

The Prime Minister of Norway

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European Parliament

20 January 1994

**NORWAY AND THE NEGOTIATIONS ON MEMBERSHIP OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

It gives me great pleasure to meet members of the European Parliament at this important stage of our membership negotiations. The European Parliament has gained new influence and an important role of co-decision in a growing number of fields. This will further strengthen the democratic functioning of the European Union.

The Parliament's vote on the accession treaties will be an important milestone in the process of opening up the Union to four new countries. The Norwegian Government has been encouraged by the past resolutions in the Parliament welcoming the enlargement of the Union. It is our hope and ambition that Norwegian elected members will take place among you in the near future.

Norway began the accession negotiations some weeks after the other applicant countries. We wasted no time in presenting our position papers and are now in parallel negotiations with the other three. We are determined to stick to the timetable laid down by the European Council in December and complete the negotiations by early March. This is an ambitious target, but if the political will is there, it is feasible.

We know that you have already begun your evaluation of the prospects of enlargement in the different committees of the Parliament. I therefore appreciate this opportunity to recall the reasons for our application, to comment on the current state of the negotiations and to answer questions.

The Norwegian membership application

I would point at two fundamental reasons for the Norwegian wish to join the Union.

The first one is our desire to secure Norway a place among those who will be taking responsibility for the future of Europe. That future will also be Norway's future. As we approach the 21st century, only much stronger international co-operation will allow Europe to assume the role on the global scene which is inherent in its potential.

Over the last years I have often been asked when Norway is going to join Europe. My answer is to recall that Norway has been a part of Europe for more than 1000

years. Our identity and world outlook has been shaped in interaction with other European cultures. Norway is a part of what we refer to as a European culture, actively taking part in European co-operation.

The entry into force of the EEA agreement strengthens the ties which link Western European countries together. It is and remains a major achievement to have created the world's largest single market, one consisting of 18 countries and 340 million people.

But a better organized market can never be the end in itself. Europe needs stability, peace and development and we have to achieve it by means of common and co-ordinated decisions and policies.. No matter how strong the political will, there is no unilateral road to full employment, nor to monetary stability or to sustainable solutions to our environmental challenges.

Together the countries of Europe have the potential of exploring the "co-operative advantage of nations". We see the European Union as the hub of the new political order in Europe. We have stated clearly from the outset that we support the political objectives set out in the Maastricht Treaty.

The second reason I would like to underline is one of security and co-operation in Northern Europe.

In the North of Europe, Russia meets the West. Norway is the only NATO country sharing a common border with Russia. Over the last few years we have established structures of deepened regional co-operation in the Baltic region and in the Barents region. These regions will play an important role in developing Russia's policy towards the West, and the West's policy towards Russia. The stability in our part of Europe would be further enhanced by the accession of the remaining Nordic countries into the European Union. This would give the Nordic countries a political platform to help draw Russia closer to Europe.

Today, Russia does not pose a military threat. But the instability of the new situation represents a new kind of security threats which cannot be ignored. It would be irresponsible to overlook the danger of new set-backs.

We face a region in major ecological crises. The safety of nuclear power stations on the Kola peninsula are source of great concern, as are the nuclear waste deposits from obsolete war ships and the major emissions from industrial plants.

Co-operation with Russia in the Far North would be an important way of pursuing the aims of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. In the accession negotiations Norway has stated clearly that we support fully the aims of the co-operation in this field. Norway endorses the objectives contained in Title V of the Treaty and agrees to the procedures and means which are foreseen.

The new security environment of Europe is such that it requires the collective efforts both of NATO and of the European Union as well as its defence component. We must use the whole range of political and economic means available to us to create and strengthen the kind of mutual interdependence and benefits for the whole of Europe that have rendered war between Western European countries impossible for almost half a century.

We are prepared to shoulder our part of the burdens and responsibilities in the shaping of a new security order in Europe.

The accession negotiations

The European Union may thus soon comprise Arctic areas, vast and sparsely populated expanses where the conditions are different from those prevailing here in the centre of Europe. If the three Nordic countries join, the total territory of the Union will increase by 50 percent, The total population, however, will only increase by 5 percent.

