

FROZEN PARTY POLITICS OR CONTINGENT OPPOSITION? THE EUROPEAN QUESTION IN NORWAY AND THE 2005 ELECTION

Ever since the question of membership of the European Economic Community first came up in the summer of 1961, political opinion in Norway has been divided on the matter. President Charles de Gaulle's veto on British membership killed off the debate during the 1960s, but during the three years between de Gaulle leaving office and the Norwegian referendum on EEC membership in 1972 public and party opinion in Norway polarised. Norway became the first country to reject EEC membership by referendum. Twenty-two years later, in 1994, a second referendum was held. The parties stuck to their 1972 positions, and the outcome was almost identical: a second 'No' to the European Union. Yet parliamentary elections in Norway usually return majorities that favour close participation in European integration, and most governments have sought to strengthen the links with the EU. In 1994 Norway and most of the others members of the European Free Trade Association joined the European Economic Area, which grants them access to the Single European Market in return for accepting all new relevant EU legislation. In 2001 the Schengen agreement on passport-free travel was extended to non-EU members Norway and Iceland, along with the rest of Scandinavia. In addition, Norway participates in a number of other EU initiatives on an ad hoc basis. In short, Norway may be described as a quasi-member of the EU. It is closely involved with the core areas of European integration, accepts all new relevant EU legislation, but has no formal power to participate in decision making. On the surface, party opinion on 'the European questions' almost seems to have been frozen for four decades; but this is somewhat deceptive. The content of Euroscepticism has changed over time, and most parties continuously review and

West European party systems feature only one or two parliamentary parties that oppose EU membership, and these are usually found at the flanks of the system, Norway has long featured four Eurosceptic parties. The two parties that compete along the main left-right dimension, the Conservatives (*Høyre* – literally the Right) and Labour (DNA), are broadly pro-EU. However, three parties compete along a second important dimension that cross-cuts left-right competition, and pits the centre against the periphery, urban interest against rural, and religious against secular. This was the nineteenth century Left before the rise of socialism. The three parties that grew out of the old Left are now are usually considered ‘centre’ parties in left-right terms: the Liberals (*Venstre* – literally the Left), the Christian People’s Party (KrF) and the agrarian Centre Party (Sp); and all three oppose Norwegian membership of the EU. Finally, a third pattern of competition emerged as parties established themselves at the left and right flanks, in opposition to consensus politics. The Socialist Left (SV) was founded in 1975, building on the anti-NATO Socialist Peoples Party (SF) and the left-wing anti-EEC alliance that developed in the run-up to the first referendum. On the right flank the Progress Party (FrP) was formed in 1973. It is principally as a right-wing populist anti-tax party, includes both opponents and proponents of European integration, and gradually returned to a neutral position on European integration after advocating a ‘Yes’ in the 1994 referendum.

Every Norwegian political party has been confronted with, and adopted a position on, the European question. The way they dealt with this may be considered a matter of a strategic choice: a broad formula for how a party is going to compete, a combination of what its ends should be and by which means these should be pursued.¹ In the classical party politics literature a party’s key aims were the pursuit of votes and office.² This has since been supplemented by focus on the importance of internal party management and organisational survival, and the pursuit of policy, which in turn shapes both coalition games and the pursuit of votes.³ The key problem is that

¹ This is based on borrowing the concept from military and business studies, C. von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, (Berlin, Dümmlers Verlag, 1832); M. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, (New York, The Free Press, 1980).

² A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1957); W. Riker, *The Theory of Political Coalitions*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1962).

³ A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988); A. De Swaan, *Coalition Theories and Cabinet Formation*, (Amsterdam, Elsevier, 1973); I. Budge & M. J. Laver, “Office Seeking and Policy Pursuit in Coalition Theory”, *Legislative Studies*

maximising one goal may entail merely sacrificing another, or even fully-blown trade-offs, and herein lies the dilemmas of party strategy.⁴ When adopting and revising their stance on European integration, the Norwegian parties have taken into account not only their ideology and policy preferences, but also electoral and coalition politics. This explains the variations in intensity of preferences, the content of Euroscepticism and even revisions of party positions or actual policy on the European question.

