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Why has the issue of EU- membership such low salience in Norwegian party politics?

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Master thesis
Master European Studies
Double Diploma
Universiteit Twente (Msc)

WWU Münster (Ma)
3 Semester

Date of delivery: 23.04.2009

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Introduction

“We don't discuss membership (of the EU), because then it would be impossible to form a government in this country. A permanent martial law has been introduced into Norwegian politics. Those who want Norway to join the EU keep quiet, because they are in government or want to join it. Political leadership has been abolished on the EU-question”¹

These strong words, published in January 2009, stems from editorial of one of the largest regional newspapers in Norway. Tough it may be harsh on Norwegian politicians to declare political leadership dead and buried, the fact remains that the issue of EU membership is remarkably absent from Norwegian party politics. Among some EU-supporters, it was predicted that that the ongoing financial crisis would change the situation and spark debate. All the while, the Norwegian pro-EU movement has repeatedly tried to raise the issue.² But while the Nordic neighbor Iceland looks to save a broken economy by joining the European Union, little has happened in Norway. Recent polls even show stronger public opposition against membership³.

In view of the growing importance of the EU, the near absence of the membership issue on the political agenda is remarkable. In recent years, there has been a significant development of both widening and deepening levels of integration, with increase in member states. Especially since the early 1990's this process has accelerated, with the European Community becoming the European Union, the issue of a common currency and the acceptance of 15 new members to make it 27 in total. Thus, the European Union now encompasses all of western Europe, and the greater

¹ Bergen Tidende (Editorial): Skaff en EU-politikk. In Bergen Tidende (Newspaper) 14.01.2009

² Nationen: Finanskrisen vil gi EU-debatt. In Nationen (Newspaper) 30.10.2008

³ Ukeavisen Ledelse: Flere sier nei til EU. In Ukeavisen ledelse (Newspaper) 15.01.2009.

part of the east. With the exception of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, all major European states have accepted accession as the way forward. Among most of the rest, there are applications to join.⁴

In spite of this, Norway has voluntarily chosen to stand outside the union. As the only country, Norway has turned down the invitation to join the union and has in fact done so twice. Both times, in 1972 and 1994, it was the result of a referendum in which the No-side narrowly got the majority of the votes.⁵ Since then, the EU membership issue has remained thorny and parties are careful not to put too much emphasis on the subject. For years the whole EU-issue has appeared frozen in Norwegian party politics.⁶ That is not to say that Norway is not involved in European integration. Through the European Economic Area-agreement, it participates in the internal market. Both citizens and companies enjoy the freedom of movement within the European Union, while participation in turn means that Norway must adopt the legislation for the market that is decided upon in Brussels. The result has been the preservation of the status quo: a close relationship with the EU, without any right to participate in the development of the integration project. The claim that this constitutes a democratic deficit is not without merit⁷. The situation can be described as some sort of quasi-membership, similar to the status of membership candidates at an advanced stage in the accession process. With Iceland edging closer to membership, and Switzerland having secured a bilateral agreement, Norway has become a novelty in the political geography of Europe.⁸

Taken together, the close connections to the union, the democratic problem of adopting legislation without taking part in the decision-making process, the widening and deepening of the European integration and finally the recent financial crisis are all factors one would expect to raise the question of Norwegian membership in the European Union. In spite of this, the issue of EU membership is remarkably absent in the political debate.⁹ Even among parties with principal stances in favor of taking

⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica : *European Union*. In Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009

⁵ Huuse, p. 6

⁶ Sitter (2003), p.16

⁷Eriksen, p. 1

⁸Eriksen, p. 1-2

⁹Because the issue is not much discussed, there is also not a lot being written on the subject. However, attempts by the pro-EU movement to raise the topic illustrate how little is happening with regards to

Norway into the union, such as Labour and the Conservatives, there is little will to put EU-accession on the political agenda. This makes it reasonable to raise the questions as to why Norwegian politicians are so little concerned with the membership issue. In light of this, the central research question is:

- **Why has the issue of EU-membership such low salience in Norwegian party politics?**

The research question directs the focus of the study towards the political parties. To answer it, I have to inquire into how the parties formulate their EU-related policies, and why they decide on their respective stances. It requires research into the factors that are involved in the decision-making on EU-policy and finding out what is the determining consideration. By doing so, I can draw some lessons about what determines party behavior with regards to EU policies. With the knowledge of what informs EU policies, I will attempt to explain why the membership issue is in fact not on the political agenda.

A natural place to start is reviewing normative outlook of the parties, their ideologies. These principles are important in informing the policy goals of the parties. In this study, it will be relevant to see how the political ideas of the parties are expressed in terms of EU policy. The lack of interest in joining the EU may be a result of ideologically based opposition towards the union. Conversely, political realities can make parties deviate from some of their principles. Factors connected to the competition in the political system, together with considerations for other political targets, may make parties give the membership issue a low priority. Also, a party's principle goals may be achieved without membership, and so it will not be interested in the topic. The basic conflict between principles and pragmatism can help directing the research. I therefore introduce the sub-question:

membership. See Wiker, Lars Johan: *-Spekulativt av Europabevegelsen*. In Nationen (Newspaper), 30.10.2008 and the editorial quoted at the beginning of the article, complaining about the lack of EU-policies Bergen Tidende (Editorial): *Skaff en EU-politikk*. In Bergens Tidende (Newspaper) 14.01.2009

- **Is party behavior towards EU membership a result of ideological views or strategy?**

Additionally, the two rejected referenda on EU-accession and the negative polls mentioned earlier in the introduction indicate an important role for public opinion for the membership-issue in Norwegian party politics: the low salience may well be due to the parties not wanting to alienate important parts of the electorate. It will therefore be relevant to see how the low popularity of accession affects party policy. As a further sub-question, I therefore ask

- **Are the parties EU-policies 'chained' to public opinion?**

The sub-questions presented above will be directed at each individual party to find out what their priorities are. Because the Norwegian parliament holds seven parties, there is bound to be some differences in EU policy. Simplified, there are two main groups, with two large parties in favor of accession, and the seven others either negative or neutral. Also in general politics the span is quite wide, with far left socialists and economic liberalisms on the right. The two EU-positive parties, Labour and the Conservative, belong to the left and right respectively.¹⁰ Their ideological differences make them traditional adversaries in the political debate. Still, no party is strong enough to form a lone majority government. That means any government with majority must be a coalition. Classic rational choice theory tells us that parties are organizations that “seeks to propel candidates to elected office in pursuit of certain policy aims”¹¹. Taking this into account, the principal goal of getting the candidates into office may result in parties putting their principles on the EU-issue to the side in order to be part of the government. On this basis, I formulate the following working hypothesis:

The question of EU membership has low salience in Norwegian party politics because all the likely government coalitions are bound to include parties with a negative attitude towards accession. Hence, parties will play down the issue to make

¹⁰ Sitter (2001), p. 28

¹¹ Bathory and Sitter, p. 55

it possible to form a governing coalition.

This suggestion as an explanation deviates considerably from many of the classic answers as to why Norway is not a member of the European Union. Certain suggestions are often repeated, some less informed than others. A typical explanation points to the wealth generated by the oil industry. It says that Norway is so rich that the country does not need EU-membership (or is unwilling to share). Others believe Norway stay out to protect its fisheries. Another explanation says that the historical experience of foreign dominance through the unions with Denmark and Sweden has made Norwegians reluctant to transfer autonomy away from the nation state. Even nationalism has been suggested. All of these explanations may contribute something to a narrative as to why Norwegian voters have turned down accession twice. However, it is difficult to falsify or confirm these ideas.¹²

With my paper, I hope to make a contribution to the research on Norway and the EU. It can be valuable in the sense that it offers an up-to-date study of the political attitudes and motivations of the Norwegian parties in relation to European integration and EU-membership. My chief source of information will be first hand interviews with parliamentarians and party officials, something which separates this attempt from similar studies based on secondary literature and statistics (Sitter 2001,2003, Aspinwall 2002, Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Also, apart from polls on the will of joining the EU, the focus is purely on the political parties and the Norwegian party system. By doing so, I try to discover factors of and insights to the behavior of the parties that are separate from more grand explanations involving high numbers of social and economic factors. It might also help to see if it is the processes within the political system that determines the actuality of the issue, or outside institutions like elections and factors like party popularity. Finally, my approach combines the theoretical frameworks from two previous studies made by Aspinwall (2002) and Sitter (2003) respectively, to create a new framework of analysis. Together with this, it uses a typology adapted from Kopecky and Mudde (2002). By using this typology, the Norwegian parties can be classified more clearly according to their EU stance than

¹² Encyclopædia Britannica: *Norway*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009

in previous studies. Thus, it provides a good overview of the support and opposition towards the EU in Norwegian party politics. Hopefully, the theoretical approach can be a useful point of reference for future studies in this gravely understudies field.

The structure of the paper runs as follows: In chapter two, I first review the literature on the behavior of political parties and look at articles that specifically deal with behavior and attitudes as related to the EU. I then propose a theoretical framework, based on the theories of Sitter and Aspinwall. Also, a typology for party position on integration is presented. In chapter three, I present the method and how the interviews were conducted. In order to give the empirical data a proper context, chapter four provide some information on the Norwegian political system. Chapter five is dedicated to the data that the interviews wielded. In the sixth chapter, I conduct an analysis of the data in light of the theoretical framework. This way, i hope to answer by research question and put the hypothesis to the test. At the very end, in chapter seven, I present my conclusion.

Chapter Two: Theory

Political parties

In order to answer the research questions, it is necessary to look towards theories that explain party behavior. These can tell us what factors determine how parties act in their political systems. While it is not the task of this paper to take on a grand analysis of parties and party systems, a look at the literature on political parties is a sensible point of departure. Parties and party systems is a well developed field of research. Maurice Duverger is an early pioneer in this department. His classic work *Les Partis Politiques* (1951) is a groundbreaking study of political parties and how they function in political systems. Duverger sees parties as a modern invention, first emerging in their proper sense after 1850. Their development is closely connected to the rise of democracy and increased importance of parliaments at this time. The specific structure and organization of the parties depended on the conditions and

institutional setting they were created in. This institutionalist view on political competition, help account for national differences between political parties.¹³ Duverger put special emphasis on the importance of the election system. He formulated the rule that “simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two party system”.¹⁴

Les Partis Politiques initiated a wave of studies on parties and party systems. It was followed by important contributions by Neumann (1956), Michel (1962), Eldersveld (1964), Epstein (1967), Rokkan & Lipset (1967), Henig & Pinder (1969), and Sartori (1976). Where Duverger considered the various political institutions as the determining factors in party systems, Epstein and Sartori limited their focus to only one: competition. This view is countered by Lipset & Rokkan, who explain “political phenomena primarily by reference to social phenomena that underlie them”.¹⁵ These interpretations represents the main lines of discussion in later literature within this field. For more recent studies, see Ware (1996), Wolinetz (1998) and Diamond & Gunther (2001).

Innovative as his study was, Duverger made no attempt to actually formulate a definition of political parties. In most of the works that succeeded his 1951 work, a definition of the term has been subject of debate. No definition is perfect, but an understanding of what a party actually is, serves as a useful reference for the proceeding work. For the purpose of this work, the variation of Neumann is preferred. It is specific enough to describe the basic purpose and goals political parties, and at the same wide enough to cover the many variations of what is today understood by the term. In his *Modern Political Parties* (1956) he describes parties as:

the articulate organization of society's active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of governmental power and who compete for popular support with another or other groups holding divergent views (...) It is the great intermediary which links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political action within the larger political

¹³ Duverger, p. 1-2

¹⁴ Ware, p. 191

¹⁵ Ware, p. 8-9

community.¹⁶

Attitudes to integration

The aforementioned studies and the definition of Neumann are worth keeping in mind when trying to explain party behavior. However, the topic of this paper is of a rather specific nature. This means that the primal focus on literature must be limited to those authors who deal with party behavior in relation to EU membership. Several articles try to explain why parties support or are opposed to the European Union. Nick Sitter (2001, 2003) argues that the choice of stance to European integration is a strategic decision, linked to the party's position in the party system. Policy is a calculated effort to reconcile the main goals (survival, policy, votes, office) of the party.¹⁷ Kopecky and Mudde (2002) ask whether Euro-scepticism is a result of ideology or strategy? Based on their research, they claim that parties do not change their principle stand towards European integration¹⁸. They might soften or harden their position towards the EU, but never beyond the borders of their general stance. The same is true for supporters of European integration.¹⁹

Similarly, Aspinwall (2002) thinks that “party ideology is closely correlated to its support for integration”²⁰. The location of parties along the ideological left-right space gives a good explanation of stances on integration.²¹ While parties with a centrist ideology tend to be favourable to European integration, parties at the margins tend to be negative.²² On a different vein, Marks and Wilson (2000) outline “a theory of party positions based on social cleavages”²³. According to this theory, the issue of European integration get incorporated into long standing cleavages, and assimilated into party ideologies.²⁴ Their work is a continuation of the tradition established by

¹⁶ Neumann, p. 396

¹⁷ Sitter (2003), p.1

¹⁸ European integration is understood as EU-related integration.

