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The Benelux and Scandinavia in the EU – explaining EU-scepticism with national identity and political culture

What's the reason for some small countries being more reluctant in the process of European integration? And why is it that small countries, such as the Benelux and the Scandinavian countries occupy different positions in the European Union? In order to find an answer to this question, the positions of Denmark and Belgium will be discussed from a cultural and historical angle. First the national identity and political culture of Belgium and Denmark will be examined and compared. Then the relevance of the results of that study will be discussed for two additional countries: Norway and the Netherlands. Ultimately, the possible parallels between the various manifestations of EU-scepticism will be reviewed.

Traditionally, the Nordic countries have been labelled as ‘reluctant Europeans'. Only Denmark joined the EC early (1972), whereas Sweden and Finland did so later, both in 1995. Norway remained outside as a result of consistent NO votes in the 1972 and 1994 referenda. Denmark and Sweden also faced considerable doubts among their population in a series of referenda, which led to the persistence of several opt-outs, most notably those concerning the EMU. Finland seems to be the only country which confessed itself entirely to the European idea.
When considered in a historical perspective the position of the Belgium and the Netherlands can be summarized as pro-European in the sense that both countries have advocated supranational policies implying the transfer of sovereignty. Neither of them showed strong signs of EU-scepticism in Eurobarometer surveys. Interestingly, the Dutch now seem to have abandoned their pro-European position. Recently, they adopted a more critical stance in the wake of the popular NO to the constitutional treaty in June 2005. It has been argued that the Dutch electorate feared loss of influence, national identity and solidarity, as a consequence of EU-liberalisation policies. Also in France the lack of a 'social paragraph' in the constitutional treaty was one of the most important reasons to vote NO. However, notwithstanding the importance of social issues, I will argue that strategic reasons were of paramount importance, thus rejecting the argument that the Netherlands have become an EU-sceptic country or that the Dutch have become reluctant Europeans.

Explaining European Integration: existing theory

Often European integration is conceived of as an economic affair. Harmonising of economic standards, rules and procedures, adopting a common legal framework and abolishing all kind of hindrances would, according to functionalists like Haass inevitably lead to an 'ever closer union'. Another more economic interpretation holds, that states deliberately chose for European solutions for their national problems.¹ For the small export dependent countries like Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands this meant free access to foreign markets for their products in a European framework.

A different angle which is often taken by politicians - and some

scholars - is that Europe was a project led by such outstanding personalities as Monnet, Schumann, Adenauer or De Gasperi, whose aim was to avoid the vicissitudes of the Interwar Period which eventually led to the Second World War.

Although the merit of at least some of these figures can not be underestimated, it is very hard to assess their real impact on European integration. More importantly, it also leaves out a crucial aspect of the process of European integration, namely the domestic level considerations and public opinion about “Europe”, especially in small countries. This aspect is also overlooked in many economic interpretations, which treat all small countries equally. It is of pivotal importance to study the national level, because of the growing importance of public opinion and the reluctant behaviour of some smaller states, as the recent referendum in The Netherlands has shown. According to most experts small countries could only benefit economically from the European Union, but this argument does not seem to reach the audience.

Drawing inspiration from Stanley Hoffmann’s notion of the EU as a two level game¹ and Andrew Moravcsik’s liberal-intergovernmentalist model², I will sketch a cultural and historical model to explain a country’s position. This model treats this position as the result of national identity and political culture, which in my view play a crucial role in the national processes of preference formation.

The first explanatory variable at the national level is national

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identity. This concept focuses on the development of a commonly shared and persistent consciousness of belonging to and identification with a group and its dominant values.\(^5\) I will try to trace this consciousness from the process of nation building which essentially took place in the 19th century. National identity also implies a notion of 'alterity'.\(^6\) Therefore, I will also include the definition of Denmark in relation to other countries by examining the Danish foreign policy legacy.

