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**Executive power in the scandinavian political systems –  
the problem of minority cabinet in Norway (selected aspects)**

**Keywords:** executive power, Scandinavian parliamentary systems, minority cabinet, government, political party, Norway

**Słowa kluczowe:** władza wykonawcza, skandynawskie systemy parlamentarne, gabinet mniejszościowy, rząd, partia polityczna, Norwegia

**Summary**

The article is devoted to the characteristics of the minority cabinet in the Scandinavian political systems and especially in Norway and its influence on political regime. Some interesting aspects has been chosen to illustrate the problem of minority government in Norway. Author explains normative and non-normative systemic factors that influenced the formation of the government cabinets without a sufficient majority in the parliament. The main thesis is that creation of minority governments is closely associated with the evolution of the party system and can be understood as a norm of political life in Scandinavia.

**Streszczenie**

**Władza wykonawcza w skandynawskich systemach politycznych –  
problem gabinetu mniejszościowego w Norwegii (wybrane zagadnienia)**

Artykuł poświęcony jest charakterystyce rządów mniejszościowych w skandynawskich systemach politycznych, w tym zwłaszcza w Norwegii i ich wpływu na reżim polityczny. Kilka

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ciekawych aspektów zostało wybranych celem zilustrowania problemu istnienia rządu mniejszościowego w Norwegii. Autor wyjaśnia, normatywne i nienormatywne czynniki systemowe, które wpłynęły na tworzenie gabinetów rządowych bez wystarczającej większości w parlamencie. Główną tezą jest, że tworzenie rządów mniejszościowych jest ściśle związane z rozwojem systemu partyjnego i może być rozumiane jako norma w życiu politycznym Skandynawii.

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## I.

A parliamentary system is known as a system of government in which the members of a legislative body try to determine the formation of the cabinet (the executive) and in which any majority of the legislature at almost any time may vote the cabinet out of office. But is this statement always true? In many states and under many circumstances it seems completely different. In the following article it is planned to present some selected problems of minority governments that are characteristic element of executive power in Scandinavian political systems.

In many parliamentary systems, legislative majorities have instruments at their disposal (such as no-confidence votes and investiture votes) they may use to control the composition of the government and government policy. However it should be remembered that the application of the majority principle to parliamentary responsibility is not altogether straightforward. In many parliamentary regimes cabinets must at various junctures produce legislative majorities in order to perform their constitutional functions. Firstly, parliamentary governments ought to be able to win a vote of confidence. This type of vote can come in three forms according to their origins. Vote of confidence may be demanded by the government itself (usually any time the government it wants) or by the opposition (example of Spanish regulation), or it may be required by the constitution (particularly likely at the time when a new government first presents itself to the legislature). This necessity of winning vote of confidence is very often called by experts a *viability* requirement, because if such voting ends negatively, the government simply vanishes<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> K. Strøm, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*, Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 5.

Secondly, constitutional functions of government are also very often connected with *effectiveness*, so it is obvious the governments must be both viable and effective. Such conditions are fulfilled by legislative coalitions which consist of the political parties from which the members of the governments are drawn. In coalition-theoretic parlance, the assumption are that the coalitions over policy and office are identical and that they can be identified as the parties holding cabinet portfolios<sup>3</sup>.

Situation of majority government is much more complicated than we can consider and that issue must be explained more precisely. Parties without cabinet portfolios may well support the government on confidence votes, legislative bills or both. This situation happens very often with parties not in the portfolio coalition participating in the legislative coalition for most of the time. Sometimes even parties not represented in the cabinet may receive some office payoffs, like for example subcabinet offices, legislative chairmanship or different appointments in the public sphere. However, parties in the portfolio coalition are likely to be members of the legislative coalition almost all the time and members of governing parties are particularly unwilling to get away with frequent departures from the fold on votes of confidence. In that case coalitions over policy may well be larger than coalitions over portfolios, and viability coalitions may differ from effectiveness coalitions. These facts describe the crucial issue of minority government, which is always a kind of expectation to form a majority government<sup>4</sup>.

