

Norway in Europe

THE GOVERNMENT'S
WORK PROGRAMME FOR
COOPERATION WITH THE EU

2016



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

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Foreword



Norway cooperates closely with the EU through the EEA Agreement, the Schengen association agreement and a number of other agreements with the EU. As a result of these agreements, major and minor developments and various political initiatives at European level have direct consequences for us.

The EEA Agreement is the mainstay of our cooperation. It ensures that Norway enjoys the benefits of the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. It gives Norwegian companies access to a 'domestic market' consisting of 31 countries with a total population of 500 million. Common European rules ensure that Norwegian companies compete on the same terms as companies in EU countries. In this way, we are safeguarding Norwegian jobs and welfare.

2016 will be a critical year for Europe. The flow of migrants into Europe is putting European cooperation to the test, and the Schengen system needs to be reviewed to ensure the continued existence of a European area of free movement without internal borders.

Economic growth is still relatively weak and unevenly distributed. The economic situation in Greece and certain other countries remains precarious. The UK is reconsidering its relationship with the Union, while other countries have elected governments whose focus is more strongly on defending national interests.

At the same time, EU bodies are continuing their work as before. The goal of promoting economic growth and employment is still high on the Commission's agenda. The migration crisis still requires a common European-level response. The Commission is intending to continue its work to make the EU more effective, concentrating more on the big issues and less on the small ones. The EU will also play a key role in efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and revamp European energy policy.

The Norwegian Government's strategy for cooperation with the EU for 2014-2017 sets out the main lines of Norway's European policy, which to a large extent respond to the challenges Europe is now facing. The five priority areas identified in the strategy – competitiveness and growth, research and education, climate and energy, justice and migration, and foreign and security policy – are based on the Government's political platform. The Government makes every effort to promote Norwegian interests when European policy is being developed in these areas.

In 2015, we provided extensive input in connection with the preparation of the EU's Digital Single Market Strategy, and we have submitted input to several of the Commission's consultations on individual aspects of the strategy. We have established an ongoing dialogue with the Commission and EU member states on the development of the EU's Energy Union, and took the decision to seek an agreement with the EU on joint fulfilment of climate commitments. We have also contributed to EU efforts to rescue refugees in the Mediterranean. This work programme sets out how we intend to continue these efforts in the year ahead.

The EEA Agreement is based on an internal market with common legislation and rules. Efforts to reduce the backlog of legal acts adopted by the EU but not yet incorporated into the EEA Agreement will continue unabated in 2016.

Negotiations on the EEA and Norway Grants for the period 2014-2021 were concluded in 2015, and the agreement is expected to be formally approved in spring 2016. At the same time, we agreed on new conditions for market access for fish. In 2016, the Government will negotiate framework agreements with the beneficiary countries on the use of the funding provided under the EEA and Norway Grants.

In European affairs, the Government wishes to see a stronger focus at an early stage on the possibility of Nordic cooperation. Closer Nordic coordination of the implementation of EU/EEA legislation would promote the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital, prevent the creation of new border barriers, and strengthen Nordic competitiveness. We should seek to submit joint Nordic input more frequently when European policy is being developed. Active use of a common Nordic platform at an early stage of the process could help us to gain wider acceptance for our views in the EU.

We will continue to pursue an open and inclusive European policy. Our European policy is a collective national effort. We hope that the work programme for 2016 will provide a good basis for this effort, and for a debate on developments in Europe and their implications for Norway.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elisabeth Aspaker', written in a cursive style.

Elisabeth Aspaker
Minister of EEA and EU Affairs

Important negotiations in 2016

The EEA and Norway Grants

Ever since the EEA Agreement entered into force, the EEA EFTA countries, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, have provided funding to reduce social and economic disparities in Europe through the EEA and Norway Grants. Negotiations with the EU on the next funding period for the Grants (2014-2021) were concluded in summer 2015. The agreement is expected to be finally approved and signed in spring 2016. Under the agreement, Norway will provide around NOK 3.3 billion (EUR 388 million) annually to the 15 least prosperous EU member states.