The second explanatory variable in this model is political culture. The following features of the various political systems have been taken into account: a) trust in and levels of satisfactions with national and international institutions and b) routinised relations between government & parliament, the state & civil society and elites & the public at large.

National Identity

Denmark: Luctor et emergo

As one of the oldest European states Denmark has passed through periods of rise, heyday, fall and resurrection. Between 1397 and 1523 Denmark was the major regional power around the Baltic Sea and the Danish king reigned over a vast territory including Scandinavia and territories at the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. However, Denmark has lost its regional power status in subsequent disastrous wars with Sweden. In the 19th century it was twice reduced in size, after siding with Napoleon against the English in 1807-1814 and the humiliating defeat against Prussia in 1864. This series of military defeats and the consequent loss of territory, strongly de-


terminated Danish self-consciousness. Denmark considered itself a small country, incapable of playing an important role at the level of 'high politics'.

On the other hand the reduction in size produced a very significant counter effect. From a multiethic state Denmark became a very homogeneous state. In combination with the feeling of being small and humble, this led to an 'inward turn'. Much focus was put on popular values, on the cultivation of land, social initiative, on social harmony and on the organisation of the educational system. In this process the Lutheran clergyman, historian and romantic poet N.S.F. Grundtvig was the central figure and he still is of paramount importance for Danish self consciousness.

His solution to the loss of external power was essentially romantic: he proclaimed that Denmark should regain its self consciousness by promoting egalitarian values, which were based on the will of the common people (folk). He also produced a body of texts and songs, which stimulated the development of Danish identity and he laid the foundations for the Danish school system. In his literary work he underlines the qualities of Denmark as a small, peaceful and lovely country. Grundtvig was preoccupied with the life and well being of the ordinary people and the functioning of popular democracy. In his representation of Danish national identity, the true way of life coincided with the harmonious, egalitarian and consensus based way of life which was found among the peasants in Jutland. Contrary to their counterparts in many other European

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8 See Jespersen, *A History of Denmark*, 2004, p. 188.
10 The egalitarian element is probably the most frequently cited characteristic of Danish national identity. See for instance Jespersen, *A History of Denmark* 2004, p. 32 and 79.
11 According to Jespersen placing rural society, represented by the independent
countries, they were too a large extent free, although they owned very little. This way of life formed a sharp contrast to the “decent” and more intellectual city life of Copenhagen.12

Grundtvig’s attempts proved to be not completely in vain. The right of participation and solidarity became deeply rooted in Danish national identity and Denmark proved capable to survive and even to raise the standard of living. Towards the end of the 19th century Denmark moved more and more to a consensual model and already before the Second World War the main political parties in Denmark drew up a compromise between conservatives, farmers and social democrats. In doing so, they could avoid polarisation, which could nurture political extremism. This compromise heralded the era of the social democratic welfare state model.

The German occupation did not lead to a renewed loss of self consciousness. Already then, the Danish model was strong enough to survive and to deal with foreign pressure. After the war much attention went to Scandinavian cooperation, rather than to European initiatives. It was widely believed that a move towards European integration was not needed as long as security issues were settled. This left room for the development of a Nordic social model which apart from a welfare state includes emancipation, consumer protection and environmental policies.

The alterity of Denmark in relation to other countries comprises determinism, idealism, pragmatism and a Nordic orientation. The

12 Interestingly, this cleavage is still visible in the actual voting behaviour of the Danes, with Jutland voting predominately Venstre (now a right wing liberal party) and state employed and state dependent people in Copenhagen and some administrative centres voting social democratic or social liberal (Radikale).
tendency of losing influence and making unfortunate choices on various occasions left Denmark with a strong feeling of determinism. This determinism could especially be seen in the discussion about military expenditure at the end of the nineteenth century, which sharpened the conflict between the conservatives (Højre) and the oppositional left (Venstre). Equally, Foreign Secretary Munch of Radikale Venstre defended a pacifist policy before the Second World War for deterministic reasons. In line with the deterministic thought, Denmark did not take part in power play and found itself morally superior to countries who were engaged in ‘high politics’. Instead, Denmark defended more idealist positions in the League of Nations and in the United Nations, for instance on the subject of development aid.

