



From Fly in the Ointment to Accomplice *Norway in EU foreign and security policy*

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Abstract

In May 2005 the Norwegian government signed an agreement to contribute troops to the European Union's so-called battle groups. These are integrated military forces that are at the disposal of the European Union for a period of 6 months at a time. Norway's association with the battle groups raises important questions concerning legitimacy and democratic accountability. How can we account for such a decision to provide a permanent military contribution to an integrated force that stands at the disposal of a Union that Norway is not part of? In this paper it is suggested that if we are to understand this it is necessary to take into consideration the particular significance that was attributed to the battle groups. Portrayed as a contribution to the United Nations and 'global peace', the idea of such battle groups echoed key concerns of Norwegian foreign and security policy. However, the anchoring of the battle groups concept in the UN does not necessarily do away with the more fundamental dilemmas that such troops raise regarding the *raison d'être* of security and defence policy in a context of intense mutual interdependence and integration in an increasingly globalised world.

Keywords

European Union battle groups - Norway - EU

Introduction¹

In May 2005 Norway and the European Union reached agreement on a permanent Norwegian contribution to one of the EU battle groups, which are integrated military forces at the disposal for the EU for crisis management operations. As a result of this agreement Norwegian soldiers were placed in readiness for deployment by the EU during the first half of 2008 and again in 2011.

How can we explain such a decision – to provide a permanent military contribution to an integrated military force at the disposal of an organisation to which Norway does not belong? The decision was in line with Norway's general policy-line with regard to the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP): To link Norway as closely to the CFSP as possible. Moreover, it fits in with Norwegian policy towards the EU more generally. Given this, the decision was perhaps not so surprising. All the same, it gives rise to some difficult questions of principle and therefore merit closer examination.

Can a *Realist* interpretation provide an adequate explanation of the commitment made by Norwegian authorities? Is it so that Norway, as a small country in a dangerous and unprincipled world, has no other alternative – if national security is to be maintained – than to seek friends who can lend a helping hand when danger threatens, regardless of the cost to sovereignty? Not everything points in that direction. Also normative assessments – perceptions of Norway's obligations to international society – played a significant role in bringing about this decision.

Following a brief presentation of the main features of Norway's relationship to the EU's foreign and security policy cooperation, I analyse the arguments put forward in the debates in the Norwegian parliament on the participation in the EU battle groups. As will be discussed in the final part of this article, the establishment of these forces and Norwegian participation have both brought new dilemmas and challenges to Norway's security policy and reinforced existing ones.

¹ This article was first published in Norwegian in *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, nr 4, 2008, pp. 323-335. Many thanks to Erik Oddvar Eriksen, John Erik Fossum and Cathrine Holst for comments, and to Bjørn Tore Erdal and Erik L. Ryen for research assistance.

Bothersome fly in the ointment?

Norway's relations with the CFSP have been characterised by inner contradictions and ambiguities. There has been scant enthusiasm for the prospect that the EU might develop into an autonomous foreign policy actor. All the same, successive Norwegian governments have systematically sought to gain maximum access and insight into the EU's activities in this policy field. The CFSP is not covered by the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement, which constitutes the main agreement regulating relations between the EU and Norway. Norway thus has connected with the CFSP by means of a series of additional agreements.

As early as in 1985 an informal arrangement on exchange of information was agreed between the Norwegian authorities and the EC presidency on activities within the precursor to the CFSP – European Political Cooperation (EPC). This arrangement was later formalised. When the EEA agreement was concluded it was also agreed to establish what was termed a 'political dialogue' between the EFTA/EEA states and the EU. Still today this political dialogue serves as the main formal channel of communications between Norway and the EU in the field of foreign and security policy. Once the details of the agreement had been concretised in 1995, this meant that Norway – in principle – would have regular meetings with the 'political directors' in the CFSP, as well as with the EU Presidency.² Further, Norway is invited to meetings with the leadership of a selection of working groups (usually between four and six) within the CFSP, to join in EU declarations, statements and *démarches*, and 'shared positions and attitudes' (often sanctions) in foreign and security policy as well as EU statements in international organisations such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. When, in the early 1990s, there was talk of making the Western European Union (WEU) into the security-policy arm of the EU, Norway also applied for associated membership in this alliance.

