

Norway in Europe

THE NORWEGIAN
GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY FOR
COOPERATION WITH THE EU

2014 - 2017



UTENRIKSDEPARTEMENTET

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Introduction

Europe is experiencing a time of change. Shifts in the global balance of power are reducing the role and influence of European countries. Many of them are still dealing with the economic, social and political repercussions of the financial crisis. Russia's conduct in Ukraine in the spring of 2014 has shown that the principles of the rule of law and democracy are still being challenged on our own continent.

Faced with these challenges, we must defend our own fundamental values, with individual freedom and responsibility at the core – values that build up trust between people and between countries. When European countries have to deal with shifting global power structures, an economic downturn or a military threat, their first instinct is to find ways of cooperating, rather than assuming that politics is a zero-sum game. This instinct is one of Europe's strengths. Thus, the financial crisis has resulted in closer economic cooperation within the EU. In the face of growing competition from emerging economic powers, the EU and the US have initiated negotiations to establish what would be the world's largest free trade area to boost growth and employment. Russia's actions in neighbouring countries have made the security and foreign policy dialogue between EU member states even more important. In addition, the EU countries have given higher priority to the goal of closer energy policy cooperation.

There is broad support both in the Norwegian people and in the Storting for Norway to continue to be part of European cooperation through the EEA Agreement, the Schengen agreement and other agreements with the EU. The Government pursues its European policy within the framework of these agreements. We cooperate 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.

The EEA Agreement is the mainstay of our cooperation. It ensures that Norway enjoys the benefits of free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. It gives Norwegian businesses access to a 'domestic market' consisting of 31 countries with a population of 500 million. Common European rules ensure that they compete on the same terms as firms from EU countries. In this way, we are safeguarding Norwegian jobs and welfare. The EEA Agreement also includes rules for consumer protection and common environmental rules. It entitles Norwegians to live, work and study in other European countries. The Agreement thus provides opportunities for large groups of people. It also facilitates cooperation on civil protection and emergency planning. The Government actively seeks to safeguard Norwegian rights and further develop Norwegian participation within the framework set by the Norwegian Constitution and the EEA Agreement itself.

Norway has chosen to collaborate with its European partners in more areas than those covered by the EEA Agreement. Through the Schengen agreement, Norway is part of a European area without internal borders, and has a share of the responsibility for external border control. The abolition of internal border checks makes it easier

for Europeans to travel to each other's countries and trade with each other. Our participation in the Schengen cooperation also opens the way for broader cooperation between justice and police authorities to deal with common challenges. In addition, Norway cooperates closely with the EU on foreign and security policy issues. Our views frequently coincide, and by acting together, we can have more influence internationally.

European legislation and policy is constantly developing. This has consequences for Norway. 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. This strategy presents the Government's main priorities for cooperation with the EU in the period 2014–17 and describes how we will seek to gain acceptance for our views and interests.

Main priorities

Politics is all about defending the values we believe in and maintaining the value creation we depend on for the future. This is the basis for the five main priorities of the Government's European policy.

Increased competitiveness and growth

Cooperating with the EU ensures economic growth and secure jobs in Norway. This is easier when companies, investors and employees know there are common rules that create a predictable situation for all parties in the European market. A Norwegian company that exports goods to Germany should not meet other product requirements than its competitors in EU countries. Norwegians who want to work in the Netherlands should be confident that they will enjoy the same working conditions as Dutch and other EU citizens. The same applies to EU citizens who are working in Norway. To ensure equal treatment and strengthen Norway's competitiveness, the Government will give high priority to making new EEA rules applicable in Norway as soon as possible after they are implemented in the EU.

However, common rules are not enough when Norwegian businesses are competing on the European market. They must also be competitive in themselves. This means that Norwegian businesses must be innovative and constantly develop new products and better production methods. To achieve this, we will cooperate closely with the EU and its member states on innovation, research and education. We will improve conditions for businesses and employees by cooperating on infrastructure development, transport and cutting red tape at European level. We will play an active role in developing new solutions, together with European partners, and will exchange best practices of modernisation, innovation and productivity in the public sector. We will also play a part in developing sound consumer policies at European level. Confident consumers contribute to growth.

It is in Norway's interest that the internal market comprises a common labour market as well. People who are willing to cross national borders to find work help to boost employment and growth both in Norway and in the rest of Europe. The Government will seek to ensure respect for the right of nationals of other EEA countries to enjoy the same working conditions as Norwegian employees. We will fight against social dumping and promote well-regulated employment conditions. We will also consider the implications of labour migration for the way the Norwegian welfare state is organised. The goal is to maintain a welfare state that is sustainable while at the same time ensuring equal treatment for all EEA nationals.

