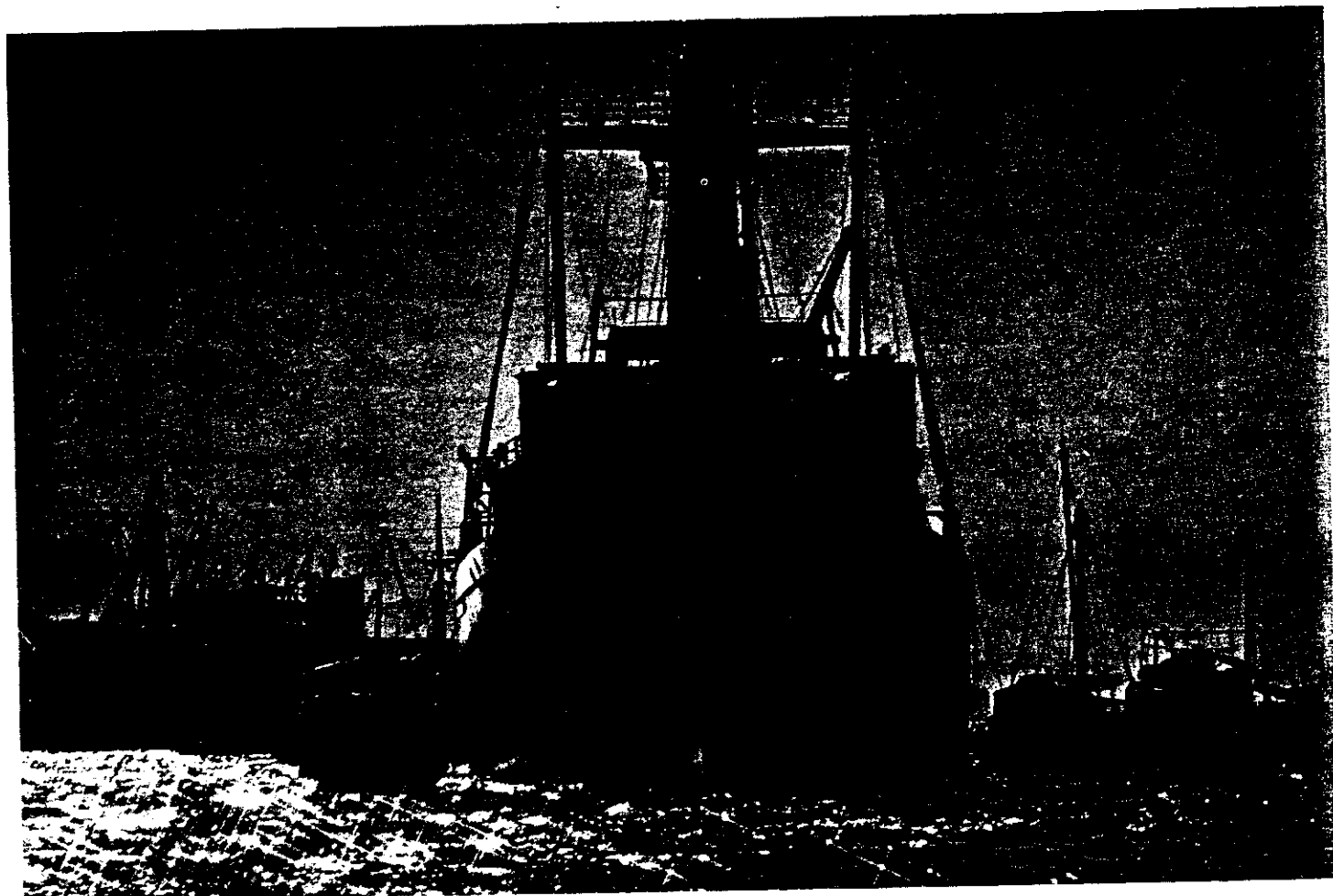


Free opinion

Reflections on the relations between Norway and the European Community

by Fredrik Th. Bolin*

Maritime transport and fishing (right: Tromsø, Norway's largest fishing port) are two fields being discussed bilaterally between Norway and the European Community.



