

**The Centre for
European
and Asian Studies**

REPORT

1/2010

ISSN 1500-2683

*A new look at Euroscepticism:
How Stable Are the Cleavages?*

**Nick Sitter, Department of Public Policy, the
Central European University; and Department of
Public Governance, the Norwegian School of
Management BI**

A publication from:
**Centre for European and Asian Studies at
BI Norwegian Business School**
0442, Oslo
Norway

Transcript of lecture at The ARENA annual conference 2009: A new look at Euroscepticism
Oslo, 11 December 2009

How Stable Are the Cleavages?

Nick Sitter, Department of Public Governance, The Norwegian School of Management BI

Thank you. I have been asked to talk about, or to address the question “how stable are the cleavages?” And, well this is slightly perplexing; because what I am going to tell you is that the cleavages aren’t very stable, because they are not really cleavages. At least that is my take on the situation. So what I want to do is to say a little bit about four points. Why is this question so relevant, why does it look like there might be stable cleavages or divisions on European integration? How stable are these things really, if we look at the data that we can gather on parties and voters. And then only will I turn to the question if euroscepticism isn’t a cleavage, what else is it? And I belong to the group of people who argue that it is largely a matter of party strategy and tactics, not a social cleavage, and I will explain why. And finally I will try to say something about: Does it matter?

I particularly like the hypothesis put forward in the opening here that what we see in Europe is a move from consensus politics to contentious politics. The idea that the permissive consensus is over. What I will suggest to you is actually the exact opposite. I will suggest to you that what we are seeing, at least in Scandinavia and the Nordic countries, possibly except Iceland which is going through its own issues at the moment, is a move from contentious politics to consensus politics. That if anything, euroscepticism is becoming more a phenomenon that we observe at the flanks, and that the mainstream political parties have developed consensus, not only in the system for settling debates about Europe, but actually on the goals of European integration, at least in the short term. There is consensus on what we can live with in the short to the medium term, even if we disagree on long term goals.

So, question one: Why the appearance of stable cleavages? I think the first and obvious answer is; anybody who has looked at this debate over the last 60 years will have seen certain patterns repeating. Broadly speaking, the same parties that are pro EU, broadly speaking the same parties that register some kind of scepticism towards European integration, and broadly speaking the same parties that are dead set against participation, close participation in European integration as defined by the European Economic Community or the EU project. We have seen the debate rise and fall, we have seen intense periods, periods of polarization and periods of truces. What I will suggest however, is that the current phase we are in is not a period of deep polarization and a long lasted truce, but rather what you could call a contingent truce, a compromise on a second best solution, that if you were a game theorist, you would say represents an equilibrium. I’m not a game theorist, so I’m not going to talk to you about equilibriums.

So, continuity of the debate, relatively stable positions, and of course the referendum results that look quite similar. So why does everybody get so excited about this? I think one of the reasons why, even if you are not a Norwegian you want to study euroscepticism in Norway, is that Norway has had more eurosceptic parties than any other country. It is hard to find any West European or even East European country where you have had eurosceptic parties,

or parties expressing sceptical views about European integration across the party spectrum. That in itself makes it very interesting to study.

Second point: How stable is actually Norwegian euroscepticism? I will take you through three different ways of looking at this and suggest that is not as stable as it might look at first sight. In terms of political parties, almost all European parties contain pro- and anti-European fractions. Even the ones that have been pro-European for a long time are now sceptical about aspects of actual EU policy. Most parties have also revised their platforms somewhat. I'll show you some data on this in a minute. The second is that Norwegian policy on European integration is anything but stable. This is the Alice in Wonderland element, that you have got to keep running as fast as you can just to remain in the same place. Norway is running very, very fast just to keep up its compromised European Economic Area solution. It is not a matter of having settled a fixed policy and following it, but rather of having settled a policy of ever closer integration with the European Union. That's what the European Economic Area model is about, that's what our buy-ins into other political areas is about. That's what ad-hoc participation in EU foreign policy initiatives, EU educational initiatives is about. And the third is about public opinion and European integration, where I'll show you some graphs that indicate that there is certainly no clear pattern of Norway being more eurosceptic than the other Scandinavian countries, and there is as much change over time in Norway as there are in the other countries. The data I have here is only updated until 2005, but that's simply because I didn't have time to update them.

So here we go. Public opinion and European integration. What I have done here is simply to use Eurobarometer data, the three black lines are from Eurobarometer data from Denmark, Finland and Sweden, that is why I start in 1993, and the white line is opinion polls reported in Norwegian newspapers, which has a slightly different question, instead of being happy or not with the EU, do you want to join the EU or not. But I think the patterns here kind of speak for themselves. Norway is not particularly stable compared to the other three. It is not less pro-EU than the rest, that's the graph on the right there, how many people favor European integration, but when you look at those in favor of integration minus those against, Norway does seem slightly more polarized, that's about the most we can say about it.