¹⁹ Kopecky & Mudde, p. 319-320

²⁰ Aspinwall, p. 92

²¹ Aspinwall, p. 82

²² Aspinwall, p. 84

²³ Marks & Wilson, p. 433

²⁴ Marks & Wilson, p. 435-437

Rokkan & Lipset (1967), who identified four lines of cleavages: Centre-periphery, state-church, land-industry and owner-worker.²⁵

Additionally, there is a secondary group of theories by authors who try to explain attitudes to EU-integration in broader terms. Though not directly directed towards political parties, they would nevertheless affect party behavior. Sean Carey (2002) found that strong national identities equal low levels of support for the EU. He therefore concludes that national identity is an obstacle to integration. According to Elisabeth Hooghe (2003), there is a divide between elite and public opinion on the EU. These attitudes are based on conflicting wishes about how the EU should be. Citizens desire a 'caring' union, with Europeanized market-flanking policies that protect them from the pressures of capitalism. In contrast to this, elites want integration to develop according to functionalist logic, with a large common market and unified external powers. The EU has largely been a story of negative integration, building down barriers and creating a common market. In recent years there has also been a move towards a more unified foreign policy.²⁶ It is therefore little surprise to find that elites have a much more positive opinion about the European Union.²⁷ This is also true for political elites.²⁸ Her conclusion therefore adds weight to the argument that integration is an elite-driven process

Pragmatism vs Idealism

All these theories offer something valuable to the study of party behavior. However, we must limit ourselves to the theories that can help us in this particular study. For this purpose, the party system theories of Sitter and Aspinwall have been singled out. There are three principal and interrelated reasons for choosing these two authors. Firstly, both theories can be tested by the same data. Simplified, it is possible to see if the position on integration is in accordance with the ideological principles of the party or not. Secondly, they represent sharply contrasting solutions to the same

²⁵ Ware, p. 185-190

²⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica: *European Union*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009

²⁷ Hooghe, p.282

²⁸ Hooghe, p.295

problem. While Sitter sees party behavior towards integration as pragmatic, Aspinwall concludes that parties handle European integration in accordance with ideological principles. They practically negate each other. The inclusion and testing of opposing theories makes the study more interesting. It also means the study can contribute to finding out which of the two explanations is more accurate. Thirdly and finally, the two theories can be incorporated into the same model, and the same method of data-collection.

Sitter: EU stance as determined by Strategy

As mentioned above, Sitter consider party behavior to be a strategic decision. The strategy is chosen after taking into account factors which influence the success of policies. He identifies four such goals or factors²⁹:

- The survival of the party
- The pursuit of its preferred policy outcomes
- The pursuit of votes
- The quest for office

Sitter illustrates how these four goals inform the strategy (See figure 1). In the figure, the goals are translated into four main factors that the party leadership must take into consideration. Firstly, survival of the party is connected to the **party organization** (1). If the pursuit of votes takes to heavy a toll on the principles of the party, the leadership may risk a faction breaking out or being overthrown by the membership. Put differently, a certain degree of **ideological** fidelity is required to maintain the loyalty of the core support. Overthrow is more likely to happen where the party organization hands the members considerable control over the leadership. Also, some parties are connected to external organizations, such as labour unions or financial benefactors with vested interests. These factors combined result in varying degrees

²⁹ Sitter (2003), p.4

of limits to what policies the party leadership can pursue.³⁰

The party organization thus represents some constrain on the three other goals which inform the strategy. These, in turn, are interrelated. Policy goals may be achieved both inside and outside of government, but is natural to assume that both electoral support and being part of a ruling coalition will help the achievements of these goals. However, a coalition requires compromise on some goals, while pursuit of more votes will alter some policies to make the party appeal to a greater part of the electorate. Thus, **the pursuit of policy goals** (2) is connected to both coalition politics and electoral appeal. As already indicated, **the quest for votes** (3) requires the party leadership to take electoral appeal into consideration. The same holds true for **the pursuit of office** (4), which often involves the factor of coalition politics.³¹

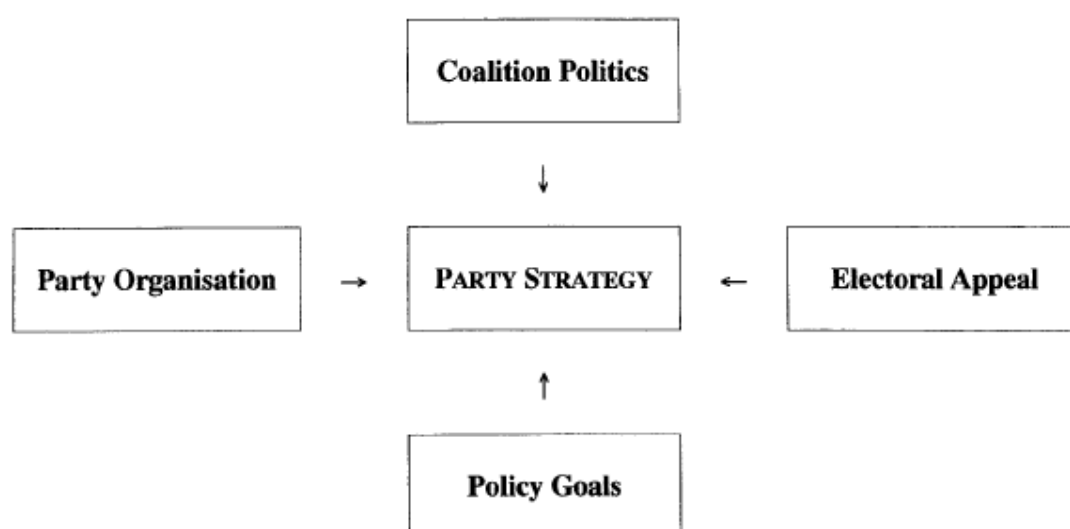


Figure 1: Sitter's strategy model (Sitter 2003, p.5)

The goals need to be balanced according to the priorities of the party, and which strategy it wants to follow. It is a delicate balance, as one goal may run contrary to another. For example, a party may choose to moderate some of its policies to broaden its appeal and attract more votes. While this aids the quest for office, it comes at the price of policy goals. Similarly, a party may enter into a coalition. This will strengthen their bid for office, but also involve some policy trade-offs between

³⁰ Sitter (2003), p.3-4

³¹ Sitter (2003), p. 4-5

the involved parties. If the coalition partner is unpopular, the party may even lose some votes. Figure 2 is an overview of the connection between goals and factors while figure 3 shows an example of how the different factors may influence each other.³²

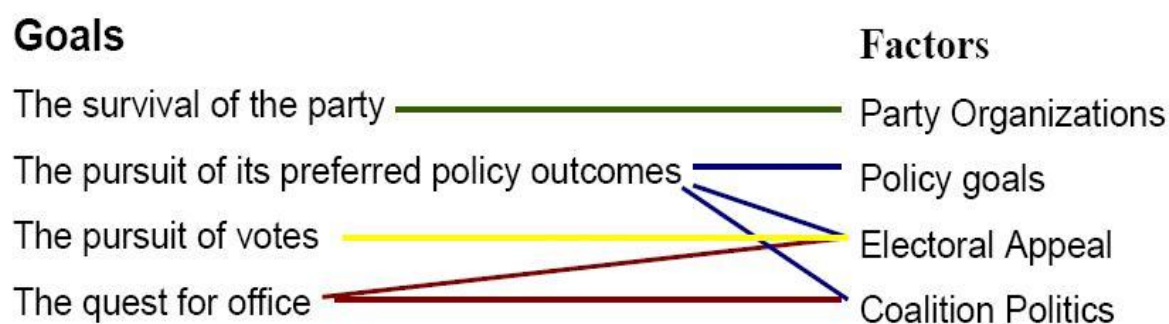


Figure 2: The connection between party goals and factors

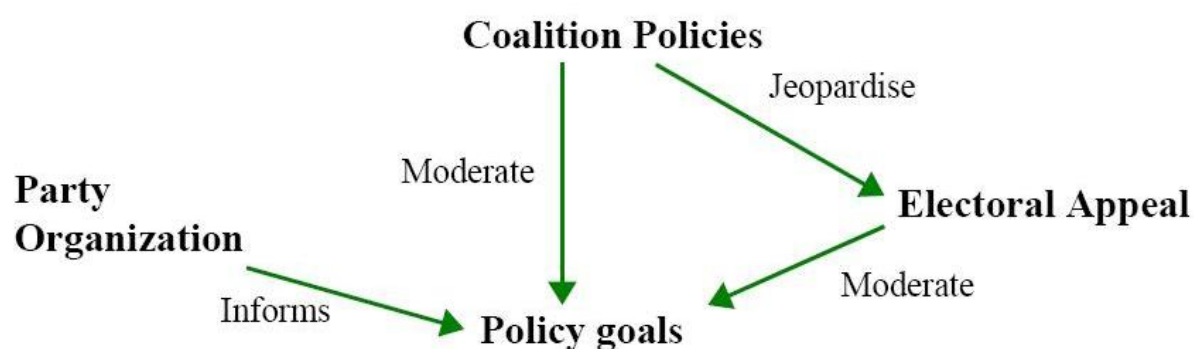


Figure 3: An example of how political factors can influence each other

Choice of strategy

As seen, Sitter identifies four goals for political parties. He translates these goals into four main factors which need to be taken into account when deciding on policies. According to this, strategy is then the priorities and decisions made by the parties, in

³² Sitter (2003), p. 4-5

relations to these factors, to achieve their goals. Or, as Downs (1957) puts it, strategy is the link between goals and their achievement. Simplified, the main decision is between the long term constraints of party organization and identity and the short term incentives for votes and office.³³

So far, the theory has shown the factors parties must consider when they decide upon a strategy. However, this tells us little about why a party would choose a specific strategy or what kind of strategy can be expected from which type of party. The real explanatory power of Sitter's theory is that it links party strategy to its position in the political system. More specifically, the **preferences of the party in relation to the four goals** are linked to whether the party finds itself close to the political centre or at the margins.³⁴ From this point of departure, he identifies three kinds of party strategy:

- Catch-all
- Interest representation
- Protest

Catch-all parties typically design their strategy to maximize votes and support the pursuit of office. Consequently, there is less emphasis on ideology and policy commitments. To attract voters, they instead focus on specific issues. This is not to say that these parties are not apolitical. Rather, Catch-all parties consciously choose to maintain a moderate ideological image to appeal to as large part of the electorate as possible. Classic rational choice theory defines parties as organizations that “seek to propel candidates to elected office in pursuit of certain policy aims”³⁵. For the Catch-all party, a mainstream political path is considered the best strategy to achieve this target. A Catch-all party typically finds itself close to the center of the party system.³⁶

Still, a party in office is not necessarily a Catch-all party. Neither can any party leadership overnight decide to adopt a Catch-all strategy. In order to have the

³³ Sitter (2003), p. 18

³⁴ Sitter (2003), p.1

³⁵ Sitter and Bathory, p.55

³⁶ Sitter (2003), p.6

freedom of action to execute such a strategy, the leading cadre of a party must have a certain independence from the party organization. The level of autonomy is dependent on how the party's decision structure is organized, how radical the ideology is and how the party is financed. When a party elite is less dependent on the membership for financing and policy configuration, it is more likely to adopt a Catch-all strategy. This does not mean that other types of parties can not adopt a Catch-all strategy. However, in parties where the constraints from the party organization are stronger, there is greater risk of internal dissent and factions breaking out. Thus, party leadership can decide to change the party strategy, but need to take into consideration the goal of party survival when making the decision. It is far from given that the party will regard a Catch-all strategy as the best way of achieving the party goals.³⁷

Sitter highlights **interest representation** as the opposite strategy from Catch-all. For parties with an interest representation strategy, “policy goals are likely to outweigh vote maximization and the quest for office”³⁸. Instead of attempting to please all, they focus on a section of the electorate with specific interests or ideological preferences. Because of the strong connection to particular aim or political identity, the membership tend to retain firmer control over the leadership of the party. In an interest representation party, it is therefore harder to transform the strategy.³⁹ Interest representation parties are typically found around the margins of the political center.

