

Norway in Europe

THE GOVERNMENT'S
WORK PROGRAMME FOR
COOPERATION WITH THE EU

2015



UTENRIKSDEPARTEMENTET

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Introduction

Norway cooperates with the EU and its member states because we share a common set of values and because we need joint solutions to shared challenges. We cooperate because it is in our own national interest to do so.

Our cooperation with the EU is close and wide-ranging. Policy development at the European level has direct consequences for Norway through the EEA Agreement, the Schengen association agreement and a number of other agreements that Norway has with the EU. 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 firms from EU countries. In this way, we are safeguarding Norwegian jobs and welfare.

The year 2015 will be an important year for European cooperation. A new Commission has been appointed in Brussels, under the leadership of President Jean-Claude Juncker. A new European Parliament has been elected and former Prime Minister of Poland Donald Tusk has taken over as President of the European Council, the EU's highest body. These changes in personnel have brought with them a new agenda. This new agenda coincides to a large extent with the main tenets of Norway's European policy, as set out in the Norwegian Government's strategy for cooperation with the EU 2014–17.

The five priority areas of this policy are based on the Government's political platform. They are competitiveness and growth, research and education, climate and energy, justice and migration, and foreign and security policy. The Government will make every effort to participate in the development of European policy and promote Norwegian interests in these areas. We will provide input and put forward proposals well before the EU takes a decision, while there is still a real possibility of influencing the outcome.

Efforts to reduce the backlog of legal acts adopted by the EU but not yet incorporated into the EEA Agreement will continue unabated in 2015. This is important for ensuring equal treatment in the internal market and for strengthening our competitiveness.

Norway and the other EEA EFTA states will conduct negotiations with the EU on a number of issues in 2015. Norway will negotiate with the EU on the EEA and Norway Grants for the period 2014–19, on market access for fish, and on trade in agricultural products. The Government will also seek to negotiate a joint fulfilment agreement with the EU that would enable Norway to participate in the collective EU effort to meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. In addition, the negotiations between the EU and the US on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) could have significant implications for Norway, even though we are not party to the negotiations.

European legislation and policy is constantly developing, and this has consequences for Norway. If we are to be able to influence developments, we must show political leadership and participate in the arenas that are open to us, given the limitations of our association with the EU. We must pursue an open and inclusive European policy. Norway's European policy is a collective national effort. We hope that this work programme for 2015 will provide a good basis for this collective effort, and for an open debate on developments in Europe and their implications for Norway.

Important negotiations in 2015

The EEA and Norway Grants

Ever since the EEA Agreement entered into force, Norway has provided funding aimed at reducing social and economic disparities in Europe through the EEA and Norway Grants, together with the other EEA EFTA countries. Some NOK 15 billion in funding was provided under the last funding period (2009–14), distributed between 16 different EU member states.

Negotiations with the EU on the next funding period for the EEA and Norway Grants began in January 2014. The Government will play its part in finding a good and balanced solution in 2015. At the same time, we are preparing for negotiations with the beneficiary countries on how the funds should be used. The Government's view is that the Grants should promote bilateral cooperation with the beneficiary countries and support Norway's European policy priorities.

Market access for fish

Norway and the EU are also conducting negotiations on market access for fish. Customs duties on imports of a number of Norwegian seafood products to the EU are still high and the trade regime is unnecessarily complicated. Our aim is to secure the best possible market access for the Norwegian seafood industry in the EU.

Trade in agricultural products

In February 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 previous round of negotiations was concluded in 2010. 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 enter a decisive phase this year. Norway's participation in the internal market and considerable trade with the EU and the US mean that a TTIP agreement will have direct implications for Norway.

It is vital for us to maintain a close dialogue with the EU and the US on the progress of the negotiations in areas of key importance to Norway. The Government's aim is to secure market access for Norwegian goods and services, and to ensure that regulatory cooperation between the EU and Norway under the EEA Agreement is not weakened as a result of an agreement between the EU and the US.

The Government has not yet decided how Norway should proceed once the final TTIP is in place. It will be important to find solutions that safeguard Norwegian interests and value creation in Norway.

