

Interview with Bjørn Tore Godal: the plan for a Nordic customs and economic union (Berlin, 19 June 2007)

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[Christian Lekl] Between 1968 and 1970, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway held talks on a Nordic customs union, Nordek. Was a Nordic union an alternative to EC accession for Norway?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] Yes and no. It could be regarded as a separate matter. That is quite clear. But others could also see it as a stepping stone, so to speak — perhaps we could start with Nordic cooperation and then develop it further — as a form of rapprochement with Europe marked by the Nordic approach. That would have been quite possible, and I believe there was strong support in Sweden and Norway; but there were opponents too, and it did not succeed.

[Christian Lekl] Why not? Why did the project fail in the end?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] I actually believe that at the time the Swedes saw themselves as a major industrial power in Europe. More so than Norway, Finland and Denmark. They had their own priorities and did not feel so closely bound up with the Nordic region as such. They had more far-reaching perspectives. You can still see that now. So, without oil and gas the Norwegians were always much weaker than the Swedes in an international economic context. But I believe that in a sense Finland and Norway have caught up. There are oil and gas and there is Nokia, and both countries are doing better.

[Christian Lekl] And is there any connection between the failure of Nordek and the establishment of a Nordic Ministerial Council shortly afterwards?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] You could look at it like that. You could say that Nordic politicians right across the spectrum, whether conservatives, social democrats or liberals, tend to look northwards. You can sense that they have a similar mentality; seen from the outside, the social trend in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark is fairly similar and there is a Nordic mindset. That is important to all Nordic politicians, and they regarded a ministerial council or various ministerial councils, various specialist ministers, as a good and useful idea.