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**Frozen Party Politics or  
Contingent Opposition? The  
European Question in Norway  
and the 2005 Election**

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

Ever since the question of membership of the European Economic Community first came up in the summer of 1961, political opinion in Norway has been divided on the matter. President Charles de Gaulle's veto on British membership killed off the debate during the 1960s, but during the three years between de Gaulle leaving office and the Norwegian referendum on EEC membership in 1972 public and party opinion in Norway polarised. Norway became the first country to reject EEC membership by referendum. Twenty-two years later, in 1994, a second referendum was held. The parties stuck to their 1972 positions, and the outcome was almost identical: a second 'No' to the European Union. Yet parliamentary elections in Norway usually return majorities that favour close participation in European integration, and most governments have sought to strengthen the links with the EU. In 1994 Norway and most of the others members of the European Free Trade Association joined the European Economic Area, which grants them access to the Single European Market in return for accepting all new relevant EU legislation. In 2001 the Schengen agreement on passport-free travel was extended to non-EU members Norway and Iceland, along with the rest of Scandinavia. In addition, Norway participates in a number of other EU initiatives on an ad hoc basis. In short, Norway may be described as a quasi-member of the EU. It is closely involved with the core areas of European integration, accepts all new relevant EU legislation, but has no formal power to participate in decision making. On the surface, party opinion on 'the European questions' almost seems to have been frozen for four decades; but this is somewhat deceptive. The content of Euroscepticism has changed over time, and most parties continuously review and adapt (if not revise) their stances. The present chapter explores the roots, dynamics and consequences of Norwegian party opinion on European integration, as well as the implications for the 2005 election on Norway's relationship with the European Union.

### *Party Strategy and the European Question in Norway*

The most remarkable features of party-based opposition to European integration in Norway are its prevalence across the party system and its persistence. While most

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Norway, as elsewhere, the term 'European question' actually denotes a range of issues including both economic questions and less tangible positions on national identity, sovereignty and democracy. It is far more disparate than the divisions that are usually classified as cleavages.<sup>5</sup> Opposition to membership of the EU is often based on a combination of interests and values, where interest-driven opposition implies analysis of the economic costs and benefits to specific groups, and value-based opposition is based on identity, concepts of democracy, self-rule and sovereignty and foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> The economic issues are relatively easy to identify, inasmuch as Norwegian Euroscepticism draws support from sections of society that face increased economic uncertainty or loss of subsidies under EU membership. This includes agriculture and fisheries, regions that fear they may lose economic transfers and positive discrimination, and some concerns that EU membership might adversely affect the welfare state and size of the public sector.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the Socialist Left has long opposed participation in European integration on foreign policy grounds.<sup>8</sup> Conversely, the Progress Party has at times supported EU membership, on the

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*Quarterly*, 11:4 (1986), 485-506; P. Dunleavy, *Democracy, Bureaucracy and Public Choice: Economic Explanations in Political Science*, (London, Harvester, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> K. Strom, "A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties", *The American Journal of Political Science*, 34 (2), 565-598; W. C. Müller & K. Strom, "Political Parties and Hard Choices," in W. C. Müller & K. Strom (eds.), *Policy, Office or Votes? How Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> D. W. Rae & M. Taylor, *The Analysis of Political Cleavages*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1970); S. Bartolini & P. Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability: The Stabilization of European Electorates 1885-1985*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> P. A. Petersen, A. T. Jensen & O. Listhaug, "The 1994 EU referendum in Norway: Continuity and Change", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 19:3 (1996), 257-281; J. Saglie, "Values, Perceptions and European Integration: The Case of the Norwegian 1994 Referendum", *European Union Politics*, 1:2 (2000), 227-249.

<sup>7</sup> I. Barnes, "Agriculture, Fisheries and the 1995 Nordic Enlargement", in L. Miles (ed.) *The European Union and the Nordic Countries*, (London, Routledge, 1996); A. Batory & N. Sitter Cleavages, Competition, and Coalition-building: Agrarian Parties and the European Question in Western and Eastern Europe', *The European Journal of Political Research*, 43:4 (2004), 523-546.