Joint fulfilment of climate targets

Like the EU, Norway has announced a target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 % by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. The Government will seek to conclude a joint fulfilment agreement with the EU so that Norway can participate in the collective EU emission reduction effort.

Supervision of the financial markets

The Government wants Norway to be able to participate in the work of the EU's financial supervisory authorities. In 2014, we reached agreement with the EU on the principles for the EEA EFTA states' participation in the work of the various supervisory authorities. The agreed solution involves a transfer of powers and, in the Government's view, requires the consent of the Storting by a three-fourths majority.

Increased competitiveness and growth

New growth

The EU's primary objective for 2015 is to stimulate new growth in the European economy. Given our close trade ties with EU member states and our participation in the internal market, it is in Norway's interest that the EU succeeds in this.

The Commission's main initiative for stimulating growth is an Investment Plan for Europe that is intended to unlock investments of EUR 315 billion over a three-year period in areas such as infrastructure, research and innovation. The Government will maintain a dialogue with EU institutions and member states on the implementation of the investment plan, with a focus on areas that are of strategic importance to Norway. We will also consider what effect, if any, this will have on Norway's participation in EU programmes such as Connecting Europe Facility and Horizon 2020.

The Government will work to ensure that the original focus of the Horizon 2020 programme is retained, with an emphasis on excellent science, competitive industries and research to address societal challenges in areas such as health, food safety, clean energy and climate change.

Under the EEA Agreement, Norwegian companies abide by common European rules, which ensure genuine competition and enable them to compete on the same terms as companies from EU countries. During the course of the year, the Commission will present a new strategy for the internal market, which will have a particular focus on the service sector and small and medium-sized enterprises. Norway will follow this work closely. The Government will also continue its cooperation with like-minded countries under the Frontrunners initiative, with a view to removing barriers to the free movement of goods and services in the internal market.

The Government will follow the development of policy and legislation for the maritime sector and the defence market closely. We will submit input to the EU in connection with the review of its maritime transport strategy, with a view to promoting a strong maritime industry in Norway and in Europe as a whole. We also attach importance to ensuring market access and genuine competition in the defence market. This means that all member states must implement the directive on defence and security procurement (Directive 2009/81/EC) in a correct and non-discriminatory manner.

We are pleased that the Commission intends to look more closely at the issue of the competitiveness of the European aviation sector. The Government indicated the need for a review of this kind in 2014 to the then Commissioner for Transport Siim Kallas. We will follow this up by submitting input in connection with the development of the Commission's planned Aviation Package and proposed revision of the EASA Regulation (Regulation (EC) No 216/2008).

The Government welcomes the Commission's ambitions to boost jobs and growth by promoting the use of the capital markets as a source of finance (through the creation of a Capital Markets Union). Norway's capital markets and those of the other Nordic countries are more developed than those in many EU member states. We should therefore follow developments in this field closely, and we will consider providing input based on our experience of the Norwegian and Nordic markets.

A digital Europe

The digital agenda and the development of a digital single market is one of the priorities of the EU's growth strategy, Europe 2020. The Commission has announced that it will present a digital single market package in 2015. The Government will support measures that can boost confidence in cross-border e-commerce, promote universal design of ICT solutions, modernise copyright and data protection rules and further develop the common European rules for electronic communications. We will also hold a major conference on the digital economy in 2015. The EU's digital agenda will be a key topic on the conference agenda.

The Government is currently carrying out a review of Norway's ICT policy. This work will be closely linked to the development of EU policy on the single digital market.

Through its participation in the ISA programme (Interoperability Solutions for European Public Administrations), Norway works to improve digital cooperation between public administrations in the EEA countries. The Government will consider participation in the proposed new programme, ISA2.

The Government will work to promote the development of European rules that allow the private and public sectors, as well as consumers, to gain maximum benefit from new technology, while at the same time safeguarding consumer protection and the protection of personal data. The Government considers it important to ensure that the reform of the data protection rules does not result in a lower level of data protection than that we currently have in Norway. We are seeking to participate in the European Data Protection Board, and will work to ensure that the European Parliament's negotiations with the other EU institutions in 2015 do not lead to restrictions on access to medical records for the purposes of research.

