

# THE NORWEGIAN CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION TEN YEARS

## AFTER ACCESSION

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## Abstract

This study demonstrates that the European Commission contribute to weaken hierarchical decision-making processes, and ultimately politico-administrative control and oversight, within the Norwegian central administration. This article studies *how* the Norwegian central administrative apparatus is penetrated by the European Commission through ten years of “associated EU membership” through the EEA agreement. The study outlines two complementary theoretical approaches to account for actual decision-making processes within domestic central administrations: one ‘administrative integration approach’ claiming that different EU institutions have profound and differentiated impact on domestic hierarchical governance, and one ‘administrative robustness approach’ advocating that the “EU effect” is filtered, mediated and modified through existing domestic decision-making routines and practices. The empirical analysis, based on a comprehensive body of survey, interview and documentation data from 2005, indicates that the European Commission tend to strengthen the lower echelons of the Norwegian government hierarchy, notably sector experts within sector agencies and sector ministries. At the same time, the European Commission tend to weaken the Norwegian politico-administrative leadership, the Foreign Office and the Prime Ministers Office. Consequently, the Norwegian case reveals that processes of mutual interpenetration between the European Commission and domestic government occur largely outside the control of the Norwegian politico-administrative leadership. Finally, this study also highlights that the Norwegian central administration mediates, filter and modify, to some extent, decision impulses from the European Commission.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Ten years ago referendums were held almost simultaneously in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Austria on the question of EU membership. In Norway 52,2 percent voted in favour of rejecting a EU membership, while 57 percent of the Finish voters, 66,6 percent of the Austrian voters, and 52 percent of the Swedish voters favoured a EU membership (Höll, Pollack & Puntsher-Riekman 2003, 338; Tiilikainen 2003, 150). This study demonstrates that the European Commission has contributed to weakening hierarchical decision-making processes, and ultimately politico-administrative control and oversight, within the *Norwegian* central administration. This article studies *how* the Norwegian central administrative apparatus is penetrated by the European Commission through ten years of “associated EU membership” through the EEA agreement. The empirical analysis, based on a comprehensive body of survey, interview and documentation data from 2005, indicates that the European Commission tend do strengthen the lower echelons of the Norwegian government hierarchy, notably sector experts within sector agencies and sector ministries. At the same time, the European Commission tend to weaken the Norwegian politico-administrative leadership, the Foreign Office (FO) and the Prime Ministers Office (PMO).

The wave of public management reforms has marked a tendency towards stronger vertical specialisation of administrative units through devolution of semi-autonomous agencies in Norway (Christensen and Lægreid 2002). A classical tension has prevailed in Norway between ministerial governance and agency autonomy. This conflict has centred on two dimensions: that between vertical politico-administrative control versus professional neutrality, and that between horizontal co-ordination versus sectoral departmentalisation (Jacobsen 1960). The argument presented by this study is that the European Commission tends to strengthen dynamics of professional neutrality and sectoral departmentalisation

within domestic government systems. The Norwegian government system applies ministerial rule and administrative monism accompanying a closer formal relationship between the minister, his cabinet and subordinated agencies (Lægreid & Pedersen 1999). In this system, “the ministers are always accountable for the actions of a directorate” (Jacobsson, Lægreid & Pedersen 2004, 6). Still, this study demonstrates that the European Commission tend to weaken the hierarchical control vested in the politico-administrative leadership of the Cabinet, PMO and FO. Whereas the territorial principle of specialisation within the Council of Ministers arguably strengthens the domestic politico-administrative leadership, the sectoral principle of specialisation within the European Commission tends to weaken that same leadership.

The dependent variable of this study is the actual decision-making processes unfolding within the Norwegian central administration generally, particularly the degrees of hierarchical decision-making processes therein. The empirical yardstick of hierarchical decision-making is the extent to which the politico-administrative leadership ultimately controls the decision-making processes that unfold within domestic government institutions. Hierarchical decision-making denotes that “the most important policy decisions [are] taken at the apex of a government organisation ... and those lower down in the hierarchy merely ... carry them out” (Page 1992, 61). De-hierarchisation refers to the fact that important decisions are crafted autonomously by civil servants in the lower echelons of the government hierarchy. Decision-making behaviour refers to the contacts, co-ordination patterns and priorities made by civil servants. A de-hierarchisation of decision-making behaviour thus denotes civil servants having few contacts with the politico-administrative leadership, receiving few priorities from this leadership, and/or co-ordinate more among fellow peers horizontally than with the leadership vertically. One indicator thereof is that EU/EEA dossiers are handled by domestic