A third group consist of parties with **populist** strategies. These are recognized by being at the flanks of the system, and having dominant leadership with strong control over the membership and policy goals of the party. In Sitter's description, there is a flowing transition between these parties and those parties which started out with a specific aim or as populist, but later moved towards a Catch-all platform.⁴⁰ Populist parties are usually found at the margins, but might try to transform themselves into Catch-all parties.

³⁷ Sitter (2003), p.6

³⁸ Sitter (2003), p.7

³⁹ Sitter (2003), p. 6-7

⁴⁰ Sitter (2003), p. 7

Strategy & European Integration

Importantly, the relation between type of party and political positions is translated into **the European question**. As party strategy is informed by position in the party system, so is the position on integration. Essentially, EU has always been a government-driven project. To be in government results in identification with EU policies. A staunch EU-reject position is therefore hardly compatible with a mainstream political strategy. Therefore, Catch-all parties are presumed to have an overall positive stance towards European integration.⁴¹

In contrast, parties at the margins are not tied to restrictions on the EU-issue. Since they prioritize policy (or protest) over the quest for office, they are more likely to stick with the ideological stance on the EU question. Typically, but for contrasting reasons, parties on the far left and far right are negative towards European integration.⁴² The same holds for parties connected to a specific interest group. These parties are likely to remain true to the specific identity of the party. A good example is the Centre Party in the Norwegian parliament, who has traditionally represented agrarian interests.⁴³

Simplified, this entails that position on European Union membership is connected to the party position on the left-right scale of the party system. Parties close to the centre will be positive, whereas those at the margins are mostly negative. This is further reinforced, as parties on the flanks to some extent cast their policies in contrast to those in the middle.⁴⁴

Aspinwall in relation to Sitter

⁴¹ Sitter (2003), p.8

⁴² European integration is understood as EU-related integration.

⁴³ Sitter (2003), 8-9

⁴⁴ Sitter (2003), p. 6

At this point, it is useful to nuance Sitter's explanation with that of Aspinwall. In one respect, their theories are quite similar. Both see position in the political spectrum as decisive for whether a party supports the EU or not.⁴⁵ What divides them, is the reason given for why a party takes a specific position. As seen, Sitter view position on European integration as a result of calculated strategy. In contrast, Aspinwall put more emphasis on party principles and identity. When formulating the integration stance, the main consideration is between the need for international cooperation and the desire for national autonomy. The different party ideologies offer competing visions of which priority between these two factors best serve national interests. The party leadership represents this view. Thus, the stance on European integration is determined by ideology.⁴⁶

But which ideologies are positive and which are negative towards European integration? According to Aspinwall, the dispute is not between the political left and right. The parties at the edges of the ideological axis tend to have similar (negative) stances, though for quite different reasons. On the left, there is fear that the market orientation of the EU will lead to erosion of state welfare organizations. On the right, parties are concerned with the preservation of state autonomy. The main divergence is actually between the political centre and the margins. Centrists accept interdependence as something positive, and the creation of “binding rules within international organizations” (integration) as a positive consequence of this interdependence. They subscribe to the liberal argument that integration will lead to common welfare gains.⁴⁷ Therefore, Aspinwall claim that “parties with centrist ideologies tend to be favourable to European integration. Parties with non-centrist ideologies tend to be unfavourable to integration”⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ Aspinwall, p.84

⁴⁶ Aspinwall, p. 84-85

⁴⁷ Aspinwall, p. 86-87

⁴⁸ Aspinwall, p. 84

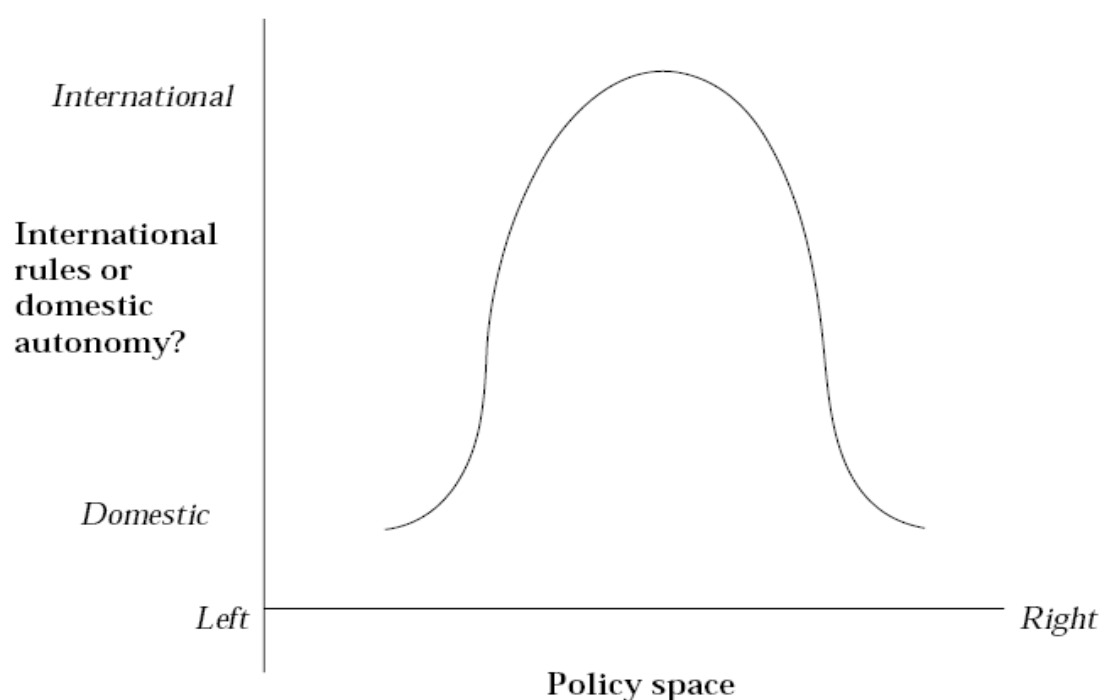


Figure 4: The political left-right space with preference curve for European Integration (Aspinwall, p. 85)

Aspinwall demonstrates his rule by introducing the support for integration into the political left-right space. Here it takes the shape of an inverted V, with “support for integration declining at a constant rate as parties move away from the median ideological position”⁴⁹ (See figure 4). He shares Sitters observation that that governing parties are generally positive to integration. For his model, this means that governing parties must also mostly be centrist. This is explained with reference to Ljiphart (1994), who judges proportional systems as biased towards centrist government. In such systems (for example Norway), centrists will therefore be “elected in a predictable manner”.⁵⁰ Aspinwall sees little or no role for public opinion in pushing EU-issues to influence government preferences on integration.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Aspinwall, p. 92

⁵⁰ Aspinwall, p. 106

⁵¹ Aspinwall, p. 103

Integration into a common model

How can then these two theories be combined for the purpose of the the research questions? Both give explanations, though contrasting, on what basis parties make their decisions. To start with, the theories must be established in relation to each other, but within the same framework. This means that the data collected must push us in the direction of one of the explanations. The factors (that makes up policy decisions) of both Sitter and Aspinwall has been combined into a model (see figure 5). It shows the relationship between ideology and the other factors. As seen, ideology is important to the membership of the party, as well as to inform the policy goals. On the opposite end, coalition politics and electoral appeal are factors that requires strategic choices. What must be determined, is whether it is ideology or the other factors that determine the position on integration. This can be done by comparing ideological stand on the EU with actual policies. With this established, it is possible to analyse whether the low focus on EU in Norwegian party politics is caused by hostile or neutral ideologies or strategic choices.

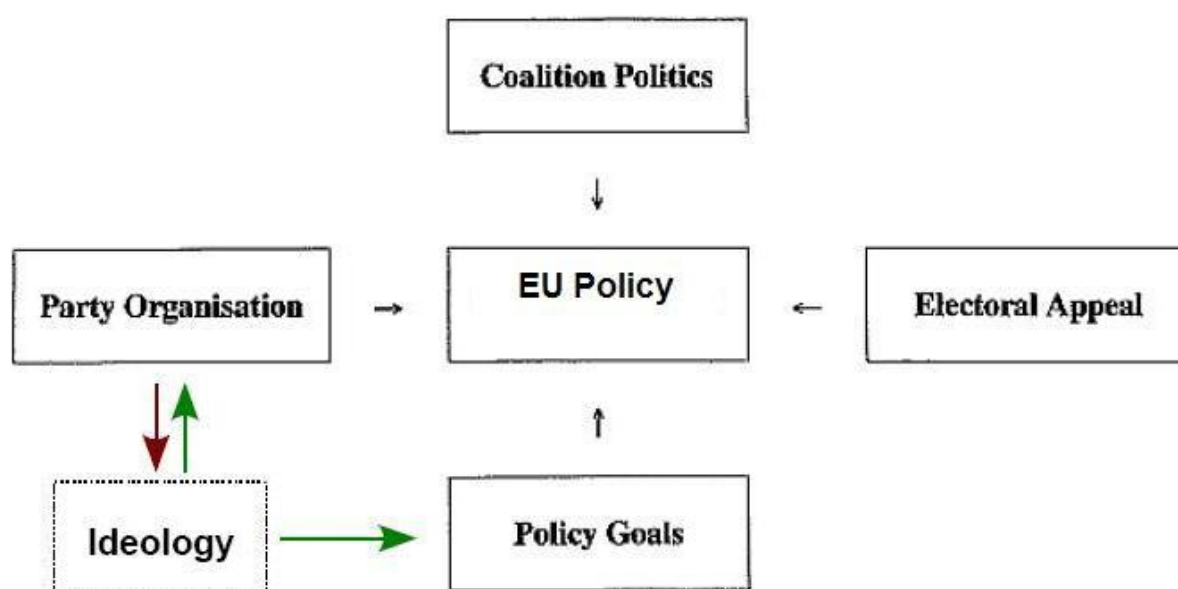


Figure 5: Sitter's model (figure 1) with ideology factor integrated

Adding a Typology

The research question and hypothesis requires a lot of information to be taken into consideration. This might make it difficult to keep track of the different integration attitudes of parties. Therefore, terms and labels are needed to separate one EU stance from another. In their 2002 article 'The Two Sides of Euroscepticism', Kopecky & Mudde presented a typology that fits well for the purpose of this study. They divide attitudes to integration into two dimensions and four ideal type positions. By adopting these labels into the theoretical framework, integration politics within the Norwegian political landscape becomes easier to comprehend.⁵²

To start with, the typology uses David Easton's distinction between different forms of political support to divide between specific and diffuse support for European integration. This is done to highlight the “distinction between the ideas of European integration, on the one hand, and the European Union as the current embodiment of these ideas, on the other hand”⁵³. *Diffuse support* is understood as support for the general ideas of European integration. These are defined as the basic ideas underlying the EU: institutionalized cooperation through pooling of sovereignty and integration into a common liberal market economy. *Diffuse support* enable us to separate between *Europhiles* and *Europhobes*. Europhiles believe in the general ideas of European integration. Actors within this group represent a wide range of views of what the EU should be, but have the general ideas of European integration in common. Contrary to this, Europhobes “do not support (or often even oppose) the general ideas of European integration”^{54 55}.