Since 1972, when Norway voted against membership of the European Community and then negotiated a Free Trade Agreement on the same lines as the other present members of EFTA, the EC has developed in a number of spheres which

are of direct interest to Norway. At the same time Norway, and the individual Norwegians, have become more and more aware of their dependence on what happens within the Community, and this also in matters which are not covered by the Free Trade Agreement. Although neither now nor in the foreseeable future is there any question of once again contemplating the possibility of Norway's entering the Community, even on this remote northern flank of democratic Western Europe, we feel that we are greatly dependent on, and greatly affected by, what happens in the EC.

It is therefore in Norway's interest—in economic and monetary matters as well as politically—to try to increase its cooperation

with the EC. The experience which we have had of free trade with the EC in almost all Norwegian exports has been good. Since the Free Trade Agreement came into effect we have succeeded in establishing arrangements with the EC on the exchange of information on matters concerning the protection of the environment, and there is a rather similar arrangement which provides a basis for frequent exchanges of views on shipping matters. The Community's attempt to work out a shipping policy is in particular of great interest to a country like Norway, and we believe that the Commission in Brussels is also aware of the value of close contact with one of the largest shipping countries in Europe which is not within the EC.

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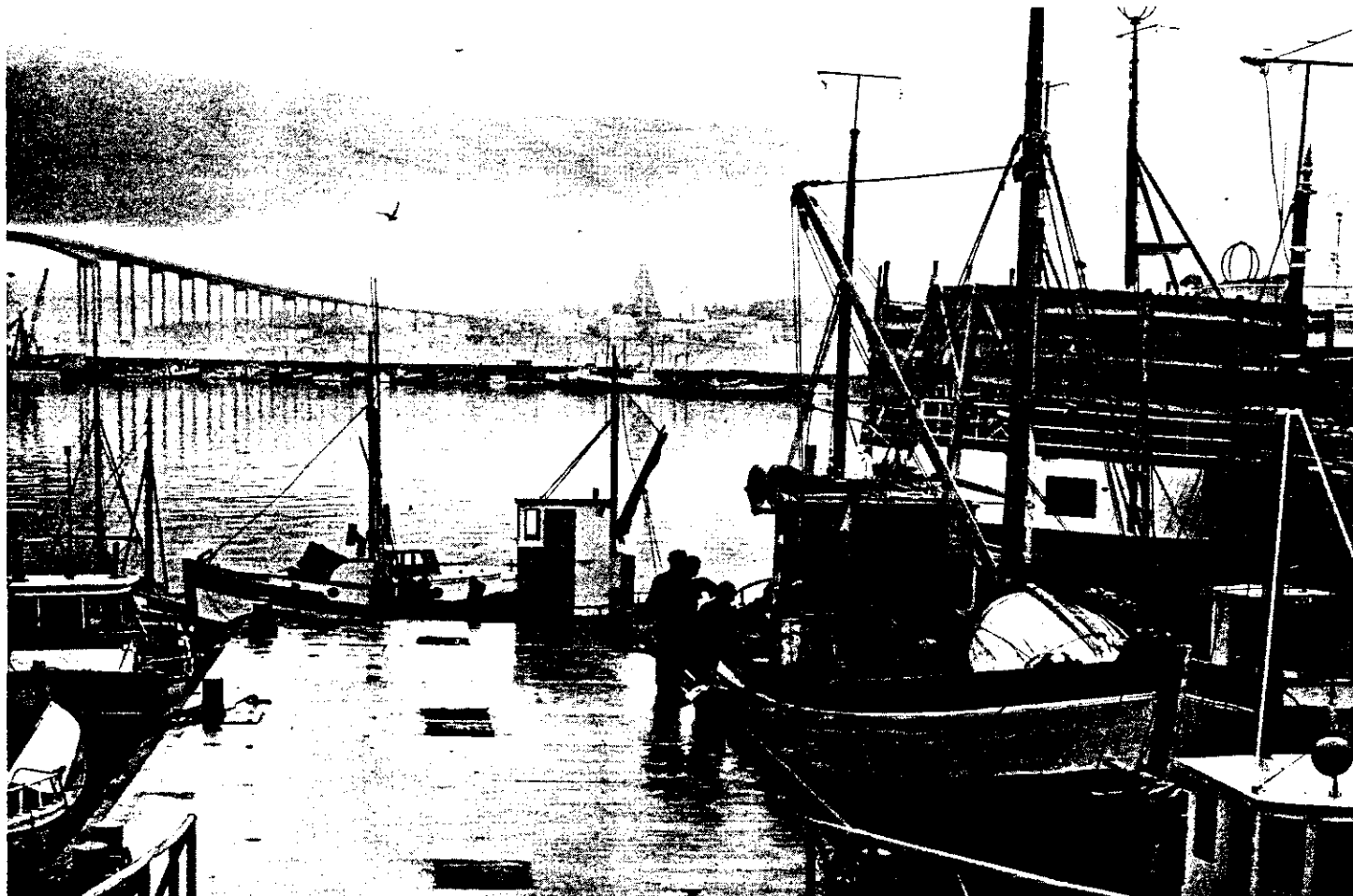
If we consider what developments there have been in cooperation within the EC since 1972 it is clear that, despite many setbacks, there has been substantial progress in a number of domains. European integration advances on its slow and irreversible path, even if the day-to-day happenings are not always such as to justify big headlines in the press. The "negative news" of unsuccessful meetings seems to have a great impact on the awareness of the public of what is going on in the Community—at least, this is true in my country. This is a dilemma in particular for those of us who work in the news media. So far as Norway is concerned part of the explanation may very well be that a number of developments in the EC