The political dialogue came about as a result of pressure from Norway. Even though an agreement on comprehensive economic cooperation between the EU and Norway was agreed to through the EEA agreement, it was far from obvious that Norway should also be granted a political dialogue. It also became clear early on that the dialogue was functioning poorly, with scant interest from the EU side and correspondingly limited gains for Norway. Time

² Meetings between the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs and a 'troika' originally consisting of the presidencies of the EU Council of Ministers – current, past and incoming. When the Amsterdam Treaty entered into force in 1999, the composition was altered, so that the troika now consists of the current Council president, the president of the European Commission and the recently established High Representative of the CFSP.

would not appear to have altered this situation. As stated in Norwegian White Paper no. 23 (2005–2006):

As a result of expansion and the increased level of activity, the EU has in recent years wished to rationalise its political dialogues with third countries. This has led to a reduction in the extent of the political dialogue lately, especially at the expert level.³

While working throughout the 1990s to gain maximal access to the CFSP, Norwegian authorities were, paradoxically, highly ambivalent to what was in the process of happening. Strengthening the role of the EU in foreign and security policy was frequently dismissed as undesirable.⁴ This was not because the content of such a policy was expected to diverge substantially from that of Norway. After all, Norway joined in almost all the EU's foreign policy declarations to which it was invited. In those cases where Norway declined, it was most often due not to disagreement on substance, but because of a strategic decision to have Norway make its mark in a given international issue. It seems likely that Norwegian scepticism concerned the country's own 'outsider-ness', as well as the desire to avoid a development that might appear to challenge NATO's dominant position in European security policy. This scepticism was also expressed in Norway's views at joint meetings with the EU within the framework of the Western European Union. During this period, some representatives of EU member-states described Norway as a 'fly in the ointment' as regards EU ambitions in security and defence policy.⁵ The ambivalence in Norwegian attitudes was further intensified by deep scepticism to the EU's ability to achieve its ambitions of becoming a global heavyweight. In other words, Norway was keen to be included in what might happen, but doubted that this would be of relevance to European security, and actually had no desire to see the EU succeed with its ambitions.

The constructive European

When the Labour Party came into government in 2000 there was a deliberate change of course. In order to ensure insight and influence more effectively, Norway was henceforth to be a 'constructive contributor' to the CFSP. And indeed, all successive Norwegian governments have followed that line. The

³ White Paper/St.meld. nr. 23 (2005–2006), *Om gjennomføring av europapolitikken*, 2006, p. 28.

⁴ H. Sjørnsen, 1998, 'Med ryggen mot Europa? Endring og kontinuitet i norsk sikkerhetspolitikk', in D.H. Claes & B.S. Tranøy (eds), *Utenfor, annerledes og suveren? Norge under EØS-avtalen*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

⁵ Sjørnsen, 1998; also H. Sjørnsen, 2000, 'Coping - or not Coping - with Change: Norway in European Security', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 5(4): 539–59.

clearest expression of this strategy can be found in the field of security and defence policy.

It is in fact here, and not within the realm of foreign policy, that Norway now has the closest links with the EU. The minister of defence has, since 2000 been invited to meetings of the EU troika four times each year; in addition, in March 2006 Norway concluded a cooperation agreement with the European Defence Agency (EDA).⁶ Prior to that, a framework agreement regulating Norwegian participation in EU crisis managements tasks was signed.⁷ To date Norway has participated in five EU civilian and military crisis managements operations.⁸ However, the Norwegian authorities' *constructive* stance on cooperation with EU security and defence policy has not had all the desired effects. For instance, there was considerable disappointment when Norway failed to achieve full membership in the EU's new defence agency, the EDA.⁹ Also, with the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty the dialogue on defence has been suspended. Most importantly, these agreements are only activated at the initiative of the EU and they do not provide Norwegian authorities with any possibilities of influencing developments within the CFSP. Assuming that a key objective of Norwegian authorities is to be able to take part in decisions that ultimately affect Norwegian interest, these agreements are far from fulfilling such a purpose.

