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Beyond Government and Opposition? The European Question, Party Strategy and Coalition Politics in Norway

Nick Sitter

A publication from: Centre for European and Asian Studies at Norwegian School of Management Elias Smiths vei 15 PO Box 580 N-1302 Sandvika Norway

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BEYOND GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION? THE EUROPEAN QUESTION, PARTY STRATEGY AND COALITION POLITICS IN NORWAY

Nick Sitter

Department of Public Governance, The Norwegian School of Management BI

The British application for membership of the European Economic Community in July 1961 came less than two months before the election that cost the Labour party its parliamentary majority and inaugurated

'the politics of opposition'.⁵ When Norwegian voters rejected participation in European integration the second time in a referendum in November 1994, both party competition and voter alignments seemed almost frozen in time since 1972. The 'No' vote decreased from 53.5% to 52.2 percent, and the 'Yes' vote rose imperceptibly from 46.5% to 47.%. Region by region the voting patterns turned out to be slightly more polarised in 1994 than twenty-two years earlier. Formal party positions barely differed, the same parties opposed EU membership in 1972 and 1994. Although party positions still reflect, with few but significant exceptions, their positions three decades ago, most Norwegian parties are reassessing both their strategies for competition and opposition to participation in European integration with a view to the 2005 election and forthcoming referendum.⁶

In what follows, the evolution of the party politics of European integration in Norway over four and a half decades is analysed, with a view to assessing the impact of the European question on party politics and to the forthcoming 2005 election. The issues that have been raised in connection with the European question in Norway are identified and their impact on pastion ce1a(qs(ps)6.4(ati1ecad(36 0 11.2sTc0.(s)-4.9(tioa)12sdieapf46.4(

European Economic Area (EEA) put the question firmly back on the Norwegian agenda. Although the second 'No' vote, in the 1994 referendum, silenced the debate, its has been partially revived with the prospect for eastern enlargement. Because it has wreaked havoc with coalition politics on the centre right, and hangs like Damocles' proverbial sword over the current centre-right coalition which includes a 'suicide clause' that will terminate the coalition in the event that EU membership is put on the agenda, the debate remained cautious for the first two years of the 2001-2005 parliament. However, as the election looms closer, EU enlargement becomes a reality and another Norwegian application for membership seems on the horizon, most parties are reappraising their strategies. Perhaps most famously and radically, Prime Minister Bondevik of the Euro-sceptic Christian People's Party (KrF) has spoken of entering what he calls the 'thinking-box' for more than a year and possibly review his stance on Norway's participation in European integration.

Party Positions on European Integration

Every Norwegian political party has been confronted with, and adopted a position on, the European question. In 1961 the Labour (DNA) government came out more or less in favour of membership, but the party remained divided. The September election had sne.6(yc.n1Tc0.096)12s(5)-5I(t)5.5(ald)-5.1(i)0.2(ty)-5.1(Sociald)-5.1((st(Peo(5)-5IIb)-5.1(e-r t'e)-84[(s)05.1(s5 th e -5.4(rfe)-8.8(e14(rnduh)-661m.h)-682 M(e)-4.3(nwhip)-5.5Ivth e -5.4n1Tc69on-sociptviei -5.4bh eee theippeapest Coaps(H1Tc.3)(-5.4 andLibegr)-7.5(a-234Isy)-9.8()]TJ0 -1.1479 TD-4 Tc0.4862 th(Coaservrati)6.6(b)-5.1(e)2.5s (c)7.9(n)0.2id hve sin(ce favoue(d)]TJ)-80940 -1.1479 TD-0.0005 ae ctm since the 1994 referendum. Carl I. Hagen, the long-standing party leader, has called it a 'meaningless' party as far as the European question is concerned. These positions are summarised in table 1.

Table 1 – The Norwegian parties, with percentage of votes in the 1997 and 2001 elections.

