

## Norway's refusal

**Source:** CVCE. European Navigator. Etienne Deschamps.

**Copyright:** (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.  
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

**URL:** [http://www.cvce.eu/obj/norway\\_s\\_refusal-en-cb6928c6-of8e-449d-bfao-8225bf5fbdfa.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/norway_s_refusal-en-cb6928c6-of8e-449d-bfao-8225bf5fbdfa.html)

**Last updated:** 08/07/2016



## Norway's refusal

While in Ireland opposition to membership was relatively weak, taking into account the economic advantages that the country hoped to draw from its membership of the European Communities, the situation in the Scandinavian countries proved to be very different. Having a Protestant tradition, Nordic public opinion was distrustful of the interventionism and centralism of the European institutions which it saw as being potentially harmful to the Scandinavian democratic and social pattern. It was also more sympathetic to the intergovernmental model of international cooperation than to the supranational approach of the EEC. In compliance with their respective constitutions, Denmark and Norway had to submit the decision on membership of the European Communities to popular referenda, since entry automatically involved the surrender of certain areas of sovereignty to Community institutions.

Denmark and Norway have been very loyal to their national independence and to Scandinavian solidarity. They had been members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and of the Council of Europe since 1949, were part of the Nordic Council – created in 1952 with Iceland and Sweden – and were, since 1960, founder members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). However, this situation was not altogether satisfactory, since EFTA involved neither agricultural nor fishing products, which were of prime importance to Denmark and Norway.

As one of the many tariff measures to come out of the *Kennedy Round* of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) a year earlier, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden – with trade between them continually growing – opened negotiations in April 1968 with a view to creating, in two stages and at the latest by January 1974, a Nordic customs and economic union, known as *Nordic Economic Cooperation* or *Nordek*.

Although it was often presented as a way of gaining access to the EEC, *Nordek* was supposed to make it easier for the Nordic countries to gain access to a wider European market and develop their trade with the rest of the world. Danish leaders, who proposed the establishment of joint institutions, also saw this plan as a convenient alternative route, after the veto used by France in 1967 to British, and so indirectly to Danish, membership of the EEC. The United Kingdom was in fact the principal market for Scandinavian exports. The Danes succeeded in putting agriculture, a key sector in their economy and exports, on the agenda for Nordic negotiations. Their objective was, in particular, to ensure the protection of national producers by introducing a system of Nordic preference and by fixing reasonable prices. The Danes went even further in making the regulation of the agricultural sector a condition of their participation in a full Nordic customs union, which Sweden hoped would be established. The final report on the draft treaty, inspired by an intergovernmental approach, was published on 17 July 1969. It did not question the membership of Denmark, Norway and Sweden of EFTA, of which Finland was an associate member. It set out the possibility of setting up the customs union from 1 January 1972. Although significantly inspired by the Treaty of Rome, the *Nordek* Treaty laid down that the Council of Ministers had to adopt decisions by unanimity. The terms of the draft treaty also envisaged the creation of a 'Permanent Committee' – made up of government officials recruited from the various national administrations – and specialised 'Cooperation Committees', as well as a Consultative Committee consisting of representatives from the industrial and agricultural sectors. A report on energy and industrial policy, dealing in particular with the joint construction and sale of nuclear reactors, accompanied the draft treaty.

However, some points of discord remained. The Scandinavian countries did not have a common approach to the role that was to be allocated to *Nordek*. Denmark and Norway, who kept the EEC as their focal point, were in no hurry to move the negotiations forward until such a time as they had definite knowledge of the fate of their applications for membership of the European Communities. Sweden, on the other hand, did not want to waste time and held the view that the creation of a Nordic economic union would not prejudice the process of enlargement of the Communities. There were plans for a Nordic Investment Bank, which was eventually established in 1975. There were also proposals for the setting up of a Nordic agricultural common market from 1974. Finland, however, who feared that drawing closer politically to the EEC might harm relations with its neighbour, the Soviet Union, gradually made known its reservations about this plan for Scandinavian regional integration. On 24 March 1970, the Finnish Government left the negotiating table for

good. On 20 July 1970, Finland went further by signing a protocol with the USSR which extended by twenty years the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance that had bound the two countries since April 1948. Denmark then proposed to continue the negotiations without Finland with a view to establishing a new accord renamed *Skandek*. Sweden and Norway declined the offer, questioning in turn the compatibility of the proposed treaty with their neutral status.

Despite these attempts at rapprochement, Denmark and Norway maintained their different economic interests that were largely bound up with their respective geographical situations. In 1970, the applications from the two countries for membership of the EEC sounded the death knell of the Scandinavian economic union project, which was finally abandoned in 1971. The Council of Ministers of the Nordic Council immediately set up their own permanent secretariat with offices in Copenhagen.

### **Norwegian fishing**

During the period of negotiations for entry, Norwegian fishing turned out to be the most sensitive issue to be resolved. Fishing was really an essential economic sector for Norway, which has more than 2000 km of coastline and exports a significant part of its fish production. Norway's accession to the EEC would have increased Community waters by several thousand square kilometres, at a time when the Six had just agreed on equal access for all the partners to national territorial waters. The Norwegians were therefore invited to share their natural riches with the fishing fleets of other countries of the Community. However, the Norwegian fishermen, whose trawlers were clearly inferior to the French factory ships, were not prepared to agree free access to their extremely rich territorial waters at one go, at a time when overfishing had already caused a reduction in marine resources. Norway therefore obtained a dispensation, which was also granted to all the new members. By virtue of this exception clause, these new members could exclude foreign boats from 6 miles of coastal waters, and even from the band between 6 and 12 miles from shore.

Norwegian agriculture, which was based high in the mountains and was not really competitive, was largely subsidised by the Government and by local authorities. However, this direct financial aid was contrary to the principles of the common agricultural policy (CAP). The 1960s had also been marked in Norway by industrialisation and urbanisation, which had caused an exodus of local populations and the abandonment of many family farms. The prospect of joining the European Economic Community (EEC) gave rise to fears of a new rural exodus.

The Norwegian Government wanted to maintain agricultural activity in the polar and sub-polar regions despite very difficult natural conditions. The high prices of Norwegian agricultural products were destined to come into line gradually with the EEC unit prices, by the end of a long transitional period.

### **Rejection by the Norwegian people**

In Norway, participation in the vote was very high (77 %), but the result of the referendum of 26 September 1972 was surprising. Whereas the public opinion poll institutes had predicted a relatively close finish, with a slight advantage for supporters of membership of the European Community, the 'no' vote won with more than 53.5 % of votes cast. Trygve Bratelli's Socialist Government and most of the left wing political parties failed in their massive campaign for a 'yes' vote.

The vote exposed the deep divisions in the country: the isolated fishermen and farmers of the Far north and west were wary of any foreign influence and consequently opposed the European Economic Community (EEC), whereas the city dwellers of the South and inhabitants of Oslo were more open to the world and therefore more in favour of European unification. Moreover, the end of the 1960s had seen a significant rural exodus, which caused considerable unease amongst the inhabitants of the northern regions of the country. So European integration became the symbol of unbridled centralisation and distance from the decision-making centres, all of which alarmed those very inhabitants of the peripheral regions.

Although strictly speaking consultative, the negative referendum result led to rejection of Norwegian membership of the EEC. In parliament, the required three-quarters majority for ratification of the Treaty of

Accession – signed in Brussels on 22 January 1972 – was not achieved. This decision led to the resignation of the government, but was followed by a free trade agreement between Norway and the European Communities in May 1973, by which the customs duty on a range of industrial products was progressively lifted.