Denmark ——— Sweden - - - - -
 Finland — — — Norway

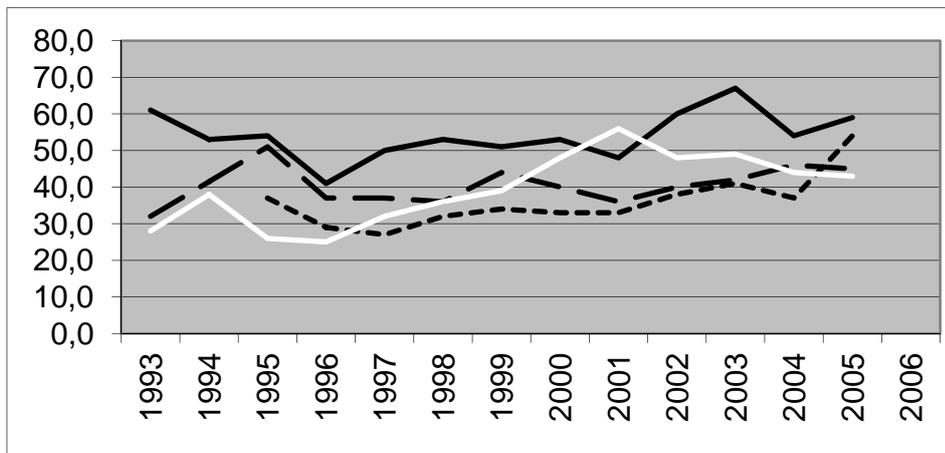


Table 1: Nordic comparison, pro-EU

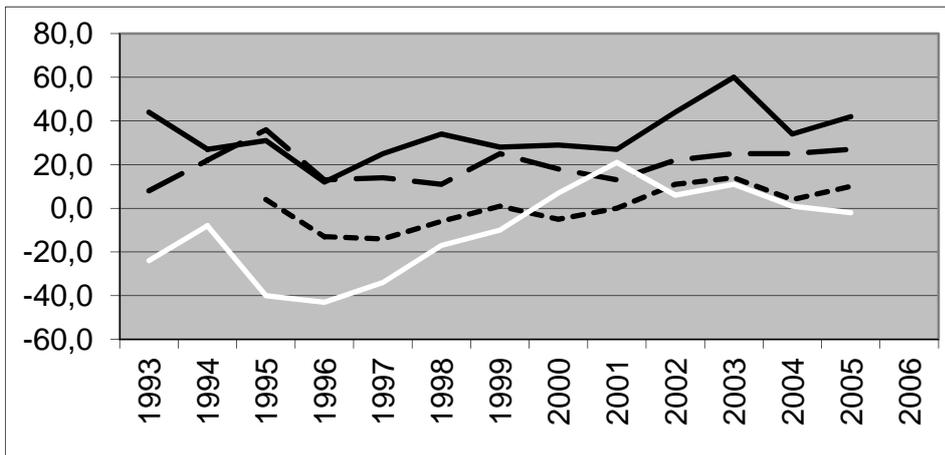


Table 2: Nordic comparison, pro- minus anti-EU

(Source both tables: Sweden, Denmark and Finland: Eurobarometer (EU membership is a 'good thing'); Norway: Statistics Norway data from the 1993-1999 Omnibus surveys ('yes' if a referendum), + Sentio polls for Nationen 2000-2005.)

Then, look at the political parties. Do we find eurosceptic parties across the political spectrum? Yes we do, all Scandinavian countries. The ones you have to look at here are the ones in green and in red (*see table 3*). They are parties that would either be classified as eurosceptic now, or as formally eurosceptic. And the really interesting thing about this is the main single explanatory factor for why some of these parties have changed from red to green, from being hard eurosceptic to soft eurosceptic, or against EU membership to tolerate EU membership, is accession to the EU. I would venture that if Sweden and Finland had not joined the EU, the parties in green, apart from the social democrats in Sweden, would still have been red. So the Norwegian pattern is not quite so unique. Norway does have the only country where a dark blue party is becoming a light blue party. I'll say more about that in a minute.

