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Between London and Brussels:

An Analysis of Norway's Role in the Brexit
Negotiations, 2016-19

Master's thesis in European Studies

Supervisor: Michael J. Geary

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of what role, if any, Norway played during the Brexit negotiations. Norway was not an official part of the negotiations but nevertheless a relevant actor given its high level of integration with the EU and extensive cooperation with Britain. An important rationale for the thesis' scope was that Norway was highly incentivized to participate, yet lacked an official seat at the table. How the EEA-member overcame its limitation to play a role during the Brexit negotiations was an important aspect of this analysis. Embedded in the analysis of the features and dynamics of the role played by Norway lies an assessment of performance using indicators developed by Græger & Haugevik.

The thesis found that Norway first attempted to engage in trilateral negotiations between itself, the EU and Britain. Once this attempt had been denied by the EU, Norway was left attempting to promote their preferences into the negotiations through other actors. Norway used its experience as an EEA-member lobbying EU matters in Brussel to become involved with the Brexit negotiations. This was evident from both the strategy and the composition of the Norwegian Brexit Task Force. Through their strategy, Norway managed to play the role as an irregular third party in the Brexit negotiations.

As an irregular third party, Norway managed to achieve its predetermined objectives for Brexit, regardless of deal or no-deal outcome. Norway's role witnessed it enter into no-deal preparatory agreements with Britain which would have seen the Nordic nation more prepared for a hard Brexit than the EU27. Norway also gained an acceptance and the participation of the EU, mainly through Barnier's Task Force 50, to mirror EEA-relevant aspects of their deal with Britain. The thesis found that the role of Norway was in this way key for the EEA-member to achieve a higher degree of Brexit preparedness than any member state. Norway was able to enjoy the same terms as the EU27 had negotiated with Britain in a deal context, while also having entered into their own bilateral agreements in the case of a hard Brexit.

The thesis found that Norway's role had a high level of performance, although it lacked in viability and its achievements may yet prove temporary. Further, I argue that the other actors' perception of Norway's role as relevant in a Brexit context rose as a consequence of the attention brought to the EEA-agreement. This attention, which had a high compatibility with the Norwegian government's strategy, was significant for the role Norway was able to play. The Norwegian government largely succeeded in playing a large enough role in the Brexit negotiations to achieve their predetermined objectives. Acting as the foundation for this success, and the role of Norway played during the Brexit negotiations was, I argue, the EEA-agreement.

Preface

Although the actual time spent writing this thesis has limited itself to a academic semester, I would like to think that it is the culmination of all my five years of higher education. I have tried to the utmost of my ability and experience to write it well, I hope I have succeeded.

The scope of the thesis is born from a long running fascination for political processes which for some time has been focused on the European Union and multilateralism. I have thoroughly enjoyed immersing myself in the fascinating world of Brexit, filled with populists, diplomats, world leaders, trade agreements, high stakes negotiations and deadlines.

The decision to analyse Brexit was also certainly influenced by my stay at the Norwegian Delegation to the EU. The grandiloquence of Brussels can make a big impression on a young man, in this I am no exception.

My sincerest appreciation and thank you must be directed to my supervisor Michael J. Geary. His contributions have throughout the process of writing this thesis been of great value and quality. For the sharing of his vast knowledge and sheer brilliance, for his dedication, his patience and his willingness to always aid, I thank him.

Acknowledgements must also be given to a group of people who throughout the process of writing this thesis have contributed with valuable support, my family. My grandparents have all played their role, each aiding with encouragement and uplifting moments of cheer. The old history teacher Rolf, who is as eager to discuss modern political history with his grandson today as he was in telling him about Napoleon and Caesar as a child. Kirsti, who invigorates everyone around her when things are hard, and always makes them easier. Håkon, who never fails to express how proud how he is of me, and who is always willing to discuss his passions, be it family or the untimely bankruptcy of Sporting Lokeren. Mette, who cares more than anyone I know, and who inspires me every day with her actions and her words. After five years in Trondheim Svanhild is still my favorite Trønder, her kindness and love of poems remain unparalleled.

My parents both deserve acknowledgements for telling me its sometimes alright to relax, and my brother for helping me do so. The contributions of all three to this thesis have been of tremendous value. My father has additionally as one of only a few people in the world read an entire draft of my thesis, despite his hectic and busy schedule. He found the experience exciting. My mother deserves credit for making me relinquish some of my fondness for large and complicated words, I believe the thesis may have improved as a result.

Lastly I must thank Frida, whose contributions to this thesis have eclipsed all others. Without her there would be no thesis at all.