In the economic field Denmark used to be rather pragmatic, seeking free trade. Economical opportunism was the main consideration for joining the EU in 1972. Earlier, the European project was judged as something completely alien to Danish political culture, probably because of the dominance of catholic politicians and the federalist aspirations. The main reason to join was the membership of the United Kingdom, not any greater European design. Instead of a European framework, Denmark preferred to tighten the cultural bonds with its Scandinavian partners in the Nordic council. Historical, cultural and political similarities with Sweden and Norway were deemed much more valuable and could be developed effectively on a intergovernmental level. As opposed to continental practices, this led to the redefinition of Scandinavian identity which features equality, a welfare state, emancipation of women and cooperative and institutionalised relations between the state and the economy. The success of this model leads to feelings of superiority and consequently, reluctance to accept alien or lower

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gradual decline of unitary policies and a rise of regional identification and regional institutions. This movement gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s when Flanders became increasingly dominant in the political and economical realm. The need for change was acknowledged in different reform packages which transformed Belgium into a federal state with strong powers for the regions. However the structure and attribution of competences is so complex and interwoven, that this solution has obscured political decision-making. Typically, advisory bodies and councils and the political elite try to find compromises, which are not thoroughly discussed in parliament, and undermine its prestige. Much of the decision-making is informally delegated to politicized bodies and commissions which are composed along the lines of the cleavage structure. This produces a large number of interests, which need to be reconciled.

These internal struggles prevented Belgium from developing a strong self image which could be opposed to that of other nations. Consequently, the Belgian position in foreign policy was most pragmatic. Belgium sought security from and economic influence on its bigger neighbours France and Germany, which had devastated the country in two World Wars. The only way to achieve this was an internationalist or indeed European way, or as former Foreign Secretary Spaak pointed out, speaking about Belgium: “Elle ne pouvait se développer que si elle devenait européenne”.15 Henceforth, Belgium has been one of the most ardent supporters on the governmental level of European integration in its supranational fashion. Belgium prefers a modest policy of accommodation with the interests of other states, rather than a definition of the international sphere in terms of “us and them”. The possibility of a European democratic polity is not questioned because this process of

identity formation is already problematic at the domestic level.\textsuperscript{16}

Political Culture in Denmark & Belgium: two most different cases

Denmark generally ranks highest when it comes to trust in national political institutions. The fact that Denmark is a relatively safe country is reflected in the high trust Danes have in their own national institutions. Eurobarometers and the European Election survey show, that Danes have a higher trust in national parliament, government and democracy than in the corresponding European institutions.\textsuperscript{17} The Danes are also more inclined to entrust the national government rather than the European Commission with policies that do not fall within the scope of the EU-treaty. Traditional national policy areas like health care, cultural policy, media and education are hardly ever mentioned as transferable to the European level.\textsuperscript{18}

Belgians on the other hand are less hesitant to transfer policy from the national to the European level. Empirical data also indicate that trust in national institutions in Belgium is usually well below the Danish level and also below the EU-average. Interestingly, Belgians are the only nationality with comparable or higher levels of trust in European institutions compared to national institutions. Overall levels of trust remain rather low in Belgium, which leads to the conclusion that Belgium is a low trust country, when compared to other EU countries. The Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau observes, that a network of relations generates trust and that these networks seem to be less developed in Belgium on the national

\textsuperscript{18} SCR, \textit{Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport} 2000, p. 150.
level, whereas they are very well organised to defend regional or particular interests. Data of the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau also show that regional or even local bindings rank highest in Belgium, whereas in Denmark national bindings are strongest. Accordingly, Denmark also shows clearer signs of national pride and moderate nationalist feelings than Belgium.