sector experts within sector agencies and ministries and less by the politico-administrative leadership of the FO and the PMO.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the Swedish EU membership has integrated the Swedish administrative apparatus into both the European Commission *and* the Council of Ministers, the Norwegian associated membership (through the EEA agreement) has (partly) integrated the Norwegian government fabric *solely* to the Commission system. Empirically, the case of Norway demonstrates how the European Commission administrative system contributes to informally circumvent the Norwegian decision-making hierarchy and thus weaken politico-administrative control and oversight by the politico-administrative elites at the PMO and the PO. Moreover, the Norwegian case also demonstrates that ten years of associated membership in the EU have not fundamentally transformed decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration. This study reveals that trends towards a de-hierarchisation of government decision-making processes are filtered, edited and translated through domestic administrative routines and practices.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section presents two supplementary theoretical approaches to account for how EU institutions impact on hierarchical governance within domestic central administrations. The first approach presented is an ‘administrative integration approach’ claiming that different EU institutions have profound and differentiated impact on hierarchical governance within domestic central administrations. The second approach is an ‘administrative robustness approach’ advocating that hierarchical governance within domestic central administrations adapt less effectively and accurately towards EU institutions than claimed by the first approach. The second section provides an empirical

analysis on how ten years of EEA-affiliation have impacted on degrees of hierarchical decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administrative apparatus.

## **THEORISING DIFFERENTIATED DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES**

This section outlines two supplementary theoretical approaches that render understandable how different EU institutions impact differently on degrees of hierarchical decision-making processes. First, one ‘administrative integration approach’ is presented claiming that different EU institutions accompany different levels of hierarchical decision-making within domestic government systems. Secondly, one ‘administrative robustness approach’ is outlined arguing that the “EU effect” is mediated and filtered through domestic decision-making routines and practices.

### **An administrative integration approach**

This approach builds on a generic organisation theory perspective, not on *sui generis* theories of administrative fusion as suggested by Wolfgang Wessels (1998). One advantage of applying a general or ‘cosmopolitan’ approach like organisation theory is the possibilities of drawing general inferences from single-case studies (Kohler-Koch 2003, 7). An organisation theory perspective assumes that civil servants employed in government institutions are bounded rational faced with information overload, computational limitations and a complex web of roles to play. The role as a civil servant is ambiguous with a multifaceted and complex set of role-expectations embedded. The vertical and horizontal specialisation of public administration serves to systematically buffer the information and role expectations relevant for each civil servant, thereby simplifying their preference formation and ultimately choice of decision-making behaviour (Egeberg 1999; Thelen and Steimno 1992). The local rationality of civil servants is systematically aggregated by this buffer function into organisational

rationality (Gulick 1937; Simon 1957). Consequently, the organisational selection of relevant information, premises for decision making and role enactment affects how civil servants think, feel and act.

Organisational dynamics are triggered when organisational borders are criss-crossed in day-to-day decision-making (Egeberg 1999). Arguably, the organisational borders between domestic administrative systems and the EU institutions are increasingly by-passed and weakened (Kohler-Koch 2003). The EU institutions and domestic government apparatuses interact in day-to-day policy-making through a complex web of EU committees, the system of seconded civil servants, through embassies, as well as informal networks of civil servants (Egeberg, Schaefer and Trondal 2003; Lewis 2000; Trondal 2004a; Van Schendelen and Scully 2003). Assumable, civil service systems that frequently interact tend to become increasingly similar in organisational terms, with respect to the decision-making processes unfolding, as well as the public policy crafted (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Wessels 1998). Assuming that formal organisations focus the attention of bounded rational actors, national government systems with intimate contact towards EU institutions are likely to become systematically affected as regards their decision-making practices.

According to the classical administration school of Luther Gulick (1937), organisations may be horizontally specialised according to four principles: purpose, process, territory and clientele. The horizontal principles of purpose and process are observed in most domestic sector ministries and agencies, in the European Commission DGs, in the subordinated agencies of the Commission as well as in the web of Commission expert committees (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Peters 1995, 147). Arguably, civil servants who frequently interact within administrative systems organised by purpose and process are assumed to evoke decision-



making behaviour that reflects their sectoral portfolios and professional skills, respectively. These civil servants are likely to perceive themselves as Weberian civil servants abiding rules and established practices within their portfolios as well as independent and neutral experts, respectively (Weber 1964). These officials are less likely to act on fixed mandates issued by the politico-administrative leadership or to negotiate within the Council of Ministers on the basis of fixed national mandates written by the domestic FO and PMO. The latter behavioural pattern is arguably activated within territorially specialised organisations, such as domestic FOs and the Council of Ministers (see below).

