

## Negotiations for accession to the European Union

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## Negotiations for accession to the European Union

Before their signing, in Oporto on 2 May 1992, of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), which was due to enter into force, concurrently with the internal market, on 1 January 1993, Austria and the Nordic countries formally submitted their respective applications for accession to the European Union: Austria on 14 July 1989, Sweden on 1 July 1991, Finland on 18 March 1992 and Norway on 24 November 1992. In the light of the favourable opinions expressed by the European Commission, official consideration by the Lisbon European Council in June 1992 and the political agreement reached by the Twelve at the Edinburgh European Council held on 11 and 12 December 1992, negotiations, which were to be conducted at the same time but separately with each of the applicant countries, got under way in Brussels on 1 February 1993 with Austria, Finland and Sweden and on 5 April with Norway, with a view to enlarging the European Union in 1995. As countries whose gross domestic product (GDP) and *per capita* income were among the highest in Europe and which, apart from Norway, were traditionally neutral, they sought fiercely to defend their economic interests and social systems, all the while carefully managing public opinion at home, which was marked by a strong current of Euroscepticism. Moreover, the economic sectors of the Four, which were very much export-orientated, were deeply divided over whether it was advisable to join the European Union.

The negotiations would prove particularly difficult on agriculture, regional aid, contributions to the Community budget and the setting of fishing quotas. Most of the Nordic countries after all offered a guaranteed price level higher than that offered by the European Union and commanded far higher farm prices than those in the Union (up to twice as high in the case of Finland and Norway). The Commission therefore proposed offsetting the price adjustment with income aid for farmers to be financed by the applicant countries. However, those countries insisted that the European Union contribute to footing the bill. With regard to regional aid, under the Community principle only those regions where the *per capita* GDP was less than 75 % of the Community average were authorised to receive the godsend of cohesion funds. However, the applicant countries wanted to be able to provide assistance for some Arctic or mountainous regions where the GDP came to 113 % of the average.

There was also fierce debate on the budget issue. Sweden, which — like all the other applicants with the exception of Finland — would be a net contributor to the European budget, wanted its financial contribution to all the Community obligations and costs to be progressive. Lastly, Norway categorically refused to apply the common fisheries policy or allow European vessels — especially the French and Spanish ones — access to its territorial waters. It also refused to suspend whale hunting, although this was prohibited by a Community directive.

Eager to achieve a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible before there was any reversal of the political situation in Russia, the Finnish authorities achieved a series of temporary adjustment measures during the negotiations and secured the possibility of continued financing for the northernmost regions of the country in addition to securing new regional funds and Community agricultural aid. Anxious to normalise its position on the international stage and to accommodate the country's economic circles, Austria succeeded in obtaining from the Twelve various derogations enabling it to continue subsidising its mountain farming, to restrict heavy goods transit by road in the alpine regions and to protect the property of its own nationals by restricting the purchase of plots of land by foreign nationals in the regions popular with tourists. Sweden received preferential treatment in refraining from taking part in Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and in retaining some of its distinctive social, ecological and health-related features. Norway in the end managed to secure significant temporary measures for its farmers and fishermen.

In spite of those difficulties, the negotiations were wound up in a record time of 13 months in March 1994. It then remained for the accession treaties submitted to a referendum in the four applicant countries to be ratified.