

NORWEGIAN EUROSCEPTICISM REVISITED. THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

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Norway has a reputation for being Eurosceptic. It earned this reputation for having rejected membership of the European Union (EU) on two separate occasions. Both rejections followed advisory referenda where a small majority had voted down the government's negotiations with the EU: In September 1972, 53.5% voted against joining the then European Community (EC), and in November 1994, 52.2% opposed the Norwegian EU accession. This makes Norway the only country which rejected an offer to partake in the European integration project on two separate occasions. Previous research has highlighted the reasons for Norway's reluctance to join the EU. While rationalists emphasize the characteristics of the country's industrial structure¹, constructivists draw the attention to aspects related to identity² and values.³

This chapter's point of departure is that Norway, alongside its refusal to join the EU's political unification project, is the EU's most integrated outsider.⁴ This current but less known position is the result of an economic integration process between Norway and the EC that goes back to 1973. In an attempt to compensate for the failed attempt to enter the EC together with Denmark and the United Kingdom in the early 1970s, the Norwegian governments engaged in a political process aiming at formalizing and then gradually extending relations between the remaining members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the EC.⁵ This process entered a new and more dynamic phase with the 1994 commencement of the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), which institutionalized Norway's relations with the EU and extended them to new policy areas.⁶ Norway's continuous quest for ever-closer relations with the EU nuances its image as a Eurosceptic country and calls for closer examination of its multifaceted relation with Europe.

- 1 Christine INGEBRITSEN, *The Nordic States and European Unity*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1998.
- 2 Iver B. NEUMANN, "This little piggy stayed at home: Why Norway is not a member of the EU," in: Lene HANSEN and Ole WÆVER, (eds.), *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States*, London, Routledge, 2002.
- 3 Marianne SUNDLISÆTER SKINNER, "Norwegian Euroscepticism: Values, Identity or Interest," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, May 2012, p. 422-440.
- 4 Christophe HILLION, "Integrating an outsider. An EU perspective on relations with Norway," *Outside and Inside: Norway's agreements with the European Union*, NOU 2012: 2, Official Norwegian Reports, Report 16, Oslo, 2011.
- 5 Lise RYE, "EFTA's quest for free trade in Western Europe (1960-92). Slow train coming," *EFTA Bulletin*, July 2015, p. 4-17; After the 1973 enlargement of the EC to Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom, the remaining members of EFTA were Austria; Finland; Iceland; Norway; Portugal; Sweden and Switzerland.
- 6 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Outside and Inside: Norway's agreements with the European Union*, NOU 2012: 2, Official Norwegian Reports, Oslo, 2012.

This chapter contains three parts. First, the different stances towards Europe are mapped by examining party programmes and public opinion surveys of Norwegian political parties and public. These positions testify of a noticeable gap between the predominantly pro-EU membership political elite and the considerably more EU-sceptic general public. Thereafter, the second part investigates perceptions of supranational European integration, as presented in party programmes and parliamentary discourse. Hard Eurosceptics explained their position with the virtues of national democracy and the wish to remain in control of the Norwegian natural resources. In contrast, principled supporters of EU membership underpinned their positions with a broader range of arguments pertaining to economy, democracy, security, and solidarity. This part of the chapter also highlights a gap between policy and politics at the level of political parties. In the anti-membership camp, this gap was created in relation to a readiness to accept a considerable transfer of sovereignty to the EU level. Amongst the EU membership-supporters, it found expression in the reluctance to raise the issue of full membership. The last section identifies three aspects that need to be taken into account when attempting to understand popular Euroscepticism in Norway: the high level of apathy toward EU affairs, Norway's status as a well-functioning democracy, and the state of its economy. This chapter argues that economic factors are more influential than the results of Norwegian referenda surveys might suggest. In the future, opposition against Norway's entry into the EU could thus be likely to decrease in relation to the state of the Norwegian economy.