Specific support refers to support of how European integration is actually practiced (through the EU), and how it is developing. Here, the division is between *EU-optimists* and *EU-pessimists*. *EU-optimists* are positive to how the EU is and how it is developing. This does not mean that parties belonging to this group are never

⁵² Kopecky and Mudde, p.297

⁵³ Kopecky and Mudde, p.300

⁵⁴ Kopecky & Mudde, p. 300

⁵⁵ Kopecky & Mudde, p. 300-301

critical to EU-policies, but a generally support towards the Union. Parties that accept the EU overall belong to this group. *EU-pessimists*, although positive toward the institution of EU, feel that the current EU (or how it is developing) is far from their interpretation of how the union should be. Still, members of this group do not oppose membership because they hope to change the institution from within.⁵⁶

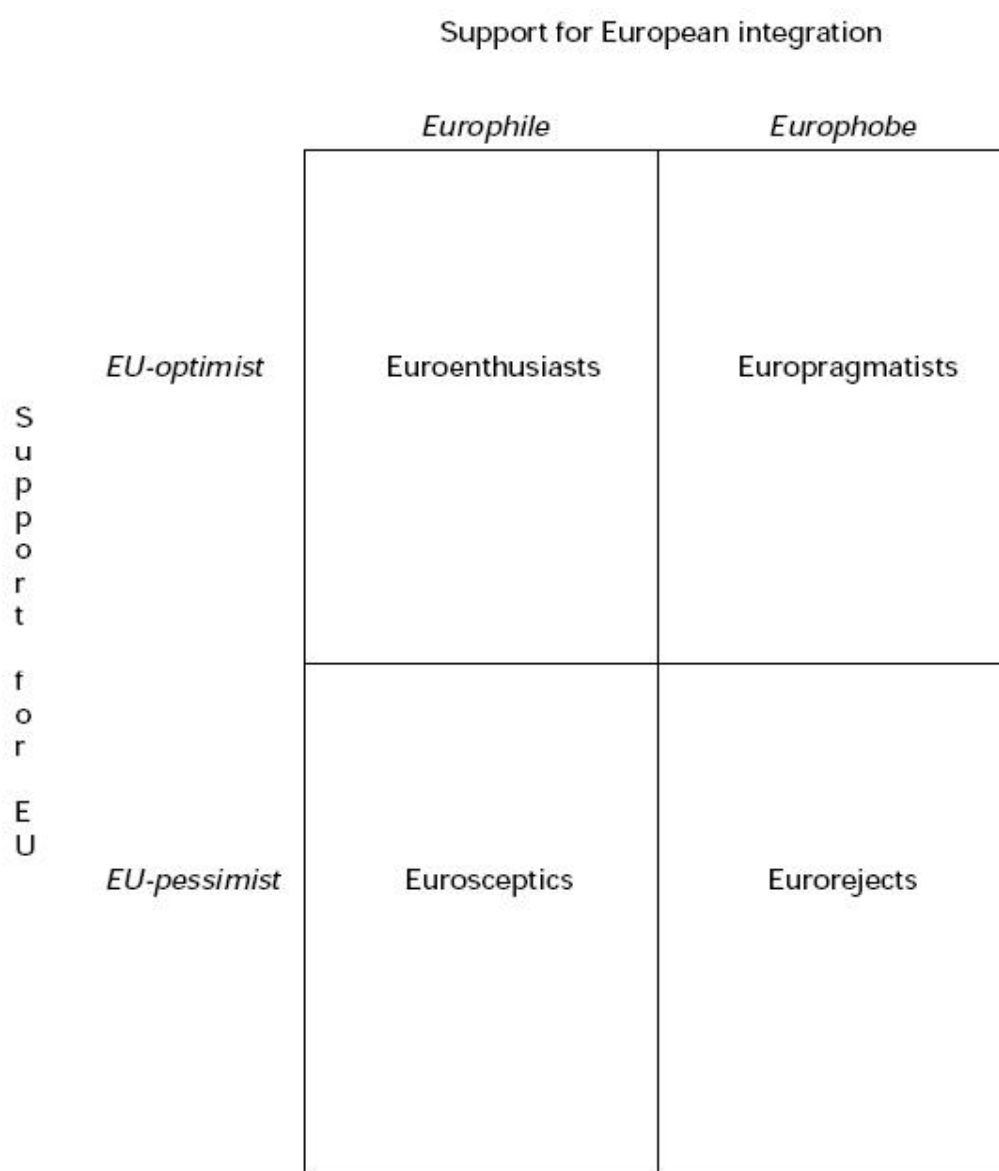


Figure 6: Typology on party position (Kopecky and Mudde, p. 303)

Figure 5 shows how the two dimensions, when put in relation to each other, enable the identification of four ideal types of positions towards European integration. Each

⁵⁶ Kopecky & Mudde, p. 302-303

ideal type is influenced by both dimensions, but in different combinations, thus creating unique positions. Starting in the top-left corner are the *Euroenthusiasts*. Parties in this group both support the underlying ideas of European integration (*Europhiles*) and see the EU as (or believe it will be) the embodiment of these ideas (*EU-optimists*). Moving down, *Eurosceptics* believe in the basic ideas of European integration, “but are pessimists about the EU's current or future reflection of these ideas”⁵⁷. Third, the typology identifies a group of parties with pragmatic attitudes towards the European integration. While not necessarily opposed to the underlying ideas of European integration, neither do these parties support them. Still, they chose to support the EU out of utilitarian considerations. Kopecky and Mudde (2002) label them *Europragmatists*. Finally, *Eurorejects* do not believe in the general ideas of European integration and oppose the European Union. Typically, these are parties on the extreme left or right, with the latter group seeing integration as a threat to the autonomy of the nation state, while the former are opposed to the liberal principles of the internal market.⁵⁸

In our analysis, we will try to identify each party with one of these four ideal types. Being ideal types, it is likely that some parties will in not make a perfect match. Still, compared to the other typologies available (See Taggart 2000, Szczerbiak 2001a & 2001b), Kopecky and Mudde's terms (2002) provide by far the one with the most precise and applicable definitions of different positions on European integration.

Chapter three: Method

Method of data collection: Interviews

The theoretical framework requires a substantial amount of data. There is a lack of up-to-date relevant books and articles on the subject of Norwegian party policies towards European integration. Erik Oddvar Eriksen (2008) gives a valuable account of the relationship between Norway and the EU, but his focus is on the government

⁵⁷ Kopecky and Mudde, p. 302

⁵⁸ Kopecky and Mudde, p. 300-303

and not the political parties. The secondary literature available could only offer insufficient or outdated data. Because the study aims to be as contemporary as possible, it has instead focused on primary sources as its main provider of information. To some extent, party programs can offer some relevant data. The chief part of empirical information, however, comes from interviews with party officials. Rather than speaking with experts whose view must necessarily be external, talking directly to a representative of a political party provides interesting insights and updated information on policy. It is also interesting to see how the party understands itself and its own policies.

Advantages and limits to the method

The intent behind the interviews was to collect information on the party line attitude towards European integration. Interviews can give more elaborate and specific information than what is otherwise available from newspaper articles and party programs. Interviews are also a method that allows for asking the questions one that are of direct relevance for fruitful research. This way, one can get exactly the data necessary, data that is not available anywhere else. It also has an advantage over data collection from multiple sources since the information given is coherent rather than a patchwork. Interviews conducted in person makes it harder for the respondent to avoid difficult issues, and easier to receive straight answers. It also gives the him/her the chance to elaborate on issues that are otherwise simplified presented, such as is usual in party programs and newspaper interviews. Another advantage of interviews is the access to a primary source. This strengthens the authenticity of the data.

All the same, confining data collection to one-on-one interviews has its limits. Firstly, by talking around topics, the respondents may seek to avoid difficult and controversial issues. This poses demands on the interviewer to ask the correct questions, and in a manner that draws the required information from the respondent. Even so, one has no guarantee that the politician will give the information needed. Second, within the party there might be regional or factional differences. Thus, their

account may not represent the actual policy pursued by the party leadership. Second, it is harder to test the validity of the information when using a qualitative method. Finally, numerous and detailed questions have the disadvantage that their proper answering is time-consuming. This requires priority among the questions to secure that the essentials were covered, and thus constitute another challenge for the interviewer.

Choosing parties and party officials for interviews

The constraints in time and space put some limits to the extent of the research. To start with, talking to all the political parties in parliament would be time-consuming and more difficult to arrange. In all, representatives from five parties of the seven parties in the Norwegian parliament were interviewed. The Liberals (V) and the Christian Peoples Party (KRF) were left out of the study. These two were not chosen out of two considerations. Firstly, they command few seats in the parliament, sharing a total of 21 between themselves.⁵⁹ Second, they are located in the middle of the political spectrum. As seen, main electoral support is concentrated on the left and the right. This means that these parties depend on cooperation with larger parties to gain influence, while their centre position increases the number of potential cooperation partners. The centre position on the political axis and their modest size combine to make them unlikely protagonist on the European question.

This leaves Labour (AP), the Socialist Left (SV), the Centre Party (SP), the Conservatives (H) and the Progress Party (FRP). Labour is a natural choice, as it is by far the largest party, it is pro-EU and it is in government. The Conservatives are included because of they are the most outspoken supporters of EU-membership, and because of their considerable electoral support. Also, they command a strong position as the traditional opponents to Labour. The Progress Party has in later years surpassed the Conservatives as the second largest party. They are the only party in the current parliament that has not been in government. Together with their size, their declared neutrality makes them a natural part of the study. The Socialists Left are

⁵⁹ Christiansen and Damgaard, p. 52

included because of their role as an outlet for EU opposition on the left. Also, they are in government. Finally, the Centre Party are the traditional voice of agrarian interests opposed to EU-membership. They are by far the most prominent of the so-called 'no-parties'. In matters connected to the EU, they receive attention disproportionate to their modest size⁶⁰.

The respondents were chosen because of their involvement with the European issue. It was important to talk to party officials with good knowledge of Norway's relationship with the EU and that could deliver the party view. This includes members of the foreign policy committee, participants in various delegations to the EU or EU-related organizations (like the EFTA) or advisors on European questions. The newly created Europautvalget consists of the delegates to the EFTA and the members of the foreign relations committee, and is the parliament's organ for consultations with the government over EU/EFTA issues.⁶¹ Four of the respondents were members of parliament and all of these represent their party in the foreign policy committee. The remaining two interview objects are political advisors on questions of foreign policy and European integration. None of the people interviewed wanted anonymity. This strengthens the credibility of these sources. At the start of each party section, a brief presentations of the respondent is given.

The Interview method

The respondents were quizzed on a total of 36 questions, unless in the cases where one answer covered another or the information from the party program could be confirmed without elaboration. The substantial amount of questions is intended to give detailed information about the five factors identified in our model (see figure 5). This approach of structured interviews was chosen to make the data comparable. In the design of the question formula, the rules of Dexter was followed, as laid out in his book *Elite and Specialized Interviews* (2006). The interview questions were

⁶⁰ For example of Centre Party activity on the EU-issue, see articles by Spence (2009) and Wiker (2009).

⁶¹ Stortinget: *Europautvalget*. Extracted 12th April 2009, <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Komiteene/Europautvalget/>

based on the following six main guiding questions:

1. What is the ideology of the party?
2. What is the ideological stance of the party towards European integration?
3. What is the policy goals of the party in relation to EU.
4. What are the EU policies of the party?
5. What are the motives for the various EU-policies?
6. Does cooperation and alliances influence the EU-policies?

Why ask these six questions specifically, and what relevance do they have for the study? To start with, **(1)** as both theories connected support and opposition towards the European Union with party position along the right-left scale, it is important to establish the ideological stances. It might be possible that the ideological stance is unclear or muted. This is also relevant, as a weak ideological stance may make the party policy more flexible. Second **(2)**, to test if leftist and rightist positions imply a negative attitude towards the EU, and if centrist positions imply a positive attitude, one can investigate if the party has an ideologically motivated stance towards the European Union and compare this with the assumptions on party positions made by the theories. Third **(3)** are the actual policy goals of the party. Asking this question in relation to the two previous ones can help to clarify what informs policy goal formation in the political parties. The fourth question **(4)** relates to what the party actually does on the European question. This includes their programmatic stance, as well European integration policy content. A party may be in favor of EU membership, but still remain inactive. Looking into the pursuit and content of policies also allows for testing of the assumption inherent in the research question: the low salience of the EU-question in Norwegian party politics. Not least, it is necessary to ask this question in order to compare policy goals with actual policies and to see if the party deviate from its goals. Question number five **(5)** is interrelated to all the four above it by seeking the reason for the position taken. I can provide information on what the party hopes to achieve with its EU-related policies. Sixth **(6)** and final, a question is needed to seek out the possible influence of cooperation and

coalition has on the EU-policies. This entail compromise. However, a lack of possible allies (and thus success) might also deter parties from pursuing a policy.