A minority government or cabinet, is most often characterized by experts as a cabinet formed in a parliamentary system when a political party or coalition of parties does not have a majority of overall seats in the parliament. It is sworn into office, with or without the formal support of other parties, to enable a government to be formed. Under such a government, legislation can only be passed with the support of enough other members of the legislature to provide a majority, encouraging multi-partisanship. However, majority or minority governments do not altogether exhaust the set of possible cabinet solutions. A further possibility is non-partisan solution, such as a caretaker or business administration.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, s. 6.

It should be remembered that many minority and some majority governments are precisely caretaker governments, however such distinguishing characteristic is not as important as nonpartisanship position of such cabinet. In the literature many authors very often concentrate on single-party and coalition governments, and claim that they form under distinct conditions: single-party government in majority situations, when one party itself controls a majority of the legislature and coalition government in minority situations, when no party is so in power.

In parliamentary democracies both minority and nonpartisan governments are treated as a kind of deviation. Nonpartisan governments violate the most fundamental norm, that of party government<sup>5</sup>. Minority governments violate the expectation that executive and legislative coalitions are the same coalitions and it is extremely difficult to say what would cause such distinction between them. Why would any party agree to support the government legislatively if it gets no portfolios in exchange? Also quite interesting scientifically is finding the answer to the question why the opposition, by definition a majority coalition in parliament in that case, does not create the government and take the spoils of office for itself. These facts indicate that minority government is a counterintuitive phenomenon in the world of parliamentary democracies, where the expectation of majority government is conventionally understood as an axiom. Any occurrence of minority government therefore seems to threaten the entire edifice of deductive coalition theory. Given the counterintuitive nature of minority governments, the question is whether they can be as easily dismissed as nonpartisan administration<sup>6</sup>.

Minority governments constitute over one third of all cabinets formed in parliaments without single party majority in Western Europe after World War II. Indeed, minority governments constitute the default cabinet solution in certain countries (e.g. Denmark, Norway, Sweden). Although their average duration may be somewhat smaller than that of majority coalitions, casual observation of the rather successful performance of certain countries with frequent

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<sup>5</sup> See for example the following works: G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge University Press 1976; R. Rose, *The Problem of Party Government*, London 1974.

<sup>6</sup> K. Strøm, *Minority...*, p. 8.

minority solutions over long periods of time suffices to demonstrate that minority governments are sensible governing alternatives to majority coalitions<sup>7</sup>.

It is important to underline that no region has experienced minority governments more frequently than Scandinavia. In sharp contrast with Finland and Iceland, the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had minority governments for more than two-thirds of the post-World War II period. In Denmark, minority governments have been in office for more than four-fifths of that period<sup>8</sup>.

The Nordic countries comprise one of the most stable regions in the world of parliamentary democracies, All states in this region adopted parliamentary system of government and were fully democratised in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Each country managed to develop distinctive parliamentary models, for example Denmark, Sweden and Norway, as parliamentary monarchies, have relied extensively on minority governments while Finland and Ireland rather implemented majority coalition cabinets<sup>9</sup>.

One of the crucial factors is that the Nordic countries possess a long parliamentary history, for example Iceland's *Althingi* operated as a consultative assembly from the year 930 until 1800, when it was abolished. During the first quarter of the twentieth century all of the Nordic countries were fully democratised, and also an universal suffrage for parliamentary elections was introduced in this period. Additionally, voting rights were also extended to women. All of these countries have for many decades operated a parliamentary form of government: Denmark from 1901 and Finland and Sweden from 1917. The other two countries had such systems prior to their independence. Norway's first parliamentary cabinet was formed in 1884, and Iceland's first was formed in 1904. This move to parliamentarism can be seen as a democratisation of executive power, as control over the cabinet shifted from an unelected monarch to an elected parliament<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> T. Kalandrakis, *Minority Governments: Ideology and Office*, Boston Seminar 2002, p. 3 <http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/4754/kalandrakis.pdf> (15.11.2016).