Apart from political system variables treated above, there is also evidence that routinised relations between state and its citizens are modelled differently in Belgium and Denmark. The organisational culture in Denmark can be characterized as egalitarian, both in the public and in private sectors. This also applies to political relations, which are informal and based on consultation and the need for consensus. As Jespersen rightly points out:

The amalgamation of government power and the interests of business and other organisations, or, […] the merging of the state and civil society, has continued to be a characteristic of […] the 'Danish model'.

This turns substitution of national practices by European institutions and practices into a hard process.

Due to an egalitarian culture and the possibilities to influence political debates, the Danish political culture also leaves more room for participation and control. This enables the parliament to play a pivotal role and to satisfy most of the citizens' needs as their true representative. Empirical data show that the public is interested in politics and satisfied with the functioning of national political institutions.

In Belgium consultation and consensual politics exist as well, but the potential for conflict is higher and political relations are

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20 See Laureys, 'De periferie met een voorsprong', 2004, p. 121.
much more hierarchical and less transparent. This is partly due to the complicated federal framework, but most observers also point towards closed circuits of political leaders, who are not really accountable for important decisions.\textsuperscript{23}

The tendency to abstruse decision-making is reinforced by the way the parliamentarian system works in Belgium. Most observers hold that the government is stronger than the parliament.\textsuperscript{24} Parties in the parliament are usually dominated by party presidents, whereas in Denmark, the parliament has a much stronger role. This can be explained by the lack of majority governments, which leaves more space for meaningful debate in the parliament and by the concept of \textit{folkestyre} (democracy \textit{by} the people, rather than \textit{for} the people). Often compromises have to be found in a plenary debate, where all parties can participate. EU decision-making is also subject of a special parliamentary procedure, which means that the relevant Danish minister receives a mandate before he goes to a meeting of the European Council of Ministers. This is not the case in Belgium, where governments have more liberty in the sense that the parliament does not exercise a strong control.

Belgian politicians also face the problem that they have to deal with regional interests, which can make it hard to formulate a clear and understandable argument. Hence, European issues are usually decided upon in informal meetings. Furthermore, it is attractive for the Belgian regions that the EU also allows for serious regional representation at the international level and allocation of regional funds. The EU was never politicized as it was in Denmark because the Belgian political culture did not allow it to happen. Against the background of a rather cynical and not very interested public, Belgian politicians were able to adopt a pro-European, often suprana-


\textsuperscript{24} Dewachter, \textit{De mythe van de parlementaire democratie}, 2001.
tional policy, without having to explain it to the public. Ironically, this policy style is probably accepted by the Belgian public, because their own political system shares many characteristics with the EU political system, such as cultural and linguistic diversity and different interpretations of the past.25 The more positive attitude towards Europe can be explained by the obvious benefits of the EU in contrast to the Belgian state.

State culture in Belgium can be characterised by informal consultation circuits of top politicians and cross state links, which are useful to overcome conflicts but little transparent for outsiders. EU-critics also point to the similarities between the EU and the French governance model. In contrast to the Danish model, parliamentary control is rather weak, so leading politicians bear considerable responsibilities. A major drawback of the Belgian system is its lack of responsiveness towards the citizens. We would expect low figures of political interest and signs of political cynicism in Belgium. And indeed in Denmark the scores on political interest are higher and those on cynicism lower than in Belgium. Political cynicism exists in Denmark but it is less pronounced than in Belgium.26

Because of the non-responsive character of governmental institutions and the rather closed political culture, the public at large in Belgium adopted a rather cynical and uninterested attitude towards politics. On the other side we find the Danes more engaged in debates, probably because they are attached to the jævnhedsprinsippet in their institutions. In a reaction to the EMU-referendum Marcussen and Zollner cite centralism, bureaucracy and distance as reasons to vote NO.27 These are all reasons related to the consensual, democratic

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and accessible, more *folkelig* character of the Danish state-citizen relations. This structure offers more possibilities for participation and it could be argued that this leads to higher levels of trust in national institutions than in the less transparent EU institutions. Ederveen and Dekker also suggest that a configuration of lack of knowledge, commitment and interest leads to cynicism. This cynicism has serious consequences for the levels of trust in national institutions. The public can adopt an apparently permissive attitude, for instance towards European integration, but in reality there is no real commitment. This seems to be the case in Belgium. The most important reason for being pro-European is pragmatic: if the EU was not supported by the Belgian state as whole, Wallonia and Flanders would lose influence and prosperity and Europe is a way to overcome internal dispute.