According to this line of argumentation, the decision-making behaviour evoked by civil servants is contingent on the organisational properties of the administrative systems in which they are embedded. Henceforth, different EU institutions – notably the European Commission and the Council of Ministers – are likely to condition domestic decision-making processes differently. Whereas the European Commission is likely to foster a horizontal sector-fragmentation of domestic decision-making processes and a weakening of domestic politico-administrative leadership, the Council of Ministers is likely to accompany domestic horizontal coherence across policy sectors and a demand for strengthening of domestic politico-administrative leadership (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). Whereas the Swedish EU membership has integrated the Swedish administrative apparatus into both the European Commission *and* the Council of Ministers, the Norwegian associated membership (through the EEA agreement) has (partly) integrated the Norwegian government fabric *solely* to the Commission system.

Figure 1 illustrates that intimate interaction between domestic sector ministries and the European Commission may contribute to turn the domestic pyramidal hierarchy of

governance upside-down. Assumable, the European Commission activates the lower echelons of the domestic government hierarchies, notably sector experts within sector agencies and sector ministries. Arguably, the European Commission de-activates the domestic politico-administrative leadership, the FO and the PMO.

-- Figure 1 about here --

According to Luther Gulick (1937) organisations may be organised to accommodate territorial interests and concerns. Domestically, local prefect offices as well as FOs are examples of territorially organised government bodies. The FO has the task of diplomatic representation abroad and to integrate national preferences that cross-cuts the portfolio of sector ministries. Traditionally the FO has been organised outside the domain of ‘domestic’ politics and outside the institutional turf-wars between sector ministries and the Finance Ministry (Christensen 1996). By this specialised organisational solution issues pertaining to other states as well as to international organisations are supposed to be co-ordinated by the FO. At the EU level the best example of territorial organisation is found within the Council of Ministers, particularly at the Minister level and the COREPER – including the Antici and Mertens groups (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Sherrington 2000). Examples of organisation by purpose and process, however, are also present within the Council, notably at the level of working groups and within the Council Secretariat (Christiansen 2001). However, national civil servants participating in Council working groups are *expected to* represent their governments and speak with “one voice” (Beyers and Trondal 2004; Larsson 2003, 164).

Arguably, the Council of Ministers is likely to activate territorially organised domestic ministries like domestic FOs and PMOs, with horizontally co-ordinating roles within the

Government. Moreover, the cross-sectoral co-ordination portfolios of these ministries contribute to a domestic filtering of the sectoral dynamics that may penetrate from the European Commission (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). The Swedish EU membership allows Swedish civil servants to participate in the Council of Ministers whereas the EEA agreement excludes Norwegian civil servants from attending Council meetings. Accordingly, we expect to observe that EU/EEA decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration are poorly co-ordinated cross-sectorally by the FO and the PMO. Hence, the Norwegian FO is less likely to be strengthened by the European Commission because ‘national positions’ (of FOs) have weak access opportunities within the Commission apparatus. Consequently, the Norwegian civil service is likely to be strongly penetrated by the sector-dynamics of the European Commission and experience a decline of the powers of the FO, PMO and the politico-administrative leadership (Figure 1).

Figure 2 illustrates how intimate interaction between domestic ministries (and agencies) and the Council of Ministers *may* contribute to uphold the domestic pyramidal hierarchy of governance.

-- Figure 2 about here --

### **An administrative robustness approach**

Bureaucratic organisations tend to develop added value “beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick 1957, 17). Processes of infusion ultimately contribute to give the organisation an embodiment of purpose that provides a conservative institutional logic preserving existing decision-making processes (Sryker and Strathan 1985). Processes of infusion create a unique culture, identity, or soul to organisations, promoting resistance

against abrupt change patterns (Christensen and Lægreid 2002). The administrative robustness approach claims that institutionalised organisations are fairly robust against ‘big bang’ changes in administrative structures, routines and decision-making processes (March and Olsen 1989). Accordingly, intimate interaction between the European Commission and domestic government institutions on the other are not likely to radically transform domestic decision-making processes. The impact stemming from the European Commission is likely to be filtered, edited and translated through existing domestic decision-making routines and practices (Olsen 2003b). Whereas the ‘administrative integration approach’ is based on an underlying assumption of bounded rationality, the administrative robustness approach is based on assumptions going beyond the logic of consequentiality (March and Olsen 1989). The central logic is that of human beings as collections of identities, roles, cognition, emotions and senses of belongingness, and that decision-making behaviour is guided by processes of matching these properties to particular situations (March and Olsen 1989). A central underlying assumption is that civil servants’ decision-making behaviour is a product of such matching-processes. The choice of decision-making behaviour is ultimately determined by perceptions of self, perceptions of relevant situation as well as perceptions of how these properties should be linked appropriately (March and Olsen 1989).