<sup>8</sup> B.E. Rasch, *Why Minority Governments? Executive-Legislative Relations in the Nordic Countries*, [In:] *Parliamentary Governments in the Nordic Countries at the Crossroads: Coping with Challenges from Europeanisation and Presidentialisation*, eds. T. Persson, M. Wiberg, Stockholm 2011, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> T. Persson, M. Wiberg, *The Nordic Model of Parliamentary Government and its Challenges*, [In:] *Parliamentary Governments*, op.cit., p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

All of the Nordic parliaments today are unicameral, though until recently (the summer of 2009), the Norwegian *Storting* did partly function in a bicameral manner in the legislative and controlling spheres. After each election, Norwegian legislators divided themselves into two sections – the *Odelsting* and the *Lagting* – to handle non-financial legislation. Iceland *Althing* had a similar quasi-bicameral system until 1991. Denmark and Sweden abolished their upper houses in 1953 and 1969, respectively<sup>11</sup>.

Another fundamental factor influencing governmental specifics of Scandinavian countries is connected with electoral systems. In the Nordic region proportional representation has got a very long history. The first usage of proportional system in the region was in Finland in 1906, when the unicameral, partly autonomous *Eduskunta* was established. By the year of 1920, proportional representation had replaced single-member constituency systems in almost every country with the exception of Iceland<sup>12</sup>.

It should be noted that the current Nordic parliaments use quite similar party-list systems of representation and only the Finnish system has anomalous features. Although Finland has no adjustment seats, the level of proportionality is still only slightly lower than in the other Nordic countries. Part of the reason for this level of proportionality is that the average multi-member district is quite large. With respect to proportionality, Sweden and Denmark generally perform well. On some occasions, deviations<sup>13</sup> from proportionality have been extremely low. In most countries, there are significant differences in proportionality between elections, even though the institutional framework is constant. Also the size of the Nordic legislatures mainly reflects population figures. Sweden, however, has a much larger parliament than one would expect, but this anomaly is an inheritance from the bicameral era. The single chamber *Riksdag* has almost as many seats as the previous first and second chambers combined<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> M. Grzybowski, *Systemy konstytucyjne państw skandynawskich*, Warszawa 2011, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup> B. Grofman, A. Lijphart, *The Evolution of Electoral and Party Systems in the Nordic Countries*, New York: 2002.

<sup>13</sup> About deviations in the political systems see analysis in the following work: *Wpływ deformacji wyborczych na systemy polityczne*, red. J. Iwanek, Toruń 2014.

<sup>14</sup> B.E. Rasch, *Why Minority...*, pp. 42–43.

## II.

According to collected data in Denmark, Sweden and Norway there have been more minority than majority cabinets (77, 76 and 62 percent of total governments, respectively). Most of the minority governments in all three countries have been single-party cabinets rather than coalitions. Denmark, however, has also had a substantial number of minority coalitions. Iceland, in contrast to the Scandinavian countries, has a history of majority coalitions; minority governments have been few and short-lived. The pattern in Finland is more mixed. Finland had minority governments before the World War II, but majority coalitions have been the norm since the 1940s. Scandinavia differs from Finland and Iceland<sup>15</sup>.

In many respects, the polities of the Nordic countries are very similar, and some of the differences clearly have no impact on government formation. One possible research strategy is to attempt to locate causal factors that are shared by the Scandinavian countries but not by the entire Nordic region. As mentioned above, it is also worth noting that some of the countries over time have slid from minority to majority governments (Finland) or *vice versa* (Sweden). Additionally, Norway has had long periods of majority parliamentarism, for instance from 1945 until 1961 and after the 2005 and 2009 elections. It also must be stated that constitutional frameworks have been relatively stable over time in all countries, so it is really difficult to trace the occurrence of minority governments back to differences in constitutional details. Instead, the most likely explanation for the Nordic patterns of government formation is the nature of party systems in the region<sup>16</sup>.

Before analysing the nature of party systems in Scandinavian states it is crucial to present one of the fundamental clues proposed by V. Herman and J. Pope<sup>17</sup>. They did not confirm previous traditional analysis, according to which minority governments was explained as the result of party fragmentation and polarisation. Sometimes it was also pointed to the gradual development of a multi-party legislature and a reluctance to enter coalitions as the main

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> See more: V. Herman, J. Pope, *Minority Governments In Western Democracies*, "British Journal of Political Science" 1973, Vol. 3.