The institutional context within which Norwegian authorities formulate their foreign and security policy has been transformed in the past 20 years due to the emergence of the CFSP. The challenge is even greater because the EU has become far more than merely an intergovernmental organisation. Although the security political cooperation formally remains in the hands of member states, a dense network of national and transnational actors and institutions has established itself in Brussels. It is indicative of deeper integration also in this area than what is usually associated with intergovernmental cooperation.

⁶ See press release no. 20/2006 from the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, 'Inngår samarbeidsavtale med EU'. Available at: <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fd/pressecenter/pressemeldinger/2006/Inngar-samarbeidsavtale-med-EU.html?id=104040> (accessed 12 June 2008).

⁷ *Agreement between The European Union and the Kingdom of Norway establishing a Framework for the Participation of the Kingdom of Norway in the European Union Crisis Management Operation*. The agreement was signed 13 December 2004 and entered into force 1 January 2005.

⁸ Operation CONCORDIA in Macedonia (March–December 2003) (military operation); Operation PROXIMA in Macedonia (December 2003– December 2005) (police operation); Operation EUFOR-Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina (military operation); the EU's police operation (EUPM) in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Aceh Monitoring Mission in Indonesia (civilian operation).

⁹ For information on the mandate and purpose of the European Defence Agency see: <http://www.eda.europa.eu/>.

The daily exchange of information is routine, and ideas and standpoints are tested out across national boundaries. These processes often referred to as a 'Brusselisation' of foreign and security policy, has little in common with traditional diplomacy, and often involves shared viewpoints developing and forming across 'national interests'.¹⁰ And yet the EU's agenda almost unavoidably becomes Norway's agenda as well, or at least an agenda that the Norwegian authorities must take into consideration in the shaping of their own policy.

As stressed in White Paper 23 (2005–06), Norway's agreement with the EU on contributing to the military forces to the battle groups stands out. It is referred to as something positive because, unlike Norway's other agreements with the EU in the field of foreign and security policy, it gives Norway 'the right' to participate.¹¹ The question, however, is whether the right to say 'no' has been equally well enshrined in the agreement.

EU military forces and Norwegian sovereignty

The news that the Norwegian government wished to contribute to the EU's military forces was announced late in the autumn of 2004. The proposal was passed by the Norwegian Parliament in spring 2005, against the votes of the Centre (former Agrarian – Senterpartiet) and Socialist Left (SV) parties. There is nothing new in Norway contributing to international military operations, whether under the auspices of NATO or the UN; moreover, as noted, Norway had contributed to EU civilian and military crisis-management missions also prior to 2004. The agreement on the battle groups is however different, as it entails a permanent contribution to integrated forces, which are to be at the disposal of an organisation where Norway is not a member. These battle groups are rapid response, flexible military units tasked with maintaining or re-establishing peace and security. That they are 'integrated' means that each participating country contributes a specialised part of the whole. In a crisis situation they are meant to be ready for deployment at two days' notice; and should be able to remain in theatre for at least 30 and a maximum of 120 days.

¹⁰ D. Allen, 2000, 'Who Speaks for Europe? The Search for an Effective and Coherent Foreign Policy', in J. Peterson & H. Sjørnsen (eds.), *A Common Foreign Policy for Europe? Competing visions of the CFSP*, London: Routledge; S. Duke & S. Vanhoonacker, 2006, 'Administrative Governance in the CFSP: Development and Practice', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 11(2): 163–82; D. Curtin, 2007, 'Transparency, Audiences and the Evolving Role of the EU Council of Ministers', in J.E. Fossum & P. Schlesinger (eds.), *The European Union and the Public Sphere: A Communicative Space in the Making*, London: Routledge; A. Juncos & E. Reynolds, 2007, 'The Political and Security Committee: Governing in the Shadow', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 12(2): 127–47.

¹¹ St.meld. nr. 23 (2005–2006) (see note 2 above).

Norway participates together with Sweden, Finland and Estonia in what is known as the 'Nordic Battle Group'. It is part of a rotation arrangement with the other EU battle groups, and in spring 2008 and 2011 it was one of two such groups ready for deployment.