In 2016, the Government will negotiate framework agreements with the beneficiary states on the use of the funds. The Grants are intended to stimulate growth by supporting innovation, research, education and increased mobility in the European labour market. They are also intended to enhance Europe's energy security and foster a proactive climate and environmental policy. The agreement also allows for the expansion of cooperation between Norway and the beneficiary countries in the area of justice and home affairs, including joint efforts to deal with Europe's migration challenges. The Government's aim is for the Grants to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Norway and the beneficiary states.

Trade in agricultural products

In 2015, Norway and the EU began a new round of negotiations on trade in agricultural products, with a view to liberalising agricultural trade, in accordance with Article 19 of the EEA Agreement. The negotiations will continue in 2016. The Government will work to secure an agreement that safeguards Norway's overall interests as effectively as possible.

TTIP

Negotiations between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) will continue in 2016. Norway's participation in the internal market and trade with the US mean that a TTIP agreement will have direct implications for us.

The Government will continue its dialogue with the EU and the US on the TTIP negotiations. Our primary aims are to secure market access for Norwegian goods and services, and to ensure that legislative cooperation in the EEA is not weakened as a result of the TTIP agreement. We support the negotiating parties' objective of ensuring high standards for health, safety and the environment and for food safety. The Government considers it important that international trade agreements do not undermine Norway's public health policy.

The Government has not yet decided how Norway should proceed once the final TTIP is in place. We have commissioned a number of external impact assessments to assess the possible implications of the TTIP for the EEA Agreement, the seafood industry and Norwegian agriculture.

Joint fulfilment of climate commitments

The EU has committed itself to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 % by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Norway has adopted the same emission reduction target as the EU, and the Government is seeking to enter into an agreement with the EU on joint fulfilment of the emission reduction commitment for 2030, as set out in the white paper on Norway's new emission commitment (Meld. St 13 (2014-2015)). In addition to participating in the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS), Norway will also contribute to emission reductions in sectors that are not covered by the EU ETS (non-ETS sectors) by setting a national emission target for these sectors in line with comparable EU countries. This is expected to be set on the same basis as the targets for EU member states, and after negotiations with the EU. For Norway, a target

for the non-ETS sectors will be conditional on opportunities for flexible implementation in line with those available to EU member states.

Participation in the work of EU agencies and supervisory bodies

In the EU, the development and implementation of legislation is increasingly being transferred to agencies and supervisory bodies with greater formal decision-making and enforcement powers. It is important for Norway to participate in the work of EU agencies and supervisory bodies. This can, however, present challenges relating to the transfer of powers from the national to the European level.

In 2014, Norway and the EU reached agreement on the principles for participation by the EEA EFTA states in the work of the EU's financial supervisory authorities. The negotiations on the necessary technical and institutional adaptations have taken some time, but the Government is hoping to be able to present a solution in winter 2016. This will involve a transfer of powers and, in the Government's view, requires the consent of the Storting by a three-fourths majority.

Talks are also being held with the EU on the terms and conditions for Norway's participation in the work of other agencies and supervisory bodies, such as the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) and the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC). Both these bodies are important for Norwegian interests, and the Government's aim is to complete these processes in 2016.

The Government will seek to ensure that cooperation between national competition authorities in the EU is expanded to include the EEA EFTA states, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, so that the competition rules set out in the EEA Agreement are enforced as far as possible in the same way as the competition rules in the EU treaties.

Increasing competitiveness and value creation

Renewed growth and better framework conditions

The need to restructure the Norwegian economy makes it essential to implement measures to create growth and increase competitiveness. Our success will depend on close cooperation with neighbouring countries, and on common European rules that ensure genuine competition and enable Norwegian companies to compete on the same terms as those in EU countries. The EU's Single Market Strategy is therefore important for us, and the Government will communicate Norway's views at an early stage, when the chances of gaining acceptance for our views are greatest. The actions set out in the strategy include assessing national-level regulation of the collaborative economy, and developing a new services passport, which will make it easier to provide services in new markets.

In December 2015 the Commission presented a new set of proposals designed to stimulate Europe's transition towards a circular economy. The Circular Economy Package contains revised legislative proposals on waste and an action plan (communication) containing 54 proposed actions. The action plan is cross-sectoral, and resource efficiency is the common denominator throughout. The Government will play a part in following up relevant parts of the plan, in cooperation with the business sector and local and regional authorities.