Organisational boundaries are more than cognitive buffers to the attention of decision-makers. Organisational boundaries are normative, ethical, symbolic and temporal orders (Egeberg 1994, 85). They grow, blossom and die through long “historical processes of interpretation, learning and habituation” (Olsen 1995, 28). Drawing and redrawing organisational borderlines not only affect decision-making behaviour on the basis of cognitive search-processes, but also on the basis of matching identities and role perceptions to particular situations (Brunsson and Olsen 1997). Parallel to the ‘hermeneutic circle’, path-dependencies

implies that future changes of decision-making processes are conditioned by past and present decision-making practices (Adler 1997, 321). One impact of this argument is that archaeological layers of decision-making routines and practices are stored within government institutions. Accordingly, it becomes easier to adopt new decision-making practices than to remove old ones due to the added value attached to existing practices (March and Olsen 1989). It also becomes easier to reorganise the balance between pre-existing behavioural practices than to add new practices or to subtract old ones. With March' words: "An individual who has been negotiating a tough contract as an antagonistic lawyer carries that identity over to the role of diner in a restaurant or driver on a highway" (March 1994, 70). In the EU-context, national officials who have just arrived at the EU meeting are likely to re-activate pre-established decision-making behaviour, preferences and roles of a domestic origin.

## Data and method

This study benefits from a multitude of data streams. The primary data is provided by a comprehensive study by the Audit General of Norway (2005) on the EU/EEA decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration. First, this data set includes interview data with key informants in selected Norwegian ministries as well as at the Norwegian Delegation to the European Union. Secondly, this data set covers a survey study among all Norwegian ministries<sup>3</sup> and relevant subordinated agencies (N = 510). The response rate in this survey is 80 percent. Finally, the data set consists of official and unofficial documents from the Norwegian FO, the Ministry of Environment (ME), the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (MPE) (Audit General of Norway 2005, 10). Among the documents covered are 535 dossiers and 356 'problem-notes' from the issue specific co-ordination committees of ME, MTI and MPE. This collection of

data was collected from October 2003 to January 2005. Additional data are provided by a large-scale survey study among Norwegian civil servants in 1996 (N = 1479 at the ministerial level and N = 1024 at the agency level), and a survey among Norwegian civil servants attending Commission expert committees (N = 116). The empirical analysis of this article thus combines a rich body of empirical data on the decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration. Together these data give an extensive empirical picture of the EU/EEA decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration.

### The Norwegian Central Administration Ten years after Accession

The government of Norway applies ministerial rule and administrative monism accompanying a close formalised relationship between minister, his Cabinet, and subordinated agencies (Lægreid & Pedersen 1999). There is currently 17 Norwegian ministries employing approximately 4000 civil servants. The Norwegian FO is by far the largest with 659 officials (St.prp. nr. 1 (2004-2005)). According to the White paper St.prp. nr. 100 (1991-1992) this existing government structure is intended to co-ordinate the EU/EEA decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration.

Norway has been pictured as an adaptive non-member of the EU (Sverdrup 1998). In the period 1997 to 2003 Norway adopted 2.129 (18,5 per cent) of the 11.511 new regulations decided by the EU (Nationen 2004). In sum, Norway has adopted 4.600 EU regulations in the period 1994 to 2004 (Dagbladet 2004). These observations indicate that Norwegian public policy has adapted flexibly towards new EU regulations (Claes & Tranøy 1999). However, studies show little evidence of a large-scale re-organisation of the Norwegian central administrative system due to the EU (Jacobssen, Lægreid & Pedersen 2004). Our focus, however, is neither on policy adaptation nor on re-organisation of the formal administrative

apparatus but on the actual decision-making processes unfolding within the Norwegian central administrative apparatus have adjusted to ten years of “associate membership” in the EU.