Broadening the scope: The Netherlands and Norway

What can be said about the situation in the similar countries? Does political culture and national identity also account for the positions of these countries? These questions will be taken up in the following paragraphs about the Netherlands and Norway.

The Netherlands: A pragmatic national identity

Until recently, Dutch national identity was hardly ever invoked in any debate about the European Union or its predecessors. It was merely taken for granted that membership of an organisation like the EEC was a good thing after the harshness of the 1930s and the economic difficulties the country faced after the Second World War. The choice for Europe was a pragmatic one, but it did not conflict with the Dutch interests, as the frequent collisions between the Dutch Foreign Secretary Luns and the French president De
Gaulle about the geopolitical orientation of the Six showed. The Dutch have always been aware of their economic interests and did not give up sovereignty easily. The attractive side was market access and control over the industries of other countries, foremost Germany. As Milward points out, integration of Germany in a peaceful framework was a major advantage, but it never dominated the deliberations which took place before the actual treaties were signed.

In the Dutch case the economic argument was extremely relevant. Contrary to the Scandinavian countries, most Dutch trade went to the continent and not so much to Britain or other countries. In the case of Scandinavia trade with Britain and the Scandinavian neighbours accounted for the lion's share of the economic sector. This made an EEC membership for economic reasons far less urgent. As I have tried to show, reasons of political culture and national identity could then come into play. In the Dutch case however, the economic argument was already very prominent right from the start and it could not be counterbalanced by arguments of political culture or by a strong national identity. Despite the efforts of protestant and conservative-liberal movements to promote Dutch history, it was not strong enough to be effectively used as an argument against Europe.

As a founding member the Netherlands had a strong influence on the course of the EEC until 1972. Consequently, a split between the Netherlands and European culture never occurred. After 1972 the position of the Netherlands weakened, but still there were no reforms, that could arouse enduring and widespread public discontent. This first occurred in 2005, when strong opposition could be mobilised against the European Constitution. Its critics managed to frame the Constitution as a threat towards Dutch society and identity. In the Netherlands other reasons for voting NO were: lack of

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information, discontent with the Euro, rejection of a Turkish EU-
membership, the bad record of the incumbent government and a
lack of necessity to adopt yet another reform package. Last but not
least, strategic explanations could be invoked. The timing just after
the French vote guaranteed world wide media coverage and gave
the Dutch electorate a sense of being important. In Belgium such a
polarisation has not taken place due to the permissive and more
passive political culture and the regional division of the country.

Until recently, the question of Dutch national identity had not
occupied a prominent place in historical research. In comparison to
Norway and to a lesser extent also Denmark, the Dutch national
identity was rather weak. Originally, Dutch national identity was
defined as protestant, tolerant, pragmatic and neutral in foreign re-
lations. With the decline of the religious cleavage in Dutch society
in the 1960s, tolerance and pragmatism remained the main ingredi-
ents of Dutch national identity. Nevertheless, no national discourse
emerged, apart from the image of the Netherlands as a guide for
the rest of world in a number of areas. Such areas were drugs pol-
icy, abortion and euthanasia and third world politics. The nature of
the discourse around this themes was more internationalist than
defensive, so that no conceptualisation of ‘us’ against ‘them’ could
come.