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Christensen, "The Left-Wing Opposition in Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Cases of Euro-Phobia?", *West European Politics*, 19:3 (1996), 525-546.

grounds that it might lead to a more free-market regime. Value-driven Euroscepticism is more multi-faceted. It is partly related to the historical link between parliamentary democracy and sovereignty (during the Union with Sweden 1814-1905, which followed four centuries of Danish rule), and the notion that democracy can only operate properly, in the form of *participatory* democracy, in a nation state. In terms of identity, religion and culture, historical resistance to Danish cultural influence transmitted through the Oslo elite thus formed a basis for resistance to Europeanisation as a threat to the country's 'moral-cultural heritage' in the second half of the Twentieth Century.<sup>9</sup> The notion that Brussels represented an extension of the threat from the central bureaucracy and mainstream (cosmopolitan) culture in Oslo was succinctly summed up in the 1972 slogan 'it is far to Oslo, but further to Brussels.' The No to EU campaign's 1994 slogan centred on three key words – environment, solidarity and participatory democracy (*folkestyre*) – all of which were threatened by the 'union'.

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

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

The second set of goals that parties consider when adopting or revising their strategies on the European questions is electoral competition and coalition government. The parties' policy position on European integration are therefore linked to their positions in the party system and patterns of competition, along the three dimensions cited above. Labour and the Conservatives more or less define the left-right dimension, and both appeal to largely pro-EU electorates (although a Labour also draws a significant

<sup>9</sup> S. Rokkan, "Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism", in R. A. Dahl (ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); B. F. Nelsen, "The European Community Debate in Norway: The Periphery Revolts, Again", in B.F. Nelsen (ed.), *Norway and the European Community: The Political Economy of Integration*, (Westport, Conn, Praeger, 1993); B. F. Nelsen, J. L. Guth & C. R. Fraser, "Does Religion Matter? Christianity and Public Support for the European Union", *European Union Politics*, 2:2 (2001), 191-217.

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

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

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

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

*The Norwegian Parties and European Integration, 1961 - 2005*

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

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

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

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

**Key:** Anti – indicates explicit opposition to EEC/EU membership  
 Neg – indicates implicit negative attitude to participation in European integration  
 SQ – indicates explicit defence of the status quo (FrP 2000: explicit ambiguity)  
 none – indicates no reference to European integration, explicit or implicit  
 Fav – indicates explicit favourable attitude to participation in closer European integration  
 Pro – indicates explicit support for (application for) EEC/EU membership

Source: *Vi vil...! Norske partiprogrammer 1884–2001*, CD ROM Versjon 1.1. Bergen & Oslo: Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste & Institutt for samfunnsforskning, 2001; and 2005 party programmes as per party web-sites. 'Soc' denotes SF, and SV after its reorganisation.

The 1972 referendum was followed by a decade-and-a-half-long truce on the European question, during which no party manifesto (except a small liberal breakaway party) explicitly called for Norway to join the EEC. Party positions as set out in manifestos are reported in table 1. Labour returned to power after the 1973 election, and ruled as a minority government for two full four-year terms (because it is not possible to call early elections in Norway, elections are held every four years). A list of governments is set out in table 2. The party was divided on the European question, had lost votes and members to the left, and barely discussed European integration in the 1970s. On the centre-right, the absence of much debate on the EU made it possible for the non-socialist parties to cooperate again. The 1981 election brought about a minority conservative government, which was expanded into a majority coalition with the Christian People's Party and Centre party two years later. After winning the 1985 election this coalition was brought down by the Progress Party over a tax issue in 1986. This time the minority Labour government took a more pro-EEC line, partly in response to the Single European Act. It worked hard to push the 'Luxembourg process' for closer cooperation between the EEC and EFTA, and this would eventually produce the EEA agreement.