background for the formation of minority government. Herman and Pope demonstrated that minority governments were more common than previously assumed and suggested a variety of reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, a substantial proportion of the minority governments they studied were caretaker administrations. These governments typically came to power as a result of some sort of crisis and were deliberately established for only a short period of time. Secondly, some minority governments took office because one or more coalition partners withdrew from majority coalitions. Thirdly, a few minority governments came to office because elections that usually provided one party with a legislative majority surprisingly ended with no party winning a majority of seats (and, typically, a new election was held soon thereafter). Fourthly, minority cabinets arose because extreme parties on either side of the political spectrum were not credible, reliable, formal coalition partners for parties closer to the centre. Fifthly, and probably most interesting in this context, some minority cabinets were formed in situations in which one of the parties fell only a few seats short of a legislative majority. Often in such cases, the dominant party formed a one-party minority government and usually did so with the formal support of one of the smaller parties<sup>18</sup>.

Moving to description of party systems and its influence on government formation in Scandinavia it is important to stress that all of the analysed countries have had multi-party systems at least since the beginning of twentieth century. Of course there are many important differences among the countries in this respect, and marked changes in the number and relative size of the parties have occurred over time.

It is worth to take a closer look at party systems in Norway, to illustrate aspects mentioned above. Until the early 1970s Norway had one of the most stable party systems in Western Europe and similar in format to Swedish and Danish. The origin of this system is dated for 1880s and emerged around 1920 into a system called 'the Scandinavian five-party model'. There were also defined six dimensions of political cleavage, determined by economic, geographical and cultural circumstances. The class cleavage and the sectoral urban-rural cleavage were determined by economic conflicts in the labour market and the commodity market, respectively. Second, territorial cleavage between phe-

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<sup>18</sup> B.E. Rasch, *Why Minority...*, p. 48.

riphery and center party overlapped with additional three cultural cleavages: a socio-cultural conflict between two different versions of the Norwegian language: a moral conflict focused in large part on the abuse of alcohol and articulated teetotalist movement, and a religious conflict over the doctrines and organization of the Lutheran state church and its role in social life. These cleavages influenced Norwegian politics and developed its party system. The major division, however, not only in shaping electoral preferences, but also in terms of government alternatives, has been along the left-right axis, between socialists (a dominant Labour Party called 'Arbeiderpartiet' and smaller Communist Party called 'Norges Kommunistiske Parti') and non-socialists (the Conservatives called 'Høyre', the Liberals, called 'Venstre' and the agrarian Centre Party, called 'Senterpartiet')<sup>19</sup>. Obviously, such model has been changing during the following decades. There were many deviations from this first model<sup>20</sup>. In 1933 for instance Christian People's Party evolved from religious fraction of Liberals. After the onset of the Cold War the Communist Party gradually faded into oblivion and finally lost its parliamentary representation in 1961. Through the 1960s Norway had one of the most stable party systems in Western Europe. The question of Norwegian membership in the European Community during the first EC referendum in 1972 also influenced the party system by generating conflict between political parties. Norway began to experience more party system fragmentation and volatility than at any time since the 1920s. As the result the previously dominating Liberals was split into two parties – one supporting the idea of integration, and second being against a closer cooperation through this structure<sup>21</sup>. After the early 1970s about one out of three voters changed partisanship from one election to the next, as compared to the 1960s when the corresponding figure was about one out of four. In the 1993 Storting election, individual volatility reached almost 44 per cent, a proportion that was virtually unchanged in 1997 and 2001<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> H.M. Narud, K. Strøm, *Norway: A Fragile Coalition Order*, [In:] *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*, eds. W.C. Müller, K. Strøm, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> See more about the evolution of party system in Norway: M. Grzybowski, *Norwegia. Zarys systemu ustrojowego*, Kraków 2015, pp. 64–86.

<sup>21</sup> See more about changes in the Norwegian party system – *ibidem*, p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> H.M. Narud, K. Strøm, *Norway: Virtual Parliamentarism*, [In:] *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*, eds. K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, T. Bergman, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 526.