This all changed rapidly in the last couple of years. Hence it is
not yet possible to give a complete overview of all the develop-
ments, but some of them need to be mentioned. First under the in-
fluence of internationalisation (Europeanisation, immigration and
economic globalisation) the need was felt to formulate what is
Dutch and what it means to be Dutch. A number of organisations
and advisory councils is studying the subject of national identity.
Among them we can find the attempts to formulate a canon of
Dutch history and recent attention for identity in numerous publi-
cations and conferences, sometimes stimulated by the current gov-
Another proof of the growing importance of national identity was its success in the debate about the European Constitution. According to Eurobarometer survey data loss of national sovereignty was the second reason to vote NO after a lack of information. The third most important reason to vote NO was to vote against the government. However, the data of the Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau show that at most 20% of the population feared that acceptance of the Constitution would mean a loss of cultural identity or national identity. The data also show that support for the European Union was still on a high level in the Netherlands until the beginning of 2005. This means that there seems to be no evidence that the NO vote should be interpreted as a NO vote against the European Union as whole. Even a large number of the NO voters judged the EU as a good thing.

The Dutch electorate seemed to be unsatisfied with the information supplied by the government, which was judged incomprehensible. Ederveen & Dekkers suggest that the knowledge gap was too wide to bridge. It turns out that Dutch knowledge about Europe was first on the same rather low level of French or Spanish voters and secondly, that it increased considerably during the campaign. However, research also indicates that the campaign was counterproductive: the more information people got in the last two weeks, the more they tended towards a NO vote. The campaign was judged to be too late, because a negative attitude towards the

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29 Examples are the "Commissie Canon van Nederland, under the presidency of Frits van Oostrom, www.canonvannederland.nl, and the discussion among historians in NRC Handelsblad and other media, which led the historians Bank, van Es and de Rooy to publish, Kunstweg Nederland: wat iedereen wil weten over onze geschiedenis, 2005.
32 Dekker & Ederveen, Europese Tijden, 2005, p. 29.
constitution was already widespread. Here the lack of experience with referenda in comparison to France and Spain, which had held referenda about the EC before, could also partly account for the negative vote.

This leads to the conclusion that national identity did not play a decisive role in the considerations of the NO voters. Rather it was the strategic environment that caused the rejection of the constitution. The public felt itself ill-informed, the government suffered from widespread discontent with its policies and some other issues like the accession of Turkey and unease with the effects of globalisation and the Euro tipped the balance. Last but not least, although no empirical evidence is available yet, timing also made a difference. Suddenly all the world was looking at the Netherlands and the only thing the already dissatisfied electorate had to do to be heard was to vote NO. Media coverage can also account for the turn-out, which was higher than critics had expected.

Norway: A strong national identity

Norway shares many characteristics with Denmark, especially when it comes to the existence of cleavages and the importance of the process of national building in the early 19th century. Norway has a strong centre-periphery cleavage which dates back from the moment in which the first attempts to centralize Norway were undertaken. The centre-periphery cleavage gained strength under the influence of the Norwegian romantic movement in the 19th century. At this time Norway was still in a union with Sweden. This fuelled the debate about what Norway was and should be, the core of the debate of national identity. In this debate two stances emerged: the ‘romanticist’ and the ‘statist’, the latter named after the civil service stratum which ruled the state.

The romantics were opposed to the civil service stratum which they saw as representatives of foreign (i.e. German and Danish and
later Swedish) influences. The central administration in Norway was located in Christiania (later called Oslo) and closer to the Danish rulers than to the Norwegian people. The civil stratum formed an educated class on its own and was used to hierarchic structures, which conflicted with the traditions of the farmers. The civil stratum had its own plans for Norway and constituted a major force in Norwegian intellectual life, despite their low numbers. Neumann defines their 'statist' representation of Norway as follows:

"It was paternalistic in the Enlightenment tradition: the civil servants were the state, and the state led the nation. The nation consisted of a leading civil stratum as well as the populace. Norwegian culture was the culture of the civil servants, and the culture of the civil servants was a seamless part of European [italics L.S.] culture."