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.⁵ Opposition to membership of the EU is often based on a combination of interests and values, where interest-driven opposition implies analysis of the economic costs and benefits to specific groups, and value-based opposition is based on identity, concepts of democracy, self-rule and sovereignty and foreign policy.⁶ The economic issues are relatively easy to identify, inasmuch as Norwegian Euroscepticism draws support from sections of society that face increased economic uncertainty or loss of subsidies under EU membership. This includes agriculture and fisheries, regions that fear they may lose economic transfers and positive discrimination, and some concerns that EU membership might adversely affect the welfare state and size of the public sector.⁷ Moreover, the Socialist Left has

grounds that it might lead to a more free-market regime. Value-driven Euroscepticism is more multi-faceted. It is partly related to the historical link between parliamentary democracy and sovereignty (during the Union with Sweden 1814-1905, which followed four centuries of Danish rule), and the notion that democracy can only operate properly, in the form of *participatory* democracy, in a nation state. In terms of

share of Eurosceptic voters). The three centre parties compete across the left-right dimension, with the Liberals and Christians drawing on mixed electorates (more Euro-septic in the latter's case) and the Centre drawing support almost exclusively from voters who reject EU membership. On the left flank the Socialist left attracts a core of Eurosceptic voters, but because its growth past the 7-percent level has involved attracting a large share of neutral or even pro-EU voters the party's electoral incentives are now mixed. On the right, the Progress Party attracts a mixed electorate.¹⁰ However, party positions may be modified due to coalition politics. Both Labour and the Conservatives face incentives to play down their Pro-EU stance if they are to attract the smaller parties to governing coalitions, at least as long as Norway remains a non-member of the EU. On the far right, the Progress Party hopes one day to work in Coalition with the Conservatives likewise provides incentives for it not to turn Euro-sceptic, but these aspirations are compatible with its ambiguous position. By contrast, until 2005 the Centre Party prioritised policy over coalitions, precipitating the collapse of coalition governments in 1971 and 1990. Likewise, the lack of coalitions between Labour and her left-wing competition before 2005 kept both parties relatively immune from pressure to moderate their respective pro- and anti-EU stances. As of 2005, however, all parties face incentives to moderate their policy stances.

Figure 2: Norwegian parties' strategic and tactical incentives Euro-scepticism: arrows indicate changes due to the 2005 election campaign and result.

Coalition government	Mainly pro-EU electorate	Vote-seeking Neutral/divided electorate	Mainly anti-EU electorate
Coalition politics/aspirations exerts moderating effect	Conservatives – H	Liberals – V	Christian People's Party – KrF
Coalition politics/aspirations exerts less moderating effect	Labour – DNA	Progress Party – FrP	Centre Party – Sp Socialist Left – SV

¹⁰ A poll by Opinion commissioned and reported by the NRK (26/04/2004) had the Conservative supporters' yes/no percentage ratio at 80/12 and Labour's at 62/22; followed by the Liberals at 64/24, Progress Party at 42/46, Socialist Left 34/47, Christian People's Party at 21/62 and Centre at 0/94.

The Norwegian Parties and European Integration, 1961 - 2005

The European question first became pressing in Norway when the UK decided to seek membership of the EEC in 1961. In contrast to the Danish and Irish governments, which quickly followed London's lead, the newly elected Labour government in Norway hesitated.¹¹ It eventually came out in favour of membership, but the party was less than united. Its new rival on the far left, the Socialist People's Party strongly opposed European integration. The Conservatives and Liberals came out in favour, but the Centre and Christian People's Party were divided. At this stage the implications of closer association with the EEC still ambiguous, and the three centre parties were open to it. Although the Centre opposed actual EEC membership, it was keen to distance itself from the socialist left and communists. In any case, De Gaulle's veto on enlargement defused the question, and made it possible for the four non-socialist parties to form a coalition government after the 1965 election. They were re-elected in 1969, but the government fell in 1971 when the EEC question came back on the agenda. The Centre party took the strongest anti-EEC stance apart from the Socialist People's Party. The Christian People's Party leadership was divided, but its membership more Eurosceptic. It stuck to a wait-and-see formula until the party conference adopted a 'No' stance in April 1972. The Liberals also opted for a 'No', but their divisions became so severe that the party split after the referendum. The two largest parties, Labour and the Conservatives, came out in favour of EEC membership. The Labour minority government, which had taken over in 1971, campaigned for EEC membership. When the referendum resulted in a 'No' victory of 53.5 to 46.5 percent the Labour government duly resigned, and handed over office to a small minority coalition made up of the three centre parties.

¹¹ H. O. Frøland, "Ambiguous Interests: Norway and the West European Market Formations 1959-62", *Arena Working Paper*, 25 (1998).

Table 1. Party positions on European Integration, as per programmes by election year.

