Dialogue with both the EU and the UK on this issue will be a key priority in 2019.

### **Marine litter, plastics and the circular economy**

Norway has played a proactive role in Nordic, European and global efforts to combat marine litter and microplastics. The Government will continue to cooperate with the EU on following up the resolution put forward by Norway at the third session of the UN Environment Assembly in December 2017, which stresses the importance of the long-term elimination of discharges of litter and microplastics to the oceans.

Cooperation with the EU has also been important in the expert group that was established by the resolution, and whose mandate included looking into ways of strengthening international cooperation to reduce marine plastic litter and microplastics. Norway will present a new draft resolution to the fourth session of the UN Environment Assembly in March, with a view to advancing the efforts to strengthen the global framework in this area, and will maintain a close dialogue with the EU on this issue.

The EU's Circular Economy Package, which was presented in December 2015, includes a number of directives on waste, and reflects a significantly higher ambition level in this area. Amendments to the Waste Framework Directive, the Landfill Directive and the

Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive were adopted in spring 2018. This legislation has implications for Norway. The European Commission has indicated that it will present further recommendations on product policy and plastics in early 2019. It will be important for Norway to follow developments in this area closely.

The EU's strategy for plastics in a circular economy was presented in January 2018. It is designed to ensure more sustainable use of plastics, and contains measures to increase the recycling of plastics in ways that do not release hazardous substances into the environment. Many of the measures are relevant for Norway under the EEA Agreement. Norway and the Nordic countries provided input to the public consultation on the strategy early on in the consultation period. Norway has played an active role in the EU's efforts to develop a directive to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of both single-use plastics, which often end up as marine litter, and fishing gear containing plastics. Agreement was reached on the Single-Use Plastics Directive towards the end of 2018, and the Directive is due to be adopted in spring 2019. This will have major implications for Norway.

### **A comprehensive approach to migration**

The Government will promote a common European and comprehensive approach to migration that makes use of a wide range of instruments, with a view to addressing the challenges posed by irregular migration and the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers. We will contribute to the EU's ongoing discussions on improving the effectiveness of the Dublin system and will follow the work to reform the EU asylum rules closely in 2019, particularly legislation relating to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The Norwegian authorities will participate in the efforts to further develop European visa cooperation, including in connection with the proposed revision of the Visa Code and the Visa Information System (VIS). This is being seen in conjunction with the ongoing efforts to improve interoperability between EU information systems, such as those used by the police, immigration and border authorities, where the aim is to enable these systems to work together in a smarter and more efficient way.

Norway will continue to provide assistance to countries that are under particular migratory pressure, for example by providing experts for operations carried out by EASO and by participating in other areas of EASO's work. The Government intends to continue to use the EEA and Norway Grants to fund efforts to strengthen the asylum

and migration system in Greece, and will use the Grants to fund similar efforts in Romania and Bulgaria.

The return of asylum seekers who are not entitled to legal residence is an important and necessary element of a comprehensive migration policy, and is a priority for the Government. For the institution of asylum to function effectively, it is vital that people who do not have a need for protection or other grounds for legal residence in Europe return to their country of origin. It is also important to address the problem of undeclared work. Norway will work closely with the EU to promote the development of more return agreements, and will participate actively in the process to revise the Return Directive.

The Government will ensure that Norway shoulders its responsibility for controlling our part of the Schengen external border and will contribute to the effective management of other parts of the common external border, with a view to ensuring that border crossings into Europe take place in an orderly manner. The Government intends to continue to contribute to operations coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex). In addition, the Norwegian authorities will take part in European police cooperation to combat human smuggling.

Strengthening Frontex is an important part of the work to ensure effective management of the Schengen external border. Expanding Frontex's mandate on returns is also important for ensuring an effective return policy throughout the Schengen area. The Norwegian authorities will contribute to the development of common European administrative procedures and systems, with a view to enhancing cooperation on returns and readmission. This includes the further development of a system for exchange of information in this area (IRMA). The Government supports the EU's approach of linking visa facilitation agreements to readmission agreements, so that failure to cooperate on readmission can lead to a tightening of visa procedures for the EU/Schengen country concerned. The Government will use Norway's position, for example as an aid donor, to secure return agreements with more countries, and increase acceptance of the principle that all countries have a duty to readmit their own citizens.

If we are to be able to address migration challenges, we must also tackle the root causes of migration. Cooperation with countries of origin and transit is vital for ensuring

that migration takes place through regular, safe and legal channels. Human rights apply to all people, and we must maintain a focus on particularly vulnerable groups.

One of the main aims of closer cooperation on migration with countries of origin and transit is to prevent irregular migration. Cooperation on migration and on return and readmission shall be an important and integral part of Norway's bilateral relations with key countries of origin. This is in line with the EU's approach in this field, and it is in Norway's interests to support the EU's efforts in this area. The Valletta cooperation and the related Khartoum and Rabat processes are key arenas for cooperation on migration with African countries. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa is the financial instrument of the Valletta cooperation. It supports both short-term and long-term efforts to improve migration management, promote stability and address the root causes of migration. Norway sits on the Trust Fund Board and participates in all its governance bodies. Norway is the fifth largest donor to the Trust Fund.

Through the UN quota system, Norway will contribute to EU efforts to provide protection to refugees who cannot receive protection in neighbouring countries, and will encourage more countries to participate in the EU's resettlement efforts.