

All for Norge – All for Norway

by Charlotta E Lindell and Gordon Craigie

NORWAY is a young and proud nation which regained its independence from Sweden just over 100 years ago. It is often mentioned as a model for an independent Scotland due to the many similarities between the two countries. The populations are roughly the same, around 5.2 million, and North Sea Oil is Norway's biggest source of income. Due to the foresight of the Norwegian Government in establishing an oil fund with surplus revenues, which has grown to be the world's largest sovereign wealth fund (currently valued at more than 1 trillion US Dollars), Norway is comfortably wealthy. Tourism is also very important for the economy of both countries, and Norway still has thriving metal and shipping industries.

Last year, Norway was recognised as the happiest country to live in by the World Happiness Report. Compiled by the United Nations, the report analyses data from 156 countries and measures not only economic factors but also subjects like health and corruption. Interestingly, Denmark is placed at number two and Iceland is third – the UK shows up at 19th place. A spokesperson for the report observed, "what works in the Nordic countries is a sense of community and understanding in the common good".

Also interesting is that Sweden is placed 10th in the same report – Norway won its independence from Sweden in 1905. In the Norwegian Union Dissolution Referendum of that year, in answer to the question 'Do you approve the ratified dissolution of the Union?', 368,208 voted 'Yes' with only 184 voting 'No' – on an 85% turnout, a 99.95% 'Yes' vote was fairly convincing! Only men were entitled to vote at the time, but an unofficial campaign by Norwegian suffragettes collected signatures from almost a quarter of a million women in favour of independence too.

Yet ever since, Norway has arguably suffered from a big brother complex towards Sweden, despite being the wealthier country. Norway is far better

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off economically than Sweden, having higher wages and pensions and a functioning welfare system. But it is also much more expensive to live in Norway than in any other Scandinavian country. Every year hordes of Norwegians drive across the border to Sweden to shop for groceries and alcohol as it is a lot cheaper.

Over the years, thousands of young Swedes have gone to Norway to work after graduation. Sweden has lost a lot of nurses, for example, who choose to work in Norway because of the higher wages. Swedish specialist nurse Karin Larsson has worked and lived in Norway for 25 years and admits, "we still get better paid for our work here in Norway, but it is ridiculously expensive to live here so it is not really worth it if you're not planning to go back to Sweden". Mattias Lindberg, another Swede who worked in Norway for a couple of years specifically for the higher wages adds, "it was so much easier to get your first job in Oslo and you earned almost double the amount of money than in Sweden".

But, what is the story behind Norway's independence and what is the relationship between Sweden and Norway like today? Well, the first few years of the 20th century was not as stormy within their Union as it had been during most of the 19th century – on the contrary, it was unusually calm. Those years are known as the 'Indian Summer' but things changed very quickly...

After centuries of complicated skirmishes involving Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Russia, France and, latterly, the United Kingdom, Norway was militarily forced into Union with Sweden in 1814. Under this Union, Norway and Sweden had separate state managements but shared monarchy and foreign policy. Yet, from 1814 onwards, crisis after crisis emerged between the two countries. In particular, foreign policy issues proved to be a major problem as successive Norwegian Governments demanded to have their own consulates, but Sweden wouldn't budge. As the arguments continued, public opinion on the issue in Norway became increasingly entrenched and it became clear that what the people really wanted was freedom and equality with Sweden.

Yet, even if the resistance towards the Union was strong in Norway this dissatisfaction would not be resolved finally until 1905. The Swedish King of Norway and Sweden, Oscar II, knew it was inevitable that Norway would one day become independent from Sweden but hoped it would not happen in his lifetime. When the Norwegian Government finally decided that they should have their own consulates in spite of what Sweden said, Oscar II refused to accept the decision. The Norwegian Government subsequently handed in its resignation, but this was not accepted by the King. In the ensuing stand-off, both sides mobilised their military forces and war was perilously close. Thankfully this was avoided after negotiations and independence was confirmed in the Union Dissolution Referendum of August 1905. In a subsequent referendum to decide if Norway should remain a Kingdom or become a Republic, the people voted in favour of a Kingdom.



