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# The Government's work programme for cooperation with the EU 2016

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(<http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/id833/>)

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.

# Norway in Europe

THE GOVERNMENT'S  
WORK PROGRAMME FOR  
COOPERATION WITH THE EU

# 2016

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([http://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/dokumenter/planer/160229-government\\_work\\_programme\\_eu\\_2016.pdf](http://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/dokumenter/planer/160229-government_work_programme_eu_2016.pdf)) (pdf)

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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.

Elisabeth Aspaker  
Minister of EEA and EU Affairs

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## **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**