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List of Abbreviations

EU	The European Union
EC	European Council
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Area
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
EPP	European People’s Party
BxTF	Brexit Task Force
Task Force 50	Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU/ Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom
DExEU	Department for Exiting the European Union
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services

1 Introduction

Today we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the European Economic Area - together. This is an expression of the shared interests and values that bind us together. The agreement has contributed to securing welfare and jobs – both in the European Union and in Norway. At the same time, we need to find answers to the challenges European citizens face. Norway is committed to doing its part.¹

Speaking in Brussels to both European Union (EU) leaders and the international press in March 2019, Erna Solberg, the prime minister of Norway, was keen to demonstrate her support for European cooperation. As the first Norwegian head of state to be invited to a European Council (EC) summit since Gro Harlem Brundtland in 1994, Solberg intended to capitalize on her opportunity on the big stage, brought on by the anniversary.² After a symbolic morning meeting however, Solberg and the other European Economic Area (EEA) leaders swiftly exited the Justus Lipsius-building.

Lofty promises and declarations of unity aside, it was now time for more serious matters. Following the departure of Solberg, the European Council convened to discuss not who had been present, but rather the noteworthy absentee.³ The following day, Brexit occupied headlines, opinion-pieces, editorials, columns and lunchbreak chatter. Following their morning session with the EEA-leaders, the members of the European Council had agreed, not for the last time, to postpone the deadline for Britain's departure from the EU, to 12 April or 22 May.⁴ Norway may have been committed to doing its part as Solberg claimed, at this point however, the EEA-member was not invited to do so.

Norway did not play a role that day in granting an extension to Brexit, this privilege was instead reserved the heads of government of the EU's member states. The EU27 and Britain were however not the only ones who were impacted by their decision. As an EEA-member, Norway constituted an actor during the Brexit negotiations, one which potentially stood to gain or lose just as much as an EU member state. This thesis seeks to answer the research question what role, if any, Norway played during the Brexit negotiations? Norway's rationale to play a role during the Brexit negotiations was tied to the impact which Britain's departure from the EU could potentially have caused. Norway's EEA-membership did not mean that it was ever liberated from any impact, given the nation's deep integration with the EU.

The decision to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the EEA-agreement amidst Brexit-tumult might seem out of place. For Norway, however, it marked a rare instance of publicly commemorating a form of partnership which, from its genesis as a back-up solution, has grown to vast importance.⁵ In 2015, over 80% of Norwegian exports went to the EU, while 60% of imports went the other way, demonstrating the EEA-agreement's profound financial importance for Norway.⁶ As a consequence of this growth the EEA-

¹ Solberg, 2019.

² *Aftenposten*, 2019.

³ Consilium, 2019.

⁴ Consilium, 2019.

⁵ Norwegian Government, 2015, p. 3.

⁶ Norwegian Government, 2015, p. 3.

agreement was at the time of Brexit, by the Norwegian government's own admission more important than ever.⁷

The extensive trade conducted between Norway and Europe meant that any economic impact caused by Brexit would extend itself to the north. Norway's deep cooperation with the EU is one motivating factor for the thesis' aim. The EEA-nation's lack of EU membership combined with the potentially large impact caused by Brexit stands to have motivated Norway to play a role where it was formally not an actor. The lack of a formal role combined with the necessity, induced by Brexit, to play one, is an interesting dynamic of European cooperation.

Erna Solberg knew of the potential impact Brexit might cause Norway, through Europe, when she was holding her speech in Brussels in March 2019. She was also at the same time acquainted with Britain's vast importance for Norway. The United Kingdom was Norway's single most important export market, meaning that Brexit might have entailed a significant hinderance to trade across the North Sea.⁸ In addition to potentially becoming impacted by Brexit through their trade with Britain, Norway was in a position to lose significant influence within the EU. Lacking a vote in European matters, while still obligated to passing EU-legislation, Norway has been well served with likeminded Britons championing Norwegian preferences from the inside.⁹ Brexit would however see an efficient end put to this practise.

The importance of Britain to Norwegian European policy and trade meant that Brexit could potentially impact the EEA-member not only through its close cooperation with the remaining EU27 but also the departing member. The added impact lends additional strength to my claim that Norway was motivated to play a role during the Brexit negotiations. The claim, as well as Norway's motivations, are essential to the justification and answering of the thesis' research question. Norway's strong motivation to play a role during the Brexit negotiations despite the nation's lack of EU membership is central to the research question's relevance. The motivation, combined with Norway's particular relationship with both the EU and Britain were, as I will argue, unique. The uniqueness of Norway's motivation, conditions, relationships and cooperation during Brexit are all arguments in favour of the justification of my research question.