Postcard from the referendum 1905 when Norway voted for independence



Eidsvoll - constitution 1814.

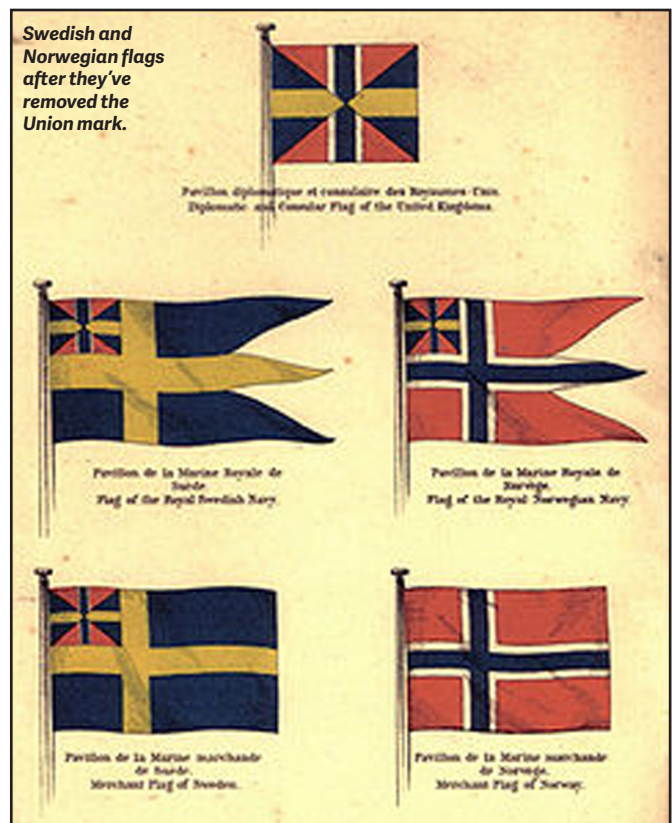
Still a touchy subject between the two countries relates to Hitler's invasion and occupation of Norway in 1940. Iron ore was vital for Germany's war machinery but their own iron was of poor quality compared to that produced in the north of Sweden. The iron ore from places like Gällivare, Malmberget and Kiruna was exported via rail to the ports of Narvik in Norway and Luleå in Sweden. But the sea outside of Luleå froze in winter, which was not the case in Narvik. Hence Narvik was the better choice for Hitler, so the Germans occupied Norway which, like its Scandinavian neighbours, had remained neutral. Did Sweden support Norway against the Nazis? The short answer is 'no' and it probably would not have helped their neighbour anyway. If Sweden had sent military forces to fight the Nazis in Norway many historians think there was a high probability that Hitler would have occupied Sweden too.

Nowadays Norway and Sweden exist happily side by side. Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), having voted against membership twice, while Sweden is. Since both countries are members of the Schengen Area there are no immigration controls, but there are customs checks along the 1,640km border as Norway's European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and European Economic Area (EEA) memberships do not include the European Customs Union. Trade between the two countries is valued at around €20bn annually and their long-intertwined histories have allowed them to devise unique and mutually acceptable arrangements to ensure both security and adherence to EU border rules. At a time where border

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King Oscar II speech on the steps to Rosendal's Castle on Djurgården in Stockholm in connection with the dissolution of the Union 1905. To the left of the King: sitting down Queen Sofia and to the left of her Prince Charles and the crying princess Ingeborg. To the right Crown Prince Gustaf.



arrangements are so topical there may be many lessons to be learned from this Scandinavian experience.

Norway celebrates its nationality not, as we may expect, by celebrating its independence but by celebrating its constitution. The Constitution of Norway predates their independence by almost 100 years, having been signed on May 17th 1814. Norwegian Constitution Day is therefore celebrated every May 17th and is a National Holiday. The festivities generally include children's parades featuring traditional dress, marching bands and flag displays and are replicated worldwide wherever there is a Norwegian community.