

Speech by State Secretary Inge Bartnes at the Interreg III B North Sea - North Sea Commission Annual Convention, Sandefjord 2007 June 20th.

Welcome to Norway



Aurlandsfjord,
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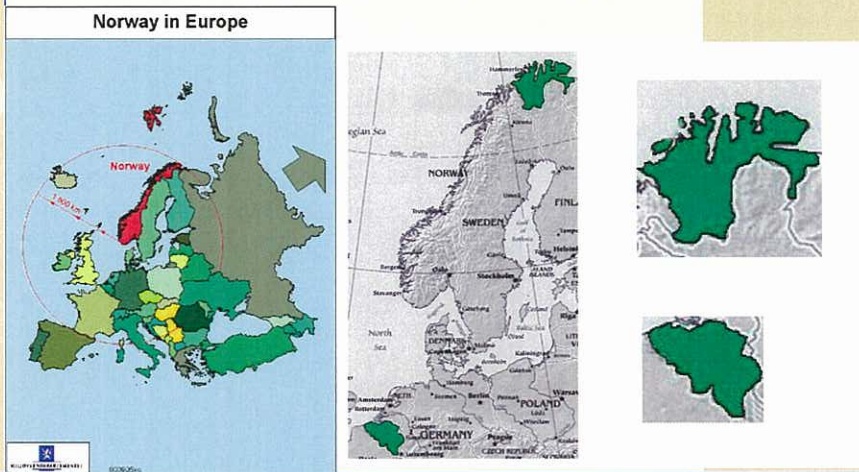
1. Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Welcome to Norway! Last time I checked there were close to 500 people registered for the conference – an impressive number, and one that, I believe, underlines the significance of the co-operation between the countries surrounding the North Sea!
2. I would especially like to thank the secretariats of the North Sea Commission, and the Interreg North Sea programme for organising this conference, which I am sure will be interesting and useful for the participants, and also for making sure that the

co-operation around the North Sea in the years to come will provide solid projects with concrete results.

3. This venue is situated in Vestfold, a small county co-operating closely with its neighbour counties in the region, and in international organizations.

4. In my intervention I will address by outlining the main features of Norwegian rural and regional policy, I will also discuss the challenges of accessibility. Innovation and regional development is my third topic. I will round off with some reflections on what we can and should expect from the new programme period.

Distances and Surface



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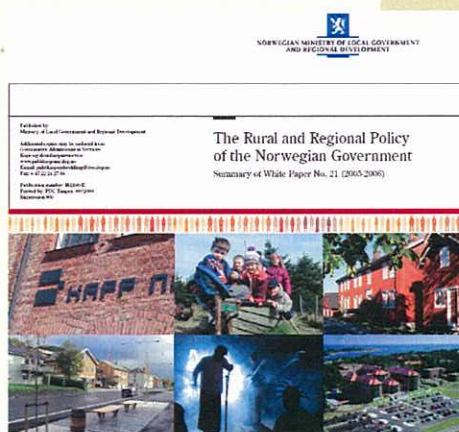
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5. As a country with a large surface, low population density and vast distances, the regions of Norway vary greatly from each other in terms of challenges and opportunities. By way of example, the distance from the north to the south of Norway is the same as from the south of Norway to Rome. The northernmost county of Norway, Finnmark, covers approximately the same surface as Belgium! In a country like Norway, regional development policy therefore is very important.

6. Our effort in gaining acceptance for the differentiated social security contribution scheme is one example of this. We believe that in order for regional policy to be effective, we must use the scope of action that state aid guidelines allow.

Norwegian aims for regional development

- Real freedom of choice about where to live
- Making use of the resources of the whole country



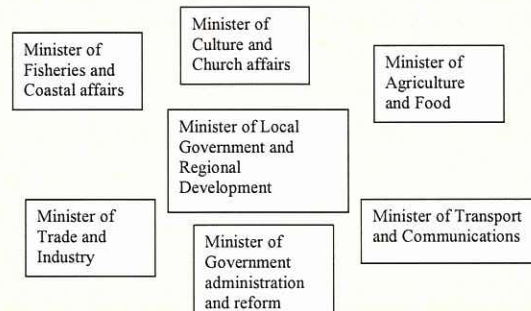
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7. The two overarching objectives of Norwegian regional policy are to secure the possibility of a real choice for people in where to live, and to make use of the resources of the entire country.
8. Norway's approach to INTERREG has this perspective in mind.
9. The territorial Agenda adopted at the informal ministerial meeting in Leipzig in May presents a differentiated approach towards territorial development, with a balanced emphasis on both sustainable economic growth and job creation, as well as social and ecological development.
10. Different kinds of communities have differing strengths and challenges. Only by addressing policy measures that are tailor made to each region and local community can we properly address the challenges of the future.