How can we explain that a majority in the Norwegian Parliament (Storting) supported such a decision, which would appear to go far beyond the mandate emerging from the Norwegian referendum on EU membership in 1994? The constitutional challenges inherent in this initiative were debated in the Storting in 2004, when the government's wish to enter into this agreement became known. The Storting then requested that the government ensure that the agreement was formulated so as to guarantee Norwegian sovereignty. The Conservative/Centre coalition government of Kjell Magne Bondevik had originally not envisaged an open parliamentary debate on the matter. However, members of the opposition demanded that the agreement should be subjected to open plenary debate, arguing as follows:

What is now at stake is whether we are to become involved in military units that are to be set in at short notice, following a decision made by the European Council. These battle groups are to be at the disposal of the EU. Obviously, it will not be easy to be involved in such military units and at the same time retaining the option of refusing to contribute to concrete operations.¹²

In the end, the Storting declared itself satisfied with the agreement, on the basis of the following text:

While the Battle Group will be deployed following the relevant EU decisions, any commitments by the participants to deploy their forces will only take place after a decision by the respective and competent national authorities in accordance with their national Constitution, legislation and policy decisions.¹³

¹² Thorbjørn Jagland, 3 December 2004, *Parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence concerning possible Norwegian participation in the EU's military forces and the framework agreement for Norwegian participation in EU civilian and military crisis-management operations*. Available (in Norwegian) at: <http://www.stortinget.no/stdid/2004/s041203-03.html> (accessed 22 February 2008).

¹³ *Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland and the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Norway and the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden concerning the principles for the establishment and operation of a multinational battle group to be made available to the European Union*, 17 May 2005.

Formally and officially, participation in such a battle group should not, then, constitute a challenge to Norwegian sovereignty. The government has stressed that any decision on participation in a concrete operation is to be taken at the national level; further, that the forces are to be under national control, and that a precondition for participation is that there is a clear UN mandate for the operation. But just how real is this national autonomy to decide on participation?

It is not immediately apparent that the questions raised in the parliamentary debate in December 2004 have been adequately answered. As it is a matter of participating in *integrated* forces, it is difficult to see how these may be operative if one of the participating countries should say 'no' to a given mission. Moreover, the potential political pressure on Norway to participate is likely to be quite high given that only two battle groups at a time are ready for deployment. A 'no' from Norway would probably mean that the EU would be unable to carry out the operation. Further, there are no provisions in the agreement for participation in the decision-making process leading to an eventual decision in the European Council to launch an operation. In practice, the assumption on the part of Norway is that Sweden, as the lead nation of the Nordic battle group, will speak also on behalf of Norway in the European Council. It is also the responsibility of Sweden to keep Norwegian authorities informed of discussions taking place within the EU prior to any decision to launch an operation involving the battle group to which Norway contributes.

Thorbjørn Jagland (Labour) noted in his speech that it could be difficult to say 'no' to an operation: '[...] after all, we must admit that we have become involved in a military cooperation that naturally binds us more closely than has been the case with other international operations [...].'¹⁴

Jan Petersen (Conservative), although perhaps less explicit than his colleague from the Labour party, appeared to take a similar line in an exchange with MP Width from the Progress Party (FrP) in the parliamentary debate on 20 November 2004.¹⁵

¹⁴ Thorbjørn Jagland, 3 June 2005, *Parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence concerning the EU's operational forces, prepositioning and further efforts in Afghanistan*. Available (in Norwegian) at: <http://www.stortinget.no/stid/2004/s050603-01.html> (accessed 15 May 2008).

¹⁵ The Storting, 28 November 2007, *Presentation by the Minister of Defence concerning the status of Norwegian participation in the Nordic battle group*. Available (in Norwegian) at: <http://www.stortinget.no/stid/2007/s071128-02.html> (accessed 15 May 2008).

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Per Ove Width (FrP):

Thank you for your explanation. It was clear and comprehensive. Without necessarily agreeing with everything, I understood what was said. I also understand that before things start to escalate, the minister will appear again in this chamber to explain the further details [...].

Jan Petersen:

[...] I believe that many of the bridges my colleague Mr. Width feels he will have to cross; he has already crossed by accepting this concept itself. Therefore, what we will need to evaluate, when the time comes, is far more limited than the impression given by the previous speaker. It is also important to stress that when Norway has already agreed to participate in the Nordic unit within a larger European connection, we will not be starting at zero when the specific operation in question is put before the Storting [...].