	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Norway
Left flank and greens	Left League Greens	Left Party Greens	Unity List Soc Ppl P	Soc Left
Social democrats	Soc Dem	Soc Dem	Soc Dem	Labour
Centre Christian Liberal Agrarian	Centre Chr. Dem Swedish Ppl P	Centre Chr. Dem Liberals	Radical Lib Liberals	Centre Chr. Ppl P Liberals
Conservative	Conservatives	Moderates	Conservatives	Conservatives
Right flank	True Finns		Danish Ppl P	Progress P

Pro-EU; ex-Euro-sceptic; neutral (ex-pro-EU); Euro-sceptic

Table 3: Scandinavian political parties

	1961	1965	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005	2009
Soc	Neg	Neg	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	None	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti
Lab	Fav	Fav	Pro	SQ	SQ	SQ	Fav	Fav	Pro	Fav	Fav	Pro	Pro
Cent	Neg	Fav	none	Anti	SQ	SQ	SQ	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti
Lib	Fav	Fav	SQ	SQ	None	SQ	Neg	Anti	Anti	Anti	SQ	Anti	SQ
Chr	SQ	SQ	SQ	SQ	None	None	SQ	SQ	Anti	Anti	Anti	Anti	Neg
Con	Fav	Fav	Pro	Pro	Fav	Fav	Fav	Pro	Pro	Pro	Pro	Pro	Pro
Prog	--	--	--	None	Fav	None	None	Pro	Pro	SQ	SQ	SQ	SQ

Table 4: Norwegian party programs

Finally, Norwegian party programs. Have a quick look at these, I just coded these, and I'll show you how difficult this is in a minute, but I've just coded these in red, black and blue.

The reds are either negative to the EU, or explicitly against membership in the EU or the European Economic Area. The blue are favorable or explicitly in favor, and the black is explicitly in favor of the status quo or saying nothing about it. You will see that most political parties in Norway have changed or modified their opinion somewhat. In fact it is pretty much only the socialist left and the conservatives who have a consistent platform across 60 years. So there are debates, there are fractions.

So that's my kind of rant against stability. I have put some text from programs here to illustrate how difficult this is [ie. to code them]. Unfortunately, these are Norwegian, and the typeface is very small, but the one I want to draw your attention to is the middle one. Pro-European statements in blue, anti-European statements in red, and the Christian People's Party mixing a kind of "we don't want to join the EU" with a "but we do quite like the European Economic Area agreement, and we should keep pushing it further." And it shows how difficult it is to code parties on an issue like this, that's the only reason I have these up here. The coding of the Christian People's Party as negative, and Venstre as status quo-oriented, really the two are very, very close on this, I am basically saying this to show how difficult it is.

<p>SV – arbeider "for at Norge innleder forhandlinger med EU om en mindre omfattende handels- og samarbeidsavtale, og at EØS-avtalen sies opp i forbindelse med dette."</p> <p>DNA – "Arbeiderpartiet har ikke endret syn på at et EU-medlemskap ville gitt Norge en politisk innflytelse på det europeiske samarbeidet og større mulighet til å ivareta norske interesser enn det EØS-avtalen gir mulighet for."</p> <p>SP – ønsker "å si opp EØS-avtalen og i stedet ha handels- og samarbeidsavtaler med EU for å sikre våre interesser."</p> <p>KRF – vil "at EØS-avtalen må utrykkes effektivt og utvikles i takt med nye behov" og "at Norge ikke skal søke om medlemskap i EU, men beholde dagens tilknytningsformer."</p> <p>V – "Det ligger ikke til rette for å starte en ny EU-debatt i Norge de nærmeste årene. Derfor vil Venstre at Norge skal videreutvikle samarbeidet med EU basert på EØS-avtalen."</p> <p>HØYRE – vil "Arbeide for at Norge skal bli medlem av EU så fort som mulig"</p> <p>FRP – "Når det gjelder spørsmålet om norsk EU-medlemskap, vil Fremskrittspartiet respektere folkets vilje gjennom folkeavstemninger."</p>

Table 5: Text from the 2009 programmes

Third question: If there aren't stable cleavages and there is not all that much stability in terms of voters, what is euroscepticism actually about? We have had a couple of suggestions for definitions, and I'm quite happy to run with them, it is about being opposed to the current EU project, one way or another. A lot of scholars divide this into hard and soft euroscepticism, euroscepticism in principle, or more pragmatic or contingent opposition, that's fine and useful divisions. In Norway that becomes particularly easy to operationalize, because you can say that those who are against in principle are usually against the European Economic Area, those who are against elements of it but quite happy to participate in practice, generally in favor of pushing the European Economic Area forward. But the debate

on this I think, and the debate has changed the last 15 years, but it still reflects three different ways of looking at European integration, trying to figure out how to study it. And this is a little bit like the debate about post materialism. Is it a product of existing cleavages? Is it a new cleavage? Or is it just any one political question? I come down on the third of those. Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe, I think they are probably the most prolific proponents of the “old cleavages shape the EU- question.” They have suggested that it is a product of left-right competition, they have suggested that it is something that happens at the flanks, and they have suggested that it is the product of competition between what they call the green alternative libertarian pole, and the traditional authoritarian national pole. Three possible models, all seem to apply in one country or another, they don’t really seem to explain the Norwegian parties, particularly the centre parties in Norway and their opposition to the EU clearly don’t fit into any of these three models, so there is a problem with that.

