

Norway and Switzerland

Norway and Switzerland are not part of the EU but are both members of EFTA (the European Free Trade Association), and Norway is a member of the EEA (European Economic Area). Norway is a Scandinavian country in northern Europe, whereas Switzerland is a landlocked country in western Europe.

Recent History

Despite attempts to remain neutral during the Second World War (WWII), Norway was eventually invaded by Germany. Following the war, Norway was one of the founding members of the *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)* and built a strong relationship with the USA. In the second half of the twentieth century, Norway experienced high economic growth and prosperity. Norway and Switzerland benefit from membership of EFTA as it reinforces them as important trading partners.

Government Structure

Both countries' governments have been largely stable for the last fifty years. Norway is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. The Head of State is King Harald V. The current Government, elected in September 2009, is a coalition between the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party, led by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg.

Switzerland is officially a confederation, but resembles a federal republic. Power is divided between the federal and the regional level. Switzerland has a long tradition of *direct democracy* in which referenda are frequently held on certain issues (e.g. constitutional changes and international treaties). The Swiss Government is led by the Federal Council, which has 7 members (Federal Councillors). The Councillors are elected by the Swiss Parliament and serve for 4 years. The current Council, elected in October 2007, is a coalition of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, Free Democratic the Liberals party (FDP), Conservative Democrats and the Swiss People's Party. The Federal Council elects a President every year, who has a largely ceremonial role with the same powers as the Councillors.

Relations with the EU

Norway and Switzerland chose not to be part of the EU. Nevertheless, they both have links to the EU through various agreements and institutions. Whilst Norway rejected membership of the European Community (EC) in referendums in 1972 and 1994, it is signed up to the *Schengen Convention* and it has agreements to cooperate with

EU bodies including *Eurojust* and *Europol* (which conduct criminal investigations and enable cross-border co-operation between prosecutors and courts) and has been involved in joint EU-UN security operations. There are no plans for Norway to join the EU, but the idea has never been ruled out.

Switzerland is not a member of the EEA, but it does have strong ties to the rest of Europe through bilateral agreements as well as the EC-Switzerland Free Trade Agreement of 1972. Future Swiss membership of the EU is unlikely, because the Swiss public have rejected both EEA and EU membership at referendums.

Facts and Figures

- Norway's 1994 referendum on EU membership was very close; 48% voted for joining the EU and 52% voted against joining the EU.
- Switzerland has four official languages: German, French, Italian and Romansch.

Quotes

'In terms of trade, Switzerland is one of the major partners for the EU. No other country has as many bilateral agreements with the EU in place.' EU Commission, Policy Coordination Unit: Trade, 2009
'The issue of [EU] membership is not on the political agenda.' Elisabeth Walaas, Norwegian deputy minister of foreign affairs, 2008.

Technical Terms

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO): military alliance of democratic states in Europe and North America.

Direct democracy: a form of democracy in which citizens make policy and law decisions in person, without going through representatives.

Schengen Convention: allowing people to move freely across national borders without visas or passports.

Eurojust: permanent body composed of national prosecutors. It was established in 2002 to enhance cooperation on serious cross-border and organised crime.

Europol: the EU's criminal intelligence agency.

Links

- <http://www.norway.org.uk/>
- http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/switzerland/index_en.htm