The Government will promote the safe and effective use of cloud computing services, both in the public and private sectors. We want to see a simplification and harmonisation of legislation in the EEA in this area to enable cloud service providers to operate easily across national borders. The Government will, for example, support the development of standard contracts, certification and data processing agreements at the European level.

We will play an active role in the planned reform of the regulatory framework for electronic communications. The rules should benefit consumers and promote greater competition across national borders. Equal rules throughout the EEA are important to ensure that the internal market functions well. The Government is therefore seeking full participation rights for Norway in the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC).

The Government will work to ensure that the EU's reform of copyright rules finds the right balance between the rights of copyright owners and the principle of free movement. We will cooperate closely with the other Nordic countries in this area, in particular with a view to safeguarding the Nordic licensing system.

Cutting red tape and simplifying rules

Norway's close association with the EU through the EEA and Schengen agreements means that a large number of Norwegian laws are based on EU legislation. The Government's aim to make daily life easier in Norway and to simplify rules and procedures for the private sector is therefore closely linked to efforts to cut red tape and remove regulatory burdens at European level.

First Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans has been given responsibility for coordinating the work on better regulation and for

presenting a strengthened better regulation agenda in autumn 2015. The Government will pursue a close dialogue with the Commission with a view to contributing to, and learning from, the work being done in this area. Our aim is to put forward suggestions as to EU legal acts that could be simplified, or possibly repealed. At the same time, we must be careful that this work to cut red tape and simplify rules does not lead to a weakening of 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, and the Government wants to make it attractive and easy for people to apply for jobs across national borders in Europe.

As business becomes increasingly global, many Norwegians are living and working, permanently or temporarily, in other countries. The Government is seeking to strengthen its cooperation with the EU in the area of civil justice, in order to ensure equal rights for Norwegian citizens travelling, studying, shopping, living and working in other European countries.

The Commission has announced that it will present proposals for measures to promote labour mobility (including revision of the regulation on the coordination of social security systems and a review of the Posting of Workers Directive) by the end of 2015. The Government will advocate measures that promote well-regulated employment conditions, equal conditions for all EEA nationals in the labour market and a sustainable welfare state in Norway.

Labour migration and the exportability of national welfare benefits are being debated at European level and in several EU countries. The Government will follow these discussions closely. We will also consider introducing measures at national level to ensure that the Norwegian welfare system is sustainable in the long term and that it is in line with the fundamental principles of the free movement of persons and non-discrimination on the basis of nationality.

The Government will participate in European cooperation to combat unscrupulous practices in the labour market, social dumping and tax evasion, in line with our strategy to combat labour market crime. We will provide input to the review of the Posting of Workers Directive, planned for 2015, and will participate actively in the European platform against undeclared work, in which the EEA EFTA states are expected to have observer status. The platform is intended to be a meeting place for the European Commission and national authorities responsible for detecting and preventing undeclared work.

Confident and well-informed consumers

Confident consumers contribute to value creation and growth. The Government will promote the development of sound consumer policy at European level.

Food safety is important, both for individual consumers and for society as a whole, as is responsible use and labelling of medicines. The Government is seeking a dialogue with the EU on antibiotic resistance, with a view to finding effective common solutions. It is vital that this problem is addressed at the European and international level, as travel and trade can result in the spread of resistant bacteria both by people and through food. We will also work at the European level to ensure that the rules for authorisation of veterinary medicines and medicated feed are not weakened.

The Government will also work to secure changes to legislation on food information to make it easier for consumers to identify added sugar in food products.

Furthermore, Norway will provide constructive input to the EU's review of the rules governing the authorisation of genetically modified organisms for use in agriculture, which is planned for summer 2015.

Higher quality research and education

Research for the future

The Government's aim is for Norway to be one of the most innovative countries in Europe. We are giving priority to research and to raising standards in schools to secure the basis for employment in the future. Cross-border cooperation helps to raise the quality of Norwegian education and research, and participation in EU programmes is a key part of this.

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 cooperation with the EU on research and innovation. For this to be successful, both central and regional authorities must be actively involved in the process.