Table 2: Norwegian governments since 1961

<i>Election</i>	<i>Government, coalition parties and status. Majority governments in bold</i>
1961	Minority Labour, interrupted by four-week centre-right cabinet in 1963.
1965	<b>Majority centre-right (H, KrF, V, Sp)</b>
1969	<b>Majority centre-right continued, fell over EEC issue 1971.</b> Minority Labour; then minority centre (KrF, V, Sp) after 1972 referendum.
1973	Minority Labour
1977	Minority Labour
1981	Minority Consv.; <b>expanded 1983 to majority centre-right (H, Sp, KrF)</b>
1985	Minority centre-right; replaced by Labour minority 1986
1989	Minority centre-right, fell over EU; replaced by Labour minority 1990
1993	Minority Labour
1997	Minority centre (KrF, V, Sp); replaced by Labour minority 2000
2001	Minority centre-right (H, KrF, V)
2005	<b>Majority centre-left: Labour with SV and Sp</b>

By the time of the September 1989 election, the European debate began to heat up again. Labour, the Conservatives and the three centre parties maintained their old positions, but the European question came back on the agenda because of the EEC's moves toward the Single European Market. The Progress Party's concluded that EEC membership would bring the benefits of free trade and lower taxes. The Socialist Left maintained opposition to any form participation in European integration, but it toned down the anti-imperialist and -capitalist language. The 1989 election saw the return of a centre-right coalition, but with EEA negotiations well under way, the EEC states negotiating the Maastricht Treaty and the collapse of communism opening new questions about European integration, the coalition's collapse was all but inevitable. In November 1990 the Centre withdrew and the government fell. Labour once again returned to office as a minority government, this time to see through the EEA negotiations. The end of the cold war making it possible for the neutral EFTA states Sweden, Finland and Austria to join the EU, and set the scene for a second Norwegian referendum in 1994. The 1993 parliamentary election also became a contest over EU politics. Labour faced the biggest challenges because it featured considerable internal dissent, and the party leadership sought to defuse the issue by allowing dissenters to organise as an internal 'semi-legitimate fraction': Social Democrats against the EC.<sup>12</sup> It contained three strands of internal opposition: the traditional trade union left, the

<sup>12</sup> J. Saglie, "Between Opinion Leadership and 'Contract of Disagreement': The Norwegian Labour Party and the European issue (1988-1994), *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 23:2 (2000), 93-113.

post-materialist new left and the rural wings of the party.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the Progress Party modified its position into ‘Yes to the EC, not to Union’, indicating its misgivings about Economic and Monetary Union and the EU’s social dimension. In the end the 1994 referendum result reflected the results of 1972, with a 52.2 to 47.8 percent ‘No’ victory.

In contrast to 1972, the Labour government did not resign after the 1994 referendum result. The party remained in office, focussed on making the EEA system a success, and maintained a generally pro-EU platform in its party programmes. To be sure, in 1997 Norway got its second Eurosceptic government, a very small coalition of the three centre parties led by Kjell Magne Bondevik (KrF). But this owed less to the European question than to Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland’s threat to resign if Labour did not improve on its 1993 result (in 1997 it dropped from 36.9% to 35.0%). The Bondevik coalition lasted until March 2000, when it was defeated on a partly EU-related question connected to gas power plants. It gave way to a Labour minority government. The next election, in 2001, prompted the first coalition agreement that successfully quarantined the European question: Conservatives, Liberals and Christians agreed a ‘suicide clause’ which stipulated that the coalition government would fall if it were to raise the question of EU membership, and Bondevik became prime minister for the second time. The consequences for the Norwegian party system were therefore far less severe after the second referendum. Due to the successful negotiation of the EEA agreement, which came into operation in January 1994, much the same can be said for the consequences for the Norwegian economy.<sup>14</sup>

### *The 2005 Election, Norway and European Integration*

Ever since 1961, the European issue has hung like Damocles’ sword over Norwegian governments. Sometimes it is tightly secured, sometimes less so. Whereas the making of coalition governments or the scope for minority governments has been shaped by

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<sup>13</sup> R. Geyer & D. Swank, “Rejecting the European Union: Norwegian Social Democratic Opposition to the EU in the 1990s”, *Party Politics*, 3:4 (1997), 459-562.