The EU's maritime policy and legislation are of great interest to Norway. The Government will follow EU initiatives to develop an integrated maritime policy including 'blue growth', and we will build further on the input we provided to the mid-term review of the EU Maritime Transport Strategy.

We will work to ensure genuine competition in the defence market and will participate in the planned evaluation of the EU directive on defence and security procurement (Directive 2009/81/EC).

In December 2015, the Commission published its new Aviation Strategy. One of its key aims is to improve the competitiveness of European airlines operating on the global market. The Commission wants the EU to enter into negotiations on aviation agreements with several countries and regions. Priority will also be given to investment in innovation and technology. In dialogue with the EU, the Government will highlight new business models and the dynamics of globalisation. We will submit input on the part of the aviation strategy relating to the use of drones (in connection with the revision of EASA Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 216/2008)).

The Commission's planned measures to promote the use of road charging schemes and establish a more effective market for road transport will be an important part of the Government's work in 2016.

In autumn 2015, the Commission launched its Capital Markets Union Action Plan, aimed at improving access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commission is also assessing whether to present a proposal on the development of a European covered bond framework. Norway and the other Nordic countries have well developed capital markets, and the Norwegian authorities will seek to ensure that EU institutions and member states are aware of the experience of Norway and the other Nordic countries in this area.

The Commission is seeking to strengthen European cooperation on the development and re-use of health technology assessment (HTA) of new medical devices, medicines and the organisation of services in the health sector, with a view to improving the efficiency of the health system. The Government wants Norway to participate in this work.

Efforts to promote growth must not have a negative impact on social rights. We are pleased to note the EU's intention to take steps to ensure a good work-life balance for working families and to promote the participation of women in the labour market. The Commission has announced that it will be introducing new measures in this area in 2016, and the Government will consider submitting input in connection with this.

Market access for fish

The EU is Norway's most important market for seafood. Over 60 % of all Norwegian seafood exports go to the EU, and the export value is more than NOK 40 billion per year. Customs duties on imports of a number of Norwegian seafood products to the EU are still high and a number of tariff-free quotas limit trade and opportunities to process products in Norway. The new agreement between Norway and the EU on market access for fish will be implemented in 2016, and will improve trade conditions for the industry. The Government will continue to work to secure free trade in seafood on the EU market.

A digital single market

The development of a digital society and of a digital single market is one of the priorities of the EU's growth strategy, Europe 2020. The Commission's Digital Single Market Strategy will be followed up by concrete proposals in 2016. The Government wishes to contribute to this work. The aim is to boost confidence in cross-border e-commerce, promote universal design of ICT solutions and modernise copyright rules. We will also follow up last year's national conference on the digital economy by organising a new event focusing on the EU's digital agenda.

In 2016, the Government will present a white paper on Norway's digital agenda. Input and measures at national level will be coordinated with similar processes taking place at European level. This also applies to the ongoing revision of the Norwegian Copyright Act.

Common European rules should make it easier for us to benefit from new technology and from access to large amounts of information. At the same time, we must safeguard consumer interests and the protection of personal data. The reform of the EU's data protection rules is now in its final phase. In December 2015,

political agreement was reached in the EU on a new regulation and a new directive in this area, and the new rules are expected to be finally approved in early 2016. When the new legislation is incorporated into the EEA Agreement, it will be important to ensure that Norway is able to participate in the work of the new European Data Protection Board.

The Government supports the development of standard contracts, certification and joint data processing agreements at the European level, in order to promote the safe and effective use of cloud computing services, in both the public and the private sectors.

The Government has submitted input to the Commission's review of the regulatory framework for electronic communications. In January 2016, we submitted joint input on this issue together with the other Nordic countries, Estonia, the UK and Belgium. Consumers, the business sector and the public sector need secure, reliable and innovative electronic communications services. At the same time, the legislation must be balanced and must reflect the fact that continued investment in electronic communications networks and services requires well-developed infrastructure.

The Government will seek to ensure that the planned 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. We intend to continue our close cooperation with the other Nordic countries in this area, with a view to submitting joint input to the EU. The Government considers it particularly important to safeguard the Nordic licensing system.