Norway was not unique in its position as a country affected by Brexit through its dealings with Britain. It did however possess a partially unique historic relationship with the United Kingdom which further complicated any role played during the Brexit negotiations.¹⁰ The relationship was shared principally by other Nordic countries, who had also often looked to London for guidance in their foreign policy decision making.¹¹ Norway did however separate itself from these other countries by the nature of its cooperation with the EU. While Denmark, Sweden and Finland were all members of the European project, Norway's two negative referendums had left the country's affiliation often described as one foot on the inside, one on the outside.¹²

Norway shares its model of European integration with Iceland and Liechtenstein through the EEA-Agreement. Though the countries were equal partners in writing, Norway was

⁷ Eriksen Søreide, 2018b.

⁸ Norwegian MFA, 2020a.

⁹ Haugevik, 2017, p. 159.

¹⁰ Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, p. 108.

¹¹ Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, p. 108.

¹² Sejerstad, et al., 2012, p. 3.

once again unique in that it constituted the largest country of the three demonstrated through its status as the biggest benefactor for the Norway and EEA grants, contributing 97% of the 2.8 billion euros assigned to the current program period.¹³ The other Nordic member of the EEA-agreement, Iceland, separated itself in size but also foreign policy history. The island nation was blocked from European Free Trade Area (EFTA)-membership for a decade because of its fishery-disputes with Britain and has only attempted to initiate EU-membership once, in 2009.¹⁴ Another testament to Norway's unique standing, even among its EEA-comembers was the attention directed at the Norway+ model during the Brexit negotiations. Despite Liechtenstein and Iceland sharing the model it was not dubbed Iceland+, but Norway+.

Norway's close relationship and cooperation with both Britain and the EU, meant that any radical change caused by Brexit would force a change in Norwegian policies. Norway had much reason to wish to influence Britain's departure from the EU, the Nordic nation was however also far less disposed than a member state to be able to do so. This paper will seek to shed light upon if, and subsequently how, Norway was able to influence Brexit. This involves analysing Britain's exit from the European Union through a Norwegian lens. Brexit seen through a Norwegian lens is both motivated and contextualised by the country's unique cooperation with both Britain and the EU. Central to this analysis is an understanding of what role, if any, Oslo played at various stages of the exit negotiation.

¹³ Andersen, 2019.

¹⁴ Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, p. 108-109.

1.1 Literature Review

Brexit has attracted much interest both academic and non-scholarly. My thesis evidently finds itself in the former category, but there is much benefit to be gained from the latter as well. While analyses made in the media regarding Brexit served their purpose in pushing public perception, my thesis will rather make use of facts presented in reliable journals¹⁵ as a resource. The value of these non-academic sources is however purely supplemental in an academic context where they are used for my designated purpose.

On the topic of scholarly interest, Brexit has inspired a young but extensive body of work. Typical for literature focusing on the negotiations themselves, like my thesis, we find Holmes, Rollo & Winters who have attempted to sketch out the negotiating landscape for Britain, making recommendations for future actions.¹⁶ While Holmes et al. approached Brexit from a specifically British point of view, others have extended their gaze to national perspectives elsewhere. Literature on Brexit written with third country context or viewpoint is rarer, but it certainly exists. It is within this growing tradition that my thesis finds its roots.

Several attempts have particularly been made to calculate the different economic consequences of a potential deal or no-deal Brexit.¹⁷ These studies all approached Brexit in different manners, focusing more explicitly on different countries and perspectives, they were however remarkably consequent in their findings. The implication of their findings is an element my paper will carry with it, that regardless of the Brexit-outcome, Norway stood to be heavily affected.¹⁸

Nordic researchers, Haugevik in particular, were early interested in the Scandinavian perception of and response to Brexit.¹⁹ Embedded in this interest was an appreciation of the potential ramifications of Brexit, one which was however not established from an economic point of view. Instead these scholars approached the topic from historical and political perspectives, attempting to capture Brexit as an important chapter in the narrative of the Nordic countries' European policy.

In this narrative, Brexit served as a likely breaking point between the Nordic countries and Britain.²⁰ Norway²¹ has in the past often looked to Britain as a leading star when making foreign policy decisions, both in the context of NATO and Europe. Evidence of this tendency was derived from analyses of Norway's applications for NATO- and EU-membership, all of them constructed to emulate Britain.²² Norway's preference for aligning its fate with Britain was a consequence of the sentiment that preferences and perceptions have been represented by their mighty ally.²³ The narrative changed during Brexit however, which marked a growing need for redefinition of the Norwegian

¹⁵ *ABC Nyheter, Aftenposten, BBC, Dagsavisen, E24, Klassekampen, NTB, New York Times, Politico, Reuters, The Guardian, VG.*

¹⁶ Holmes, Rollo, & Winters, 2016, p. 29.