<sup>14</sup> K. A. Eliassen & N. Sitter, “Ever Closer Co-operation? The Limits of the ‘Norwegian Method’ of European Integration”, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 26:2 (2003), 125-144; K. A. Eliassen & N. Siter, “The Quiet European: Norway’s Quasi-Membership of the European Union” in P. Magnette (ed.), *La Grande Europe*, (Institut d’études européennes, Université de Bruxelles, 2004).

primarily by domestic politics and left-right competition, the breaking of governments has, as table 2 shows, been shaped also by the European question. In the 1960s and 1980s the centre-right coalitions depended on keeping Europe off the agenda. When the coalitions led by the Conservatives broke down in 1971 and 1990, the party was out of office for the next decade. The deal that the Conservatives reached with the Liberals and Christians in 2001 broke new ground in that the three parties formally agreed to keep Norway's relationship with the EU off the political agenda. The 'suicide clause' meant that the coalition would break up if the Conservatives were to push for EU membership; but it also meant that Norway maintained its path to ever closer cooperation with the EU through the EEA, Schengen and ad hoc cooperation. In 2004, when it became clear that Labour would not be able to persuade the Christian People's Party to consider a centre-left coalition even if the left won the 2005 election, Labour began to work toward a pact with the Socialist Left and the Centre Party. During the 2005 electoral campaign these three 'Red-Green' parties made it clear that they sought to form a coalition government that would be based on a similar kind of agreement not to change Norway's policy towards the European Union. The immediate consequence was the European question became a non-issue in the 2005 election.

In most West European liberal democracies a government might expect to win an election if the economy is performing well, especially if the EU is not an issue. As it turned out, Norway has not suffered much economically from the decision not to join the EU, largely because the EEA effectively provides membership of the Single European Market. Over the last decade the mainland economy has grown steadily, the interest rate has decreased to the EU level, unemployment is low by European standards and Norway has accumulated large reserves in the Petroleum Fund.<sup>15</sup> Yet this has not helped incumbents at election time. Labour lost in 1997, after seven years in office. In 2001, a mere seventeen months of government was enough to erode the party's popularity, after a period during which Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg had embarked on a modernisation and privatisation programme that many compared with Tony Blair's policies in the UK. It was Labour's worst result since the schisms of the

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<sup>15</sup> See the English-language web-pages of the Norwegian Central Bank (including its Inflation Reports): <http://www.norges-bank.no/english/>. As of 30 June 2005 the market value of the Norwegian Petroleum Fund was NOK 1,184bn, or some Euro 150bn.

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

The Progress Party's withdrawal of support in June, just after the parliament closed for the summer recess, was the bombshell of the election campaign. It reduced the credibility of a government that was already under pressure and fighting a defensive campaign against an opposition that could (because of the oil money) call for both better services and lower taxes, as the Progress Party did. The Red-Green parties actually promised to increase taxes, focussing on public services and better funding for the regions. In the event, the 2005 election was even worse for the centre-right coalition than it had been for Labour 2001: the three parties dropped ten percentage points to less than 27 per cent. The Conservative party lost a third of its support compared to 2001, and Bondevik's Christian People's Party lost nearly half. Only the Liberals improved their position, partly by attracting supporters from the other two parties (it was important to get the party above the four-percent threshold for a share of the top-up votes that the proportional representation system provides for). Labour and the Progress Party were the two big winners: Labour returning above the 30-

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<sup>16</sup> Madeley, J., "The Politics of Embarrassment: Norway's 1997 Election", *West European Politics*, 21:2 (1998), 187-94; J. Madeley, "Outside the Whale: Norway's Storting Election of 10 September", *West European Politics*, 25:2 (2002), 212-222; N. Sitter, "Norway's Storting Election of 12 September 2005: Back to the Left?", forthcoming in *West European Politics*, spring 2006.

<sup>17</sup> World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness reports (<http://www.weforum.org/>) have rated Norway in the top ten the last four years; on the UN ratings see UNDP Human Development Reports (<http://hdr.undp.org/>).