Better regulation

The Government's aim to make everyday life easier for Norwegian citizens and Norwegian companies is closely linked to efforts to reduce regulatory burdens and simplify rules at European level. The Commission has introduced new methods for ensuring the quality of new legislation and a procedure for reviewing and updating existing legislation. This work is highly relevant to Norway, as a large number of Norwegian laws are based on EU legislation.

We will make sure that our work relating to EU legislation is in line with the new procedures, and that we make use of the opportunities available to provide input when new proposals are being drafted. We also aim to put forward specific suggestions for improvements in connection with the EU's review of existing legislation. We must ensure that the work to cut red tape and simplify rules does not weaken standards in areas such as health, the environment, consumer protection and food safety.

Free movement of workers

Labour from EU/EEA countries contributes to growth and value creation in Norway. We must ensure that it remains attractive and easy for people to apply for jobs across national borders in Europe. The Government will seek to ensure that the Commission's planned measures to increase labour mobility promote well-regulated employment conditions, equal conditions for all EEA nationals and a sustainable welfare state in Norway.

The issue of the exportability of national welfare benefits is high on the agenda, both at European level and in individual EU countries. The Government is following these discussions closely and will consider introducing measures at national level to ensure that the Norwegian welfare system is sustainable. Any such measures will be in line with the fundamental principles of the free movement of persons and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality.

The Government takes part in European cooperation to combat unscrupulous practices in the labour market, social dumping and tax evasion, in line with our strategy for combating work-related crime. We are seeking to participate in the European platform against undeclared work, a meeting place for the European Commission and national authorities responsible for detecting and preventing undeclared work.

A forward-looking consumer policy

Trade, value creation and growth in Europe are dependent on confident and well-informed consumers. The Government wishes to contribute to the development of a good and balanced European consumer policy. The rise in online shopping and sales of digital content heightens the need for common European consumer protection rules. For Norway, it is particularly important to retain a five-year guarantee period for physical goods that are meant to have a long lifetime. The Government will communicate this view to the European Parliament and the EU member states, with a view to securing an amendment to the Commission's legislative proposal, which as it stands would not allow Norway to retain the five-year guarantee period.

Food safety is important, both for individual consumers and for society as a whole, as is responsible use and labelling of medicines. The Government wishes to continue its dialogue with the EU on antibiotic resistance, with a particular focus on the rules relating to veterinary medicines. We will also follow the Commission's reviews (under the Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) programme) of food safety legislation, both those already underway and planned reviews.

Higher quality research and education

From education to work

If we are to succeed in our efforts to restructure the Norwegian economy, it is essential that people have the necessary knowledge and skills. The education system must equip people with the tools to be able to think creatively, create jobs and participate in the labour market of the future. The Commission is expected to present a renewed modernisation agenda for higher education in the EU in the course of 2016. The EU's education and training policy encompasses access to and the quality of early childhood education, and progression through the education system from pre-school to upper secondary education. The Government has already communicated Norway's views on the Commission's work in this area so far. We will expand on these views in our input to the consultation on the modernisation agenda for higher education and intend to make use of the ideas gained from this work in the planned white paper on the quality of higher education (spring 2017).

A targeted policy to improve knowledge and skills will ease the transition from education to work. The Commission is planning to launch a New Skills Agenda for Europe in spring 2016, and Norway will host a high-level meeting on this topic in Bergen in June, at which the Commission and the EU countries will participate. The Government is working to develop a national skills strategy. Through the EEA and Norway Grants, Norway will promote youth mobility by supporting opportunities for young people to study, work and undertake apprenticeships in other countries.

Research for the future

Participation in EU research and innovation programmes enhances the quality of Norwegian research, and encourages innovation. The Government will help Norwegian research groups and companies to succeed in the competition for Horizon 2020 funding, in line with the Government's strategy for research and innovation cooperation with the EU. For this to be successful, central, regional and local authorities must be actively involved in the process.

We will provide input to the work of determining the priorities of the EU's next framework programme for research and innovation to ensure that future initiatives promote research and business and social development in Norway as well as in the rest of Europe. Research will be a priority area in the cooperation agreements to be negotiated in 2016 with each of the beneficiary states receiving funding under the EEA and Norway Grants.