We will also provide input to the work of determining the priorities of the EU's next framework programme for research and innovation to ensure that future European research and innovation initiatives promote the development of business and society in Norway as well as in the rest of Europe.

Higher education

European countries are increasingly coordinating their education systems. It is therefore important for the Government to provide input in connection with the preparation of a new communication on higher education by the Commission in 2015.

The Government wants to exchange experience with the EU on digital learning. The Government has appointed a committee to look into the impact

of massive open online courses on higher education, and intends to share the results of this work with EU institutions and member countries.

From education to work

Youth unemployment is a major problem in Europe today. Even in Norway where youth unemployment is relatively low, it can be difficult for young people to find work after completing their education. The Government is therefore strengthening the apprenticeship system, in cooperation with other European countries. We have been invited to provide input to the EU education ministers' meeting on vocational training in Riga in June. We also want to use funding under the EEA and Norway Grants on measures designed to ease the transition from education to work in the beneficiary states.

An ambitious climate and energy policy

Climate and energy policy up to 2030

In 2014, the EU adopted the headline targets of its climate and energy policy for the period up to 2030. These are reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 %, increasing the share of renewable energy to at least 27 %, and increasing energy efficiency by at least 27 %. The EU emissions trading system (EU ETS) will continue to be the main instrument for achieving the emissions reduction target. Norway supports the gradual tightening of the annual cap on emissions and the early introduction of a market stability reserve for the EU ETS.

The Government is seeking a dialogue with the EU with a view to concluding a joint fulfilment agreement that would enable Norway to participate in the collective EU effort. This would make Norway's intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) an integral part of the overall EU target of reducing emissions by at least 40 % below the 1990 level by 2030. Such an agreement will not be incorporated into the EEA Agreement, but will be negotiated as a bilateral agreement between Norway and the EU.

Norway is already part of the EU ETS through the EEA Agreement, and we also wish to take part in the comprehensive reform of the system for the period after 2020. Norway's position is that the cap on emissions needs to be further tightened to stimulate a rapid and effective low-carbon transition, among other things through the development and deployment of new technology.

If Norway concludes a joint fulfilment agreement with the EU, this will mean that Norwegian emissions from non-ETS sectors will be included in our cooperation with the EU, in addition to those already covered by the EU ETS. National targets will need to be set for these sectors. The EU's Effort Sharing Decision, which regulates non-ETS emissions, is to be revised in 2016. The Government will seek to be involved in this process by providing input to EU institutions and member states. Targets for emissions reductions in non-ETS sectors and flexibility in how targets are to be met will be key topics in the Government's dialogue with the EU.

Our participation in the Green Growth Group, which brings together the EU countries that are advocating an ambitious climate policy and a tighter ETS cap, gives us excellent opportunities to promote Norwegian interests and views in the European arena. The Government will also contribute to discussions on clean energy in the transport sector, providing input on areas such as Norway's experience of promoting the use of electric vehicles, and on the role land use, land use change and forestry can play in mitigation in the long term.

EU Energy Union

The EU is expected to adopt a framework for a European Energy Union in the course of 2015 that will cover the following five main areas: energy security; further development of the internal energy market; reduced energy demand in Europe; investment in low-emission technologies; and promotion of research and development in the field of energy. The Energy Union is part of the 2030 framework for climate and energy policies.

The discussions on the Energy Union will be based on the Commission's Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy, which was adopted in February 2015. The Framework Strategy will provide a basis for identifying specific measures to be adopted by member states in mid-2015. The EU is expected to establish a new governance system to achieve the 2030 energy targets. The Commission has also proposed that national plans for achieving the EU's energy targets should be coordinated in an integrated governance and monitoring process.

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 the EU on the development of the Energy Union. The Government will emphasise the need for well-functioning energy markets and better gas and electricity infrastructure. 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.

Carbon capture and storage technology is crucial for combining economic growth with emissions cuts in Europe. In the Government's view, investment in carbon capture and storage technology should be a key element of the EU's Energy Union.