¹⁷ Nicita, Koloskova, & Saygili, 2019, Mion & Ponattu, 2019, Ries, et al., 2017.

¹⁸ Nicita, Koloskova, & Saygili, 2019, p. 5, Mion & Ponattu, 2019, p. 11.

¹⁹ Fagersten, et al., 2018.

²⁰ Fagersten, et al., 2018, Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, Haugevik, 2017.

²¹ Together with Sweden, Denmark and Finland.

²² Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, p. 108.

²³ Haugevik & Sverdrup, 2017, p. 106.

relationship with both Britain and the EU.²⁴ Haugevik depicted this change by portraying Brexit as a possible catalyst for renewed domestic debate regarding Norwegian EEA-membership.²⁵

The analysis of Norway's potential change of leading star has a place in my thesis as it carried implications for the Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations. It must however be supplemented because it alone fails to understand the autonomous efforts made by Norway to manoeuvre Brexit to its best interest. My thesis will seek to expand upon this dynamic by analysing how Norway, in its unique position, has been able to influence Brexit to protect its interests. Norway has remained frozen with EEA-membership for 25 years, with no immediate plans to become a member state. Any redefinition of Norway's relationship with the EU seem at first glance unlikely to be harmonious with a continued lack of membership. My thesis will therefore attempt to analyse the possible implications of a Norway redefining its relationship upon its role during the Brexit negotiations.

Haugevik has also written an article titled *Hva betyr Brexit for utenforlandet Norge?*²⁶ which investigated how Brexit has impacted Norway. The article's main focus rested on how Brexit has and will continue to influence Norwegian foreign- and European policy. Haugevik touched upon many of the same elements, such as interest orientation and policy adaptability, which are highly relevant for my thesis. My analysis will however approach Brexit through a specifically Norwegian interest-oriented lens. Haugevik has performed an outside-in analysis, writing broadly about how Brexit was perceived and to some degree handled in Norway.

I will instead attempt to analyse inside-out, establishing the success of Norwegian actions in influencing the negotiations. This approach will allow me to extend the pre-existing literature by examining Brexit from a new perspective. My perspective cannot exist without an inclusion of the Norwegian perception to some degree, as it in turn bore influence on Norway's actions. While Haugevik for example discussed how Norwegian media and politicians seemingly did not view Brexit as a likely outcome of the British referendum, my thesis will use this fact and analyse how it translated into action.²⁷

The difference between my research and Haugevik's will however be highlighted not only by perspective and time of writing, but also the analytical orientation. Where Haugevik sought to answer what Brexit entailed for Norway, I wish to investigate how Norway could manoeuvre and possibly influence Brexit to its best interest. These two analytical orientations are related in their use of topics, but not purpose. The ability of a third-party nation to impose itself upon the Brexit negotiations is an up to now unexplored dynamic.

²⁴ Haugevik, 2017, p. 156.

²⁵ Haugevik, 2017, p. 156.

²⁶ What does Brexit mean for the outsider-nation Norway?

²⁷ Haugevik, 2017, p. 157.

1.2 Justification of the study

My thesis finds its justification embedded in two purposes. Through analysing what role, if any, Norway played during the Brexit negotiations I hope to uncover previously undiscovered dynamics of Brexit, as well as Norwegian foreign policy. By uncovering a previously unresearched perspective and dynamic, I hope to increase the academic understanding of Brexit. The understanding of Brexit is increased through analysing the possible role of a third-party nation. The Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations is valuable because of the EEA-member's unique position.

Second, my thesis will in answering its research question seek to expand the understanding of the EEA-agreement. Norway's role during the Brexit negotiations was inevitably linked to its role as an EEA-member. How Norway was able to influence the Brexit negotiations will therefore in turn reveal important features of the dynamic of the EEA-agreement.

Norway was heavily incentivized to play a role during Brexit, yet lacked EU-membership. How this obstacle was overcome sheds light on how the EEA-agreement might function when put under pressure. Using Brexit as an enhanced circumstance for analysing the potential dynamic embedded in the EEA-agreement has not been done before. The circumstance is valuable because of its unprecedented nature in a European context. The deep reaching nature of Brexit signified that it was able to cause behaviour and performance at the extremity of the limits of the EEA-agreement. This makes the thesis' findings less generalizable but more revealing of underlying embedded potential. The use of interviews with diplomats holding first-hand knowledge of Norwegian actions and attitudes aids the value of the thesis by providing empiric material with a high degree of authenticity.