An ambitious climate and energy policy

Climate and energy policy up to 2030

The EU has undertaken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 % by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. It has also set specific targets for the share of renewable energy in EU energy consumption, and for improving energy efficiency. Norway has adopted the same emission reduction target as the EU, and the Government is seeking to enter into a bilateral agreement with the EU on joint fulfilment of the climate commitment for 2030.

The most important instrument for achieving the emission reduction target is the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS). This takes a 'cap and trade' approach, with tradable emission allowances and a cap on the total amount of emissions. The EU is tightening the cap by reducing the number of allowances issued year by year in order to achieve its target of reducing emissions from sectors covered by the EU ETS by 43 % in 2030 (compared with 2005).

Approximately 50 % of Norway's greenhouse gas emissions are now covered by the EU ETS, which now encompasses land-based industry, the oil and gas industry and the aviation industry. Norwegian enterprises to which the system applies contribute to emissions reductions in ETS sectors on the same lines as enterprises in EU countries. Norway provided input to the EU in connection with the revision of the EU Emission Trading System (EU ETS) Directive for the period 2021-2030. Norway supports the gradual tightening of the annual cap on emissions, and has also supported the EU's decision to introduce a market stability reserve from 2019. A higher carbon price will stimulate a rapid and effective low-carbon transition, for example by encouraging the development and deployment of new technology.

An agreement between Norway and the EU on joint fulfilment of the climate commitment for 2030 will mean that a national target for Norwegian emissions from non-ETS sectors also has to be determined. This target must be set on the same basis as the targets for EU member states. The Commission will probably present a proposal for the revision of the rules for non-ETS sectors (the Effort Sharing Decision) in the second quarter of 2016. The Government has communicated Norway's views and provided input to EU institutions and member states on this issue. For non-ETS sectors, flexibility within the EU system will make it possible to achieve some of the cuts through limited purchases of EU emission allowances or the implementation of measures in other EU countries. Norway would make use of this flexibility on the same lines as EU member states.

The Commission has clearly indicated the need to integrate climate considerations into European road transport policy. As part of this work, the Commission will present a plan for the decarbonisation of road transport. The plan is expected to be completed in summer 2016. Norway has useful experience that it can share with the EU, particularly as regards the roll-out of Europe's largest electric vehicle fleet.

2016 could be an important year for climate change efforts in the aviation sector. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) will present a recommendation on market-based measures for the aviation sector at the ICAO Assembly in the autumn. Norway supports the establishment of a separate global emission trading system to regulate emissions from the aviation sector after 2020. Through our participation in the EU ETS and our membership of the European Civil Aviation Conference, we will maintain a close dialogue with the EU and individual EU countries, and we will take part in the EU initiatives prior to the ICAO Assembly. If it is not possible to achieve a satisfactory global solution for aviation, we will work with the EU to strengthen the EU ETS.

Norway's participation in the Green Growth Group, which brings together the EU countries that are advocating an ambitious climate policy and a tighter ETS cap, provides excellent opportunities to promote Norwegian interests and views in the European arena.

EU Energy Union

The Energy Union is a key part of the EU's 2030 climate and energy framework. The EU's Energy Union strategy sets out the EU's intention to promote energy security, sustainability and competitiveness in the EU energy sector through measures and initiatives in five priority areas: energy security, solidarity and trust, a fully integrated European energy market, energy efficiency and moderation of demand, decarbonising the economy, and research, innovation and competitiveness in the energy field.

The Commission is proposing measures in each of the five priority areas. A package of new initiatives is expected to be presented in February 2016. This will include proposals for two EU strategies, for liquefied natural gas (LNG) and gas storage and for heating and cooling, and proposals for revision of the Security of Gas Supply Regulation and the Decision on inter-governmental agreements. These new initiatives could have significant implications for Norwegian gas exports. The Government has submitted its views on the EU's LNG strategy and has presented new forecasts for Norway's gas exports to EU institutions and key member states.

A new governance system, which will include reporting obligations, is being developed to help the EU to meet its climate and energy targets. In 2016, the Commission will present a proposal on streamlining planning and reporting obligations related to energy and climate. The new governance system could have implications for Norway's interests. The Government recommends a system that is flexible but reliable, and that is effective in helping the EU to reach its 2030 climate and energy targets .