Parties and	1961 - 1972	1972 - 1989	1989-2001	Currently
election results				
1997 and 2002				
Left Flank				
Socialist Left –	Hard Euro-	Hard Euro-	Hard Euro-	Some softening in
SV	sceptic, against	sceptic, against	sceptic, against	the party, not the
(SF before 1975)	NATO	NATO	EEA and NATO	leadership
1997: 6.0%				
2001:12.5%				
Social Democrat				
Labour – DNA				

1997: 35.0% 2001: 24.3% as the Labour and Liberal parties did in the 19070s. The second goal, pursuit of policy, is often the central focus in the literature on Euro-scepticism.¹⁰ However, given a few significant cases of parties changing or modifying their positions on European integration, the third and fourth goals, the quest for votes and the dynamics of party competition in office and in opposition, are increasingly valuable as explanatory variables.¹¹

Ideology and Policy Positions

In Norway, as elsewhere, the term 'European question' actually denotes a range of issues including both economic questions and less tangible positions on national identity, sovereignty and democracy. It is far more disparate than the divisions that are usually classified as cleavages.¹² Although material bases for opposition to European integration can be identified this has given rise to organised opposition, this builds on a broad range of issues and divisions. Euro-scepticism is perhaps better analysed as a broader term that "expresses the idea of contingent or qualified, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration."¹³ It therefore ranges from 'hard' principled Euro-scepticism which combines economic and value-based rejection of supranational integration, to the 'soft' contingent or qualified opposition to participation in European integration based on opposition to speciffon tff.3(dien)-5(..4()]7.57(ion,)t)6.7(.3(g)(t)5fang.3(int(usu-5.5(a))-5TDIroad)00 -

The economic issues are relatively easy to identify, inasmuch as Norwegian Euroscepticism draws support from sections of society that face increased uncertainty or loss of subsidies under EU membership, even though Norway has followed the EU in terms of economic policy liberalisation.¹⁶ Agricultural and fisheries policy has proved the main obstacles, because of high subsidies and reluctance to open Norwegian influence (e.g. on written language) and Swedish administration, transmitted through the Oslo elite, thus formed a basis for resistance to Europeanisation as a threat to the country's 'moral-cultural heritage' in the second half of the Twentieth Century.²⁴ This has since been extended to a debate on whether European integration represents a threat to democracy, fuelled by the 'democratic deficit' and 'subsidiarity' debates in the EU.²⁵ The notion that Brussels represented an extension of the threat from the central bureaucracy and mainstream (cosmopolitan) culture in Oslo was succinctly summed up in the 1972 slogan 'it is far to Oslo, but further to Brussels.'²⁶ The No to EU campaign's 1994 slogan centred on three key words – environment, solidarity and the ubiquitous term *folkestyre* – all of which were threatened by the 'union'.²⁷

righten. Norwegian partes long-term portey perspectives on Lo membership							
Economic cost-benefit	Non-material goals: values and identity						
analysis							
	EU not seen as a threat	EU seen as a threat					
EU impact seen as/expected to be positive	Conservatives – H	Progress Party – FrP					
or neutral	Labour – DNA	Christian People's Party – KrF					
EU impact seen as/expected to be negative	Liberals-V	Centre Party – Sp					
		Socialist Left – SV					

Figure 1. Norwegian parties' long-term policy perspectives on EU membership

Electoral Appeal and Coalition Games

Parties' strategies for electoral competition and their efforts to join or break coalition governments make up the second building bloc in the analysis of party-based Euroscepticism in Norway. First, parties' policy position on European integration can be linked to the parties positions' in the party system, along three dimensions of opposition. These dimensions are defined in terms of the parties' strategies for pursuit of votes and office, but also reflect their historical and organisational origin and policy goal. The three patterns include i) competition between two largest parties, which defines the left-right dimension of the party system; ii) cross-cutting competition based primarily on other issues, the 'third party' or parties in many party systems; and iii) competition on the flanks of the system, by new left or far right parties. In the Norwegian case, the Labour and Conservative parties come closest to the first strategy. Both appeal to largely pro-EU electorates, although a Labour also draws a significant share of Euro-sceptic voters. The three centre parties come closer electorates (more Euro-septic in the latter's case) and the Sp drawing support almost exclusively from voters who reject EU membership. On the flanks, the SV faces a consistently hard Euro-sceptic base, albeit one that faces the prospect of a reassessment arising out of the EU's eastern enlargement, whereas the FrP draws on a

toward a more catch-all like strategy (it began to use the English translation 'Christian Democratic Party of Norway' parallel to 'Christian People's Party').