1. Positions on European Integration: The Elite-Masses Gap

As pointed out by Kopecký and Mudde, any analysis of Euroscepticism must start with a precise definition of the term.⁷ The concept has its origins in the British press. It first appeared in a November 1985 article in *The Times* where it denoted basic opposition to participation in the European integration project.⁸ This is also how it was used when entering the vocabulary of the Norwegian press, in a 1992 story covering the Swiss reluctance to join the EC.⁹ Efforts to capture the various degrees and targets of Euroscepticism have resulted in a rich and gradually more nuanced scholarly literature. The majority of this literature concerns Euroscepticism within the EU. When the object of study is a country where the question of whether or not to become an EU member is still valid, Szczerbiak and Taggart's widely used distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism remains relevant. Moreover, the formal positions of Norwegian political parties regarding the question of EU membership have remained stable. The Norwegian case, thus, avoids one of the essential objections raised against the 'hard-soft'

7 Petr KOPECKÝ, Cas MUDDE, "The Two Sides of Euroscepticism. Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe," *European Union Politics* 3, 3, 2002, p. 297-326.

8 Robert HARMSEN and Menno SPIERING, "Introduction. Euroscepticism and the Evolution of European Political Debate," in Robert HARMSEN and Menno SPIERING, (eds.), *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*, Amsterdam, Editions Rodopi B.V., 2005, p. 16.

9 Per NORDRUM, "Laber EF-stemming. Økende euroskepsis hos nølende sveitsere," *Aftenposten*, March 28, 1992, p. 4.

conceptualization, namely, that it is based on policies likely to be conjunctural or opportunistic.¹⁰

According to Szczerbiak and Taggart, hard, or principled, Euroscepticism signifies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration. It also opposes joining or remaining a member of the EU. Soft Euroscepticism denotes a contingent, or qualified opposition to European integration.¹¹ Transferred to the Norwegian political landscape, this distinction enables the separation of the parties formally opposed to EU membership and those that are not. Table 2.1 presents the position of the eight political parties currently represented in the national parliament (*The Storting*) on the question of EU membership as stated in party programmes. The parties are listed in keeping with their position on the left-right political spectrum.

Table 1 Party positions on EU membership¹²

	Principled supporters of membership	Principled opponents of membership	No official Position	Support in 2013 general elections	Seats
The Socialist Left Party		x		4.1	7
The Labour Party	x			30.8	55
The Green Party ¹³			x	2.8	1
The Centre Party		x		5.5	10
The Christian Democratic Party		x		5.6	10
The Liberal Party			x	5.2	9
The Conservative Party	x			26.8	48
The Progress Party			x	16.3	29

The table shows that in Norway, hard Euroscepticism is not reserved for the fringes of the political spectrum. The Centre Party – the former Farmers’ Party – has always been the leading group opposing EU membership. The Centre Party is located in the midst of the political spectrum, and a former participant in both centre-right and centre-left governments. The Socialist Left Party also opposes the Norwegian membership of the EU. On paper, these two parties oppose the EEA Agreement, which they would like to replace with a less comprehensive free trade agreement. This last point separates them from the Christian Democratic Party which pursues a pro EEA, but still anti EU membership policy.

10 Aleks SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 242.

11 Paul TAGGART and Aleks SZCZERBIAK, “Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe,” *European Journal of Political Research*, 43, 1, 2004, p. 1–27.

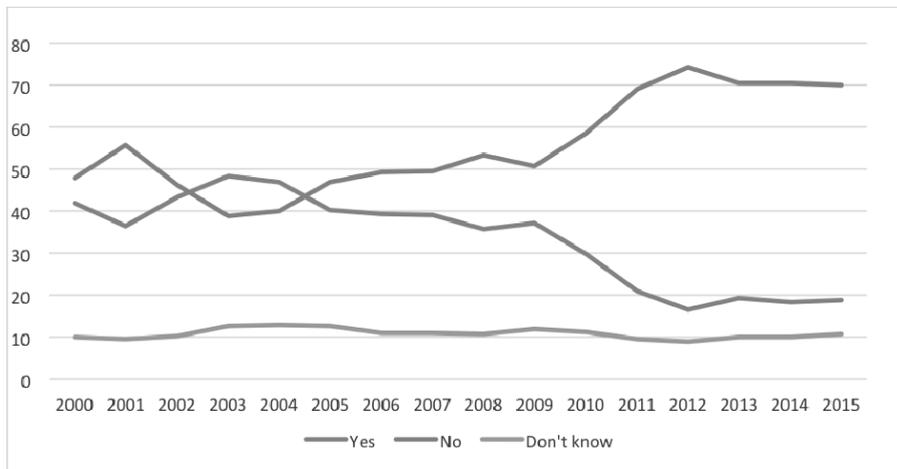
12 Source: Party programmes and Stortinget.no.