The Norwegian case shows evidence of a de-hierarchisation of the decision-making processes in the central administrative apparatus. A comprehensive study of the decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration in 1996 showed that approximately 50 per cent of the civil servants were affected by the EU and/or the EEA agreement. 22 per cent of the sector ministry officials and 13 per cent of the agency officials reported having attended Commission expert committees. Only very few officials had experiences from the comitology committees (Egeberg & Trondal 1999). Moreover, the Norwegian central administration, with the exception of the FO, had witnessed a remarkable stable level of participation in the Commission expert committees from 1994 to 1999: 252 committees in 1994, 200 committees in 1995, 207 committees in 1996, 211 committees in 1997, and 200 committees in 1999 (Egeberg & Trondal 1999, 138; Statskonsult 2001:15). At present a minority of top Norwegian civil servants belong to the core segment of very active EU committee participants (Jacobsson, Lægreid & Pedersen 2004, 51). Norwegian officials attending Commission expert committees are mostly from the agency level and the majority is employed in lower rank positions. They are typically professional experts with fairly loose ties towards the politico-administrative leadership (Statskonsult 1999:6, 27). Yet, when attending Commission expert committees these officials tend to perceive their role as that of a national representative in addition to the role as independent expert and a supranational agent (Trondal 2004b). Notably, Norwegian government officials attending the Commission expert committees attend with ambiguous mandates. They generally receive few clear instructions and signals from the politico-administrative leadership (Statskonsult 1999:6, 44). According to one Norwegian

civil servant, “the EEA work does not get the necessary daily attention from the top management” (Statskonsult 2002:5, 19 – authors’ translation).

Few Norwegian government officials are accustomed to a written procedure for co-ordinating EU/EEA dossiers, and actual co-ordination is mostly done informally and *post hoc* to the EU committee meetings, marginally involving the politico-administrative leadership (Jacobsson, Læg Reid & Pedersen 2004, 39; Sætereng 2001). Despite Norwegian officials are obliged to prepare written co-ordination documents (‘problem-notes’) in the pre-pipeline agenda setting phase of the European Commission, this is seldom done in practice (see Table 2 beneath).

Illustrative, the Norwegian FO does not have any written strategies for how EU/EEA dossiers should be administrated within the Norwegian central administration (Audit General of Norway 2005, 22). The Norwegian central administration tends to be more adequately co-ordinated *intra*-ministerially than *inter*-ministerially when approaching the European Commission. Moreover, these co-ordination processes are less formalised and routinised than intended by the Norwegian PMO and FO (Audit General of Norway 2005, 33). More generally, the formal co-ordination apparatus for EU/EEA dossiers is activated less frequently than officially intended by the Norwegian PMO (Audit General of Norway 2005; St.prp. nr. 100 (1991-1992)). As seen in Table 1 (below) this co-ordination apparatus is more active *post hoc* in the Commission agenda setting phase than *ex ante* in the agenda setting phase of the Commission expert committee meetings (Statskonsult 1999:6 and 2002:5, 37). However, ministries heavily affected by EU dossiers and strongly involved in EU committee meetings seem to have better co-ordination capacities than those ministries less involved in EU affairs (Statskonsult 2001:15, 15). Finally, the ministry-level seems better co-ordinated than the agency-level, and officials in top rank positions (typically heads of unit) are more adequately mandated than officials in lower rank positions (Statskonsult 2001:15, 16; Trondal 2004b).



Table 1 shows in which phase of the EU decision-making cycle the Norwegian issue specific co-ordination committees are activated – in the pre-pipeline preparation phase, in the decision-shaping phase, or in the decision-making phase. Table 1 refers to the experiences within the Norwegian Ministry of Environment (ME), the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy (MPE). The Table is empirically based on in-depth analyses of 535 dossiers handled by the issue specific co-ordination committees of ME, MTI and MPE.

-- Table 1 about here --

Table 1 clearly testifies that the Norwegian inter-ministerial co-ordination apparatus is mainly operating *after* the preparation phase within the European Commission. 89 per cent of the EU regulations dealt with by these co-ordination committees are situated in the decision-shaping and decision-making phase within the EU apparatus. Hence, Table 1 shows clearly that EU/EEA co-ordination processes within the Norwegian central administration are directed towards the agenda setting processes within the European Commission. Moreover, minutes from these issue specific co-ordination committees reveals that these committees seldom discuss how Norwegian interests should be “uploaded” to the Commission decision-making process (Audit General of Norway 2005, 29).