The influence of the civil stratum was considered to be detrimental to the true Norwegian nation by competing national or popular romantics. In their vision of the nation the free peasant was the true representative of the Norwegian people (fjölk). In the 19th century, when Norway was seeking independence, which it finally got in 1905, the myth of Norway as a free country of fishermen and farmers was forged, which is still very much alive today. In this view the peasant was free, not taxed, and incorporated the spirit of the Middle Ages when Norway was not under Danish or Swedish rule. In the remote fjords and valleys, where peasants and fishermen lived, foreign rule had never been able to firmly establish itself. Interestingly, it is still in these areas that most NO votes are cast.

In the popular romantic representation the 'danomans' or intelligentsia with European (often German) ties were despised. Eventually, this popular romantic representation became dominant in the 19th century. The civil servant culture became suspect because it was foreign, rooted at the institutional level and a culture of civil

33 Neumann, 'This little piggy stayed at home', 2002, p. 97.
servants, not of the people. The fierce debates about the Norwegian language exemplified this divide. The popular nationalists promoted the use of *nyndansk* or *landmål* instead of *bokmål*, which was the language of the administration and the civil service class. The popular romantic version managed to remain dominant, although in the struggle with the civil stratum, they concluded an alliance with the more moderate romantic and nationalist groups, that had defined the nation as the ‘people’ in a broader category than the popular nationalists.

After gaining independence from Sweden in 1905, Norway tried on the one hand to become a state with all the characteristics of the other European states. On the other hand something quintessentially Norwegian should remain. Norway should be unique in some way and not surprisingly the idea of the free peasant was taken up again, whereas Europe was seen as the other: not democratic, colonial, warlike, catholic. This trend of defining the country as something special, including the references to peasants and the ‘popular’ was also common in Denmark in the writings of Grundtvig, as we have seen earlier. Another common feature is the stress on the people and the parliament as representative of the people.

Soon after Norway’s independence, the social-democrats took over and took hold of the concept of the people, in which they united state nation and society. They managed to marginalise other representations of Norway, with a brief exception during the Second World War. When the EEC emerged, the reactions were similar to those in Denmark. No interest was taken in this economic project, which was completely alien to Norwegian national discourse.\(^{34}\)

Following the development of the EEC, two interpretations predominated: the nationalist and the functionalist. The latter advocated Norway’s accession to the EC/EU, but they were beaten

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twice with roughly the same arguments: rural Norway, representing the true community spirit of the Norwegian nation state, had nothing to win from European bureaucracy. Norway's oil reserve allowed costly financial schemes that would not comply with EU competition law. For EU-sceptic Norwegians, the EU is a non-social liberal project, aimed at the gradual destruction of Norwegian society. It is permeated by the vicissitudes of social and sexual inequality, capital, drugs, prostitution and big city life.\textsuperscript{35} Ironically, centre forces in Norway found themselves unable to mitigate the concerns of peripheral Norway. These peripheral forces effectively took hold of important values, such as democracy, freedom and equality. These core Norwegian rural values were perceived to be threatened in case of an EU-membership.

Concluding remarks: EU-scepticism or a future of the European project?

It can be concluded that Denmark is more reluctant because of its strong national identity and strongly developed national political culture, which features participation egalitarian values and high levels of trust. The EU is highly politicized and it is difficult to reach decisions that imply a transfer of sovereignty. Belgium is in an easier position because the EU is not politicized at all. For historical reasons, Belgium lacks a strong national identity, which could impede a European orientation. Gradually a complex political culture developed out of the cleavages, notably the linguistic cleavage. This culture can be characterized by strong government and compromise seeking in informal talks with advisory bodies. Although this ultimately leads to consensus, the level is satisfaction with national politics is very low.