The primacy of security?

One might be tempted to assume that the reason why a majority in the Storting did in fact agree to this is self-evident. In line with a Realist perspective on international politics, Norway's decision would be due to a concern for national security. The preconditions for shaping Norwegian foreign and security policy have changed as Norway's European NATO-allies are increasingly coordinating their policies within the framework of the EU. Also Nordic cooperation often has to pass via Brussels. At the same time, NATO, and Norway's bilateral relations with the USA have been weakened. Thus, a turn toward the EU might be seen as logical from a Realist perspective. The potential security gains from taking such a step might appear greater than the costs.

A review of the relevant parliamentary debates confirms that this line of thought contributed to the Norwegian decision.¹⁶ Speeches and remarks from representatives of the Labour Party and the Liberals alike reflect a Realist assessment. From the Liberal side: '[...] if we had remained outside [*the EU security arrangement*], our security-political position would have been weakened.'¹⁷ And from the Labour Party:

¹⁶This analysis is based on debates in the Storting on Norway's contribution to the EU forces, on 3 December 2004, 3 June 2005 and 28 November 2007.

¹⁷ Thorbjørn Jagland, 3 June 2005 (see note 13 above).

Norway needs friends, and if we stand together with others, then we can call on our friends in a situation where this is necessary. I think it is important to have a broad perspective. There are friends through the NATO track. There are friends through this practical track to the EU. There are friends in the Nordic track.¹⁸

Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen (Labour) agreed:

Let me begin by expressing agreement with what representative Dørum has said about having friends. It is important for Norway to be able to collaborate in the EU, in NATO, in the Nordic sphere; it is also important that, through our collaboration and through our dialogues with them, we get them to look to the North – that we can get them to see that this is an area of strategic importance far beyond the borders of Norway. So I support the views that have been expressed here.¹⁹

Inge Lønning (Conservative) followed up by stating that Norway had no other choice than to enter into such an agreement, despite the

[...] considerable difficulties in connection with a situation where the collaborating countries might differ in their perceptions of, for instance, matters of international law [in connection with putting a battle group into the field]. But that is a dilemma we will have to live with, because that is how reality is.²⁰

However, it is also evident that considerations of *realpolitik* cannot fully explain why the Storting approved the Bondevik government's proposal concerning Norwegian participation in the EU battle group arrangement. A review of the parliamentary debates reveals that the focus was mainly on how these forces could contribute to international security and thereby support the UN's work for global peace and stability. Take, for example, the following excerpt:

¹⁸ Odd Einar Dørum, 28 November 2007, speech in the parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence (see note 14 above).

¹⁹ Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, the Storting, 28 November 2007, *Presentation by the Minister of Defence concerning the status of Norwegian participation in the Nordic battle group* (see note 14 above).

²⁰ Inge Lønning, 3 June 2005, speech in the parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence (see note 13 above).

Åse Wisløff Nilssen (Christian Democrat)

We hold that there is a great need for these forces, and that Norway should join in their development in order to resolve military and civilian crises. [...] An important point for the Christian Democratic Party is the fact that the UN Secretary-General has welcomed these EU forces [...] Together with the UN; the EU forces can help to ensure peace.²¹

Also the parliamentary presentation by *Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen* in November 2007 held up the contribution to the UN as the main reason for Norwegian participation:

Why is it important for Norway to participate in a Nordic battle group? Improved European capabilities in crisis management are a strength for international society [...]. The government is working actively to strengthen the UN's own capabilities to lead complex peace operations, and, as the UN leadership, views the establishment of the EU battle groups as a useful supplement, whether as support to a UN force or as the initial force to be deployed until the UN assumes responsibility.²²