13 The Green Party does not position itself along the traditional left-right axis. Nevertheless, the prevailing view of the Norwegian electorate is that this is a leftist party.

A second lesson to be drawn from the above table is that hard Eurosceptics constitute a minority. The two large catch-all Norwegian parties, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, are both in favour of EU membership. The Conservative Party was the first party to come out in favour of EC membership and the only party to have done so before the first national referendum of 1972. The Labour Party followed in spring 1992 after having negotiated the EEA Agreement. This agreement ensured that Norway's access to the EU internal market proceeded on equal terms with other EU member states. It is fair to say that in spite of the pro-EU positions of both parties, the question of EC membership remains a far more divisive issue in the Labour Party than in the Conservative Party. The political constellation on the issue of EU membership is the opposite in Iceland, which is one of Norway's fellow EFTA EEA countries. The large catch-all party on Iceland's political right is vehemently opposed to Icelandic EU membership, while the social democratic party is not.

Previous research has described the elite-masses gap in European integration as notorious.¹⁴ Norway forms no exception to this rule. The gap between the relatively EU-optimistic political elite (the political parties) and the far more EU-pessimistic public is considerable. This has been evident ever since the question of European supranational integration entered the Norwegian political agenda in the beginning of the 1960s. Two decades after Norway's last referendum on EU membership, popular opposition against joining the EU shows no sign of slackening. On the contrary, since 2009, the percentage of the population opposing EU membership has increased to a record high of approximately 70%. Figure 1 presents the attitudes of the Norwegian population towards the question of EU membership as they have developed since the turn of the millennium.

Figure 1 : Norwegian attitudes towards EU membership, 2000–2015¹⁵



14 Wolfgang C. MÜLLER, Marcelo JENNY, Alejandro ECKER, "The Elites-masses Gap in European Integration," in Heinrich BEST, György LENGYEL, Luca VERZICHELLI, (eds.), *The Europe of Elites: A Study into the Europeaness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*, Oxford Scholarship Online, May 2012, p. 2.

15 Source: Sentio Research Group, <http://www.sentio.no/>

The elite-masses gap is politically consequential. The Norwegian constitution stipulates that the transfer of powers “that are normally vested in the authorities of the state” to an international organization “to which Norway belongs or will belong”, requires a three-fourths majority in the Storting.¹⁶ The granting of such consent also demands the presence of two thirds of the parliamentarians. The present government does not have EU membership on its agenda. However, with the current makeup, another popular refusal to join the EU would have entailed a negative vote in parliament. As table 1 shows, three political parties have no official position on the question of EU membership. The Green Party refrains from taking a position because the issue is not on the political agenda. The Liberal Party and the Progress Party make it clear that they will cast their votes in accordance with popular advice. The Christian Democratic Party holds this latter position as well. Together with the votes of the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party, the Liberal Party, the Progress Party, and the Christian Democratic Party hold enough seats to block a decision to enter the EU.

2. Perceptions of European Integration and the Policy-Practice Gap

The political parties that oppose the Norwegian entry into the EU are brought together by the view that EU membership will weaken the conditions for national democracy. The Centre Party states the following: “We believe in active democracy with short distances between decision-makers and decision-takers. The EU offers poorer conditions for representative democracy”.¹⁷ The Socialist Left Party argues along similar lines: “Norwegian membership in the EU will increase the distance between the people and the decision-makers in a number of areas, and weaken representative government in Norway.”¹⁸ The central concept in this context is that of “national sovereignty”. In the Norwegian anti-membership discourse, this is referred to as *selvråderett*, and used to denote the supreme and independent power of the state. For parties opposing EU membership, the maintenance of national sovereignty is incompatible with the transfer of sovereignty to supranational institutions. An entry into the EU implies a loss of Norway’s sovereignty.

The concern to preserve national sovereignty is closely linked with the wish to remain in control of Norway’s rich natural resources. Norway’s current association with the EU allows this. The EEA Agreement does not cover the EU Customs Union, the Common Agricultural Policy or the Common Fisheries Policy. National control of agriculture and fisheries are, in turn, essential instruments of Norwegian regional policy. The motives underpinning this policy differ fundamentally from the ones supporting EU regional policy. EU regional policy has developed in response to the challenges of the EU political project. These challenges arise from the considerable economic differences existing between

16 *The Constitution of Norway*, Article 115, <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/constitutionenglish.pdf>. (2.3.2016).