How the interviews were conducted

The interviews themselves were conducted between 20-22 of January 2009, at the Norwegian parliament (Stortinget) in Oslo. They span between 45 and 60 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The respondents were specifically requested to specify between party positions and individual opinion where these occurred. They were also quizzed about whether there is any internal dissent within the party. This, together with transcription, was done to ensure that the information in the answers gets correctly reproduced and does not give out false information on party stance. The questions were not known to the respondent in advance. This was done to get as straight answers as possible. Where info is based on something other than the interviews, this is marked. All interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and the answers reproduced in this paper have been adapted to English. If anything is lost in translation, this is the sole responsibility of the author.⁶²

Chapter four: The Norwegian Parliamentary system & the EU-issue

Thus far, a research question has been developed. Thereafter, the method that will be used to try to answer this question was presented. However, to place the empirical findings in the correct context, some additional insights into Norwegian politics are needed. In the following, there will be given a basic presentation of the Norwegian political system and some relevant information on the parties. Then there is a short

⁶² At request, copies of the transcribed interviews can be provided. However, they are only available in Norwegian.

section on the relationship between governments and opposition. Finally, there is some information on the popularity of the EU in the Norwegian public and the constitutional terms and conditions for EU membership.

The Norwegian system of government can best be described by the words of 19th century politician Johan Sverdrup: “All power in this chamber”⁶³. Sverdrup was referring to the parliament, Stortinget, which at the time (1872) was changing in a parliamentary direction. By the 1890's, parliament had in effect done away with Montesquieu's ideal of a three way separation of powers laid down in the constitution and introduced a parliamentary system. This continued as political custom until 2007, when parliamentarianism became part of the constitution.⁶⁴ Central to the relationship between government and parliament is the fusion of powers. Government is not only elected out of parliament, but is also responsible to the parliament. In other words, the executive answers to the legislative. If it loses the confidence of the majority in parliament, it must leave office. Unlike many other European countries, this does not mean that government at investiture must have a positive majority. The negative version of parliamentary practices in Norway allows for (and often involves) minority governments. A vote of confidence is not necessary. Instead, a government remains in office as long as it does “not receive a motion of censure passed by a majority in parliament”.⁶⁵

The position of minority governments, though vulnerable, is not as bad as it seems. The constitution does not allow for new elections within the four year term, should a government be brought down.⁶⁶ This means that one or more parties in the opposition must replace the government, should it fall. In effect, a minority government must replace another. To assume power under these circumstances is a risky endeavor, and one that parties are often not willing to make. The greatest advantage of being in government is the initiative that comes with executive power, and the role of the government to propose and initiate new legislation. Since Norway is a constitutional monarchy, there is no president with which to share power with.

⁶³ Mardal: Johan Sverdrup. In Store Norske Leksikon, Extracted 12th April 2009.

⁶⁴ Versto, Olav: Reform av Grunnloven, In Verdens Gang (Newspaper) 21.02.2007.

⁶⁵ Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 52-54

⁶⁶ Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 52-54

The king has long since only ceremonial duties, making the prime minister in effect the most powerful state official.⁶⁷

The election system is based on proportional representation. This means that the amount of votes a party gets is translated into a proportional number of seats in parliament. The Norwegian parliament is unicameral, with 169 seats filled by representatives from seven parties. Other than proportionality, the high number of parties is caused by the relatively low threshold of four percent.⁶⁸ Because of the nature of the system, as described above, also small parties can have considerable influence. They are often junior partners in coalition governments, or gain influence as support party for the government in power. For the term 2005-2009, the following parties are represented in Stortinget (abbreviation, English name):

● Arbeiderpartiet (Labour, AP)	Seats: 61
● Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party, FRP)	Seats: 38
● Høyre (Conservatives, H)	Seats: 23
● Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialists Left, SV)	Seats: 15
● Senterpartiet (Centre Party, SP)	Seats: 11
● Kristelig Folkeparti (Christian Peoples Party, KRF)	Seats: 11
● Venstre (Liberals, V)	Seats: 10

The current government, a majority, consists of Labour, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left. The parties are well organized, with a leadership group, and the members of parliament assigned into parliament committees dealing with specific policy areas. This means that the politicians are specialized in the policy area of the committee they are part of, and one from each party will act as spokesperson in each field. Because of a strong primacy of party, the representatives seldom deviate from the party line. With regards to the European integration, the relevant politicians can

⁶⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica: Norway. Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009

⁶⁸ Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 52-54

be found in the foreign policy committee and the new European committee.⁶⁹

Only two of seven parties in parliament have a tradition for a clear pro-EU stance. This exclusive club consists of Arbeiderpartiet (the labour party), located on the political left, and Høyre (the Conservatives), located on the political right. The parties in the political centre, SP (agrarian party), Venstre (liberals) and KRF (Christian democrats), all belongs to the old no-camp. In addition to this is the EU-negative SV (socialists) on the left end of the political axis, and the EU-neutral FRP (Liberalist) on the right end.⁷⁰ Neither does the composition of the current coalition government help the membership cause. Central to the agreement allowing for the coalition between SV, SP and Arbeiderpartiet was a so-called suicide clause on the European question. This implies that Arbeiderpartiet will abstain from actively pursue EU-membership during their time together in office. If not, SV and SP would leave the coalition. This efficiently leaves only one party, Høyre, to carry the European torch. But even Høyre is hesitant to throw their weight behind the EU issue.⁷¹

As we have seen, the Norwegian political system grants the smaller parties a relatively strong position. In a study from 2008, Danish social scientists Flemming Juul Christiansen and Erik Damgaard highlight the strong position of the Norwegian opposition between 1945 and 1994. Their data show that Norway has one of the strongest tendencies to minority government in Europe, ranking third behind Sweden and Denmark. In the covered period, 68% percent of governments were in minority. Furthermore, they use an expert survey to show the great influence of opposition on government policy. On this scale, defined by values 1-9, where nine is the strongest level oppositional influence, Norway scores 7,1 and is only beaten by Italy. This relationship between small and large parties, and between government and opposition is worth keeping in mind when investigating the European issue in Norwegian party politics.⁷²

⁶⁹ Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 52-54

⁷⁰ Sitter (2001), p. 28

⁷¹ See the interview section, chapter five

⁷² Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 49-50

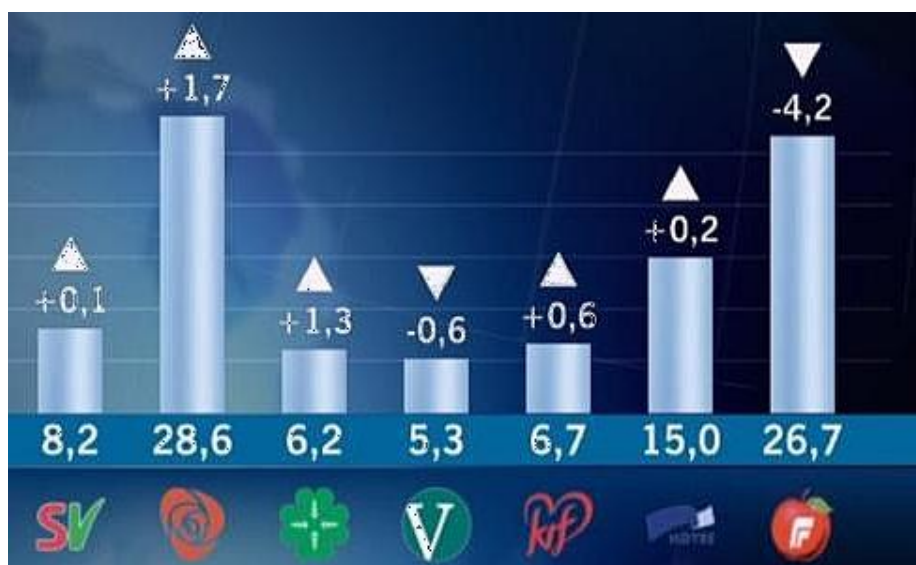


Figure 7: The ideological left-right scale in Norwegian party politics. From left to right: SV, AP, SP, V, KRF, H, FRP. Taken from a poll in september 2007. Even though the numbers do correspond to the current popularity of the parties, it gives an indication to the relative strength of the parties in parliament (Source: Norstat)

The European issue

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, EU membership has twice been up for referendum and twice defeated (1972, 1994). Both times, accession was championed by governing labour party (AP). Opposition to membership is traditionally found among the smaller parties, most prominently Senterpartiet (formerly the agrarian party).⁷³ Since 1994, polls on EU-membership have remained stable, without any dramatic increases in popularity. Recent years have seen the establishment of a solid majority against accession. A poll published in March 2009 showed a majority of 54,9 percent saying against membership, while only 33 for and another 12 percent uncertain. This marks a four year span in polls where more than fifty percent of those asked has stated that they do not want Norway to join the EU.⁷⁴

This being said, Norway is by no means a political outsider in Europe, and is participating in many spheres of European integration. Through the EEA-agreement

⁷³ Encyclopædia Britannica: *Norway*. In Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009.

⁷⁴ Brønno, Micheal: *Fire år med Nei-flertall*. In Nationen (Newspaper) 23.03.2009.

and EFTA, it is part of the internal market, and also of Schengen, the latter allowing Norwegian citizens visa-free travel. Norwegians can also live and work anywhere in the Union. To take part in these goods, Norway pay the EU a negotiated sum according to bilateral agreements⁷⁵. The Norwegian parliament also has to accept EU legislation relevant for the policy areas related to the parts of EU integration that Norway takes part in. As a non-member, Norway still reserves the nominal right to reject any law from Brussels, but this is hardly ever used in practice⁷⁶. Furthermore, there are strong connections to many of the member states, like cooperation with the other Scandinavian states in the Nordic council, through membership in NATO and through trade⁷⁷.

⁷⁵ The EFTA countries (Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein) pay the EU 1,3 billion € during the period 2005-2009. Of this sum, Norway contribute 97%. See Bakken, Anbjørg: Pengestrøm til EU. In Aftenposten (Newspaper) 17.07.2008.

⁷⁶ Eriksen, p. 1-2

⁷⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica: *Norway*. In Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2009.

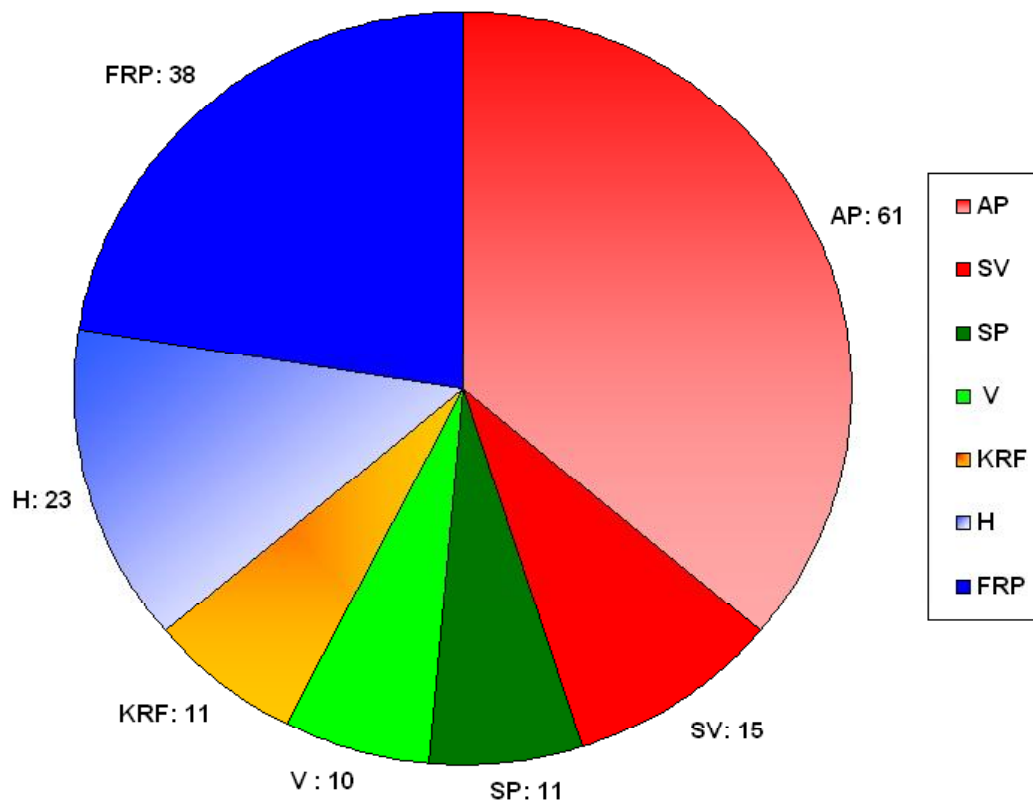


Figure 8: The distribution of seats in the Norwegian parliament for the term 2005-2009 (Christiansen & Damgaard, p. 52-54). Illustration taken from wikipedia commons.