Evolution of the post-war Norwegian party system could be described as a change from unipolar, through a bipolar, to a multipolar format. The history of this development is summarized by experts, as follows:

1. **Social Democratic Predominance: 1945–1961.** In this period the Labour Party enjoyed a predominant position and four consecutive elections yielded outright parliamentary majorities and a single-party Labour governments. The party system was at this time unipolar and socialist parties jointly obtained 51 per cent of the popular vote in all elections. The centre parties like for instance Liberals, the Centre Party and Christian People's Party was gathering about 29 per cent and the rest – 20 per cent of voters – were supporting the Conservatives. It is crucial to remember that only marginal electoral shift occurred from one election to another.
2. **Bipolar Stability: 1961–1972.** The 1961 emergence of the Socialist People's Party caused some erosion of Labour's support, while the non-socialist parties gained in strength and cohesion. There was also a slight increase of the legislative parties. Till the 1970s electoral volatility remained low and socialist and non-socialist blocs were extremely evenly balanced and minority Labour governments alternated with bourgeois coalitions.
3. **Bipolar Fragmentation: 1972–1990.** The European Community referendum in 1972 began a strong change in the party system. It is clear if compare the effective number of parties that increased from 3,2 in 1969 to 4,1 in 1973. From the mid 1970s on, a massive shift could be observed in favour of the parties of the right: the Conservatives with Progress Party, popularly referred to as 'the swing to the right'. This situation corresponded with a decline in support for Labour and the parties of the Centre. The highest support for Conservatives was in the early 1980s, from which they have gradually lost their popularity. The Progress Party has experienced even greater and less predictable volatility, but have gone on particular successes in the elections in 1989 and 1997.
4. **Multipolar Fragmentation from 1990.** The legacy of the political upheaval started in 1970s has been substantially weakened Labour Party, significant new parties on the extreme left and right, a resurgence

of the right and a simultaneous atrophy of the non-socialist centre. The fragmentation, volatility and some polarisation was a visible longer term party system trend<sup>23</sup>.

At the electoral level, increased competition between the parties visibly reflected in the increased number of floating voters. After the early 1970s about one-third electors shifted position from one election to the next, as compared to the 1960s when the corresponding figure was one-fourth. In the Storting elections of the 1990s, gross individual volatility has reached almost 45 per cent<sup>24</sup>.

According to analysis of Kaare Strøm and Hanne Marthe Narrud Norwegian parties, both those on the Left and those on the right, traditionally had strong mass membership organizations. For many years about fifteen per cent of the electorate were dues-paying members, according to reports from party headquarters. In some smaller parties, particularly the Centre Party, the ratio of members to voters has at times been as high as one in three. However, national election surveys indicate that during the 1990s party membership declined to around 10–11 per cent. In such parties as the Labour Party and the Liberals, it had the late 1990s come closer to 5 per cent than to double digits. According to the parties' own records, the Labour Party and the Conservatives (the two largest membership organizations) both lost about one-third of their gross membership figures between 1993 and 1999, whereas the smaller parties all suffered somewhat smaller losses<sup>25</sup>.

### III.

The party system and election rules are important factors that influence cabinet position in Norway and other modern democracies. Also quite crucial is cabinet formation to understand rules regulating executive power in Norway.

Formally, the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, which is currently the oldest living codified constitution in Europe and indeed second only to that of the United States in the democratic world, gives the King wide discretion to ap-

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<sup>23</sup> H.M. Narud, K. Strøm, *Norway: A Fragile Coalition...*, pp. 160–161.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> H.M. Narud, K. Strøm, *Norway: Virtual...*, p. 526.

point the members of the cabinet (formally known as the King's Council). In practice, however, the King has exerted no influence on the composition of any cabinet since 1928, and it is questionable whether he could constitutionally exercise any such authority today. In reality, when he formally calls upon someone to form a new government, the King always follows the advice of the leaders of the parliamentary parties. In practice, the choice of a Prime Minister-designate has rarely been difficult. The use of informateurs has no codified place in the Norwegian Constitution, and the practice has been rare indeed. In the postwar period, there is only one notable case. In the difficult cabinet crisis of 1971, when a bourgeois majority coalition had just broken down over the EC issue and the Prime Minister's conduct in this area, the King formally gave the President of the *Storting*, Conservative Bernt Ingvaldsen, the mandate of investigating the opportunities for another non-socialist coalition. It was obvious that the role of Ingvaldsen, a senior, right-wing, and somewhat formal member of his party, was purely that of an informateur. At any rate, his efforts failed for no fault of his own, and the informateur institution has never again been used. But on the other hand if the recent trend toward party system fragmentation and coalition fluidity continues, however, it is not inconceivable that a stronger tradition of informateurship may develop<sup>26</sup>.