17 The Centre Party Political Programme 2013–2017, [http://www.senterpartiet.no/partiprogrammet/\(2.3.2016\)](http://www.senterpartiet.no/partiprogrammet/(2.3.2016)).

18 The Socialist Left Party Political Programme 2013–2017, [https://www.sv.no/arbeidsprogram/\(2.3.2016\)](https://www.sv.no/arbeidsprogram/(2.3.2016)).

rich and poor regions. As a consequence, EU policy has a strong focus on convergence – on the reduction of economic, social, and territorial disparities between regions. In contrast, the primary ambition of post-war Norwegian regional policy is to uphold the country's settlement pattern.¹⁹ The aim to keep the entire country populated is a struggle against the much stronger forces of centralisation and urbanisation. Norwegian regional policy has provided people that prefer to live outside major cities with opportunities to do so. The regulation of agriculture and fisheries is a key framework of this policy.

The political discourse of hard Eurosceptics has been consistent for decades. The Eurozone crisis did not change this discourse in a substantial way, but rather only gave it new relevance. The Eurozone crisis is presented as general proof of the inherent weaknesses of the EU political project. The economic and monetary policies of the EU are singled out as particular examples of the Eurozone weakness.

Hard Eurosceptics acknowledge Norway's interest to collaborate with the EU but disagree on the form this should take. The Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party argue that the EEA Agreement should be replaced by trade and cooperation agreements with the EU. In contrast, the Christian Democratic Party holds, and is unique among Norwegian political parties to state this, that the EEA Agreement serves Norwegian interests best. The party emphasises that Norway's commercial interests necessitate good relations with the EU, and that the EEA Agreement is exemplary because it provides access to the EU internal market while maintaining Norway's freedom of action in other important areas.²⁰

Principled supporters of Norwegian entry into the EU firmly believe that Norway's EEA association with the EU is democratically problematic. The 1994 EEA Agreement provides Norway and its fellow EFTA countries Iceland and Liechtenstein with access to the EU internal market on equal terms to EU member states. As participants of the internal market, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein are subject to internal market legislation. While the EEA Agreement includes provisions for their participation in the formulation of EU law, the passing of such legislation is the prerogative of EU members. The result of this is, as the Conservative Party points out, that the "Norwegian society is formed by decisions made in a political system in which Norwegian electors remain unrepresented."²¹

For the principled supporters of EU membership – the Conservative Party and the Labour Party – economic integration with the EU is necessary but not sufficient. Both parties acknowledge the beneficial impact of access to the EU internal market for Norwegian businesses. As the Labour Party points out, eighty per cent of Norwegian exports go to the EU market, and more than fifty per cent of Norwegian imports come from this market. Against this backdrop, predictable conditions for trade and access to markets are of immense importance. The Labour Party also emphasises that the EEA Agreement grants Norwegian busi-

19 Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, "On Regional Policy," *Regjeringa.no*, 2014, [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/kommuner-og-regioner/regional--og-distrikts-politikk/om-regionalpolitikken/id2345452/\(2.3.2016\)](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/kommuner-og-regioner/regional--og-distrikts-politikk/om-regionalpolitikken/id2345452/(2.3.2016)).

20 The Christian Democratic Party Political Programme 2013–2017 [https://www.krf.no/politikk/politisk-program/\(2.3.2016\)](https://www.krf.no/politikk/politisk-program/(2.3.2016)).

21 The Conservative Party Political Programme 2013–2017, [http://publikasjoner.hoyre.no/hoyre/160/\(2.3.2016\)](http://publikasjoner.hoyre.no/hoyre/160/(2.3.2016)).

nesses access to labour and expertise while providing the entire country with new residents.²² On this last point, it is worth noting that Norway is a country with a geographical size comparable to Germany.²³ While Germany is a country with more than 80 million inhabitants, Norway's population is 5.2 million. Thus, the challenge inherent in the political aim of keeping the entire country populated is considerable. Nevertheless, in order to obtain political influence and participation, both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party want to replace the EEA Agreement with full membership of the European Union.