Co-ordination of EU dossiers within the Norwegian central administration is intended to be based on written documentation (so called ‘problem-notes’), written by the issue specific co-ordination committees. Table 2 demonstrates in which phase of the EU decision-making cycle these problem-notes are actually written – in the pre-pipeline preparation phase, in the

decision-shaping phase, or in the decision-making phase. Table 2 refers to the experiences of the ME, MTI and MPE. Table 2 is empirically based on in-depth analyses of 356 ‘problem-notes’ handled by the issue specific co-ordination committees of ME, MTI and MPE.

-- Table 2 about here --

Table 2 clearly shows that inter-ministerial co-ordination through a written procedure, like the problem-note system, is rarely used in the Norwegian central administration in order to influence the preparation phase within the European Commission. Whereas 5 percent of the problem-notes are written at the preparation phase in the Commission, 90 percent of the problem-notes are written after the Commission has finished this phase, and where the Norwegian central administration have formal rights of access (EEA agreement Art. 99 to 101).

Trondal & Veggeland (2003) show that Norwegian and Swedish officials attending the Commission expert committees evoke fairly *similar* roles – national, functional and supranational roles, respectively (ordered by importance). The Commission expert committees, however, have a stronger functional dynamic than both the Council working groups and the comitology committees, accompanying lower levels of inter-sectoral co-ordination among participants to the Commission expert committees than among Council working group and comitology committee participants (Egeberg, Schaefer & Trondal 2003). Moreover, during the so-called ‘interim period’ for Norway in 1994, when Norway prepared for EU membership, Norwegian civil servants were entitled to attend the Council working groups. Trondal (1999) shows that this period was marked by a profound increase of inter-ministerial co-ordination and a substantial co-ordinating role for the Norwegian FO vis-à-vis

Council working groups and COREPER. As a result of the Norwegian referendum in November 2004 Norway lost the right to attend the Council system. One notable impact was that the degree of FO-lead inter-ministerial co-ordination decreased markedly in the spring 1995, and that the co-ordinating role of the Norwegian FO diminished relative to the co-ordinating role of sector ministries and agencies (Christensen 1996; Trondal 1999).<sup>4</sup> At present the responsibility for co-ordination of EU dossiers within the Norwegian central administration is pictured as ambiguous and with “hands-off” politico-administrative leadership (Audit General of Norway 2005, 55).

The declining role of the Norwegian FO vis-à-vis the sector ministries is a long trend in all EU member-states (Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003). In Norway East (1984, 127) reported early that officials in the Norwegian FO tended to be more concerned with *intra*-ministerial co-ordination than *inter*-ministerial co-ordination, and that the Norwegian FO was more effective on inter-ministerial co-ordination on bilateral issues that transcend Europe. By contrast, the international activities of Norwegian agencies’ are more narrowly oriented towards the European hemisphere (Underdal 1987, 182). Hence, the European Commission seems to accelerate an already ongoing weakening of the Norwegian FO (Christensen 1996). EU dossiers handled by the Commission are highly technical, requiring specialised knowledge to disentangle and influence successfully. As typical generalists in foreign affairs and diplomatic encounters, most Norwegian FO officials lack the professional capabilities available to sector-experts in the sector ministries and agencies to substantially and instrumentally handle EU dossiers (Claes 2003, 92; Kassim, Peters & Wright 2000, 239). For example, relatively few officials from the Norwegian FO attend Commission committee meetings (Egeberg & Trondal 1999, 138). Officials at the Norwegian Delegation to the EU have more direct and intimate contacts with Norwegian sector ministries than preferred by the

Norwegian FO (Statskonsult 2002:5, 18). These observations support the picture of the Norwegian FO as that of a “post-box” between the Norwegian sector ministries and agencies and the European Commission (Trondal 1999).

The Norwegian Parliamentary EEA committee convene few meetings, handle few EU dossiers substantively, and have weak administrative resources to control the Norwegian central administration on EU dossiers (Melsæther & Sverdrup 2004; Sørensen 2004). The Norwegian Parliamentary EEA committee may not issue binding mandates on the Government on EEA dossiers as may for example the Danish Parliamentary EU committee (Larsson & Trondal 2005). Notably, some Norwegian political parties have better access to the European Parliament through their European party federations than the Norwegian Parliament as an institution (Nordby & Veggeland 1999, 89; Statskonsult 2002:5).