Chapter Five: The Interview results

The Labour Party

For Labour, representative Vidar Bjørnstad (b.1955) was interviewed. Bjørnstad has held a seat in parliament since 1993 and been a part of the wider Foreign relations committee since 1997 and the main group since 2005. In addition to this, he has been

part of several parliamentary delegations to European institutions, such as the parliament's delegation for relations with the European parliament, the delegation to the parliament of the European Council , and the delegation to the parliamentary committees of EFTA.⁷⁸ During the interview, Bjørnstad var accompanied by Ola Mannsåker from the foreign policy fraction of Labour's parliamentary group.

Party ideology and view of the EU

Bjørnstad describes Labour as a social democratic party .Of the parties in the Norwegian parliament, only government coalition partner the Socialist Left is more to the left.⁷⁹ The socialist ideology and the position on the political left is put into context by the membership in the Party of European Socialists (PES), the socialist party in the European parliament. Of the other parties in parliament, he stated that the the Socialist Left and the Centre Party, their government coalition partners, had most in common with Labour's principal views. The party is a mass party.

The party has a positive attitude towards the EU and believes that Norway should be a member. It is in favor of the underlying principles of European integration as seen in the treaties. They opinion that there is an increasing need for international cooperation. Bjørnstad did concede that the party would prefer a more social direction to the union, but maintained that this was not due to dissatisfaction with the EU as an institution. The party sees the union as not necessarily connected to any particular political view. Instead, it is a arena for competition between different political directions. It holds that the current policies of the union is shaped by the fact that most European governments are ruled by Conservatives. Labour believes membership would allow the party to contribute in making the union more in tune with social democratic principles.

⁷⁸ Stortinget: *Vidar Bjørnstad*. Extracted 12th April 2009, <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Representantene/Representantfordeling/Representant/?perid=VB>

⁷⁹ See figure 7

The desire to participate in the decision making of the EU is, along with the wish to shape the EU in a more social direction, is also motivated by democratic considerations. As Norway must implement much of what goes on in the union, the lack of participation in the actual decision making represents a democratic problem. Through the EEA (European Economic Area)-agreement, Norway must accept legislation from the European union with any real treatment or debate in parliament. As Mannsåker illustrates it, “a good rule in democracy, is that one is able to influence the issues that one is influenced by”. The relationship between the EU and the Norwegian parliament often means that this rule is broken. “Simply put, we want Norway to participate where the decisions are made”, quote Bjørnstad. However, it should be mentioned that there is a minority within the party that opposed membership.

The party officials are keen to stress that despite having reservation about some of aspects of the institution, they believe the EU is developing in a positive direction. They point to increased focus on social issues and more interest for the Nordic model. Of recent developments, they see a tendency of rhetoric of more state control similar to the Nordic model in the wake of the financial crisis. Most importantly, they are pleased by the increased power of the European parliament. Along with the part of the Lisbon treaty that states that both the national parliaments and the European parliament are to have more influence in the union, this represents a positive development towards a more democratic EU. Being positive to both the basic principles of the EU and the direction in which the union is developing, Labour belongs to the Euroenthusiasts group in the typology of Kopecky and Mudde (2002)⁸⁰.

EU policy

In spite of their strong endorsement of the European Union, Labour does not pursue membership in the current term (2005-2009). The main reason is the low support for

⁸⁰ See figure 9

accession in the public, as evident in frequent polls. “For us to take an active stance, there must be a lasting positive attitude (towards membership) among the public”. The party does not wish to raise the question at a time when another referendum appear bound to again defeat membership. Bjørnstad explains the missing interest of the voters with a lack of urgency of the issue: “The majority of the voters are yet to discover the same advantages to accession as we see” For this to change, one must be able to demonstrate that membership is to the advantage of the individual citizen...but apart from the democratic aspect, when looking at what people are concerned about, the party don't see any specific things that it can point to and say 'the solution is to join the EU'. Many other topics has higher priority for the people. As such, the issue has somewhat fallen victim of the strong Economic position of Norway. Issues that otherwise would raise the issue to prominence, such as high unemployment, is yet to occur in Norway. The ongoing financial crisis has so far done little to change this. Bjørnstad sums up the situation by stating that “one has to pursue a policy with broad appeal in the population, something which the EU-issue is currently lacking”.

“For us to take an active stance, there must be a lasting positive attitude (towards membership) among the public”

As already mentioned, the party does not see the EU as an obvious solution to any important issues that Norway has to deal with. This lack of necessity relegate the EU-question among the priorities of the party. A key aspect here is the opposition to the EU-issue among its government partners. The party sees little reason to jeopardize the government coalition as long as EU-membership is not a more pressing issue. According to Bjørnstad, “as long as the European question is not more on the agenda, whether out of necessity or in among the public, there is no point in raising the case and make it into a priority and thus spoil a government coalition” However, the situation is continuously reviewed. In addition to a EU-positive public opinion, the respondents identify three points that can make the party consider to adopt an active membership stance: The population among the coast must become positive to membership; a third party must support accession; the appearance of a new problem that membership will solve. Taken together, it must be a situation

where the party deem EU-membership overshadows other considerations. If the issue were indeed raised, Labour would respect the majority decision of a referendum.

“as long as the European question is not more on the agenda, whether out of necessity or in among the public, there is no point in raising the case and make it into a priority and thus spoil a government coalition”

Coalition politics

In the current coalition, because of the aforementioned suicide clause, the membership-issue is taboo. But also in parliament, European integration is a difficult question according to Labour. Discussions on European policy is hindered by the distraction of the EU-issue, reducing the debate into a question of for or against membership. When it comes to the EU, the respondents identify the Conservatives as the party with a stance most similar to their own. They also point to the fact that in the previous term (2001-2005), Labour's support in foreign policy was found on the right. However, because of ideological differences, the conservatism is not a realistic coalition partner. On the whole, as Mannsaker points out, any future government constellation is likely to include a party which opposes membership.

The Conservative Party

Finn Vallersnes spoke for the Conservatives. Though previous a deputy representative between 1985 and 1993, Vallersnes began his current tenure in 2001. Since then, he has been a member of parliament's Foreign relations committee. He has also been part of parliament's delegation for relations with the European parliament, and is the

current leader of the delegation to the Inter-parliamentarian union (IPU).⁸¹

Ideology and view of the EU

The Conservatives are located on the centre-right side of Norwegian politics. In an international perspective, they can be compared with CDU of Germany and is an associate member of the EPP (European Peoples Party) group which is represented in the European parliament, and members of the IDU (International Democrat Union). It is a Catch-all party and the traditional rival and ideological opponent of the Labour party. Of the other parties in parliament, the Conservatives has the Christian Peoples Party as their most frequent cooperation partner.

“In the foreign affairs committee, we are frequently asked by visiting parliamentarians, why on earth we are not members of the European union”

In Norwegian politics, the Conservatives are the most enthusiastic supporter of European integration and membership in the European Union. It believes in the founding principles of the European union, and also believes that the current union fulfills these principles. In addition to this, the party is in favor of the current development of the union, towards a more active foreign policy role and more influence for the European parliament. Within the party, there is total consensus on the European question.

The Conservatives think it is necessary for Norway to be part of a EU with a continuously growing market and increasingly strong international role. They see the

⁸¹ Stortinget: *Finn Martin Vallersnes*. Extracted 12th April 2009, <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Representantene/Representantfordeling/Representant/?perid=FMV>

EU as representing values and interests similar to those of Norway. When speaking together, the union has considerable influence. In a continuously globalized world, Norway's interest will be better protected as a member of the union. In the opposite case, the Conservatives fear, as the European cooperation continue to develop, that Norway will see its influence dwindle both in European cooperation and internationally (WTO, NATO). Membership, on the other hand, would mean a secure bond to western Europe and a stronger position vis-a-vis Russia. From a security policy point of view, it is therefore the natural block to align with.

From a normative perspective, the Conservatives see the recent enlargements as an act of solidarity with eastern Europe, both economically and politically, and something that Norway should take part in. As for Norway itself, the current situation represents a democratic problem. Vallersnes illustrates this by pointing to the high amount of legislation from the union, that because of the membership in the EEA, passes through Europautvalget for automatic implementation. The positive attitude towards the EU place the Conservatives firmly among the parties that Kopecky and Mudde (2002) labels as Euroenthusiasts⁸².

EU Policy

Vallersnes maintains that the unpopularity of the EU membership does not have an effect on the views of the party on European integration. Even with lower popularity than recent polls show, a pro-EU stance would still appeal to a large part of the electorate. However, he admits that it puts the party in a difficult position with regards to strategy. On the one hand, the party wants to promote EU membership and its advantages. On the other hand, the negative popular opinion means that any attempt to bring EU accession to the agenda is likely to be unsuccessful. As Vallersnes puts it, "At the moment, the time is not right"... "We don't want a new membership debate before we believe that there can come something positive out of it". Instead, the party seeks to keep public attention towards the EU. Especially, they

⁸² See figure 9

see a need for more knowledge and information on the EU. The long time strategy is there fore to “increase the awareness of what the EU means to Norway”.

“We don't want a new membership debate before we believe that there can come something positive out of it”

For a change in the support for membership to occur, Vallersnes believes that a perception of being better off within the union is needed. The voters need to feel that they are losing out on something by standing outside. This could be economic advantages, or, as the union develops, rights exclusively for EU-citizens. At the time, however, the strong Norwegian economy keeps people comfortable with the current status. Another point that could make a difference, is a stronger and more visible Russian neighbor. This can make citizens want to seek security within the union.

Coalition politics

Unlike Labor, the Conservatives are not bound in the European question by coalition commitments. However, there is a lack of allies on the membership issue. The Liberals had some internal debate, but the EU-supporting fraction was recently at their general assembly⁸³, and they would nevertheless be too small to make any significant difference. The one party that could really make a difference, would be the Progress Party. Situated to the right of the Conservatives, the party contains many EU-supporters. However, it is also declared neutral. As for general political cooperation, before the election only the Kristian People's Party can be counted as a relatively secure cooperation partner. The party with the most similar European stance, is the ideological remote Labour party.

⁸³ Nielsen, Andreas: *Venstre fortsatt Nei-parti*. In Verdens Gang (newspaper) 08.03.2009.

The Socialist Left

Since 2001, Bjørn Jacobsen (b.1960) has been one of the representatives of the Socialist Left. Jacobsen is part of the wider foreign relations committee, deputy member of the delegation for relations with the European parliament, as well as member of parliaments delegation to the assembly of the council of Europe.⁸⁴

Ideology and view of the EU

The Socialist Left describes itself as a red party, but who also are concerned with the environment. Of the parties in parliament, it is the one that is furthest to the left. Internationally, it is a member of GUE/NGL (Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left), which is represented in the European parliament. While not catering to any specific interests, the party has a strong anchoring on the political left and is therefore closer to Sitters description of a interest representation party. It is currently in government with Labour and the Centre Party, which is also the party it sees itself as having the most in common with.

With regards to integration, the party is in favor of participation in the European organizations that Norway is already part of. However, it will only accept supranational integration, such as the EU, when it is also democratic. According to Jacobsen, the European Union has cut the direct relationship between the voters and the elected. If Norway was to become a member, it would represent a democratic problem, since the supranational structure would mean losing control of the fishing resources along the coast. The party also believe that special national circumstances and economy make Norway's interests in areas such as agriculture, fishing, petroleum and gas, and administration of the vast sea areas quite different from those of Brussels. There is some minor dissent within the party with regards to European question, but when facing other parties it stands united.