For the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, EU membership is more than a question of participation in the passing of internal market legislation. These parties' position is underpinned by normative arguments pertaining to security and solidarity. The Labour Party holds that European integration is conducive to ensuring a peaceful continent. Moreover, "Norway ought to seek cooperation and influence, and not place itself outside co-operation that may provide a better basis for increased political governance and a better distribution of welfare in Europe."²⁴ The Conservative Party argues that cooperation with the EU has contributed to Norway's economic growth, welfare, and to environmental and security improvements. As a result, "Norway is under an obligation to assume co-responsibility for the development in Europe, and this obligation is best met by EU-membership."²⁵

On the level of public opinion, attempts to grasp the essence of, and reasons for, Euroscepticism are hampered by the lack of systematic information. The standard Eurobarometer would constitute a useful source to such information but is only conducted in EU member states. Moreover, due to its contested nature, the EU question is subjected to little coverage and debate in Norwegian media.²⁶ The periods leading up to the two referenda were exceptions to this pattern. As a result, much information is available about why a majority of the voters rejected the EC/EU in 1972 and 1994. This information testifies of continuity over time, as well as of convergence between party-level and popular level Euroscepticism. Election surveys show that in both 1972 and 1994, voters named arguments related to sovereignty and democracy their most important reason for voting no.²⁷ More specifically, opponents of the Norwegian EC/EU accession held that membership was a democratically inferior alternative to non-membership. This group highlighted the increased distance between decision-makers and decision-takers that the surrender of sovereignty to supranational institutions would entail. The principal slogan during a major demonstration in Oslo

22 The Labour Party Political Programme 2013–2017 <http://arbeiderpartiet.no/Politikken-AA/Partiprogram-2013-2017> (5.11.2016).

23 Norway's total area is 385,199 km² (the islands of Svalbard and Jan Mayen included). Germany's total area is 357,021 km².

24 The Labour Party Political Programme 2013–2017, <http://arbeiderpartiet.no/Politikken-AA/Partiprogram-2013-2017> (20.11.2016).

25 The Conservative Party Political Programme 2013–2017, <http://arbeiderpartiet.no/Politikken-AA/Partiprogram-2013-2017> (20.11.2016).

26 Tore SLÅTTA, "Fortiet, forsinket og forvrengt?," *Outside and Inside: Norway's agreements with the European Union*, NOU 2012: 2, Official Norwegian Reports, Report 11, 2011.

27 Kristen RINGDAL, "Velgernes argumenter," in Anders TODAL JENSSEN, Henry VALEN, (eds.), *Brussel midt imot. Folkeavstemningen om EU*, Oslo, Gyldendal, 1996, pp. 45–66, 56; Marianne RYGHAUG, Anders TODAL JENSSEN, *Den store styrkeprøven: om EU-avstemningen i norsk politikk: sluttrapport fra Folkeavstemningsprosjektet*, Trondheim, Tapir, 1999, p. 19.

days before the second referendum in November 1994 illustrates this position: “Yes to the people’s democracy – no to the Union” (*Ja til folkestyre – nei til Union*).²⁸

Twenty years after the second Norwegian rejection of EU membership, the leading newspaper *Aftenposten* established that Norway’s 1994 “no to the EU had become a yes to quite a lot.”²⁹ New research presented in the form of an Official Norwegian Report commissioned by the Norwegian government substantiated the claim. The report established that the democratic problems inherent in the EEA association had increased. It pointed out the gap between formal and actual sovereignty – between formal autonomy and actual subjugation to decisions taken without Norwegian participation. The report also emphasised that the democratic deficit inherent in the EEA association had grown. The agreement works in ways that “dampens political engagement and debate in Norway and makes it difficult to monitor the Government and hold it accountable for its European policy.”³⁰

The gap between formal positions on the question of EU membership and political practice in Norway is equally evident at the level of political parties and public opinion. The political parties’ “formal positions”, in this context, signify party positions as stated in political platforms and/or party programmes. When discussing public opinion, this is inferred from data stated in public opinion polls. “Political practice”, in turn, signifies active action, such as voting, but also non-action, such as omission to raise the question of EU membership. The existence of a gap between the underlying positions of the Norwegian parties’ treatment of EU membership, and the way they accommodate the issue in Norwegian politics, is not an original observation. The political scientist Nick Sitter called attention to this aspect in 2008.³¹ In light of the developments since then, it is nevertheless astonishing that this gap has not narrowed but increased.