Higher quality research and education

The Government's aim is for Norway to be one of the most innovative countries in Europe. Major investments in research by both the public and the private sector will help to secure the basis for employment in the future. Norway will never have the cheapest labour, so knowledge is our most important competitive advantage. Cross-border research cooperation helps to raise the quality of Norwegian education and research, and to increase the competitiveness of Norwegian businesses.

Research and education is an important part of Norway's cooperation with the EU. Norway's contributions to the major EU programmes for research and innovation, education, and culture will total around EUR 3.2 billion (NOK 26 billion at the current rate of exchange) in the period 2014–20. We must ensure that we take full advantage of our participation in these programmes. We need to make sure, that teachers, students, researchers, business leaders, local and regional authorities and civil society are aware of opportunities for project funding from the EU, and help Norwegian research communities to succeed in the competition for funding. The Government will take steps to ensure the best possible use of the opportunities offered by programme cooperation, through a separate strategy for cooperation with the EU on research and innovation.

An ambitious climate and energy policy

Action to secure energy supplies and mitigate climate change is at the top of the European agenda. Together with the EU, the Government will play a leading role in efforts to achieve a legally binding international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in order to reach the target of limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius. We will contribute to cuts in emissions in Europe. Emissions trading is an important tool for promoting restructuring and technological innovation, and the Government will work towards a tightening of the cap in the EU Emissions Trading System, so that releasing greenhouse gases becomes more costly. At the same time, we will encourage investment in research, environmental technology and infrastructure. In this way, we can play a part in achieving the goal of a low-carbon economy and create new opportunities for the Norwegian business sector.

Building cross-border gas pipelines and high-voltage power lines between European countries can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, make the energy market more efficient and improve the security of energy supplies. Cross-border power lines

have advantages for all the countries involved – they give better use of electricity supply systems, more effective use of resources, greater security of supply and opportunities for greater integration of renewable energy into the supply system. Such new power lines will have to be economically profitable.

During the transition to a low-carbon economy, we will promote Norwegian natural gas as an alternative to coal – which is a more polluting energy source – in Europe. We will also support the development of carbon capture and storage technology. Norway is a major energy exporter and a participant in the internal energy market through the EEA Agreement, and it is therefore important for us to take part in the development of EU energy policy.

Enhancing security

Along with the US, the EU member states are our most important foreign, security and defence policy partners. We agree on a common set of values based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We also share a conviction that international cooperation must be based on international law. We maintain a close political dialogue and take part in civilian crisis response operations together. Norway has also participated in military operations under EU leadership. In cases where our interests coincide, we seek to coordinate our positions and the action we take with the EU. By coordinating our international engagement in this way, we can gain greater influence. It is therefore in Norway's interest for the EU to act as one and for the Union to succeed in developing a common foreign and security policy.

Improved European capability for crisis management would benefit both the international community and Norway. Norway will therefore provide standby troops for EU battle groups in 2015. We will play an active part in EU efforts to develop and strengthen military capabilities. In this way, we can strengthen both our own and European military capability, and our ability to operate together.

If we are to fight transnational organised crime, European countries must assist each other, exchange information and coordinate their efforts. The Government therefore wishes to strengthen police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters with the EU. The goal is to be better equipped to combat the networks that organise criminal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, crime for gain and the distribution of child pornography.

At the same time, the Government is clearly aware of the need to find a balance between considerations of security and crime policy and the protection of privacy. Data protection is attracting increasing attention in Europe, and the Government will play an active part in the development of new legislation in this area.

The Government will also intensify its cooperation with the EU on preparedness and response for terrorist attacks, natural disasters and other serious threats. It must be easy to give and receive help across national borders if a serious incident occurs.

A global approach to migration

Many people wish to come to Europe to live and work. Others find themselves forced to flee from conflict and persecution in their home countries. As a participant in the Schengen cooperation, Norway will work towards common solutions to the challenges created by migration. We will seek to ensure that all Schengen countries take on their share of the responsibility for effective and sound control of the external borders. At the same time, we will exchange experience with other European countries on how we best can integrate immigrants into society, and not least into working life.

We will also seek to address the underlying reasons why people migrate. This means that, together with the EU, we must strengthen cooperation with their countries of origin and transit. The aim is to promote human rights, democracy, peace and economic development in these countries. The EU's neighbouring regions are also Norway's, and we have a common interest in the highest possible degree of security and stability in these areas. Our cooperation with the EU in North Africa is a key element in the development of an integrated Norwegian Mediterranean policy. We support the European Neighbourhood Policy, designed to promote economic, political and social development to the south and east of the EU's borders.

Policy instruments

In order to promote Norwegian interests in matters of high priority, the Government will pursue a coordinated European policy based on openness, knowledge and political engagement. We will also strengthen our cooperation with individual EU member states.

Political engagement and coordination

Cooperation with European partners helps us to implement the Government's policy platform and safeguard national interests. The Government will use the European arena to promote its policies. We will get involved at an early stage, and will present a clear position when the EU is in the initial phase of developing new legislation that is important to Norway. Our opportunity to exert an influence is greater when we help to develop solutions that are good for both Norway and Europe.