The talks on the Energy Union will involve EEA-relevant legislation, since they will include further discussion of directives and regulations relating to the internal energy market, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The development of the Energy Union could strengthen Norway's role as a supplier of renewable energy. The Nordic electricity market is linked to the rest of Europe, and renewable energy could therefore be used to replace fossil fuels on the continent, make it possible to further develop intermittent

renewable energy sources in other countries, and promote green growth in Norway. Greater investment in infrastructure in Europe will make markets more efficient and allow the development of a more effective climate policy.

We also want to use funding under the EEA and Norway Grants to support the efforts of EU member states in the areas of the environment, climate change and energy.

Climate summit in Paris

The Government will cooperate closely with the EU on preparations for the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in December 2015, the aim of which is to secure an ambitious global climate agreement. The Commission will publish a communication outlining the EU's strategy ahead of the climate summit in the spring of 2015.

Both the EU and Norway will submit their intended nationally determined contributions to the UNFCCC in the first quarter of 2015. Norway will also report on its dialogue with the EU on a joint fulfilment agreement. In the time leading up to the Paris conference the Government will work to secure a memorandum of understanding with the EU on this issue.

Both Norway and the EU intend to do their part to secure a strong, legally binding and ambitious agreement that reduces global emissions, enabling us to meet the goal of limiting the average rise in global temperature to no more than 2°C above the pre-industrial level. Norwegian and European climate and energy policies are closely integrated through the EEA Agreement and Norway's participation in the EU ETS. The dialogue we are seeking with the EU on a joint fulfilment agreement will also be part of our cooperation with the EU. In 2015, we will therefore need to maintain our close cooperation with the EU institutions and member states in this area.

Global approach to migration

Causes of migration; cooperation with third countries

Migration from countries in Europe's southern 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 the countries of origin and transit.

Norway is already involved in cooperation between the EU and the African Union on migration from the Horn of Africa (the Khartoum Process) and from West Africa (the Rabat Process). The Government is seeking to formalise Norway's participation. We will also support the EU's regional development and protection programmes and will intensify our strategic cooperation with the EU on the situation in the Sahel and Maghreb regions.

External border controls

Each Schengen member state is responsible for controlling its part of the Schengen external border. However, pressure on the external border is greater in some countries than in others, and a number of mechanisms have been put in place to assist these countries, both through the Internal Security Fund and through 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 therefore strengthen its contribution to Frontex. We will also play a part in the development of new legislation relating to the electronic registration of entry and exit data of third country nationals. We will give priority to finding a good balance between the need for effective border controls and the protection of personal data.

Migration and asylum in Europe

The EU member states are working together to ensure common standards for asylum procedures and uniform treatment of asylum seekers throughout the EU. The EU has adopted rules establishing a Common European Asylum System, and the Government considers it important that all countries comply with these rules. It is important to Norway that the Dublin system is maintained and continues to function well. This system ensures that migrants have the opportunity to seek asylum and guarantees that each application is considered by one country only.

Some European countries are under greater pressure from migration than others. Norway has therefore been providing assistance to these countries, for example through its participation in the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). The Government will consider expanding Norway's participation in EASO operations.

We wish to continue to use funding under the EEA and Norway Grants on migration and asylum measures, based in part on lessons learned from the steps already taken to improve the capacity and quality of the Greek migration and asylum system.

Enhancing security

Our European neighbourhood

Russia's conduct in Ukraine represents a challenge to the principles of the rule of law and democracy on our own continent, and has made the security and foreign policy dialogue between EU member states even more important, for Norway as well. The Government supports the European Neighbourhood Policy, and will pursue a close dialogue with the Commission and the EU member states on the revision of this policy in 2015.

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 these countries' efforts towards closer European integration. We will coordinate our bilateral support for Ukraine with the EU, and will maintain a close dialogue with EU institutions and member states on the issue of restrictive measures against Russia.

Norway has important national interests in the north. We welcome the EU's engagement in the Arctic. The Commission has announced that it will present a proposal for an integrated and coherent Arctic policy by December 2015. The Government will pursue a close dialogue with EU institutions and member states to ensure that Norway's interests are safeguarded when the EU develops its policy in this area. The EU is focusing on a number of areas in the Arctic, including energy, the environment and climate change, fisheries, transport, research and regional development. The EEA Agreement does not apply to the sea areas outside Norway's territorial waters.