Bringing to light the unfortunate democratic consequences of Norway’s EEA association has had no traceable impact on the politics of hard Eurosceptic parties. These parties recently spent eight years in government together with the pro-membership Labour Party. During this period (2005–13), Norway did not once make use of the right to reserve itself against EU legislation. In addition, parties with principled support of EU membership have put the question of EU membership on hold. The Conservative Party confines itself to present membership as its long-term ambition. The Labour Party is equally unwilling to raise the issue and relates this stance to the European economic crisis:

“To give up the anchor pile that the EEA Agreement constitutes for Norwegian businesses at a time of economic storm in Europe, would be to gamble with

28 Alf OLE ASK, “For 20 år siden, 28. november, sa Norge nei til EU for, andre gang,” *Aftenposten Innsikt*, 25.11.2014.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Outside and Inside: Norway’s agreements with the European Union*, *op. cit.*, 2012, p. 7.

31 Nick SITTER, “The European Question and the Norwegian Party System since 1961: The freezing of a modern cleavage or contingent opposition?” in P. TAGGART & A. SZCZERBIAK (eds), *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

Norwegian businesses. Today it is more important than ever to ensure predictability and safety for Norwegian workplaces. The EEA Agreement does that.”³²

The discrepancy between formal positions and political practice at the level of public opinion is even more striking. In 2009, approximately 50% of the Norwegian public declared their opposition to EU membership. In the general elections that year, 12.6% gave their votes to the two hard Eurosceptic parties that opposes both EU and EEA membership. Four years later, popular opposition to EU membership had risen to approximately 70%. In that year’s general elections, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party together collected 9.6% of the vote.

3. Explaining Norwegian Euroscepticism

The hard-soft conceptualization enables drawing a line between the political parties that are formally opposed to Norwegian membership of the EU and those that are not. However, this fails to capture the willingness of the first group to partake in the European integration project, as well as the reluctance of the latter to actively promote their pro EU membership position. Evidence suggests that in the first case, practice is the result of office seeking. In the 2005–13 period, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party formed part of the red-green coalition governments headed by Jens Stoltenberg from the Labour Party. These three parties were divided over the EU question. Their forming of a government was based on a compromise in which the pro EU Labour Party agreed to keep the membership question off the political agenda. In return, the Centre Party and the Socialist Party accepted a stated ambition to step up Norway’s European policy on the basis of the EEA Agreement. This was a price the hard Eurosceptics were willing to pay in 2005, and again in 2009.

As for the principled Euro optimists, the omission to raise the issue of full membership is the result of pragmatic adjustments to the changing mood of the electorate. The crisis clearly entailed a shift towards a stronger defence of the EEA association among the advocates of Norwegian accession to the EU. However, even before the strong increase in popular opposition to EU membership from 2009 onwards, the Conservative Party made it clear that it did not want a new debate on EU membership. It would only engage in such a debate when public attitude on the issue would render a positive outcome of a referendum likely.³³ At the height of the crisis, the Labour Party maintained that full membership would have served Norway better, “but when 70% of the population say that they are not interested, I agree with the Prime Minister that we have other issues to spend time on now.”³⁴

Thus, in both camps, principal policies have given way to pragmatic politics. The situation indicates that European policy is an area where people lead and politicians follow. In turn, this calls for a closer look at the factors that are likely to impact Norwegian public opinion on the EU question. In this section, I highlight three interrelated aspects of Norwegian popular Euroscepticism: apathy,

32 The Labour Party Political Programme 2013–2017, <http://arbeiderpartiet.no/Politikken-AA/Partiprogram-2013-2017> (2011.2016).

33 Finn MARTIN VALLERSNES, *Stortingsforhandlinger*, 8.11.2007, p. 384.

34 Svein ROALD HANSEN, *Stortingsforhandlinger*, 22.11.2011, p. 582.

perceptions of the quality of Norwegian democracy, and the country's relatively strong economy.