The Minister responsible for EEA and EU Affairs will ensure that our policies vis-à-vis the EU are coherent and in line with the Government's overall priorities. The Minister heads the Government's European policy coordination committee. The task of this committee is to ensure strategic and early-stage coordination of Norwegian positions on European issues and Norwegian initiatives vis-à-vis EU institutions and member states. Relevant ministers take part according to the matters on the agenda at any given time.

All ministers are responsible for informing the Government's European policy coordination committee about EU matters that are important to Norway. Ministers are to identify the consequences of EU initiatives for Norwegian interests in their respective fields at an early stage. They are to cooperate on formulating a joint position on matters that affect the areas of responsibility of several ministers. This will make it possible for the Government to participate in the European debate in an early phase and enable Norwegian representatives in working groups and expert committees to base their work on clear policy guidelines.

Ministers are to draw up and promote the Government's positions vis-à-vis EU member states, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and not least the European Parliament, which has an increasingly important role in the development of new legislation. Ministers are to safeguard Norwegian interests by participating in informal ministerial meetings in the EU and other meetings that we have access to through our agreements with the EU. They are to cooperate closely with their colleagues in EU member states and in the other EFTA states that are members of the EEA, Iceland and Liechtenstein. Cooperation with Nordic colleagues on European matters is of particular importance.

Openness and debate

European cooperation is about policy-making, and good policies are developed through exchanges of views and debate. Norwegian companies, the social partners, and other organisations have access to information and knowledge through extensive European networks, and they are actively involved when new EEA legislation is to be implemented in Norway. Regional and municipal authorities also cooperate actively with partners throughout Europe in EU regional programmes. This cooperation enhances exchange of best practices with other European regions and provides early insight into policies that are being developed in the EU.

The Government will therefore cooperate with these stakeholders when taking a stance on new common rules that are being formulated in the EU. Dialogue with relevant industries and groups in society will inform Norway's positions, which in turn will be reflected in Norway's participation in the various expert groups that advise the Commission and in our dialogue with EU institutions and member states.

The Government will promote greater political engagement and exchange of views on EU and EEA matters. We will consult the Storting's European Consultative Committee on EU–EEA matters as early as possible, so that the political debate on these matters in Norway can take place at the same time as the debate in EU member states. In the same manner, we will use the biannual addresses on EU–EEA matters to inform the Storting about policies and legislation that are being formulated in the EU. The Government will also strengthen its dialogue with the Storting by means of concise white papers on EU–EEA matters of particular importance.

Knowledge

Meaningful debates, both in Norway and in Europe, must be based on knowledge. We need knowledge in many areas: about how the EU works, about the member states' policies, and about the EU's concrete initiatives in individual matters that are important to us.

The Government will support cooperation between Norwegian researchers that work with European issues and European research communities, so that Norway has access to independent expert analyses of developments in the EU and their significance for us. We will also work to assist schools in strengthening teaching on European cooperation.

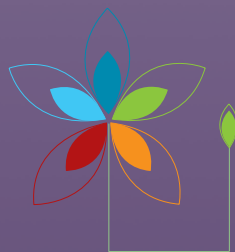
We will seek to ensure that Norway's public administration has a solid knowledge of the EU and the EEA, in part through systematic opportunities for Norwegian civil servants to work for a period in EU institutions and member states. This will also increase the level of knowledge about Norway within the EU. European bodies and committees are important forums for learning for Norwegian civil servants, researchers and national experts. The expertise gained from working in the EU should be used in a targeted manner when the persons concerned return to Norway. The Government will also ensure that the posting of representatives from the various ministries to the Norwegian Mission to the EU in Brussels and to other missions in Europe reflects Norway's European policy priorities. These representatives are to help ensure that we get the information we need about matters being discussed in the EU, so that we can quickly develop our positions on legislation as it is being developed.

Cooperation with EU member states

EU member states are important partners for Norway. The Government intends to cooperate more systematically with member states of particular importance for Norway, especially the Nordic ones. Despite their different affiliations with the EU, the Nordic countries share fundamental interests in relation to the internal market and the overall political challenges Europe is facing.

Norwegian embassies in Europe play a key role as instruments for the entire central government administration. In addition to gathering information about the host countries' views on current EU matters, the embassies promote Norwegian interests and seek support for Norway's positions. It is therefore important to recruit personnel with a solid background in European policy for our European missions.

The EEA and Norway Grants play a unique role in Norway's cooperation with many EU countries. These grants are designed to reduce economic and social disparities in Europe. They are also an instrument for Norway's European policy. The Government will ensure that the EEA and Norway Grants support Norwegian political priorities and lay the foundation for closer cooperation with the recipient countries and with EU institutions.



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