“[G]overnments deal with European affairs much as they manage domestic affairs” (Engel 2003, 245). The Norwegian central administration is no exception. The Norwegian central administration seems more sectorally de-coupled, de-politicised and fragmented than territorially integrated, politicised and co-ordinated when handling EU dossiers. With respect to how the Norwegian central administration handles EU/EEA dossiers, it is pictured as reactive, de-politicised and horizontally fragmented (Jacobsson, Læg Reid & Pedersen 2004), even vertically disintegrated “whereby ‘micro-decisions’ tend to be de-coupled from the overall policy purpose and strategy” (Underdal 1987, 170). EU dossiers are largely integrated into the day-to-day decision-making routines of Norwegian sector ministries, agencies, divisions and units (Egeberg & Trondal 1997, 342). Hence, the Norwegian central administration displays more horizontal fragmentation than co-ordination between ministries, and more horizontal fragmentation between ministries than within them. The Norwegian case

indicates that ten years of intimate relationship between national sector ministries and the European Commission has strengthened trends towards horizontal inter-ministerial fragmentation. Secondly, ten years of interaction between Norwegian sector ministries and the European Commission has accompanied a weakening of hierarchical decision-making processes within the Norwegian central government apparatus (cf. Figure 1).

## Conclusions

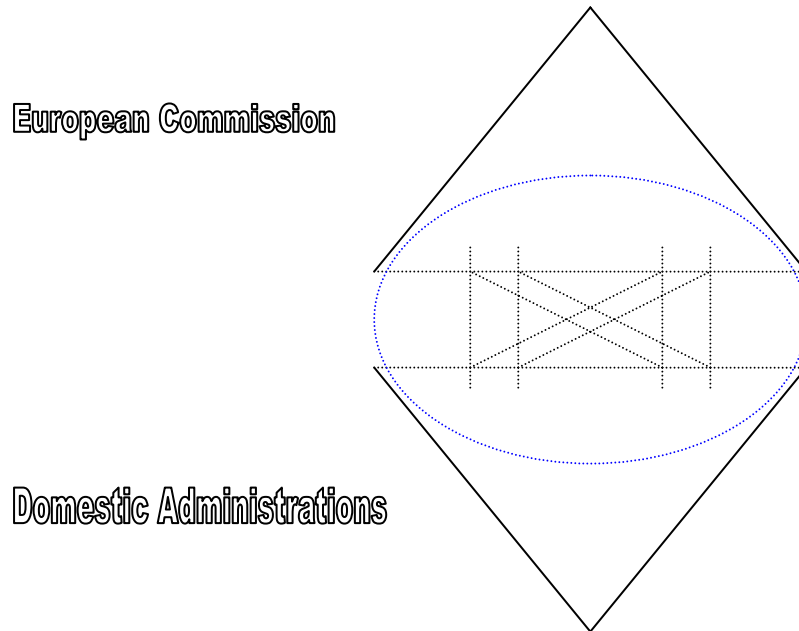
This study demonstrates that intimate relationships between the Norwegian central administration and the European Commission have accompanied profound impacts on the day-to-day decision-making processes unfolding within the Norwegian central administration. The study reveals that the Norwegian central administration is strongly sector-penetrated by the European Commission accompanying a de-hierarchisation of the actual decision-making processes unfolding within the Norwegian central administration (Figure 1). The European Commission fosters a rift between Government responsibility and Government control over the decision-making processes crafted by the government officials. These observations support the ‘administrative integration approach’ as suggested in this study. The European Commission tends to activate the lower echelons of the Norwegian government hierarchy, notably sector experts within sector agencies and sector ministries. The European Commission fosters a de-activation of the Norwegian politico-administrative leadership, the PO and the PMO. Henceforth, the empirical observations presented demonstrate that EU/EEA decision-making processes within the Norwegian government system are strongly conditioned by the Commission structure, as indicated in Figure 1.

In support of the ‘administrative robustness approach’ this study reveals that the impact of the European Commission is received differentially within different parts of the Norwegian