Thus the issue of Norway's contribution to the EU battlegroup does not seem to have been perceived solely as a question of national security. Nor is it clear to what degree support for the agreement was based primarily on considerations of *realpolitik*. In most of the speeches and remarks in the parliamentary debates, it was argued that Norway had a moral duty to contribute to international assignments like those for which the EU battle groups were intended. Also emphasised was the importance of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan explicit approval of the establishment of these forces. In other words, the Norwegian decision appears to have emerged as the result of a moral assessment of the legitimacy of submitting to a higher authority, in this case the UN. The force of this argumentation became particularly evident when the Socialist Left Party (SV) was pressured to explain its opposition to the EU battle groups. Even though the party had voted against a Norwegian contribution, a prominent representative from SV admitted that the battle groups as such were perhaps not so problematic:

Håkon Blankenborg (Labour): And so I have a fundamental question to Kristin Halvorsen: whether SV believes that there is a need for such international forces [the EU battle groups] in order to support UN resolutions, for instance?

²¹ Åse Wisløff Nilssen, 3 June 2005, speech in the parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence (see note 13 above).

²² Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, the Storting, 28 November 2007, *Presentation by the Minister of Defence* (see note 18 above).

Kristin Halvorsen (SV): Does the world need such military forces? Yes, the world probably does.²³

Only the Centre Party clearly and firmly disagreed with this emphasis on the importance of the link to the UN. Their focus was on considerations of national security and not global responsibility. But from their perspective national security was linked exclusively to NATO, and not to any affiliation with the EU:

Marit Arnstad (Centre Party)

The Centre Party holds that Norway should rather concentrate its energies on placing resources at the disposal of NATO. And we should also use more of our resources in military and defence policy to focus on our own Northern neighbourhood.²⁴

However, the duty to support the UN is not the only argument that appeared in addition to considerations based on *realpolitik*. It was equally argued that participation in the EU battle group represented an important contribution to Nordic cooperation. Indeed, sometimes in the debate it is barely noticeable that this is a military unit established by the European Union – as it is repeatedly referred to simply as a ‘Nordic battle group’. This approach became more prominent among Labour Party MPs after formal governmental collaboration with the Socialist Left Party had been established, than when the debate on the EU forces began in 2004. According to *Defence Minister Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen (Labour)*:

These forces have also become a central part of Nordic security and defence cooperation, and are thus well-suited for further developing this collaboration and adapting it to new needs. In this connection, our contribution is important because it means involving Norwegian defence in practical cooperation with our Nordic neighbours.²⁵

²³ The Storting, 3 December 2004, *Parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence* (see note 11 above).

²⁴ Marit Arnstad, 3 December 2004, speech in the parliamentary debate on the presentation by the Minister of Defence (see note 11 above)

²⁵ Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen, the Storting, 28 November 2007, *Presentation by the Minister of Defence* (see note 18 above).

Adaptation or normative learning?

Today Norway has changed from being a bothersome 'fly in the ointment' in the 1990s to becoming a kind of accomplice to the EU's security policy. This shift, which came in 2000/2001, was initially driven by instrumental considerations. Arguing against the development of a common foreign and security policy for the EU had turned out to be ineffective. By 2000 Norwegian authorities considered that they would be able to pursue Norwegian interests more effectively by presenting Norway as a 'constructive' contributor to the CFSP. Views on the EU's security policy and its desirability had not really changed: the question was how Norway could most effectively gain insight into what was actually going on within the EU.

Here, as also before, we can see how an actor enters into cooperation as a result of pure calculations of utility and gradually comes to see things differently. In turn, this often becomes decisive for policy. The debates in the Norwegian parliament on participation in the EU forces render such an interpretation plausible. Whereas in the 1990s the EU's security policy was described as undesirable, by 2004 it was described as a 'good thing'. The decision to 'contribute constructively' did no longer seem to rest solely on strategic calculations of how this might benefit Norwegian interests but was linked to the broader normative objectives of Norwegian foreign policy. It thus appears that Norway underwent a process of normative learning since the beginning of 2000. This assessment builds on the analysis of the arguments put forward in the parliamentary debates. Some might still claim that it is possible to account for the shift in Norwegian policy on the basis of considerations of *realpolitik*. However, the Realist account is weak because there is no security guarantee involved with Norwegian participation in the EU forces. Whatever security gains are achieved they can at least only be indirect, as the intention behind these battle groups is to enable the EU to contribute peace operations outside its territory, on mandate from the UN. The aim is not to defend the territories of the contributing states.