Norway's dependence on natural resources is a part of this picture. Norway has learned, sometimes the hard way, the need for sustainable management of natural resources. Although we have lived through extensive technological changes, Norway's economy remains largely dependent on the exploitation of its natural resources - renewable such as fish and water and non-renewable such as oil and gas. The harvesting of these resources represents the backbone of Norwegian economy. It also determines the settlement pattern in a country with less than 14 persons pr. km².

I am convinced that it is in Europe's interest that we manage to keep Northern Norway populated. The county of Finnmark borders on Russia. It has a population of 70 000 and it is one and a half times the size of Belgium with its 10 million inhabitants. Our redistributive policies have aimed at providing as equal opportunities as possible in a country where settlement are scattered and far apart. Special regional policy measures will still be needed to maintain the main features of our settlement pattern.

What we bring to the table in the negotiations is the need to find solutions related to our natural resources. None of the solutions we ask for represent hurdles on the future road towards European integration. When we present a negotiation result to the Norwegian people we must be able to say confidently that we can continue a sustainable management of our resources and maintain the essential elements of our regional policy.

At the outset my Government pointed at four key areas: Regional policy, energy, fish and agriculture. In these fields Norway differs from the present members of the EU, and in some respects from the other applicant countries. So far we have achieved encouraging results related to energy, and also regarding environmental standards. We have also met a constructive approach to regional policy.

What remains is agriculture and fish.

An immediate transition to the Common Agricultural policy would reduce our farmer's income by nearly 50 percent overnight and place our industry in an extremely difficult situation.

Our agricultural sector is characterized by unique features not present in the Union. Only three percent of our territory is used for agricultural purposes. Our self-sufficiency is the lowest in Western Europe. The agricultural sector has not been part of previous trade agreements and has thus been sheltered by quantitative restrictions. The Norwegian producer prices are currently about twice as high as EU

climatic characteristics. For obvious reasons the instruments of the EU fisheries policy have not been developed with these waters in mind. It would seem logical to base management and control measures on the experiences and practices which we have developed. These practices have proved both sustainable and viable and benefit all those fishing in these waters, including the numerous vessels from EU countries.

In our position paper we proposed that Norwegian practices continue to be applied in Northern waters. Parts of this approach was met with difficulties in the Commission's draft. Our position is based on the need to secure existing or improved standards on control, management and technical regulations. In the coming weeks we would need creative thinking on how to find good solutions in this field.

Let me conclude these remarks on management of natural resources by commenting briefly on the debate on enlargement and the environment. I believe that all candidate countries will be allies to those in the European Parliament who strive for setting more ambitious environmental standards and targets. The solutions that we reached on higher standards will contribute to a continued process towards more ambitious goals on a Union level.

If Norway joins, we will bring with us our environmental experience. With our great variety of resources and species, we have experienced that resource management has to be based on scientific criteria, or it will have no basis. Most commentators describe our environmental credentials as impeccable.

By means of prudent management, we are now restoring important marine species to earlier and high levels. Norwegians are knowledgeable about the environment and the state of natural resources and determined to manage their resources in a sustainable manner. This applies to marine mammals as well as any other species.

The attitudes in many European countries, criticizing our sustainable harvesting of marine mammals is not something that Norwegians take lightly. Our policy is prudent and in accordance with international law and the principles adopted at the Rio conference.

When we wind up these negotiations, the result will be submitted to you. Then it will go on to the member states and to the candidate countries. For Norway's part, the people will have the final say in a referendum. During the last two years, uncertainty in Europe has been reflected in growing scepticism in my country. I believe these trends can be reversed as recent polls may indicate.

My Government is firmly committed to bringing these negotiations to what we hope will be a successful conclusion. We will thereafter do what we can to gain support for Norwegian membership in the run up to a referendum. What we need is good intentions and a feeling of being welcomed in the family to which we so clearly belong. In this we count on the support of this distinguished assembly.