Is it a new cleavage? Simon Hix and his team has looked at this at the European Parliament-level, and found that there are voting patterns that indicate that pro- and anti-European voting is independent on left and right. Neil Fligstein has written a book about “Euroclash” suggesting that there is a new division here between winners and losers. I think if we stop and go back, and look at the literature about cleavages, there is a problem with this. Generally the literature about cleavages argues that cleavages need either a structural basis, or a cognitive basis, or an organizational basis. Sartori argue that they need all three. I would certainly say that all three are not present in this case. But I don’t want to label the issue, rather move on to the group that I position myself in, which is the argument that euroscepticism is contingent on party strategy. Paul Taggart suggested that euroscepticism is a touch-stone of dissent. Parties that are against the central consensus in their country will tend to incorporate opposition to European integration as part of that, because European integration is driven by consensus of the mainstream parties.

To be a little bit provocative, I suggested that euroscepticism can be thought of as the politics of opposition, to be a little bit provocative I go one step further and say think of it as an empty box. It is a box into which you can put almost anything. Almost anything. The box isn’t empty, of course it is not, it is opposition to a clear project. But I would suggest that if you look around at eurosceptic parties across Europe, they have very, very different content. Those of you who have read Jared Diamond may have seen how he uses Tolstoy to invoke the Anna Karenina principle: all happy families are the same, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own different way. All pro-European parties are more or less the same, they have to, because they are committed to supporting something that is there. Most eurosceptic parties take a different line of attack on euroscepticism. Not necessarily within each country, but certainly across countries.

When I say it’s about party strategy, what do I mean? Briefly, I look at party strategy as being something developed by the party leadership in response to four different sets of pressures: The pressure from the party organization, electoral appeal, policy goals and coalition politics. What I’m suggesting here is simply that it is not enough to look at the ideological commitment of the party, or the view of its voters. We also have to think about

how the party has to position itself with respect to its colleagues in a coalition. Almost every Norwegian party has now been member of a coalition government, therefore pro-European and anti-European parties in Norway have had to modify their positions in practice.

So my ultimate slide. Euroscepticism and party competition. Catch-all parties, we would expect them to be pro-European, they are often in power, when they are in power they can keep a tight leash on their fractions. They have to defend the deals they agree to, and here we see the conservatives and liberal parties fitting in very, very nicely with the patterns that we find across Europe. Parties that mobilize across the left-right dimension, based on values or issues, have I think a stronger reason for being eurosceptic, but at the same time they have to consider working with their coalition partners. And I think what we find in Norway is that the centre parties do compare to some of their Central European or West European counterparts, they are just stronger in Norway. But they are not strange in that sense. As I said, we have seen some changes in Denmark and Sweden and Finland, which I think reflects the fact that these countries have actually joined the EU. Finally on the flank; the rejection of the core consensus of the mainstream parties if you want, that seems to fit quite well into the touch-stone of dissent thesis, the more the Progress Party moves in there, the more it fits in. The curious thing about Norway is that the Progress party is not more explicitly eurosceptic, and I would probably explain that by the size of the progress party. If you look at the polls it shows that half of their voters are against, and half are in favour, and it would be electoral suicide for them to take a position one way or the other.

Finally, I'll spend my last 30 seconds on does euroscepticism matter? Well, yes of course it does. That little table is up there to show how different the four Scandinavian countries participate in European integration. It is not a clear yes-no. And of course these differences are shaped by referendums. So when you have parties where parliamentary majorities are in favour of further, closer cooperation with European integration, but you put these things to referendums, you do get some interesting results. But there is not, as I said, a clear pattern. I think it matters for coalition politics, it's clear in Norway that all coalitions have had the EU question hanging as a sort of sword of Damocles over them, but I will suggest that the last ten years we have seen the sword not so much hanging by a thin thread as it does in the old story, but being fastened by some pretty solid chains that you need to take some kind of blowtorch to loosen, so I would say that it is relatively safe.

	Finland	Sweden	Denmark	Norway
Single Market (EEA)	x	x	x	x
Schengen	x	x	(x)	x
Full EU membership	x	x	x	
EMU	x			

Table 6: Scandinavian countries' participating in European integration

Finally, I would have liked to say something about patterns of Norwegian electoral behaviour, but Ulf Sverdrup will turn up and say something about that, so I'll leave that with my last point saying let's see what Ulf have to say about that.
Thank you.