Furthermore, it is far from obvious that Norway finds itself in a particularly unstable security situation. Despite intermittent reports of increased Russian military activity in the North, there have been few signs of military threats that would indicate that Norway were in need of special 'protection'. On the other hand, it might be possible to explain the decision on grounds of worries that Norway's options in security policy have been reduced. With bilateral dialogue between the EU and the US gaining in strength, NATO's role as a forum for consultations between Europe and the USA may become less important. According to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' work programme on cooperation with the EU in foreign and security policy,

Norway desires a 'strategic partnership' between NATO and the EU.²⁶ There can be little doubt as to the realism of worries about NATO's future role as a transatlantic forum for consultation. The dialogue between the EU and NATO is reported to be functioning poorly. Even though the EU was not established as a competitor to NATO, it has become increasingly clear that the aim is to establish an autonomous European security actor. The 'Berlin+' agreement between NATO and the EU, which foresaw the EU as a kind of European branch of NATO has not become as important as expected.²⁷ And thus we may well envisage the development of direct EU dialogue with the US, outside of NATO. Such a development would further limit Norway's access to key fora for decision-making in security policy.

The point here is, however, that such fears of a weakened NATO cannot provide a full explanation for Norwegian policy in relations to the EU battle forces. The arguments put forward in the Parliamentary debates all indicate that other factors were involved. If one is intent on maintaining a Realist explanation, this would require that one does not take these debates seriously. The claim in this paper is thus that it is more plausible that the arguments presented publically were those that actually make the decision acceptable to a majority of the political parties in the Storting.

The idea that Norway has certain obligations to international society that require action on its part is not novel. This way of justifying participation in international military forces are in line with what has long been established Norwegian policy. What is new, however, is that these arguments were used with reference to the EU: It's role is thus considered in a broader, more cosmopolitan perspective. The political dimension of the EU appears to have become more visible to Norwegian decision-makers, and was linked to the argument that the EU had become an important - and positive - actor in international society.

The establishment of the EU battle groups, and the issue of Norwegian participation, exacerbates existing dilemmas for a non-EU member state such as Norway. It also brings new dilemmas. But they are of a different kind than those that would be highlighted through a realist perspective and seen as founded in fears of a reduced role for NATO and in weakened possibilities for protecting 'national interests'.

²⁶ *Work programme for cooperation with the EU on foreign and security policy (CFSP)*. Available (in Norwegian) at:

http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/eu/CFSP_Arbeidsprogram_2008.pdf.

²⁷ http://www.nato.int/shape/news/2003/shape_eu/se030822a.htm (accessed 15 May 2008).

Dilemmas and challenges to democracy

Security policy is often regarded as different as regards requirements for openness, insight and democratic control of decision-making. In general, there has been some acceptance that a certain degree of secrecy is important in security and defence policy. It is also said that this policy area places special demands as to effective decision-making, and that it should therefore be the prerogative of the executive branch. Security policy is seen as something that concerns the *national interest*, and thus to rise above the daily disagreements along party political lines. The view that in security policy, all should speak with *one voice* is deeply rooted.

However, as the nature of security policy is changing, it has become less consensus-based, and the executive branch will probably in future have to prepare for more debate and stronger demands for transparency and insight. In this connection, the issue of Norway and the EU battle groups represents a particular challenge that nevertheless is reflective of a broader trend. With the end of the Cold War and with the changes in the security-policy landscape in the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, the assumed value consensus has been reduced nationally as well as internationally. Arguments against openness and democratic control of security policy and defence policy have come under pressure. We also see how criticisms of the foundations of security policy, previously heard only from the political margins, are now coming from the political centre, indeed even from within the Norwegian government. If not *de rigueur*, it has at least become acceptable to openly challenge the sacred cows of Norwegian security and defence policy.