1.3 Methodology

My thesis approached Brexit from an inside-out perspective closely linked to the research question of the role played by Norway. The inside-out analytical approach was informed by Græger's *Norway between NATO, the EU, and the US: A Case Study of Post-Cold War Security and Defence Discourse*.²⁸ Græger was also interested in the Norwegian position caught between major allied actors, she was however using a different scope by including NATO and the US, and a different approach through security and defence discourse. Apart from the approach and scope however her methodology was highly relevant to my thesis, as she established precedence on how to analyse from an inside-out perspective.

My analysis of the role played by Norway employed methodological tools used by Haugevik (2017), Græger (2007) and Knutsen (2000). The authors utilized national perception, interest orientation and influence to understand national strategies and the role played by Norway. My thesis used the same methodological tools to analyse the role played by Norway during the Brexit negotiations, despite varying degrees of harmony between the authors' topics and my own. While Græger and Knutsen focused on security policy their methodological tools were still relevant because they too analysed the role played by Norway.

However, as the rationale for employing my inside-out perspective relied on the Norwegian need to impose itself on the Brexit negotiations in order to escape negative impact, an analysis of the role played by Norway must inherit an assessment of objective and achievement. In order to include an assessment of Norwegian achievements related to its role played during the Brexit negotiations the thesis made use of the definition of performance operationalized by Græger & Haugevik (2011) from Lusthaus *et al.*'s (2002) indicators.²⁹ Central to the operationalisation were the use of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and viability as tools for measuring performance.

The thesis operationalized effectiveness as the degree to which the Norwegian predetermined objectives for the Brexit negotiations were realized. Further, the manner in which these objectives were achieved was weighed in accordance with their efficiency. The analysis of efficiency was conducted comparatively, as the measurement allows for an assessment as to which degree the achievement of objectives could have been lesser or greater performed otherwise. Relevance was used to analyse the degree to which Norway was perceived as a relevant actor in the Brexit negotiations by Britain and the EU. Lastly viability is included as criteria to analyse the degree to which Norway's objectives may continue to be achieved.

In order to combine the assessment of performance with structural context, national perception, interest orientation and influence I have chosen to break my research question down into three sub-questions. Following a brief assessment of the historical background and structural context behind Norway's relationship with Britain and the EU. The following chapter sought to establish Norway's national perception of Brexit by answering the first sub-question; how was Brexit perceived by Norwegian foreign policy decision makers? The sub-question was important because it placed my thesis in the

²⁸ Græger, 2005.

²⁹ Græger & Haugevik, 2011, p. 744.

analytical tradition focusing on Norway's European policy, more specifically the substitute of Britain as leading star.

The second sub-question was connected to the assessment of performance when analysing the role played by Norway during the Brexit negotiations. What was Norway's strategy for Brexit? The sub-question sought to establish preset objectives for Norway in relation to the Brexit negotiations. The sub-question also captured the manner in which the Norwegian government sought to achieve its objectives, thereby including Græger' & Haugevik's use of effectiveness as a measurement of performance.

An assessment of Norwegian interest orientation in a Brexit context was also included in the second sub-question. In contrast to the past literature on the subject I have chosen to conduct interviews with Norwegian diplomats to capture this aspect of the role played by Norway during the Brexit negotiations. The interviews with members of the Norwegian Brexit Task Force (BxTF) were beneficial and relevant to several aspects of the thesis, but were mainly used to establish Norwegian interest orientation in relation to strategy. The interviews were necessary to gain an intimate understanding of Norwegian perception and performance.

Was Norway successful in implementing its strategy on the Brexit negotiations? The third sub-question sought to address the level of success achieved by the Norwegians, measured by their pre-determined objectives. It is heavily linked with the first indicator of performance, effectiveness. Whether Norway was able to reach the intended goals of its strategy was logically linked with the assessment of how Oslo was able to impose itself upon the Brexit negotiations. Analysing to what degree Norway was successful in implementing its strategy on the Brexit negotiations involved an assessment of what factors enabled and drove the outcome.

2 The Norwegian Perception of Brexit

Europe has increased in importance for Norwegian foreign policy during the Solberg I and II governments according to Haugevik & Græger.³⁰ The previous government, Stoltenberg II (2005-2013), left office leaving behind a partly subdued European policy. Limited by Norway's affiliation to the EU, the political leadership had more or less left European matters to bureaucratic management.³¹ The dividedness of the EEA agreement among the coalition parties of the Stoltenberg II government caused politicians to neither discuss nor engage with the EU to a large degree, according to the authors.³² Despite the un-politicized nature of Norway's European policy, the EEA-member had, according to Haugevik, still maintained a steady pace in implementing EU-legislation before Solberg I entered office in 2013.³³