⁸⁴ Stortinget: *Bjørn Jacobsen*. Extracted 12th April 2009, <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Representantene/Representantfordeling/Representant/?perid=BJ>

Furthermore, the party is critical to the basic principles of the EU, such the four freedoms. For Jacobsen, the vision of the EU is similar to the vision of a business. He sees economical profit maximization as the principal goal of the EU. According to his view, initiatives such as the Lisbon treaty is created for biggest possible growth, at the expense of the environment or the workers. The party is also negative towards the proposed constitution for the European union, which it view as making the EU more supranational. However, Jacobsen see some positives, such as aspects of the environment policy. Notably, the Socialist Left oppose the EEA-agreement. It believes a better alternative should be possible, preferably a trade agreement similar to that of Switzerland. Taken together, the party fits the description of a *Euro-reject party* in the typology of Kopecky and Mudde (2002)⁸⁵.

EU policy

As an opponent of EU membership, the party is happy with the current situation and does not pursue any special strategy with regards to the EU. Similarly, there is no need for a new debate on the membership issue. The people would not be interested, as they already know the issue well. If the debate was to arise, it would in fact be positive for the Socialist Left as the party is united on the issue and because membership is unpopular among the public. More divided parties, such as Labour and the Progress Party, will seek to avoid the discussion. Still, the Socialist Left will not attempt to create a debate itself, as voters would know that there would be no real issue. But, as Jacobsen notes, the big debate will come as soon as the supporters of membership feel they have a chance.

Issues and directives from the EU that come to parliament because of the EEA-agreement is handled on an ad hoc basis, and the party to try to shape implementation in a favorable direction. Though most of the minor legislation does not attract a lot of interest, the directive on services in the internal market is an

⁸⁵ See figure 9

example of such an issue.⁸⁶ Also, the party supports so-called anti-EU organizations.

As mentioned, the party is critical to EEA-agreement that regulates the close relationship between Norway and the EU. While the so-called suicide clause of the government coalition freezes the membership issue for Labour, the same goes for the Socialist Left opposition towards the EEA/EFTA. In practice, the current government is based on a compromise which states that the EEA will be the basis for Norway's relationship with the EU during this term. Hence, to get into government the party had to put resistance to NATO and EEA to the side. According to Jacobsen, a new agreement to replace the EEA will not be a ultimatum if the current coalition was to continue after the election.

Coalition Politics

In addition to from the coalition partners, Jacobsen see similarities with the policies of his own party in the liberals. However, at the time only the current cooperation parties are likely future government partners. With regards to the EU issue, the most obvious cooperation partners are the Centre Party and the liberals, possibly also the Christian People's Party. The current coalition, through the suicide clause, secure that the party has secured that Labour will keep away from the membership issue during this term.

The Centre Party

⁸⁶ Norway has in fact never used its reservation right on legislation from the EU: Eriksen, p.1

On this directive, the Socialist Left and the Centre party abstained from voting. See Elsebutangen and Helmikstøl: *SV og SP tar dissens på tjenestedirektivet*. In Dagsavisen (Newspaper) 13.11.2008

Cathrine S. Amundsen (b.1979) was a deputy representative for the Centre Party between during the term 2001-2005. She is now a party official, acting as political advisor with responsibility for foreign policy.

Ideology and view of the EU

The Centre Party orients itself towards the political centre. It has traditionally cooperated with parties both to the left and and right. It perceives itself as not being attached to any of -ism, instead considering it positive to be flexible in political choices. The core principle is a decentralized society model, in terms of democracy, ownership and population pattern. While not participating in any of the European party groups, it cooperates with the other Swedish Centre Party. The latter is part of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party in the European parliament, which gives some reference to where the Centre Party stand in a European context. Traditionally, the party has been identified with agrarian interests. According to Amundsen, the party is trying to become a Catch-all party, similar to its Swedish sister party, but is still most active in(and identified with) the traditional rural interests. The Centre Party is part of the so-called red-green coalition government together with Labour and the Socialist Left.

The party is closely associated with the membership issue, and is probably the most high profile of the parties that are against Norwegian accession. Amundsen explains the opposition towards the EU on grounds of incompatibility between the basic principles of the European Union and the political goals of the Centre Party. They are scepticism towards which kind of society the EU is working towards. The party see the treaties of the union as ideologically biased towards economic liberalism. This has laid the basis for a model of European integration that follows 'blue' competition policies, aimed at market liberalism and almost unrestrained profit maximization. The development is perceived as a treat to the Nordic welfare model. The consequences of EU policies, such as the freedom of movement, will be to pull the wages down and increase the differences between rich and poor. This separates the Centre Party from Labour, who believe that the direction of integration within the

EU is not given, and can be directed into a more social path.

Second, the supranational aspects of the EU is at sharply at odds with the the Centre Party's belief that society is best ordered at the lowest possible level (subsidiarity). It separates the voters from the political decisions, and is therefore undemocratic. More and more decision are decided by majority in the EU system. This threatens the sovereignty of the nation states. The European parliament does little mellow this view, because it is seen as not having enough power compared to the council and the Commission. Recent developments, such as the process towards a constitutional treaty, will only increase supranationality. Amundsen points to how the treaty was rejected in France and the Netherlands, but represented to the voters in a new version shortly thereafter [with minor changes]. Because of the aforementioned reasons she states that the party see accession into the union as something that will weaken the Norwegian democracy.

The Centre Party is strongly against the EEA-agreement. According to the party, the greatest flaw of the current agreement is that Norway has no real possibility to reject unwanted directives from Brussels, but have to implement the legislation of the internal market. The right to veto is only nominal, and has never been used. In place of the EEA, the Centre Party wants what Amundsen describes as democratic bilateral trade agreement with the EU. She refers to the relationship between the EU and Switzerland as a model. With its negative attitude towards the principle of the EU, Centre Party belong to the Eurorejects group in the typology of Kopecky and Mudde

⁸⁷.

EU Policy

There is no overall strategy in the Centre Party with regards to the membership question. The issues that arrives from the EU is dealt with on an ad hoc basis. Because the directives cannot be dismissed, there is limits to what is actually

⁸⁷ See figure 9

possible to do. This is highly problematic, because some of the things that comes from the union are not compatible with the political goals of the government. Apart from daily politics, the party supports the movement against membership ('Nei til EU') and try to maintain knowledge and attention around the EU issue.

As the only party of the ones interviewed, the Centre Party will not automatically accept the majority decision in case of a referendum on EU-membership. It maintains that even if the yes-side wins a referendum, It holds as a premise for accepting accession, that in accordance with the § 93 of the constitution, a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority in parliament must vote in favor of joining the EU. This is not to say that the other parties can ignore the constitution, but that they will vote in favor if there is a majority. The Centre Party is opposed to this, and states that it will block the issue if it has the opportunity, regardless of the outcome of a referendum. The argument is that a simple majority should be too low a threshold for the serious decision it is to give up parts of the state's sovereignty to a supranational organization, and that avoiding that this happens is also the purpose of the aforementioned paragraph.⁸⁸

In November last year, the leader of the Centre Party Liv Signe Navarsete, commented that the party would demand a revision of the EEA-agreement if it was to remain part of a government coalition in the next term.⁸⁹ However, during this term the party is tied by the the foreign policy suicide clause of the coalition government. In practice, this means that the party can not touch the EEA-agreement during this term, as it is the basis of the European policy of the government. Because the same clause also hinder Labour from raising the membership issue, this secures the status quo with regards to Norway's relationship with the EU.

Coalition politics

⁸⁸ See also interview with former Centre party leader Åslaug Haga from 2004: Spence, Thomas: Nøler ikke med å blokkere Ja-flertall. In: Aftenposten (Newspaper) 08.03.2004.

⁸⁹ Wiker, Lars Johan: *Navarsete krever evaluering av EØS-avtalen*. In: Nationen (Newspaper) 28.11.2008.

The position and orientation of the party towards the political centre means that the party share various viewpoints with parties both to the left. However, Amundsen states that the party has a lot in common with its current coalition partners. With regards to the European question, the Socialist Left, the liberals and the Christian People's Party are viewed as likely allies. It is emphasized that the No-faction in parliament consists of a broad group and that opponents to membership is also found within Labour. The suicide clause of the coalition means that the Socialist Left and the Centre Party has efficiently prevented Labour from raising the membership issue during this term.

The Progress Party

Morten Høglund (b. 1965) represents the Progress Party. First elected to parliament in 2001, Høglund has been a member of the Foreign relations committee during his whole tenure. Apart from this, he has been involved with European integration as part of the parliament delegation for relations with the European Parliament and as a member of the EFTA parliamentary committees. Høglund is the current leader of the parliaments delegation to the assembly of the OSCE.⁹⁰

Ideology and view of the EU

The party describes itself as mainly an adherent to liberalism, with a purely liberal economic policy. It does not have an official sister party in Europe or see itself as belonging to any specific group, but maintain connections with the liberal party of Denmark (Venstre), the British Conservatives and the Czech ODS. Both the Conservatives and the ODS belong to the European Democrat group in the European

⁹⁰ Stortinget: "Morten Høglund". Extracted 12th April 2009, <http://www.stortinget.no/no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Representantene/Representantfordeling/Representant/?perid=MORH>

parliament. In the Norwegian parliament, the Progress party is the party furthest to the right. During this term, it is the second largest party in parliament, something which is reflected in its self perception as a Catch-all party. This is notable, compared to its position on the ideological right-left spectrum.

The Progress party is the youngest of the seven parties currently in parliament, founded in 1972. As such, it avoided the first EU-debate in 1972. It did have a yes-attitude at the election in 1994, but EU-membership has always been a difficult issue for the party, says Morten Høglund. Within the party, there are factions both in favor and against membership. The general stance towards Europe is support for economic trade-related integration. As such, the party is positive to the the internal market and the founding principles of the European Union. It sees the EU project as something positive and wants it to succeed. At the same time, there is a feeling that the union has developed too big an appetite, expanding into areas that should be the reserve of the nation state. While in support of enlargement, this means a scepticism towards the deepening of the scope of integration. Høglund mentions the establishment of an EU-dimension on foreign policy and the agricultural policy of the EU as especially problematic. Furthermore, the party sees Norway as having a special economy, quite different from that of the EU member countries. It might therefore be that Norway's economic interests are better served outside of the union. For instance, Høglund believes Norwegian fisheries might suffer from membership. As for the current relations between Norway and the EU, the party is in favor of the EEA-agreement, but feels that its effects should be evaluated.

EU policy

Because of the mixed feelings about membership, the party has decided to declare itself neutral to EU accession. The representatives stand free to on the subject. Høglund explain that this is done not to disrupt the harmony within the party and keep the EU issue from getting in the way of other issues. Instead of ideological based stance, the party will treat the issue according to opinion of the people. That is

to say, if the issue were to arise, they would want the issue to be decided by referendum. With the exception of the Centre Party, this is an opinion that is shared by the other parties as well. The unique in the position of the Progress Party is that the party will not campaign in favor for a stance, but await the result and act according to this. Another difference is that it wants a referendum to be held before there is an application. The two previous EU-referendum were held after applications to join the European community had been accepted. The reason is to ensure that parliament does not start an accession process that is not wanted by the people. As Høglund put it, “If we are to approach the EU again, we also need a popular mandate to start negotiations”.

“If the Norwegian people feels a need for [accession] negotiations, then I think we should do that”

Høglund further explains how the party is able to remain neutral: “it is not so hard for us to hold this stance, when all the possible government coalitions comes with an inherent suicide clause. [Because of this] no party is able to put membership on the agenda.” The other parties will therefore not touch the issue. “Hence, there will also not be any significant pressure on the progress party to decide on this issue”. Another reason is the low interest for the membership issue. The party is helped by the fact that EU-accession is a topic that is not very high on the political order of the day. The party is rarely contacted by the media for their opinion about EU-related topics, and there are few newspapers and journalists who take an interest. Hence, the party will instead focus on other more pressing issues. As Høglund puts it, “our visibility is in part decided by the interest of the media”. At the moment, EU-accession is therefore not a topic for the Progress party. Because of its neutral stance, it was not possible to place the party in the typology of Kopecky and Mudde (2002) based on the view of the EU alone. Based on the policies of the party, however, it comes close to what the typology labels as *Europragmatists*⁹¹.