The apathy toward the question of Norway's relations with the EU is striking. At a time when 70% of the population is opposed to EU membership, less than 10% gave their vote to the two most pronounced Eurosceptic parties. The situation is contrasted by the high turnout at the 1972 and 1994 referenda, where 79.2% and 89%, respectively, turned up at the ballot boxes. On one level, the situation is surprising. The majority of the Norwegian electorate rejected EC/EU membership on the grounds that this would weaken national democracy. The EEA Review has since established that Norway's relations with the EU works in undemocratic ways. The surprising facet of this information is that nearly 60% of voters continue to express their satisfaction with the EEA association nevertheless. This is regardless of the fact that the EEA association dampens political debate and breaks with central democratic principles of participation and control.³⁵

There are at least two possible explanations for this apparent paradox. One is that EU membership opponents consider the EEA association the lesser of two evils. Support for the EU's political integration project has never been strong in Norway. The number of members in the *European Movement* in Norway, as opposed to the number of members in the corresponding association of opponents of EU membership is illustrative of this fact. At the height of the campaign leading up to the 1994 referendum, the *European Movement* had 35,000 registered members. At this same point in time, the *No to the EU* membership was 145,000. While the country's dependence on European markets has driven it towards the EU, the wish to remain in control of its natural resources has caused Norway to keep a distance. The EEA Agreement was conceived to accommodate both of these interests. Today, the EU has changed while the EEA Agreement has not. Consequently, its fit with Norwegian interests is not as good as it once was. A majority of Norwegians still perceive it as preferable to full EU membership.

A second possible explanation may lie in the contrast between the workings of the EEA Agreement and Norway's overall status as a well-functioning democracy. Norway figures at the top of several democracy-indexes, and has done so for years.³⁶ It is tempting to suggest that the country's general and high compliance with democratic standards is conducive to its population's readiness to accept the inherent democratic weaknesses of the EEA association. Against this general positive backdrop, the negative aspects of the EEA association may appear as minor and manageable flaws. It is, however, also possible that Norwegians ignore facts that might compromise the image of Norway as one of the world's foremost democracies.

The economy is a third aspect requiring consideration when discussing Norwegian popular opposition against EU membership. A focus on the critical junctures in Norway's relations with the EU draws a picture of continuity as well as of a prioritization of political concerns. Both in 1972 and 1994, membership op-

35 As of January 2014, 58% of the Norwegian public opinion expressed itself in favour of the EEA Agreement, <http://www.nrk.no/okonomi/flertallet-vil-beholde-eos-avtalen-1.11447446> (2.3.2016)

36 See for instance, The Economist Intelligence Unit's *Democracy Index*, which assesses the quality of democracy in 167 states. In its 2015 index, the EIU ranked Norway as number one. The EIU ranked Norway's fellow EFTA EEA country Iceland second. That same year, as in 2010-11 and 2012-13, Norway also figured on top of the *Global Democracy Ranking*.

ponents formulated their responses along similar lines, using the topics of national democracy and sovereignty as reasons for voting no. Research based on time series analyses reach different conclusions. In 2005, Grünfeld and Sverdrup analysed the relationship between economic fluctuations and attitudes to EU membership. They found that fluctuations in the Norwegian economy, measured in unemployment rates and growth in GDP, had considerable impact on the variation of Norwegian attitudes to EU membership. In hard times, Norwegians were more likely to endorse membership, and even small changes in employment rates were able to shift the majority from one position to the other.³⁷

This argument is still valid in 2016. The period since the EEA Agreement took effect is described as a golden era of the Norwegian economy. It is a period marked by strong economic growth and high employment.³⁸ In the latter part of this period, the Eurozone suffered a crisis that left Norway largely unaffected. Unemployment rates may serve to illustrate this point. When the financial crisis hit Europe in 2009, the level of unemployment in Norway was 3.1%. In comparison, unemployment in the EU was at an average of 8.9%. Five years later, the corresponding figures were 3.4% as opposed to 10.8%.³⁹ During this same five year period, the percentage of Norwegians opposed to EU membership went from 50% to 70%. The figures suggest that fluctuations in the EU economy are just as decisive for Norwegian attitudes towards the EU as are fluctuations in Norway's economy. It is the relative strength of each that matters.

If Norwegian positions towards Europe are formed by economic factors, recent developments suggest that Norwegian opposition against EU membership is likely to drop. While Norway escaped the financial crisis, the fall in crude oil prices has had a significant impact on the employment rate in Norway. Unemployment rates for Norway and the EU showed opposite trends in spring 2016. While unemployment in Norway rose to 4.6%, unemployment in the EU decreased to 8.9%.⁴⁰ Moreover, the European Commission expects the EU economy to grow by 1.8% in 2016, while it has recently reduced its growth forecast for Norway from 1.5% to 1.2%.⁴¹

Conclusion

On a day-to-day basis, hard Euroscepticism in Norway is more formal than real. Parties that oppose the Norwegian accession to the EU have proved both willing and able to govern on the basis of an agreement with the EU that, from a purely democratic perspective, is the worst of all possible options. As a full EU member, Norway would have a say in EU policy-making. Had Norway been associated to the EU through a less comprehensive trade and cooperation agreement, the EU influence on Norwegian affairs would have been smaller. Norwegian support for

37 Leo A. GRÜNFELD, Ulf SVERDRUP, "Når penga veier tungt - Nordmenns holdninger til EU medlemskap," *Økonomisk Forum*, 5, 2005, p. 39–48.