	1961	1965	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005
Soc	Neg	Neg	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	None	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti
Lab	Fav	Fav	Pro	SQ	SQ	SQ	Fav	Fav	Pro	Fav	Fav	Pro
Cent	Neg	Fav	none	Anti	SQ	SQ	SQ	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti
Lib	Fav	Fav	SQ	SQ	None	SQ	Neg	Anti	Anti	Anti	SQ	Anti
Chr	SQ	SQ	SQ	SQ	None	None	SQ	SQ	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti
Con	Fav	Fav	Pro	Pro	Fav	Fav	Fav	Pro	Pro	Pro	Pro	Pro
Prog	--	--	--	None	Fav	None	None	Pro	Pro	SQ	SQ	SQ

Key: Anti – indicates explicit opposition to EEC/EU membership

Neg – indicates implicit negative attitude to participation in European integration

SQn – indicates explicit defence of the statusquo (FrP 2000: explC /P n()6((0)5(F)1(rP)6(2)5(0)-1(0)5(0)- TmT

Table 2: Norwegian governments since 1961

<i>Election</i>	<i>Government, coalition parties and status. Majority governments in bold</i>
1961	Minority Labour, interrupted by four-week centre-right cabinet in 1963.
1965	Majority centre-right (H, KrF, V, Sp)
1969	Majority centre-right continued, fell over EEC issue 1971. Minority Labour; then minority centre (KrF, V, Sp) after 1972 referendum.
1973	Minority Labour 1973

primarily by domestic politics and left-right competition, the breaking of governments has, as table 2 shows, been shaped also by the European question. In the 1960s and 1980s the centre-right coalitions depended on keeping Europe off the agenda. When the coalitions led by the Conservatives broke down in 1971 and 1990, the party was out of office for the next decade. The deal that the Conservatives reached with the Liberals and Christians in 2001 broke new ground in that the three parties formally agreed to keep Norway's relationship with the EU off the political agenda. The 'suicide clause' meant that the coalition would break up if the Conservatives were to push for EU membership; but it also meant that Norway maintained its path to ever closer cooperation with the EU through the EEA, Schengen and ad hoc cooperation. In 2004, when it became clear that Labour would not be able to persuade the Christian

1920s. In both cases part of the explanation lay in Norway's oil wealth.¹⁶ In 2005 it was the centre-right's turn: despite solid economic performance, top ratings in international competitiveness leagues and the country being nominated the best place to live by the UN five years running, the government could not win re-election.¹⁷ The governing parties sought to fight the election based on their management of the economy, but the opposition successfully focussed the campaign on health care education, kindergartens and care for the elderly. Having turned to the left with the Red-Green alliance, Labour's campaign carried little of the 'third way' rhetoric from 2001. On the far right, the Progress Party joined in the call for better public services, and combined this with calling for more liberalisation and lower taxes, arguing that the 'oil money' could be spent to accomplish this. Even more importantly, it announced that it would no longer support Bondevik as prime minister, on the grounds that he ruled out inviting the Progress Party into the coalition whatever the election outcome.

The Progress Party's withdrawal of support in June, just after the parliament closed for the summer recess, was the bombshell of the election campaign. It reduced the credibility of a government that was already under pressure and fighting a defensive campaign against an opposition that could (because of the oil money) call for both better services and lower taxes, as the Progress Party did. The Red-Green parties actually promised to increase 002 Tn that coocull for both

percent mark and the Progress Party replacing the Conservatives as Norway's second biggest party. The junior partners in the Red-Green coalition performed less well, but could be pleased with the overall coalition victory. The results are reported in table 3; they provided Norway with its first majority coalition government since 1985.

Table 3: The 12 September 2005 election – results and changes from 2001

Party	Votes	Percent	Change	Seats	Change
Socialist Left	232,965	8.8	-3.7	15	-8
Labour Centre	862,454	32.7	+8.4	61	+18

and the parties face incentives to revise and adjust their positions. The Progress Party and the Liberals have adjusted their positions the most, to the present neutrality or near-neutrality on the EU issue, the Christian People's Party had gone through internal debates but remains cautiously Eurosceptic, whereas the Socialist Left faces incentives to change but has so far resisted this pressure, and the Centre remains staunchly Eurosceptic. Labour and Conservatives maintain a pro-EU stance, but have at times been obliged to suspend their quest for EU membership. The centre-right successfully quarantined the EU question for the duration of the 2001-2005 parliament, but although the Red-Green parties have reached a coalition agreement that is an attempt to kill off the EU issue as effectively this might prove somewhat more difficult. Labour holds the pivotal position in parliament, its two partners are principled Eurosceptics, and the Conservatives may want to raise the EU question. The new government may be able to keep the European question off the agenda, but this will require somewhat more careful management than it did during the 2001-2005 parliament.