⁹¹ See figure 9

Coalition Politics

In parliament, the party see itself as having most in common with the Conservatives. However, the party finds itself somewhat isolated, with no obvious cooperation partners. Høglund does not believe that this is likely to change before the election. With regards to its position on EU, it is the only one that holds a neutral stance. Both these factors taken together means that the Progress Party stance free to decide upon its policies without having to take potential coalition partners into consideration. Furthermore, the emphasis on a referendum as decisive for how the party will vote on membership keep the EU policy of the Progress Party relatively isolated from party politics. For the other parties, this means that it at the time can not be considered as a potential ally in a EU debate.

		Support for European integration	
		<i>Europhile</i>	<i>Europhobe</i>
S u p p o r t f o r E U	<i>EU-optimist</i>	Labour Euroenthusiasts Conservative party	 Europragmatists Progress Party
	<i>EU-pessimist</i>	 Eurosceptics	Centre Party Eurorejects Socialist Left

Figure 9: Typology of Kopecky and Mudde (2002) with 5 Norwegian parties introduced

Chapter six: Analysis

The data in the interview section show that there is a variety of positions and argumentation among the parties with regards to EU policies. What they have in common, with the exception of the professed neutral Progress party, is that all are to some degree restrained from pursuing their preferred European integration policy goals. In this chapter, the information gained from the interviews will be put used as input into the theoretical framework. From this, it will hopefully be possible to draw some lessons on the behavior of the Norwegian political parties with regards to European integration, to be used to answer the research question. Furthermore, the information will be used to classify the EU stance of the parties according to the topology of Kopecky and Mudde (2002).

To start with, it is possible to make some general observations with regards to the common central assumption of Sitter and Aspinwall. Both see party position on the political right-left axis as determining party stance on integration. The rule was that parties in the ideological centre are positive towards EU, while parties close on the flanks are negative. In the Norwegian case, this does not hold true. The two EU-positive parties, Labour and the Conservatives, belong to the left and right sides of the ideological scale. At the same time, parties in the political centre, such as the liberal party ⁹² and most notably the Centre Party, are opposed to EU membership. As such, the introverted V of European support in relation to position on the left-right scale seen in Aspinwall's model (see figure 4), becomes a normal V. Only at the very left margin does this assumption hold true, through the Euroreject Socialist left. The party at the other end of the spectrum, the Progress Party, is neutral.

Furthermore, both authors are wrong when they assume that political support is concentrated in the middle of the political spectrum. Firstly, there is no party in the political middle with wide enough electoral base to be counted as Catch-all. Rather,

⁹² Nielsen, Andreas: *Venstre fortsatt Nei-parti*. In Verdens Gang (newspaper) 08.03.2009.

electoral support is typically centered around the traditional counterparts Labour and the Conservatives, with the rightist Progress Party also popular. A proportional election system thus does not automatically mean voter bias towards centrist parties. Neither does participation in government and support of EU integration necessarily coincide.

Explaining party behavior

The interviews gave further confirmation that the issue of EU-membership has low salience. At the same time, with the exception of the Progress Party, the parties had extensively developed viewpoints on European integration and would prefer a relationship between Norway and the EU that is different from the present one. In the following, the answers of the individual parties will be analyzed to see what keeps them from actively pursuing the issue. Even with the central assumption gone, the model⁹³ can still be applied to see explain party behavior in European integration and ultimately why the issue has low salience.

The Labour party has a very positive attitude towards the European Union and European integration. However, if the party was to actively pursue membership, this would have many negative effects. To start with, membership is not very popular with the public. As a Catch-all party seeking to appeal to wide sections of the public, bringing attention to the issue would overall hurt the overall **electoral appeal** of the party. Second, the pursuit of office requires compromises with coalition partners. The current government is a good example of how **coalition politics** influences the behavior of the parties. Here, the cooperation between Labour and the EU-negative Centre Party and Socialist Left is based upon the aforementioned suicide clause that makes the EEA-agreement untouchable, but outlaws active support for the EU or opposition to the EEA. For Labour, all the likely parties for government cooperation have a negative attitude towards the EU. It then has to make a decision between pursuing membership and thus alienate the coalition partners, or to put the issue to

⁹³ See figure 5 and chapter two

the side in order to use office and the current government majority to pursue other **policy goals**. As it stand, the party has chosen to sacrifice an active pro-EU stance to achieve what it considers as more pressing issues. From this it can be concluded that the EU policy of Labour, most notably the dropping of the EU issue to form a coalition government, is based on strategy rather than ideological considerations.

As the second pro-membership party in parliament, the Conservatives face the same problem as fellow Euroenthusiasts Labour, in that all realistic coalition partners have a negative stance towards EU membership. Therefore, any government it was to join, would be likely to come with a compromise similar to the suicide clause of the current government. However, as it is in opposition, this means that it stands more free to pursue its preferred **policy goals**. Furthermore, the low popularity of EU membership is not directly affecting the position of the party, as a pro stance still strengthens **electoral appeal** among a significant minority of voters. Rather, the reason why the Conservatives does not actively pursue membership, is the likelihood that another great debate would only hurt the issue. As it looks to have little chance for success at the moment, the Conservatives thus have taken a strategic decision not to press the issue until timing is better for pursuing its long term **policy goal** of EU accession.

The current government coalition compromise allow the socialist left, together with Centre party, to ban Labour from raising the EU issue. This contributes to keeping Norway out of the EU, a core **policy goal** for the party. With its position on the left en of the political spectrum and Euroreject integration stance, the party party is the one that fits best with Sitter and Aspinwall's assumption for party behavior towards the EU. However, the coalition trade-off also means that the party can not challenge the EEA-agreement. In effect, this means that it has negotiated away its opposition towards the democratically problematic EEA-agreement in the **quest for office**. It might be argued that the party give higher priority to keeping parliaments biggest party Labour quiet on the EU issue, since membership is seen as even more problematic than the EEA. However, the likelihood of Labour finding another coalition which would not include a suicide clause is so small that this argument can not be justified. Thus, for the Socialist Left, coalition politics is the reason why the

party is not more active in trying to move Norway away from the EEA-agreement. To accept this restriction on the EU policy in exchange for office is a strategic decision.

The Centre party are in a very similar situation to the Socialist Left. It also has a prevention of Norwegian EU membership as one of its **policy goals**. In the coalition, these two therefore made sure that Labour would be bound from pursuing membership by the so-called suicide clause. But also like the Socialist Left, it had to accept to leave the EEA-agreement alone during the government term. The party is strongly opposed to this agreement, as they feel it infringes on the sovereignty of Norway and poses a democratic deficit. However, the compromise on the EU/EEA through coalition politics was accepted because of the quest for office was considered more important than to actively oppose the status quo. What makes the acceptance of the EEA quite remarkable is the central position of the party on the ideological left-right spectrum. While the Socialist Left have few other possibilities for coalition than Labour and the Centre Party⁹⁴, the Centre party at least nominally has the chance to find coalition partners among the centrist parties. The fact that a party so strongly opposed to EU integration compromise on the EEA only shows that the government office is deemed more important than EU policies.

The Progress Party is the most peculiar case in the Norwegian parliament with regards to EU policies. According to the assumption of Aspinwall and Sitter, the party should be opposed to membership because of its position on the right end of the ideological spectrum, while their electoral strength and Catch-All appeal would imply a supporter of membership. However, the Neutral stance on EU-membership makes it something in between. The motivation behind the stance is to avoid splitting the **party organization** over this difficult issue. Also, the party is careful not to damage its **electoral appeal**. Through neutrality it avoids a difficult question in a way that may not necessarily appeal to too many, but will alienate very few. That being said, the fact that the second largest party in the Norwegian parliament can afford to be neutral on the EU, speaks volumes about the EU debate in the Norway. Because of the low salience of the issue, there is no real pressure on the party to take

⁹⁴The Centre Party is the most left-leaning of the centrist parties, see figure7)

a stance. Another reason for why the progress party can afford this position, is its relatively isolated political position. Thus far, there has not been any potential coalition for the party to take into account, which leave the it with only the voters to cater for. As Europragmatists, they therefore decide to leave the issue in the hands of the electorate.

The findings tell of a party system where the issue of EU membership appear frozen. As seen, questions regarding Norway's relationship with the European Union remain low on the political agenda. The fact that there is even a party with a neutral stance on EU membership says a lot about the lack of actuality the issue has in the political debate. In the introduction, the sub-questions asked whether the party behavior was based on ideology or strategy and as whether the parties are chained to public opinion or not. To start with the former, the analysis show that four of the five parties in this study was restrained in some way or other from pursuing their ideal EU-policy. In all these cases, this was due to strategic consideration. One of the parties, the conservatives, deliberately chose to keep a low profile on its pro EU-stance because there is little chance of achieving this policy goal at the time. The decision is connected to the low support for membership in the polls, but also because the party would find no coalition partners that share its pro-EU stance. For the three government parties, the findings were even more interesting. All of them had to give up on their principal stance on European integration in order to form a government. Interestingly, also the two Euroreject parties were willing to give up on their principled opposition towards the EEA in order to form government. As for the by far biggest party in parliament, Labour, the compromise was necessary to find coalition partners with similar political views. Were it to steadfast pursue an active EU policy, it would simply be impossible to form a coalition government. Herein lies the central obstacle against a higher salience for the issue of Norwegian membership of the European Union. The two parties in favor EU membership both have strong electoral support and is likely to form the backbone of any coalition on their political side. However, the two parties are too far apart to cooperate between themselves. Therefore, every likely coalition government is bound to include one or more parties with a negative stance towards EU-membership. As the study of Christiansen and Damgaard show, small parties have a very strong position in Norwegian party

politics. These parties will demand a suicide clause similar to that of the current government. I therefore think that the following hypothesis can be confirmed:

The question of EU membership has low salience in Norwegian party politics because all the likely government coalitions are bound to include parties with a negative attitude towards accession. Hence, parties will play down the issue to make it possible to form a governing coalition.

What then about the role of public opinion? The interview data showed that three of the parties researched put strong emphasis on the public when deciding on their EU-policy. Most notably, the neutral Progress Party wanted the issue to be decided by the public entirely. Also Labour did not want to pursue an issue that had so little support in the population. For the conservatives, the negative polls meant that the time was not right to raise the issue. However, Labour saw the situation as a result of priority. If the party were to perceive an aspect EU-membership as absolutely necessary for Norway, it would pursue membership regardless of polls or coalition. What can be read into the importance of public opinion is that it lays the ground for for the debate. If the public was more positive, it would make it harder for the smaller parties to keep blocking the EU issue in coalition. However, with the current low support for membership, and also the comfortable economical position for Norway, the European issue lacks the urgency it would need to overcome the obstacles that the party system represents for politicians eager to raise the membership banner.

Conclusion

One would be wrong to believe that the absence of an European debate in Norwegian party politics was due to a lack of an opinion from the parties. Perhaps with the exception of the officially neutral Progress Party, all parties have well developed stances viewpoints and stances about how they feel European integration should be, and what relationship Norway should preferably have with the European Union. Rather, the low salience of the EU issue in Norwegian politics is connected to two factors. Firstly, the low popularity of the EU-issue makes it unlikely that a

membership debate will be successful. This will naturally help to lower the priority of the EU-issue among pro-EU parties. However, the deciding factor that is keeping the EU-issue quiet, is the difficulty of creating coalitions without involving parties with conflicting views on membership. Because of this, governing coalitions will have to be based on a compromise on the EU-issue. The result is the preservation of the status quo, where Norway's relationship with the EU is regulated by the EEA agreement. Interestingly, the EEA is not the preferred outcome of any of the five parties researched in this study. Due the difficulties the EU-issue creates for political cooperation, the parties chose not to focus on the issue to prevent it in getting in the way of other issues, mainly the quest for office. On this basis, I conclude in agreement with my hypothesis: All the likely government coalitions include parties with a negative attitude towards accession. Hence, parties will have to play down the issue to make it possible to form a governing coalition.

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List of Abbreviations

Norwegian political parties (Abbreviation, Norwegian name, English name)

AP	– Arbeiderpartiet	– Labour Party
H	- Høyre	– Conservative Party
FRP	– Fremskrittspartiet	– Progress Party
V	- Venstre	- Liberal Party
SV	– Sosialistisk Venstreparti	– Socialist Left
SP	- Senterpartiet	– Centre Party
KRF	- Kristelig Folkeparti	– Christian Peoples Party

Other abbreviations

EEA	-European Economic Area
EFTA	- European Free Trade Association
EU	- European Union