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

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

Party	Votes	Percent	Change	Seats	Change
Socialist Left	232,965	8.8	-3.7	15	-8
Labour	862,454	32.7	+8.4	61	+18
Centre	171,063	6.5	+0.9	11	+1
Chr. People's Pty.	178,885	6.8	-5.6	11	-11
Liberals	156,111	5.9	+2	10	+8
Conservatives	371,950	14.1	-7.1	23	-15
Progress Party	581,893	22.1	+7.5	38	+12
Others*	82,931	3.1	-2.4	0	-1

Source: Official results, as per the *Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development*, <http://odin.dep.no/krd/html/valgresultat2005/frameset.html>.<sup>18</sup>

\* Includes 32,355 votes for the Socialist Electoral Alliance (which won a seat in 1993) and 21,948 votes for the Coastal Party (which lost its single seat).

The 2005 elections resulted in Norway's first ever centre-left coalition government. Apart from the grand coalition during the Second World War, this is the first time Labour governs in coalition, and the first time since 1961 it is part of a majority coalition. Equally significantly, this is the first time the hard Eurosceptic Socialist Left party is in government, and it is there as part of a coalition with the equally Eurosceptic Centre Party. Both oppose not only EU membership, but also Norway's participation in the EEA. Although the three parties more or less copied the centre-right's successful agreement to quarantine the EU issue and to maintain Norway's present relationship with the EU, the dynamics may be somewhat different. To be sure, French and Dutch voters' rejection of the Constitutional Treaty may have reduced the pressure on the Norwegian government, but the internal dynamics in the centre-left coalition differs from that of the centre-right for three reasons.

First, both the Socialist Left and the Centre Party have called for a more assertive policy toward the EU, including making use of what they call the "EEA-veto". The European Economic Area is a dynamic agreement, which is based on the three EFTA

<sup>18</sup> *Statistics Norway* publish historical election statistics, <http://www.ssb.no/vis/emner/00/01/10/stortingsvalg/histtab/tabeller.html>. Electoral data since 1961 can also be found at author's web-site ([http://www.bi.no/templates/artikkel2\\_35406.aspx](http://www.bi.no/templates/artikkel2_35406.aspx)). See also N. Sitter, *EPERN Election Briefings No.20*, (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/epern-eb-norway2005.pdf>).

states accepting new relevant EU-laws. There is no veto as such, but all parties to the treaty (i.e. Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and the EU) have to accept each EEA amendment. Norway may therefore in theory block new laws being incorporated into the EEA. If it were to try this, the rules provide for a six-month period of negotiations, possibly followed by suspension of part of the EEA treaty (but not the core, which includes free movement of goods, services, labour and capital). The potential consequences of such a move are uncertain, apart from the fact that it would trigger an EEA-crisis that would be likely to last for some time. This would certainly reinvigorate the European debate in Norway.

Second, if this were to happen, or in the event of another EU-related crisis, Labour does not stand to lose as much from a coalition breakdown as the Conservatives did during the 2001-2005 parliament. Unlike the Conservatives, Labour occupies something like a median position and it is a bigger party. In the last parliament the collapse of the centre-right coalition was likely to lead to a Labour minority government, as it had done in 1971, 1986 and 1990 (and 2000); in the 2005-2009 parliament the collapse of the centre-left coalition could well lead to a Labour minority government rather than a centre-right government. Raising the EU question is not necessarily the 'suicidal' prospect for Labour that was for the Conservatives.

Third, having lost the election the Conservatives have little reason not to play the EU card. Unlike Labour, the Conservative party is united on the EU question, and need not fear internal dissent if begins to debate EU membership. The party leader, Erna Solberg has suggested that that 2007 might be the right time to raise the membership question. Given the Red-Green coalitions divisions on the issue, which are deeper than the divisions on the centre-right, she has every reason to try to use the European question to embarrass the government.

In short, on the surface Norwegian party positions on the European question have remained remarkably stable over four decades, Norway's participation in European integration through the EEA provides a tolerable compromise for most parties and secures access to the Single European Market, and the new coalition government that was elected in 2005 chose to continue along this steady course. However, closer inspection reveals that the party positions are not as frozen as they may at first appear,

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