

## Interview with Bjørn Tore Godal: the negotiations on the European Economic Area (Berlin, 19 June 2007)

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[Christian Lekl] You have often referred to the importance of the European Economic Area for Norway. As Minister for Foreign Trade, you conducted the negotiations on the creation of the European Economic Area. What were the key points for Norway in those negotiations?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] The most important thing was direct access to the market for all Norway's products. That also means access to the labour market. There were to be no differences between Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Germans or Spaniards on the same market. We have the same rights. And that was greeted positively, even in anti-EU circles. The focus was on our rights as an export nation. So although many did not want Norway to join the EU — I have mentioned the Christian Democratic Party, which is against EU membership, and the trade unions, many of which are still opposed to membership — they all wanted the same rights as other nationalities on the labour market in Europe, so that was greeted positively. That guaranteed our national rights, so to speak, in a wider context.

[Christian Lekl] And how were the negotiations structured?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] At that time things were a bit difficult, particularly in fisheries and agriculture, although a distinction has to be made here between EEA and EU membership. But there were difficult negotiations in both cases.

[Christian Lekl] Can you go into that in a bit more depth?

[Bjørn Tore Godal] Fishing is the most important area; the industrial interests in the fisheries sector in Norway are in favour of membership because they want free market access without tariffs, without difficulties. I think, for example, that 70 % of salmon in Germany is Norwegian. That means it is in any case important for us to have a presence in France, the Benelux countries and Germany without restrictions. Those are our export interests in the fisheries sector. But the fishermen see it slightly differently. They do not want any competition in Norwegian waters. In other words, Spanish and other foreign fishermen are not welcome, but of course fishing rights go hand in hand with market access. Hence the negotiations were difficult in this area. In agriculture things look a bit different. There we only have defensive interests; no major export interests, or hardly any. We have an agriculture which is heavily subsidised, as in Switzerland and also in other countries at global level. And these defensive interests are not easy to reconcile with our offensive interests in fisheries, where we would like to export more without tariff barriers.