In the light of the fact that Norway is integrated into the internal market and is a major energy supplier, the Government will maintain a close dialogue with EU institutions and member states on the development of the Energy Union. It is in Norway's interests that the energy markets function well and that gas and electricity infrastructure is improved. Natural gas has an important role to play in Europe's energy security, it reduces emissions provided that it is used to replace coal, and it can provide balancing power in systems where the share of intermittent renewable energy is increasing. All existing and planned infrastructure for electricity exchange between Norway and other countries is to EU countries, and this infrastructure makes Norway part of the European electricity market. The Government is also seeking to ensure that investment in carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology is a key element of the EU's Energy Union.

The talks on the Energy Union will include discussion of EEA-relevant legislation relating to the internal energy market, energy efficiency and renewable energy. The Norwegian authorities have provided input to the EU's consultations on new energy legislation. Norway will continue to submit input on proposals that could have implications for Norwegian interests, as consultations on new initiatives are conducted in 2016. Norway will work to promote closer cooperation on electricity between the Nordic countries in connection with the development of new EU legislation for the internal energy market.

Climate change and renewable energy is a priority sector for the EEA and Norway Grants in the period 2014-2021. The Government will ensure strategic use of the Grants to support the efforts of the beneficiary countries as regards the environment, climate change and energy.

Enhancing security

Foreign and security policy

In recent years, the EU has consolidated its position as a key security policy actor, in part through its response to Russia's violations of international law in Ukraine and in its role in the nuclear negotiations with Iran. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, the mutual defence clause (Article 42.7 of the EU treaty) was invoked for the first time.

Dialogue with the EU on foreign and security policy is becoming more and more important for Norway, and the European dimension will be a priority area in the new white paper on foreign and security policy that the Government is planning to present in autumn 2016. The Government is also seeking to contribute Norwegian perspectives to the work on an EU global strategy on foreign and security policy, which is due to be completed in summer 2016. Norway's input will focus on the EU's Arctic policy, cooperation with Russia and cooperation between the EU and NATO.

Since Norway makes a significant contribution to European security and defence policy, the Government is seeking to further develop its political dialogue with the EU in this area. The Government will work to make it possible for Norway to participate at the meetings of the Steering Board of the European Defence Agency at political level. The Government will also work to increase Norway's participation in EU operations. Norway is currently participating in three of the EU's civilian operations (Kosovo, Palestine and Ukraine). Norway has also offered to provide up to 10 personnel to the EU's military training mission in Mali, initially for one year, but with the possibility of an extension.

Norway's efforts are designed to promote close and effective defence and security cooperation, in which the EU and NATO complement and reinforce each other. The Government will therefore continue its cooperation with the EU on joint development of defence-related products, with the aim of enabling the EU to become a more independent and strategically relevant actor. We also want to participate in the EU's pilot programme on defence-related research and development.

The Government will follow up the Commission's existing initiatives and instruments for strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. Norway will continue its work to ensure that the directive on defence and security procurement (Directive 2009/81/EC) is implemented in a transparent and fair manner. The Commission's evaluation of the directive in 2016 will be of crucial importance. In a new and more complex regulatory situation, it is important to ensure that we have a sustainable strategy for complying with the directive but at the same time make use of the opportunities available to protect national security interests where necessary.

Stability and cooperation in the EU's neighbourhood

The European External Action Service and the Commission are expected to present a proposal for an integrated Arctic policy at the beginning of 2016. The Government will safeguard Norway's interests by raising relevant issues directly in Brussels and in dialogue with EU institutions and member states. For Norway, it is particularly important that the EU emphasises the importance of the Law of the Sea as the binding legal framework for the Arctic, and that priority is given to finding a good balance between conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Stability and development in Eastern Europe and the Balkans are important for our security and welfare. Norwegian financial assistance to countries in Eurasia has been targeted towards the three countries that have entered into association agreements with the EU (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) and is designed to support the efforts of these countries towards closer European integration. The Government will therefore continue its dialogue with EU institutions and member states on cooperation with the countries in Eurasia and on other instruments, such as restrictive measures against Russia.

