

FOR THE LOVE OF FISH

Norway's relationship with Europe should not be compared with Europe's relationship with Norway. The latter is not very important, but the former is a mirror of Norway's subconscious, full of inner trauma the nation is unable to confront. It is a dark and strange place to view. The Norwegian ego is suspended between the id of fear, greed, and aggression, and the superego of superior morals, between feelings of inferiority and superiority. On a basic level, it's the old and familiar story about the love and hate of fish. We don't eat much of it. We catch the fish, but eat frozen pizzas instead. In fact, the whole question of Norway vs. Europe could be condensed into one single shiny codfish. Up North, where I'm from, the attitude of most people is: "What the hell could the European Union offer us? We've already got fish." Before the 1994 referendum on Norway's entry into the union, Jan Henry T. Olsen, the Minister of Fisheries, was a central member of the negotiating team that went to Brussels. He knew what he was up against. Before he left, he defiantly stated that he wasn't going to give away a single Norwegian fish to Europe. It turned out he had to throw in a few tons to the Spaniards. The Norwegians rejected the proposal. "No fish"-Olsen was sent to the woods.

Norway's relationship with Europe is nearly older than Europe itself. We were Vikings. Before the people of Europe invented self-defence, we filled our longboats with weapons and *Amanita muscaria*, commonly known as the fly agaric or fly Amanita: a poisonous and psychoactive basidiomycete

fungus. Then we'd set sail and roam around in the world until we got tired of it. Somehow we've lost pride in our history and our basic instincts. I sometimes ask myself: should we be guilty about a bit of raping and pillaging down on the continent a long time back? Or should this tradition be turned into a source of pride to help us commemorate something that is easily forgotten: We haven't always been a social democratic version of Kuwait. These days we've even forgotten how to hate the Swedes. And that's just wrong, no matter how you twist and turn the facts around. The parts of Norway the Swedes stole is referred to as "occupied Norway" or "the East Bank". The Nazis stole the Viking/Norse legacy. But who ever saw a German wearing one of those horned helmets anyway? We used to, and we should start wearing them again, with pride.

Our relationship with France and the British Isles has faded. But we are still very well travelled. Several times every year most Norwegians go to what for us has become the centre of Europe. Our Central Europe is a few small islands off the coast of Africa: the Canaries. To be fair, in the summertime we visit some Greek or previously Greek islands in Turkey, too. What's attractive to us and makes us feel at home at these places, are the "small fishing villages".

Being a minor nation speaking an incongruous language, we were once forced to learn other languages. Now we don't give a toss. We don't even speak English, only English as a Foreign Language. After the Second World War we decided to punish the Germans by refusing to learn to speak or read their language. This way we still inflict a lot of well-

deserved pain on the Germans. French was always too complicated and perhaps was never designed as a form of communication anyway. And we don't really need Spanish. All the menus of Spain are in Scandy, so why bother?

The real obstacle for us is politeness. Those foreigners. They say "How are you doing?", "S'il vous plaît", "Mucho gusto", and a lot of other shit they don't really mean. We can see straight through their false pretences. We know how an honest and truly polite person is supposed to behave. Not by pretending to be considerate and kind by using shallow words and gestures, that's for sure. If someone tries to screw us with that sort of stuff, we know what to do: Stay quiet and stare him or her down. The only way to be authentic is to be rude.

The Eskimos are said to have about 1400 different words for snow. But there are only two phrases of politeness in Norwegian – "takk" (thank you) and "unnskyld" (I'm sorry). They are hardly ever used.

We have lost touch with Europe. According to a large survey conducted by MMK, a polling institute, only one in fifteen Norwegians is aware of the fact that Norway has a common border with Russia. More surprisingly, forty-seven percent of those asked felt "absolutely certain" that Norway is an island. Can you believe that?¹

The truth is that our politicians don't want to be a part of Europe. That would jeopardize their favourite activity: wasting billions of our hard earned petrodollars spreading the gospel of bland Norwegian goodness around the world in some peace process or another. What happens is usually this: a Nor-

wegian politician gets bored and buys himself an atlas. He finds a place where there's been a war since Neolithic times, and decides he'll be the harbinger of peace for this place. Until this point he's typically been away from Norway 12 times. Three times on the Canaries, and nine times in Sweden to buy alcohol and chicken legs in bulk. After years of free spending and breakthroughs, you can be sure of one thing: the war in question will escalate into an even more mindless bloodbath than ever before. Then the politician goes back to the boring old country to lecture on the Norwegian peace model. Never heard of it? You'll be all right for now, then.

Norway's attitude to the EU can be summed up as follows: How can hundreds of millions of people be so utterly wrong? How can they, with open eyes, be willing to enslave themselves to Brussels, when just four million of us managed to get it right? Contrary to popular belief in Norway, the European Union is better off without us. We are soft people living in a hard and unforgiving land close to the North Pole, with tremendous shoals of fish swimming around in the cold waters off our beautiful coastline. We have nothing to add but our vast oil and gas reserves.

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¹ Obviously, you shouldn't. I made both those facts up, just to get my point across, and I hope you realized that. As they say in Finland: If you can't stand the heat, get out of the sauna.