Co-ordination of Sector policies for regional development

- Members of the sub-committee



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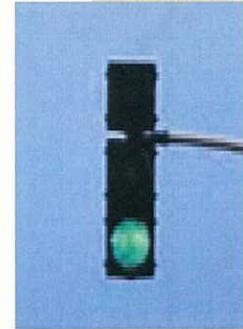
11. Regional development policy is cross-sectoral. In order to make places attractive and dynamic there is a need for a wide variety of services and functions. Environmental qualities and accessibility go hand in hand with job opportunities and education. The white paper on rural and regional policy presented to the parliament last year stressed coordination of sector policies as one of the crucial elements for regional development.

12. Norway has therefore established the Government sub committee on rural and regional policy. This is now an arena for different ministries to discuss issues of importance for regional development.

Innovation

- Public agencies
- National and regional authorities
- Business
- Research institutions

- A need to work together!



13. Stimulating regional innovation is a central strategy in Norwegian regional policy. In a country with sparse population and a great many communities relying on one or just a few enterprises for jobs and the regional economy, the stimulation of innovation is vital.

14. Innovation Norway, The Research Council of Norway and The Industrial Development Corporation of Norway, SIVA, are central institutions for the stimulation of regional innovation. SIVA stimulates co-operation between enterprises through infrastructure and networks between regional, national and international research and development. By linking different actors, communities, organisations and business, Siva facilitates the creation of an environment that leads to entrepreneurship, growth and regional development.

15. For regional development purposes it is of course also important to stimulate research in the private sector, and to achieve a more balanced geographical distribution of research and development. Although one often thinks of the major cities when it comes to cutting edge research and development, we should not forget that smaller centres often excel in one or a few sectors.

16. The micro electronics cluster here in the county of Vestfold is one example of this. The maritime cluster around Ålesund is another. Both of these examples have gained status as Norwegian Centres of Expertise, joining a programme to further stimulate the cluster dynamics of strong business communities.

Good accessibility is vital for regional development

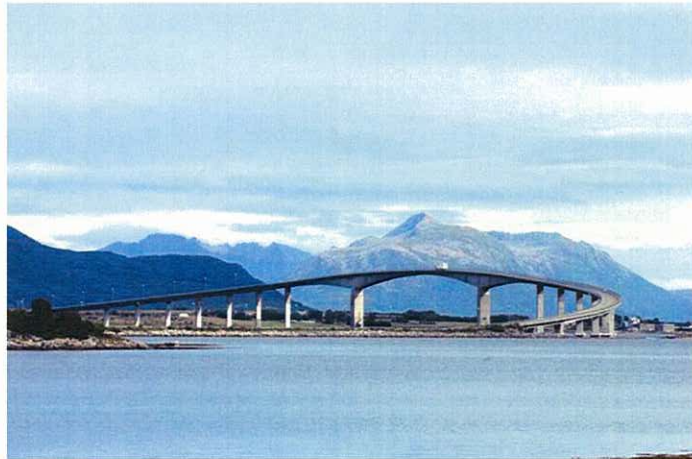


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17. In order for a community to be attractive, it furthermore requires to be accessible. Accessibility to services for inhabitants as well as accessibility to markets for local and regional industry is crucial for the viability of a region. Norway has a large number of remote communities, with long distances to markets and central institutions. This provides particular challenges to the viability of these communities. We therefore welcomed the continuation in the regional aid guidelines of the possibility for transport aid for these remote communities to overcome the extra cost of transport of goods to the markets due to location and infrastructure.

18. In order to strengthen the accessibility of the whole country, the Norwegian Government in our recent white paper on regional policy, stated that it will take steps to facilitate access to

broadband and mobile phone technology and reception of television broadcast where people live.

19. Through the North Sea programme Norway has contributed to some strong projects on maritime accessibility. The Northern Maritime Corridor project is an excellent example. One of the central success criteria from these projects is that the project developers have managed to involve the relevant national actors in the projects. This means that the project results have been easier to integrate with existing policy initiatives, leading to effective results that will have a lasting impact.

The new programme – Taking the co-operation a step further



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20. This year marks the transition from the Interreg III B North Sea Programme to the Interreg IV B programme. The programme area has been expanded. I am pleased that all Norwegian regions, including Northern Norway, now are part of the programme area. I think this will provide even better opportunities for strategic projects involving Norwegian partners than has been the case thus far.

21. It is important to note that the new programme period does not mean simply a prolonging of the programme as it has been in the last period.

22. The North Sea Programme has delivered strong results thus far, but the success of the new programme cannot rest on the achievements of the past. The value of Interreg lies in producing