The Government will maintain Norway's cooperation with the countries in South East Europe that are seeking closer integration with the EU. Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are currently engaged in accession negotiations. Albania and Macedonia are candidate countries, but accession negotiations with them have not yet been opened, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are defined as potential candidates. The aim of this cooperation is to promote stability and strengthen the rule of law in these countries.

Adaptation to the EU is one of the main drivers of reform. Consultations with EU institutions and member states are an important part of Norway's engagement in the region. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for EU candidate countries and the potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans is

intended as a supplement to EU efforts in the region. Dealing with the rise in the number of refugees and migrants and the consequences of this will be a priority for Norway's engagement in the region in 2016.

Internal security and preparedness

The Government will intensify cooperation with EU institutions and individual member states to address the threats posed by terrorism and transnational organised crime. This ranges from measures to combat the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters and efforts to improve border checks of people entering the Schengen area to measures to improve internet security and combat cybercrime. It also includes the exchange of information between the police and prosecuting authorities in different countries. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen last year and the significant number of thwarted terrorist attacks in several European countries have further highlighted the importance of this cooperation. We will follow the EU's revision of the framework decision on combating terrorism closely.

The Government will also work to maintain Norway's close links with and participation in Europol cooperation.

The Government is promoting an integrated anti-radicalisation effort with a good balance between control and prevention. We are seeking to cooperate with the EU to develop effective measures, in line with the Government's Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. Cooperation in this area takes place within the framework of the Schengen cooperation and through the Radicalisation Awareness Network. An informal partnership has also been established between a group of countries that have done more work on the issue of foreign fighters than others. The group has met at political level in the margins of formal EU structures and has put forward proposals that have later formed a basis for discussions and decisions at EU level. Norway participates in the group, and it is an important arena for our efforts in this area.

In the event of a terrorist attack, natural disaster or other serious accident, it must be easy and straightforward to give and receive help across national borders. With this in mind, Norway participates in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and we have access to information from the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements. In 2015 five European countries requested assistance through the Civil Protection Mechanism at the same time to respond to the inflow of refugees and migrants.

We are helping to develop regional cooperation in this area, in line with the EU's overall policy, through Nordic cooperation on civil protection and the Nordic cooperation on search and rescue services. In this context and in line with the Nordic declaration of solidarity, the Government wishes to strengthen and more clearly define cooperation with the Nordic countries and the EU.

Democracy and human rights in Europe

Established rules for relations between states have been challenged in Europe in recent years, and the fundamental principles on which our liberal democracies are based are being put to the test. The challenges we are facing take the form of violations of international law, violent extremism, terrorism, xenophobia, intolerance, populism and lack of respect for human rights. These trends are being fuelled by a difficult economic and social situation. European cooperation to protect our common values is therefore vital. The Government will pursue a close dialogue with the EU on developing effective systems that ensure respect for human rights and the principles of the rule of law.

Through the EEA and Norway Grants, we are seeking to strengthen civil society, focusing on thematic priorities such as freedom of expression and independent media, and protection of human rights defenders and vulnerable groups. We will also intensify our cooperation with beneficiary states in the police sector and the prison system. The Government will work to ensure that measures to address the changed security situation in Europe do not undermine the values and principles they are intended to protect, such as freedom of expression and the protection of privacy.

A comprehensive approach to migration

Strengthening control of the external borders

Effective control and registration procedures at the EU's external borders are essential for ensuring that the Schengen cooperation functions well and for freedom of movement within Europe. Each Schengen member state is responsible for controlling its part of the Schengen external border. However, some countries are experiencing greater pressure on the external border than others. The EU has established a number of mechanisms to assist these countries, including the border management agency Frontex.

As a Schengen member state, Norway will seek to ensure that all Schengen countries take on their share of the responsibility for ensuring effective and sound control of the external borders. The Government will continue its contribution to Frontex, including the deployment of two search and rescue vessels in the Mediterranean, initially until summer 2016. There is an urgent need to strengthen border control and procedures for registering migrants, particularly in Greece, and we will consider providing Norwegian resources for this purpose.