The Flanking Parties – The Socialist Left and the Progress Party

The alternative non-catch-all strategy, the third pattern of opposition, is found on the flanks of the party system in the younger Socialist Left party (SV) and Progress Party (FrP). Again the difference from other parities lies more in party strategy than organisation, as both parties have opted for opposition on the flanks of the system rather than catch-all strategies or territorial interest-based opposition. Alone among the major parties, the two have never been in government. The SV's roots in Labour's neutralist, anti-NATO and anti-EEC left wing makes modification of its hard Eurosceptic stance difficult both from a policy standpoint and in terms of its electoral appeal. Its opposition to European integration provided the main unifying platform in the early 1970s. The party's somewhat softer stance on European integration in the early 1990s proved costly in the 1993 election, when it lost out to the Centre Party.³⁴ More recent attempts by the leadership to reopen a debate on Europe have been met with hostility by the party grassroots. However, the possibility of a coalition with Labour has generated some pressure for modification of the party programme. The party passed Labour in the opinion polls for the first time in March 2002, but like the FrP its fortunes according to polls fluctuate considerably.

On the far right, the free-market low-tax orientation of the Progress Party (FrP) has provided a modifying factor for a party that might otherwise be expected to oppose European integration given its hard-line stance on immigratioharde i.6(m)12.-5.299(iTJ0i)6.8y.6(m)1'pse fun e71.7(d)-5.3(bo(thp)-5.3((ppnen thrPe fose a e7143(d)-0-3()-5.3(the)5.3(uil)-459tl thathks facerisle.

Persistence and Change in Norwegian Euro-Scepticism

Since the question first emerged on the agenda in 1961, the debate on EU membership and has gone through three broad phases. The period up to the 1972 referendum

1961 – 1972: Deliberation, Prevarication and Polarisation

When the European question was raised seriously for the first time with the British application for EU membership in July 1961, the Norwegian political parties were confronted with the challenge of how to integrate a new issue into their political profiles. The election set for September left little time for to elaborate positions on European integration. Although Labour returned to power, it was now a minority government at the mercy of the socialist left SF's two MPs. The new government prevaricated, and De Gaulle's veto was welcomed as relief by many in the party.³⁶ The veto also ended the truce with the pro-EU conservatives, the first evidence of the indirect effect of the European question on coalition politics. A short-lived minority four-party centre-right coalition relieved DNA government for a month in 1963, and won the election two years later. However, the four were far from united on the European question, a fact Labour exploited by criticising the governments timid approach to the EU question.³⁷ Even the Conservatives, who had established their pro-EU stance early, would not replace 'integration' with explicit advocacy of membership until in the party programme until 1969. Though divided between the conservative southern and radical urban Oslo wings, the Liberals eventually came out in favour of membership in 1962 after a 43-13 vote in the party.³⁸ The KrF and Centre parties were more ambiguous, but despite the latter's opposition to membership it accepted association (partly to distance itself from the socialist left and communists).³⁹ 1965-69 was first and only time these parties would give up their Euro-scepticism in order to maintain a coalition. De Gaulle's second veto probably saved the government.⁴⁰