Norway's engagement in the Western Balkans supports stabilisation, democratisation and development in the region. Norway and the EU have the same political and assistance priorities. Norway works to achieve these priorities through joint efforts with the EU and its member states. This work will continue in 2015.

Security and defence policy

It is in Norway's interest to promote effective defence and security cooperation within the framework of the EU and NATO.

Norway will provide standby troops for EU battlegroups in 2015, through the Swedish-led Nordic-Baltic Battle Group//Swedish-led Nordic Battle Group. The establishment of the EU battlegroups was a concrete step to ensure Europe's ability to respond to crises quickly.

Norway is participating in three of the EU's civilian operations (Kosovo, Djibouti/Somalia and Palestine). We have agreed to participate in the EU's civilian mission in Ukraine, and will be recruiting Norwegian personnel for this purpose in 2015. The Government also wants Norway to participate in the EU mission in Libya, as soon as the security situation improves and provided that we can find the right personnel. The Government will also consider Norwegian participation in EU military operations where appropriate, and participation in the EU training mission in Mali.

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. We will also work at political level to make it possible for Norway to participate at the meetings of the Steering Board of the European Defence Agency.

The Government will support the Commission's initiatives and instruments for strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base, including the proposed pilot programme on defence-related research and development.

The Government will also work to intensify cooperation and dialogue with the EU on cybersecurity and the development of an international policy in this area. The Government has appointed a committee to review digital vulnerability in Norway, which is to present its report by the end of September 2015. The report will serve as a useful knowledge base and could help to identify digital challenges that are also relevant to the EEA cooperation. The Government will also work to promote closer cooperation with the EU and several of the EU member states on preventing cybercrime in countries outside the EEA.

Internal security

During the course of 2015, the Commission will put forward a proposal for a new European agenda on security for the period 2015–20, a renewal of the EU's Internal Security Strategy. The new agenda is likely to outline important political priorities in efforts to combat terrorism, organised crime, radicalisation and recruitment of foreign fighters. It will also include measures to improve internet security and to combat cybercrime. There will be an increased focus on emergency preparedness and response. At the same time, emphasis will be placed on ensuring citizens' universal rights and protection, including the protection of privacy.

The EU's priorities in this area coincide with Norway's key policy objectives. The Government will consider providing input to the discussion on the renewed internal security strategy at European level.

Democracy and human rights in Europe

The terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015 have once again illustrated the importance of efforts to promote democracy, human rights, tolerance and diversity, in Europe as elsewhere. The Government will promote universal rights and the principles of the rule of law in Europe. We will use funding under the EEA and Norway Grants to promote the implementation of the Council of Europe's human rights conventions and will maintain a close dialogue with the EU on developing effective systems that ensure respect for the fundamental principles of the rule of law in the EU member states.

The EEA and Norway Grants are also a key instrument for supporting civil society in the beneficiary states, and the Government wants to reinforce efforts in this area in the years to come. We intend to increase the amount of support allocated within the framework of the Grants to thematic areas such as promotion of freedom of expression and independent media, and protection of human rights defenders and vulnerable groups. Among other things, the Government wishes to be involved in EU efforts to safeguard the rights of LGBTI people.

Foreign fighters

Many European countries, including Norway, are concerned about the large numbers of young people from Europe who are travelling abroad as foreign fighters, both because these people may commit serious criminal acts abroad and because of the security risk they may pose on their return to their home countries. This problem has been brought further to the fore by the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen.

The Government is seeking to promote 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. A group of countries has gone in the forefront on the issue of foreign fighters. These countries have met outside the formal EU structures and have put forward proposals that have later formed a basis for discussions and decisions at EU level. These countries are of particular interest to Norway as cooperation partners.

Civil protection and preparedness and response

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.

We are promoting regional cooperation on emergency preparedness and response in the Nordic countries, in line with the EU's overall policy, through the Nordic cooperation on civil security (the Haga cooperation) and the Nordic cooperation on search and rescue services (NORDRED). In this context and in line with the Nordic declaration of solidarity, the Government wishes to promote stronger and more clearly defined cooperation with the Nordic countries and the EU.