Expectations of greater openness can be discerned in the demands from the parliamentary opposition that the agreement between Norway and the EU battle groups must be debated in open plenary session of the Storting. With this agreement, as well as with the EEA-agreement between the EU and Norway, the conditions for free and open opinion formation are weakened. This may then in the longer run entail new challenges for Norwegian decision-makers.²⁸

It is increasingly pointed out that also the EU has democracy-related problems in the sphere of security policy. Even though this cooperation is, as noted, formally an inter-state affair, so that democratic control should be ensured at the national level, integrated forces like the battle groups will make it far more

²⁸ E.O. Eriksen, 2008, 'Norges demokratiske underskudd', *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* 25(4): 368–79.

difficult for the national legislatures to control their own governments.²⁹ The existence of such forces adds to the 'Brusselisation' of security policy, providing actors based in Brussels with greater room to manoeuvre. For Norway the challenges are even more daunting, because both the legislative and the executive have limited access.

The majority in the Storting decided to 'resolve' this challenge to democracy by coupling Norwegian participation in the EU forces to a UN mandate. In other words, the legitimacy of the agreement is linked to invoking a higher authority. It has been systematically stressed that Norway will only participate in an EU operation if it has a UN mandate. However, that only serves to reproduce the dilemma, as it still means that a decision has been taken without a democratic anchoring. A *carte blanche* to the UN also obscures the fact that a mandate from the UN Security Council is not always a guarantee of the legitimacy of a decision to employ military force. The UN is not an absolute authority, and invoking the UN cannot provide a definite solution to the dilemmas.

This is particularly apparent today, when the very foundations for the legitimacy of security policy are contested. The guiding principles of security policy as practised by Norway and other Western countries, and as also expressed through the UN, are being questioned. The principle of sovereignty remains the main pillar for the work of the UN. At the same time, demands for action in the face of serious violations of human rights – genocide and crimes against humanity – are placing this principle under pressure. Thus far, the UN has had scant success in its attempts to solve the quandary by means of the R2P principle. Just when, except in self-defence, is it legitimate to employ military might? This question arises more and more frequently, but no clear answers have been provided.

The debate inside the Norwegian government concerning the US invasion of Iraq provides an example of the problems in assuming that a UN resolution in itself is sufficient to provide legitimacy to a military operation. In late 2008, a series of articles in the Norwegian daily *Aftenposten* described how the prime minister, Kjell Magne Bondevik, had hoped that an intervention would not be granted a mandate by the UN Security Council – because then Norway would have to support it.³⁰ The articles further referred to strong disagreements

²⁹ 28 H. Sjursen (ed.) 2011, 'The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy: the Quest for Democracy' *Journal of European Public Policy*, 18 (4).

³⁰ R. Gjerde: 'Irak-krigen skapte krise i regjeringen', *Aftenposten* 19 March 2008; 'Overkjørte UD', *Aftenposten* 25 March 2008; 'Et politisk mesterstykke'; also J. Petersen, 'Hva jeg faktisk tenkte', the latter two in *Aftenposten* 26 March 2008.

within the government as to the position Norway should take. Some of the details provided in that article series have since been refuted, but they still confirm the overall impression that the legitimacy of a UN decision (or the absence of a decision) is not self-evident, neither politically, nor in principle. A similar dilemma may thus appear also when the question is whether or not to deploy the EU battle groups.

In this paper we have seen how the prospects for a common European security and defence policy in the 1990s were assessed from the perspective of 'NATO-Norway', as a threat to Norway's interests in maintaining a strong and unified alliance. This has changed. Although Norwegian authorities still desire close cooperation between the EU and NATO, the EU's ambitions in the area of security policy are no longer evaluated solely with that in mind. Today the EU is described as being as important global actor. This shift is evident in the parliamentary debates on Norway and the battle groups. The justifications provided for Norwegian involvement in these forces have been linked to the fact that their establishment enjoyed the support of the UN and of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Such references to the UN help - as least as an interim measure - to make the issue of a Norwegian military contribution less controversial. The agreement glides discretely in with the general Norwegian self-perception of the country's foreign policy and its commitment to global peace.

All the same, this does not resolve the latent political dilemmas involved: Instead, it reproduces them. Questions of security and defence are no longer isolated from other policy issues, and the UN is not an absolute authority. The semi-ritualistic references to the UN cannot provide the answer to the most fundamental challenge to Norwegian security policy today, which also comes with involvement in the EU military forces: On what grounds can security and defence policy be justified in a context of mutual interdependence in an increasingly more globalised world order?