Because of the lack of formal rules and mechanisms, Norwegian government formation is best described as 'free-style bargaining'. One of the most fundamental procedural rule is called 'negative parliamentarism', that is, the rule that governments can be invested and sustained as long as there is no explicit majority vote of opposition in Parliament. Norwegian parliamentary procedure contains several more or less formal rules that contribute to this practice. The following rules are:

1. There is no formal vote of investiture, and governments are assumed to have the confidence of the *Storting* until the opposite has been demonstrated.
2. The Prime Minister is neither formally nor by convention expected to hand in his (or her) resignation at the end of a parliamentary term or on any other formal occasion (e.g. the accession to the throne of a new King).

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 532.

3. Moreover, the prevailing interpretation of confidence and no-confidence votes is permissive and allows the cabinet to remain in office under circumstances in which it might otherwise have to resign<sup>27</sup>.

**Table 1. Governments in Norway from 1945 to 2016**

No.	Cabinet	Took office	Left office	Prime Minister	Party(s)	Type of the government
1	Gerhardsen's First Cabinet	25 June 1945	4 November 1945	Einar Gerhardsen	<i>Labour</i> , Conservative, Liberal, Agrarian, Communist	minority coalition
2	Gerhardsen's Second Cabinet	5 November 1945	18 November 1951	Einar Gerhardsen	<i>Labour</i>	single-party majority
3	Torp's Cabinet	9 November 1951	21 January 1955	Oscar Torp	<i>Labour</i>	single-party majority
4	Gerhardsen's Third Cabinet	22 January 1955	27 August 1963	Einar Gerhardsen	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
5	Lyng's Cabinet	28 August 1963	24 September 1963	John Lyng	<i>Conservative</i> , Centre, Christian Democratic, Liberal	minority coalition
6	Gerhardsen's Fourth Cabinet	25 September 1963	11 October 1965	Einar Gerhardsen	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
7	Borten's Cabinet	12 October 1965	16 March 1971	Per Borten	Conservative, Liberal, Centre, Christian Democratic	majority coalition (1965–1969) minority coalition (1969–1971)
8	Bratteli's First Cabinet	17 March 1971	16 October 1972	Trygve Bratteli	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
9	Korvald's Cabinet	17 October 1972	11 October 1973	Lars Korvald	Centre, <i>Christian Democratic</i> , Liberal	minority coalition
10	Bratteli's Second Cabinet	12 October 1973	14 January 1976	Trygve Bratteli	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 533 and further.

No.	Cabinet	Took office	Left office	Prime Minister	Party(s)	Type of the government
11	Nordli's Cabinet	15 January 1976	3 February 1981	Odvar Nordli	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
12	Brundtland's First Cabinet	4 February 1981	13 October 1981	Gro Harlem Brundtland	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
13	Willoch's First Cabinet	14 October 1981	7 June 1983	Kåre Willoch	<i>Conservative</i>	single-party minority
14	Willoch's Second Cabinet	8 June 1983	8 May 1986	Kåre Willoch	<i>Conservative, Christian Democratic, Centre</i>	majority coalition
15	Brundtland's Second Cabinet	9 May 1986	15 October 1989	Gro Harlem Brundtland	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
16	Syse's Cabinet	16 October 1989	2 November 1990	Jan P. Syse	<i>Conservative, Christian Democratic, Centre</i>	minority coalition
17	Brundtland's Third Cabinet	3 November 1990	24 October 1996	Gro Harlem Brundtland	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
18	Jagland's Cabinet	25 October 1996	16 October 1997	Thorbjørn Jagland	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
19	Bondevik's First Cabinet	17 October 1997	16 March 2000	Kjell Magne Bondevik	<i>Christian Democratic, Centre, Liberal</i>	minority coalition
20	Stoltenberg's First Cabinet	17 March 2000	18 October 2001	Jens Stoltenberg	<i>Labour</i>	single-party minority
21	Bondevik's Second Cabinet	19 October 2001	16 October 2005	Kjell Magne Bondevik	<i>Conservative, Christian Democratic, Liberal</i>	minority coalition
22	Stoltenberg's Second Cabinet	17 October 2005	15 October 2013	Jens Stoltenberg	<i>Labour, Socialist Left, Centre</i>	majority coalition
23	Solberg's Cabinet	16 October 2013	incumbent	Erna Solberg	<i>Conservative, Progress Party</i>	minority coalition