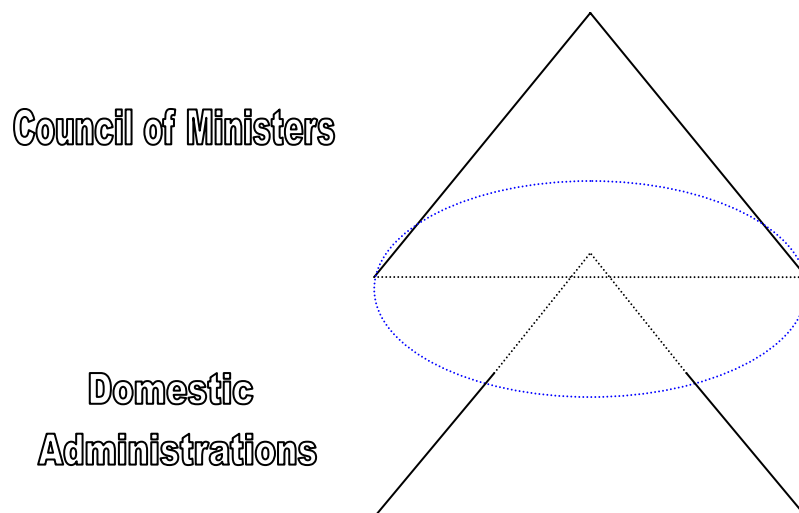
central administration. The European Commission seems to contribute to a de-hierarchisation of the decision-making processes both within sector ministries and agencies, notably at the level of advisors and senior advisors. However we see a stronger de-hierarchisation of decision-making processes at the *agency*-level than at the *ministry*-level. Ministry officials attending Commission expert committees tend to be more strongly co-ordinated from the politico-administrative leadership than agency officials attending Commission expert committees; and officials from the Norwegian PO tend to be more strongly mandated than officials from Norwegian sector ministries. Hence, this study highlights how domestic government institutions mediate and filter the impact of supranational executive institutions like the European Commission. EU dossiers are largely organised into existing ministerial structures and routines within the Norwegian central administration. These observations indicate that despite ten years of associated EU membership, domestic administrative routines and practices leave strong imprints on decision-making processes within the Norwegian central administration.

## Figures and Tables

**Figure 1: Administrative sector-integration across levels of governance**



**Figure 2: Territorial integration across levels of governance**



**Table 1: Percent of EU regulations dealt with by the issue specific co-ordination committees of ME, MTI and MPE, by EU decision-making phase.**

	<i>Preparation</i>	<i>Decision-shaping</i>	<i>Decision-making</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Responsible ministry:</b>	<i>phase</i>	<i>phase</i>	<i>phase</i>	
<i>ME (215 dossiers)</i>	14 %	49 %	36 %	100 %
<i>MTI (269 dossiers)</i>	7 %	19 %	74 %	100 %
<i>MPE (51 dossiers)</i>	16 %	45 %	39 %	100 %
<i>SUM (535 dossiers)</i>	11 %	34 %	56 %	100 %

*Source: Audit General of Norway 2005, 28*

**Table 2: Percent of ‘problem-notes’ written by ME, MTI and MPE, by EU decision-making phase.**

	<i>Preparation</i>	<i>Decision-shaping</i>	<i>Decision-making</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Responsible ministry:</b>	<i>phase</i>	<i>phase</i>	<i>phase</i>	
<i>ME (112 problem-notes)</i>	13 %	40 %	46 %	100 %
<i>MTI (227 problem-notes)</i>	1 %	26 %	73 %	100 %
<i>MPE (17 problem-notes)</i>	6 %	59 %	35 %	100 %
<i>SUM (356 problem-notes)</i>	5 %	32 %	63 %	100 %

*Source: Audit General of Norway 2005, 31*



## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> When analysing transformations of organisational *modus operandi* one is plagued with problems of empirical operationalisation, validations of causation as well as problems of assessment (Knill & Lenschow 2001). To begin with, it is not always clear what has changed and whether these changes should be considered fundamental or marginal. In many cases, although the government leadership officially claims that radical organisational overhauls have been accomplished, the changes may be merely cosmetic in practice (Brunsson 1989). At the other extreme, one may observe that organisations change drastically – not by re-organising the formal apparatus but by changing the decision-making processes unfolding within the established structures (Olsen 2003a). Organisational change may happen without formal approval or sanctioning by the leadership (March 1994). A growing body of literature on the Europeanisation of public administration demonstrates that domestic politico-administrative systems are mainly preserved and adapt path-dependently towards EU institutions (e.g. Engel 2003; Kassim, Peters & Wright 2000; Wessels, Maurer & Mittag 2003). Upon closer inspection domestic public administrative bodies are transformed incrementally through minor adjustments of decision-making dynamics (Olsen 2003b).

<sup>3</sup> Except the Norwegian Ministry of Defence.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the relative co-ordination power of the Norwegian PMO with regard to domestic EU/EEA decision-making processes seems to correlate with the political party in office. For example, whereas Prime Minister Brundtland from the Labour party “was personally strongly committed to EU membership and made it a central part of her political agenda for the 1990s” (Narud & Strøm 2000, 141), the current Prime Minister Bondevik from the Christian Democratic party is a reluctant European and officially against Norwegian membership in the EU.

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