the cooperation in monetary policy, are other reasons why in many respects Norway is facing a Community which is different from, and represents something more than, the EC we rejected in 1972.

Then one should mention also the somewhat more political aspects of developments within the EC and its institutions. The approach to direct elections to the European Parliament is being followed in Norway with an interest which is slowly but surely increasing. We suspect that after some years the direct elections will come to give the Community greater political weight. Any people with a parliamentary tradition knows that in the long run no popularly elected assembly will be content to be impotent politically vis-à-vis plan-

has that the EC which we have to deal with now is founded on something much bigger than the EC with which we have a Free Trade Agreement. The juridical, political and institutional developments within the Community create for the EFTA countries a whole range of new tasks and challenges as they attempt to adapt their forms of cooperation with the EC.

The implications of the EC summit meeting in Bremen last year and the expected establishment of a new European Monetary System (EMS) can have far-reaching effects on Norway's position so far as trade and monetary matters are concerned. Norway was associated with the old "snake" from the time when it was created, but the government has pro-



take place in sectors which, either for reasons of geography or because of the subject matter, are not at the centre of the interests of the average Norwegian. Examples are the Lomé Convention, despite its epoch-making significance for the relations between Western Europe and the developing countries, the negotiations with three Mediterranean countries about their entry into the EC, and the whole set of agreements associating a number of other countries around the Mediterranean with it. In addition the EC has made a good start on integration in matters of environmental policy, and Norway is following this with greater attention for several reasons. The efforts being made in the Community to coordinate economic policy, and not least

ning and executive bodies. Norway also observes the growing importance of the consultations between the EC countries on foreign policy matters since the consultations are always becoming closer and more successful. In an attempt to compensate for this, Norway is increasing the frequency with which it engages in bilateral discussions on policy matters with the individual EC countries.

The distinction between matters which are strictly Community affairs and those which are the subject of foreign policy consultations between the nine members is becoming more and more unclear. Because this is so these consultations have noticeably contributed to the awareness which an EFTA country such as Norway

visionally decided not to take part in the new monetary system. This is understandable on the basis both of a provisional appreciation of the immediate problems of the Norwegian economy and of the uncertainty about the participation of Britain in the EMS. If the new system proves successful and all the EC countries take part, the necessity for Norway to join the system will appear with renewed strength.