The following years would however witness an increase of political attention turned towards the European project. 2014 saw the Russian annexation of Crimea highlight the need for Norway to be engaged with the EU and NATO. The power amassed by large multilateral actors to counter Russia as a response to the annexation, was not overlooked by Norway, who was by far the junior partner at their north-eastern border. 2015 witnessed more major events like migration and terrorist attacks shift Norwegian political attention to the EU. In his disposition to parliament 5 March 2015, foreign minister Børge Brende spoke of the year of crisis which Europe had persevered.³⁴

Norway's increasing appreciation of the EU may have transferred itself into the Brexit negotiations. Brexit may in many ways have been perceived to constitute a crisis of equal gravity as the migration crisis. Following the realisation that Norway was in the past drawn to the EU in times of crisis, Brexit may have caused an increasingly strong support for multilateralism and European cooperation. The trend carries implications for the thesis' research question because it suggests that Norway might have played a role during the Brexit negotiations which sought to position itself ever closer to the EU. One which favoured the benefits of multilateral cooperation above its bilateral relationship with Britain.

Britain has seen a contrastingly different trend in its relationship with Norway, one which saw it lessening from a high level of outspoken appreciation. From security-guarantee to trade partner, Norway's relationship with Britain existed in a context of deeply rooted historical and economic ties, according to Haugevik.³⁵ Britain was so important to Norwegian foreign policy following the second world war, that at one point in the 1950s, there were concrete, serious discussions for the latter to join the Commonwealth and adopt Pound Sterling as their currency.³⁶ So close were the two nations during the post-war period, that British diplomats enjoyed direct and unrestricted access to leading

³⁰ Haugevik & Græger, 2018, p. 220.

³¹ Haugevik & Græger, 2018, p. 222.

³² Haugevik & Græger, 2018, p. 223.

³³ Haugevik, 2017, p. 154.

³⁴ The Norwegian minister of foreign affairs is obligated to deliver semi-annual dispositions to the Norwegian parliament, Stortinget, detailing the status of foreign affairs. Brende, 2015.

³⁵ Haugevik, 2017, p. 153.

³⁶ Haugevik, 2012, p. 69.

Norwegian officials, at one point considering to simply move their embassy into Norway's foreign ministry.³⁷

Britain was a large part of the reason behind Norway's choice to pursue an Atlantic line in their foreign policy according to Haugevik.³⁸ The author portrayed Britain as a leading star in Norwegian foreign policy decisions, citing the political attention directed across the North Sea.³⁹ Vidar Helgesen, former minister of EEA- and EU- affairs summarized the sentiment in an address about the Norwegian perspective of Brexit: "Quite possible, Norway's longest-standing and most consistent foreign policy tradition is not to part ways with the British".⁴⁰

During the 21st century however, the relationship between the two nations has grown more pragmatic and uncelebrated according to Haugevik. As Britain's relevance as a security actor for Norway has lessened, so has the intimacy enjoyed between the countries.⁴¹ The adjustment in foreign policy relations did however not necessarily eradicate the importance of Britain to Norwegians. As in 2020, half of all British gas import originate from the Norwegian continental shelf, as well as an estimated 70% of all oil import.⁴²

Britain has also maintained importance in its role as a representative for Norwegian preferences within the EU, according to Haugevik.⁴³ "... not least because the two countries have similar attitudes towards European integration with Atlanticism, anti-federalism and pragmatism embedded in their spinal reflexes".⁴⁴ Norway's EEA-membership has not allowed the country to formally influence EU decisions which impacted them, forcing diplomats to be left standing in the hallways, according to Haugevik.⁴⁵ Britain's departure has however seen an end put to their proxy-representation of Norwegian preferences, thereby forcing the latter to reconceptualize their practise in Brussels.

The historic, economic and strategic importance of Britain in the eyes of Norway would suggest that the two had an effective and beneficial cooperation, although not always mutual. The consequences for the Norwegian perception of Brexit is that a loss of cooperation with Britain would have been particularly harmful, but not necessarily prioritized politically on the same level as the partnership with the EU. The idea that Brexit had the potential to be particularly economically impactful on Norway is supported by the findings of Mion & Ponattu.⁴⁶ Even in the context of other EEA and EU countries, the two authors calculated that Norway was among the countries who stood to be most significantly impacted economically regardless of Brexit outcome.⁴⁷

³⁷ Haugevik, 2012, p. 68.

³⁸ Haugevik, 2017, p. 159.

³⁹ Haugevik, 2017, p. 159.

⁴⁰ Quote made by former Minister of EEA- and EU-Affairs Vidar Helgesen in, Brexit: a Norwegian view, 2015.