The Government will participate in the general debate about the future of Schengen. Better control of the external border is essential if the cooperation is to continue and function well. At the same time, individual countries must be able to safeguard key national interests, including internal security and migration control. We will take part in the discussions on strengthening control of the external border and expanding the role of Frontex, based on the Commission's smart borders package and its proposal to set up a European Border and Coast Guard.

Refugees and asylum seekers

In 2015 more than one million people sought protection in Europe, and a large number of refugees and asylum seekers are also expected in 2016. Most of them are arriving by sea from Turkey or are crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa. The migratory pressure on Europe's external and internal borders is huge, and member states have failed to comply with the common rules on asylum. It is in Norway's interests that the EU succeeds in establishing a well-functioning mechanism for distributing refugees and asylum seekers between the member states.

The Commission is expected to propose amendments to the rules for determining which member state is responsible for processing an asylum application (the Dublin Regulation) in spring 2016. The Government will participate in the debate on the proposed amendments and will work to ensure common European solutions that are in line with Norwegian interests. We will continue our support for the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and will participate in following up EASO operations, including in 'hotspot' areas. We will also offer to relocate 1 500 asylum seekers in 2016 and 2017 under the EU relocation programme.

Norway's quota for resettlement of 3 000 Syrian refugees in 2016 will be included in the EU resettlement programme.

We will strengthen our cooperation with the EU on the rapid return of people who are not entitled to protection, and will give priority to European police cooperation to combat human smuggling. This is crucial for achieving the goal of reducing the number of asylum seekers who are not in need of protection. The Government will strengthen cooperation on the return of those who do not qualify for asylum with transit countries and countries of origin. We support the EU's goal of developing a broader migration and return policy, including strengthening the link between return of refugees and aid.

The Government wishes to continue and increase the use of the EEA and Norway Grants to fund efforts in the asylum and migration sector. High priority is being given to measures to improve the capacity and quality of migration and asylum systems in selected beneficiary states.

Causes of migration and cooperation with third countries

Migration from countries in Europe's southern and eastern neighbourhood has created a protracted humanitarian crisis in and around the Mediterranean Sea. Any long-term solution will have to address the underlying reasons why people migrate and are prepared to risk their lives at sea in the attempt. We need to consider the issues of migration and aid together, and to strengthen our cooperation with selected countries of origin and transit. Norway will support efforts to find a political solution to the conflicts in Syria and Libya. The Government will intensify efforts to help refugees close to conflict areas, by providing both humanitarian assistance and longer-term support.

Norway will support efforts that can give people who have fled to third countries, for example in the Middle East, parts of Africa and South-East Asia, an alternative to embarking on the dangerous journey in an attempt to reach Europe. We will also be willing to participate in European initiatives to establish reception facilities in key transit countries to which asylum seekers may be returned in accordance with our international commitments and obligations under international law.

The Government supports efforts to follow up the EU–Turkey joint action plan to combat irregular migration, which the EU and Turkey agreed to activate in November 2015. The flow of migrants to Europe via Turkey is also affecting the situation in Norway, and it is in our interests that the action plan is effective.

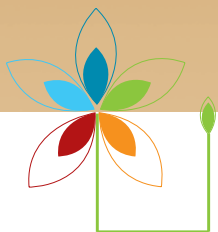
The Government will participate actively in efforts to follow up the Valletta summit on strengthening cooperation between the EU and the African Union on migration, including migration from the Horn of Africa (the Khartoum Process) and from West Africa (the Rabat Process). Through the EU Emergency Trust Fund, Norway is contributing to strategic projects that have been selected as part of the follow-up to the Valletta summit.

The Government will use grant funds from the Ministry of Justice and Public Security budget to promote cooperation with transit countries and countries of origin on the return of asylum seekers who do not qualify for asylum and on measures to prevent migration. Grants could also be given to support joint projects with other European countries.

Cooperation on integration

European countries are facing a number of common problems when it comes to integration policy. A large number of refugees and migrants need to be settled in local communities quickly. They need housing, healthcare, education and work. Norway will take part in discussions on these issues at European level. The Government will also look at ways of using the EEA and Norway Grants to strengthen the capacity of the beneficiary states to integrate refugees.

The work programme is available online at www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/european-policy/



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