38 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Outside and Inside: Norway's Agreements with the European Union*, op. cit., 2012

39 OECD, "Unemployment Rate (indicator)," *OECD Data*, 2017, <https://data.oecd.org/unemp/unemployment-rate.htm> - indicator-chart (2.1.2017).

40 OECD.Stat, [http://stats.oecd.org/\(2.1.2017\)](http://stats.oecd.org/(2.1.2017)).

41 "EU ser for seg lavere norsk vekst," *Dagens Næringsliv*, 3.5.2016.

EU membership is also more formal than real. Principled support for Norwegian entry into the EU goes hand in hand with a firm reluctance to promote this policy in an active manner. For those who still believe that the job of a politician is to lead rather than to follow, the situation is disheartening. However, it also suggests that the answer to the question of how Norway's relations with the EU will proceed in the future is to be found at the level of public opinion. The gap between formal positions and action is evident at this level, too. The current and, from a historical perspective, unusually high level of popular opposition against Norway's membership of the EU fails to translate into increased support of political parties promoting this position. While this tells us that the question of EU membership is not one that mobilizes voters at general elections, it is probably also an expression of an attempt to achieve the best of two worlds: Access to the EU internal market *and* the preservation of Norway's formal sovereignty. This strategy has proved economically beneficial for two decades. Evidence of the unfortunate actual consequences of the EEA Association for the quality of Norwegian democracy has had, so far, no discernible effects. This leads to the conclusion that Norwegian Euroscepticism is first and foremost a function of Norway's economic situation.

L'EUROSCEPTICISME NORVÉGIEN REVISITÉ

La Norvège est dans l'histoire de l'intégration européenne le seul pays qui a rejeté par deux fois l'adhésion à l'Union Européenne. L'opposition à une adhésion éventuelle ne donne aucun signe d'affaiblissement, et s'est maintenu depuis 2009 à un niveau record de 70%. Tant dans l'opinion publique que dans les partis politiques, le rejet fondamental d'une adhésion va de pair avec l'acceptation d'un vaste transfert de la souveraineté concrète de la Norvège à l'UE. L'euroscepticisme norvégien est donc plus formel que réel. Le fossé existant entre la théorie politique et l'action politique quotidienne montre que pour expliquer l'euroscepticisme norvégien les facteurs politiques sont moins importants que les résultats des sondages d'opinion à l'occasion des référendums d'adhésion ne le suggèrent. Il consolide bien plus la thèse que l'euroscepticisme norvégien est induit par la situation économique du pays.

NORWEGISCHER EUROSKEPTIZISMUS UNTER NEUER BETRACHTUNG

In der Geschichte der Europäischen Integration sticht Norwegen hervor als das einzige Land, das zwei Mal den EG/EU-Beitritt ablehnte. Die Opposition zum norwegischen EU-Beitritt zeigt keinerlei Anzeichen der Abschwächung, sondern hat sich vielmehr seit 2009 auf einem Rekordniveau von 70% gehalten. Sowohl in der öffentlichen Meinung als auch in den politischen Parteien verbindet sich die grundsätzliche Ablehnung der EU-Mitgliedschaft mit der Bereitschaft, einen er-

heblichen Transfer der konkreten Souveränität auf die EU zu akzeptieren. Der norwegische Euroskeptizismus ist also eher formal als real. Die Kluft zwischen politischer Theorie und politischem Alltagshandeln zeigt, dass für die Erklärung des norwegischen Euroskeptizismus politische Faktoren weniger wichtig sind, als es die Umfrageergebnisse der norwegischen Referendumsabstimmungen suggerieren. Sie untermauert vielmehr die These, dass der norwegische Euroskeptizismus vor allem von der wirtschaftlichen Lage des Landes bedingt ist.