The Norwegians attached great importance to the summit meeting of the EFTA countries in Vienna and to what they hoped might result from it in the form of a stronger joint effort to secure full employment and to work for a sound economic development accompanied by price stability. Both the administration and the trade

union movement in Norway attached great hopes to the idea of holding a tripartite conference which was to be organised in Oslo this spring under the aegis of the Council of Europe. This meeting will not now take place, and so far the hopes and expectations of the concrete measures that would be taken as a result of the Vienna meeting have not been fully realised. Oslo is, however, working on new plans to bring about a Western European tripartite meeting of unions, employers and governments, this time jointly sponsored by the EC and EFTA. In cooperation with the trade unions the Norwegian government is trying to arrange this. Although so far Norway has fared remarkably well throughout the recent years of mass unemployment in Western Europe and the whole of the industrialised world, the Norwegians were very much disturbed last year by the cold winds of unemployment.

Norway is to such an extent integrated into the Western and European economy that it is impossible for us in the long run to solve all our problems on our own or to expect to be able to live a happy life in isolation when other countries are hit by economic problems and difficulties in maintaining a high level of employment. Because of Norway's great dependence on foreign trade, the way in which the EC develops, and the way in which we can cooperate with the EC, will be of decisive importance for Norway's future economic condition. The increasing interdependence of all Western European countries has been demonstrated in a way which gives Norwegians every reason to make great efforts to establish a close cooperation with the EC in a number of fields which are not covered by the Free Trade Agreement.

Norway should therefore watch out for any signals that come from the Commission in Brussels once the Vienna initiative has been fully studied. The evidence of the first reactions in the Community, in so far as they are known at the beginning of this year, provide reason for believing that the Community is also interested in discussions with EFTA countries on some new cooperative arrangements in order to follow up with them the "second generation" of the integration process.

The extent to which EFTA as an organisation can make a real contribution to

promoting the relations between the individual EFTA countries and the Community is in my view more questionable. The Ministerial meetings of the EFTA Council in recent years have shown how little homogeneity there is in this group of seven countries, both in economic terms and in their basic political and philosophical conceptions of the forms of cooperation with the EC which are appropriate to them individually. What is involved here is not simply the fact that there are wide differences in their evaluation of the political implications of cooperation in relation either to neutrality or to integration. The EFTA countries also take very different positions so far as purely economic cooperation is concerned. Even within what might be called the Nordic sub-group in EFTA one can detect differences in the keenness of their interest in relations with the EC. Thus Sweden has in many ways been more active in Brussels in recent years than has Norway.

It is worth noting, although unfortunately little attention has been paid to it in Norway, that both Sweden and Switzerland have entered into agreements with Euratom on participation in the thermonuclear fusion research programme which is designed to give Western Europe a new source of energy in the next century: fusion energy. Norway has shown no interest in this, presumably because we have no significant research experience to contribute to this Euratom programme. But for future generations it can be as valuable for Norwegians as for the Swedes and the Swiss. And what, from a Norwegian point of view, is particularly of interest is that two neutral countries, Sweden and Switzerland, have been able to become associated with a Community project of this kind.

Experiences such as these show how different the EFTA countries are in the extent of their interest in arrangements for cooperation with the EC and in their view of the political implications of this cooperation. It would seem to follow from this that EFTA as such will have only a very limited role in any further developments in their agreements on future cooperation with the EC. Everyone knows that EFTA was successful in the work it did to establish free trade in Western Europe. Norway, and



Norwegian industry, are as conscious as any one of what they owe to EFTA. The Stockholm Convention still provides scope for a strengthening of cooperation between the EFTA countries but there is much to indicate that it is as individuals that they can best organise their future relations with Brussels. Here in Scandinavia we are also waiting with great interest to see whether the Community will place more emphasis on strengthening its relations towards this part of the world, north of Denmark, in order to balance the increased weight of the southern element in the EC in the 1980s once Greece, Spain and Portugal have become members. ■

Above: Norwegian countryside.