⁴¹ Haugevik, 2012, p. 72.

⁴² Norwegian MFA, 2020a.

⁴³ Haugevik, 2017, p. 160.

⁴⁴ Haugevik, 2017, p. 159-160.

⁴⁵ Haugevik, 2017, p. 155.

⁴⁶ Mion & Ponattu, 2019, p. 11 & 18.

⁴⁷ The authors fail however to account for Norway's Brexit preparations, which would have altered their calculation and yielded a different result.

Mion' & Ponattu's conclusion was however not seemingly embedded in the early Norwegian perception of Brexit. In his first disposition of important international events to the Norwegian Storting⁴⁸ as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Børge Brende chose to largely focus on European topics and the state of Europe. Despite the tendency throughout his account to revert around a euro-centric world view, Brende did not mention Brexit once.⁴⁹ The referendum in Britain was at this point in time 2 years away.

We need not interpret too much from the lack of Norwegian political attention given to Brexit at this moment in time however. Although David Cameron had expressed his intent to hold a referendum on British EU-membership following a potential election win, the scenario still primarily existed as a potential outcome.⁵⁰ Cameron's promise was at the time still linked to his eventual election win in May 2015, and subsequent negotiations with the EU.⁵¹

November 2015 was the first time the Norwegian government chose to publicly address its own parliament on the topic of Brexit. Six months had at this time passed since the British general election win which saw the Tories victorious. Rethinking British EU-affiliation had at this point transitioned from an election promise made by David Cameron, to negotiations beginning to take place in Brussels over the summer.⁵² It was here, in Minister for EEA- and EU – Affairs Vidar Helgesen's disposition, we find the first traces of a Norwegian perception of Brexit.

Another big test for the EU-cooperation concerns Britain's negotiations with the EU regarding adaptations in their relationship and the coming referendum on membership. This will be a core-issue for the future of European cooperation. It is of course up to the British people [to decide] what is in their own best interest, we do however mean that Europe is a safer security policy actor and a more dynamic economic area with Britain as EU-member. Norwegian interests are well served with having Britain – a close ally, partner and a country we share many points of view with – as an influential EU-member.⁵³

This first position towards the early negotiations was harmonious with the historic background of both Norway's relationship with Britain and the increasing commitment to Europe. In his disposition, Helgesen expressed a view which saw Norway prefer Britain to remain an EU-member for two reasons. The first reason concerned the EU's success as a powerful economic and security actor. The Norwegian government saw itself best served with a powerful and united EU; this scenario was seen as more likely with Britain as a member, given the island nation's prestige.

⁴⁸ See footnote 34.

⁴⁹ Brende, 2014.

⁵⁰ Cameron, 2013.

⁵¹ *BBC*, 2013.

⁵² Consilium, 2016.

⁵³ Translation conducted by author. Quote in original language goes as follows: En annen stor test for EU-samarbeidet gjelder Storbritannias forhandlinger med EU om tilpasninger i forholdet, og den kommende folkeavstemningen om landets medlemskap. Dette blir et kjernesporsmål for det fremtidige europeiske samarbeidet. Det er selvfølgelig opp til det britiske folk selv å bestemme hva som tjener deres interesser best, men vi mener at Europa er et sikkerhetspolitisk tryggere og økonomisk mer dynamisk sted med Storbritannia som EU-medlem. Norske interesser er godt tjent med å ha Storbritannia - en nær alliert, partner og et land vi deler mange synspunkter med – som et toneangivende medlem av EU - Helgesen, 2015.

The second reason why Norway preferred Britain to remain a member of the EU was because of the internal European influence the island nation held. This was also evident from the statement the minister made to parliament. Helgesen expressed a view of Britain as a likeminded nation with the power to champion stances shared with Norway. Britain was not merely a close ally to Norway, but a highly useful one in a European context where the Norwegians desired influence.

Although a clear expression of the Norwegian government's views on a potential Brexit, one might remark the late and brief manner in which Helgesen addressed the matter to his own parliament. A simple explanation for both the direct and brief presentation of Norwegian preferences might have been connected to the contemporary understanding of Brexit. While Brexit, ever since David Cameron's election pledge, attracted attention in Norway, it was also according to Haugevik viewed as a highly unlikely outcome up until the vote itself.⁵⁴

The realisation that Helgesen might have been voicing a position regarding something he did not think would become a real possibility weakens the legitimacy of his stance. The Norwegian government may well have been opposed to Britain leaving the EU if they thought of it as an unrealistic scenario. The unlikelihood of a scenario loans insignificance to the opposition of it, whereas Helgesen might have expressed a different preference should Brexit be a more realistic outcome. The unlikelihood of an outcome does however not influence motivating factors. If Helgesen expressed a preference for Britain to remain in the EU based on the two reasons discussed above, they still held legitimacy regardless of the perceived likelihood of Brexit. More factors might yet have come into play later, as the debate and referendum in Britain approached, these other factors might even alter the preliminary position expressed by Helgesen. Neither they, nor the perceived likelihood of an outcome were however diminishing towards the first motivating factors.