Source: Own study based on information from M. Grzybowski, *Norwegia. Zarys...*, pp. 182, 186, 194; M. Grzybowski, *Systemy konstytucyjne państw skandynawskich*, Warszawa 2011, p. 161; H.M. Narud, K. Strøm, *Norway: A Fragile Coalition Order*, [In:] *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*, eds. W.C. Müller, K. Strøm, Oxford University Press 2006, p. 171; K. Strøm, *Minority Government and Majority Rule*, Cambridge University Press 2010, pp. 196–197.

It is stressed in the literature that the fluidity and informality of the Norwegian Constitution has a permissive impact on coalition bargaining. Specifically, it has favoured the formation of numerically weak governments. Norway is one of the world's leaders in the frequency of minority governments, especially from the 1970s onwards. Till 1961, the Labour Party dominated Norwegian elections, and the country experienced stable, single-party, majority governments. The 1961 election, however, deprived the Labour Party of a parliamentary majority, which it has never again recaptured. After that severe change, Norwegian cabinets have more often been 'undersized', and coalitions have been less common than single-party cabinets. Moreover, in most cases in which (non-socialist) coalitions have formed, the coalition-building process has stopped short of a majority. Even in these cases, then, some 'coalition avoidance' has taken place. While this record no doubt has multiple causes, part of the explanation surely lies in the permissive institutional rules concerning government formation and confidence. From the first postwar election in 1945 till now, there have been twenty-four cabinets: fourteen single-party administrations and ten coalitions. Five cabinets included parties that collectively controlled a majority of the seats in the Storting (around 20% of the post-war cabinets), whereas nineteen (around 80% of the post-war cabinets) were minority cabinets. Most of these relied on ad hoc parliamentary support. While the composition and size of Norwegian governments have changed substantially over the postwar period, other patterns of cabinet formation have almost remained stable. However there has been no peacetime coalition between Socialist and non-socialist parties for many years but this rule has been changed after election in 2005 when a wide majority coalition was formed. In fact, the Norwegian Labour Party was for many post-war decades the only major social democratic party in Western Europe that tried not to enter a cabinet coalition with any bourgeois party. Labour has eschewed coalitions not only with non-socialist parties, but also with the smaller parties to its left. This tactic finally collapsed and we face now some new tendencies in the cabinet formation in Norway at the beginning of twenty-first century<sup>28</sup>.

Firstly, it must be stated the increase of further 'erosion' of electorates of main Norwegian parties, so none of the parties can aspire to form a homog-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.



enous majority government. Secondly, in the cabinet formation process there were vanished two crucial barriers which were stable for many years before. One was a habit not to create government coalition between Labours and center parties and another was including into government coalition a party that for many years was treated as an anti-system protest party (Progress Party). Thirdly, some new ideas connected with supporting government were invented (for example a model of external support of government instead of joining a formal coalition)<sup>29</sup>.

In conclusion minority governments in Norway should not always be criticised. The strong position of parliament means that parties in opposition have considerable decision-making clout. In this case the participation in government is not necessary to gain influence and as a result a minority governments become more likely. At the turn of twentieth and twenty-first century the slight evolution of government formation may be noticed, but it is not a kind of unexpected revolution. There are no visible preferred parties that can legitimize its mandate to form a stable majority government. More coalition governments are more possible and this fact reflects the changes in the party system and transfer of electoral preferences. Analysis showed also a kind of balance between maintenance of majority coalition governments and minority coalition governments in Norwegian politics. The last observation confirms that a role and impact of minority cabinets in Norway is still alive and actual and can be treated as a norm in spite of changes in the party system that also can be noticed.

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<sup>29</sup> M. Grzybowski, *Norwegia...*, pp. 193–194.

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