\textsuperscript{35} Hille, 2005, \textit{Gate Nation oder Europa?}, p. 218.
The case of Norway offered some striking similarities with the Danish case. In the first place the arguments of superior democratic institutions and importance of the popular element bear many resemblances. As Hille puts it for Norway:

Die Selbstbeschreibung, dass Norwegen demokratischer sei, lässt sich nur aus der politischen Kultur und der Gemeinschaft eines sich selbst als egalitär und demokratisch beschreibendes Volkes, das in nahem, unhierarchischem Verhältnis zu seinem Regierenden steht, verstehen.36

This similar development is not surprising in the light of the common history until 1814 and similar social and economical development. However, the Norwegian arguments are more fiercely put forward and proved to be even more convincing than in the Danish setting. This is due to greater economic independence of Norway and the more peripheral position of Norway.37

The Netherlands are an interesting case because they used to have a rather pragmatic national identity and a clear economic interest. Paradoxically, the economic element was downplayed in the discussion about the European Constitution and more ‘Scandinavian’ arguments were used, related to sovereignty and national identity, depicting the EU as a threat to good old Dutch society. However, this is not to say that the Dutch have also internalized the Scandinavian views. The historical path to national identity formation differed in too many aspects and feelings of superiority or pride in the political culture are relatively absent. A clear sign for this was the relatively minor role of the democratic deficit of the EU in the discussion. It is my conviction that timing and strategic mistakes played an important role. The lack of commitment of certain parties, the impopularity of the incumbent government, the

37 Laureys points to the fact that the periphery constantly voted NO in referenda in: ‘De periferie met een voorsprong’, 2004, p. 118.
absence of earlier EU-debates and the media momentum after the French vote might have been conducive to a NO vote. Further research will hopefully cast more light on this question.

The only stable case is Belgium. Belgian politics will muddle through because of existing tensions in the political culture prevent the politicisation of the EU. Moreover, it would not be credible to raise the national cause in Belgium since the national level is politically weakened. This does not mean that there is a strong conviction in Belgium, but the political culture and the absence of a strong national identity prevent EU-sceptics from capitalising on this lack of true European commitment. For Belgium the EU still is an economic necessity, which is dealt with in a pragmatic way.

Figure 1 is an attempt to summarise all these findings in a theoretical model, which can account for the differences in EU-scepticism. It consists of two axes: on the horizontal axis prevalence of economic benefits offered by the EU is opposed to the prevalence of cultural considerations i.e. national cultural distinctiveness. Norway definitely has a clear position on the cultural end, whereas Belgium could be placed on the economic end.

The vertical axis is a scale of ‘national satisfaction’, meaning high levels of trust in national institutions, national democracy and the patterns of interaction and possibilities for political participation. The positions of Denmark, Norway, The Netherlands and Belgium are indicated. The other country positions are estimations and only serve to encourage the discussion about the theoretical scope of the model. As it has been argued above, the Netherlands moved away from economy towards a more culturally motivated position, whereas Denmark is moving in the direction of the Netherlands. The demarcation line delineates the different shades of EU support. Left of it we find full EU support, to the right we find those countries that do not participate fully or remained outside. On the right a circle indicates the core of EU-sceptic countries.
Figure 1: A theoretical model for the strength of EU-scepticism

Outlook
The future of the EU will be increasingly unpredictable and in general historians should refrain predicting the future direction of European integration. However, the discussion is likely to continue and some movement has already been indicated in the model. It
could be argued that Denmark is moving towards a less reluctant position, because the importance of the EU is growing and because Denmark has already gone a long way. For Belgium no change is expected, unless a political crisis erupts. In the case of the Netherlands much depends on the culture and the general situation in the country. Once optimism spreads through the Netherlands again, EU might become business as usual. Support for EU is not likely to be on the wane. Norway is most likely to remain an outsider, despite political will of the elite to join. The economic necessity is lacking and cooperation with the EU runs smoothly. Still one needs to be careful for instance if the proportion of people living in the periphery changes or if pro-European education causes generational changes.
References


Lijphart, A. (ed.), *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium*, University of California, 1981.