The four-party coalition's election victory was undermined by the radicalisation of the three centre parties, and particularly their youth wings, in the late 1960s over e.g. the Vietnam war and the 1968 protests in Europe. Although the three centre parties' barely addressed European integration in their 1969 manifestos, all decided to advice their voters to reject EU membership in the September 1972 referendum. When the EU question brought down the Per Borten (Sp) government in early 1971, the overwhelmingly hard Euro-sceptic Sp was free to openly reject membership. The Liberals' divisions became so severe that the party split after the referendum.⁴¹ KrF leader Lars Korvald stuck to a wait-and-see formula until the party conference adopted a 'No' stance in April 1972, but had declared himself privately for the 'Nos' the year before.⁴² Although the KrF leadership was evenly divided, its members and voters opposed EU membership by a four-to-one margin and some of its MPs were defying the party line in votes on Europe.⁴³ On the left, DNA's leadership was firmly committed to EU membership, as advocated in its 1969 manifesto, although the party

³⁶ O. Nordli [DNA PM 1976-81], Min Vei: Minner og Meninger, (Olso, Tiden, 1985).

³⁷ J. Lyng [H PM 1963], *Mellom øst og vest: Erindringer 1965-1968*, (Oslo Cappelen, 1976).

³⁸ K. Jensvold, Venstre og EEC-spørsmålet 1961-63, Hovedoppgave, University of Oslo, 1979.

³⁹ R. W. Kunudsen [Sp], "Senterpartiet og den nye Europa-debatten", in B. B. Knudsen (ed.), *Den Nye No-3.1*

was increasingly and bitterly divided. Trygve Bratteli (DNA), Borten's successor as

whereas the other parties criticised the EEA alternative as too limited (H) or going too far (SV, Sp).⁴⁷ On Labour's left flank, SV maintained opposition to any form of closer integration with the EU, although the anti-imperialist and -capitalist language of the

giving way to a DNA minority government led by Jens Stoltenberg. The main surprise was not the government's collapse, but how long it remained in place given that the pro-EU majority in parliament. European integration retained its place in the party programmes. Apart from DNA's softening of its pro-EU language in 1997, only FrP and V have modified their stances significantly. While the FrP has taken up an explicitly ambiguous position, V's 2001 programme opened for but does not welcome a new EU debate. KrF's 2001 manifesto Euro-scepticism is somewhat softer than four years earlier, while both SV and Sp retain their calls for leaving the EEA. The Conservatives maintained explicit advocacy of membership in 1997 and 2001. Even the DNA 2001 manifesto opened for membership during the 2001-05 parliament, presenting argument in favour and barely falling short of calling for immediate EU membership.

At the same time the implications of Norway's 'quasi-membership' of the EU through the European Economic Area have become clearer, and begun to affect the membership debate. Inasmuch as the agreement requires Norway to adopt new relevant EU legislation, and Norway has secured separate participation in the Schengen agreement, Norwegian public policy is increasingly made in the shadow of the EU.⁵⁴ Although legal sovereignty (the legal right to rule) is retained, effective sovereignty (exercise of power) is proving to be more limited than for EU members. Although the EEA agreement is intergovernmental in form, it has proven largely supranational in effect, with the EFTA Surveillance Authority playing a similar supervisory role for Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland as the Commission plays for Towards 2005: The European Question and Domestic Coalition Games

The H-KrF-V minority government that took office in 2001 election remains as divided over European integration as its bourgeois predecessors. The very survival of the government is contingent on the question of EU membership not being raised. The incoming leader of the Conservative party, Erna Solberg, is increasingly prioritising referendum (one on whether to negotiate a new deal with the EU.

from 'no' parties could sit in a coalition government that negotia (Aftenposten efforts to

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March 2004). In short, on the centre-right, the fu question are inextricably linked for some time to co

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Kristin Halvorsen remains committed to opposition to EU, EEA and NATO membership. Only Sp therefore faces no incentives to alter its Euro-sceptic strategy. A key difference between the two is that whereas SV will follow a (formally only advisory) referendum result in the formal vote in Parliament, SP-leader Åslaug Haga retains for herself the right to vote no in the event of a narrow referendum 'yes' (*Aftenposten* 20 June 2003). In short, while the 1972 result yielded a long period of