On the basis of their legitimacy, the preliminary motivating factors are relevant for the first sub-question and the research question. Combined with the acknowledgement that Norway viewed Brexit as an unlikely event, we are provided with a preliminary understanding of Norwegian perception. The early opposition to Brexit indicated that Norway would later have sought to limit Britain's departure from European cooperation. Once Brexit had proved sufficiently impossible for Norway to counteract, it is not unlikely that the Norwegians kept their motivations which created their first preliminary stance. The first motivational factor would have driven Norway to play a role during the Brexit negotiations which attempted to strengthen the EU's power as an economic and security actor. The second could potentially have seen Norway seek new positional allies within the EU once Britain had gone.

⁵⁴ Haugevik, 2017, p. 157.

2.1 Norway's Role in the Brexit Referendum

Regardless of any assessment of viability, it is an undeniable truth that Norway's EU-affiliation received an increase in attention as a consequence of Brexit. The implications of this fact for the research question are numerous, primarily we may deduce that Norway must have enjoyed an increase in visibility as EEA-membership became a more frequent topic of debate around Europe. The question of a potential Norway+ model for Britain, as an alternative to EU-membership, seriously emerged throughout the first half of 2016.⁵⁵ In Brussels, a deal meant to appease unsatisfied Britons had been negotiated between David Cameron and his fellow European heads of government as of February of the same year.⁵⁶

The following sub-section aims to analyse the role of Norway during Britain's referendum. The analysis is valuable to answering the thesis' research question because the role of Norway in the referendum was tied to the one it played during the later negotiations. The role of Norway in the referendum held many of the same capabilities and dealt with similar actors as the role of Norway in the negotiations. The negotiations were however more characterized by gravity given that Norway according to Haugevik did not believe a leave win be a viable outcome of the referendum.

Norway was not invited to participate in the negotiations before the referendum, but without a vote in the European Council there was perhaps not apparent reason as to why they should have been.⁵⁷ The same may however also have been said for the later Brexit negotiations. One could argue that the Norwegians should have been invited on the grounds that Cameron's deal could potentially have affected them too. This was also true for the later Brexit negotiation. Inclusion to the first negotiation would however arguably have provided Norway with a greater possibility to be perceived as more relevant for the second and larger one. Compared with member states who were part of both negotiations, Norway's exclusion from Cameron's negotiation meant they would have been perceived as a less relevant actor in the Brexit context. The lack of perceived relevance is important to the role of Norway because it would have limited Norwegian inclusion on the equal basis as a member state at a later stage.

Aside from the importance of keeping Britain inside the European Union, Cameron's negotiation also impacted Norway directly, meaning that they were a relevant actor. Speaking to Norwegian newspaper NTB, Solberg admitted that in her view, the deal negotiated by David Cameron in Brussels might lead to Norway ultimately benefiting.⁵⁸ The mindset was not dissimilar from Helgesen's advantages of keeping Britain in the EU - piggybacking of the influence of a likeminded, powerful ally. Solberg's belief served both as an additional argument for Norway to want Britain to remain, and as an example of the second mechanism⁵⁹ described by Helgesen in his previous disposition to parliament.

The most relevant aspect of Cameron's deal for Solberg was the possibility to change practises in Norway's cash-for-care benefits.⁶⁰ A long running political issue; Norway's

⁵⁵ The Guardian, 2016a.

⁵⁶ Consilium, 2016.

⁵⁷ Consilium, 2016.

⁵⁸ NTB, 2016a.

⁵⁹ Page 20.

⁶⁰ NTB, 2016a.

particular welfare model which saw benefits delivered to foreign workers had witnessed massive amounts transferred abroad to other EU member states.⁶¹ The large number of Polish labourers working in Norway through internal market access saw the Norwegian government transfer an excess of 105 million NOK to Poland alone in child welfare benefits in 2014.⁶² Cameron's deal would see this practise ended for Britain and as a consequence other internal market members, such as Norway. For the ripple-effects of Cameron's deal to reach Norway however, the British public would first have had to vote stay in the upcoming referendum.

Norwegian interests were, in the case of European welfare legislation, as they had often been in the past regarding other matters, harmonious with Britain's. Adding to the analysis of the role of Norway in Cameron's agreement, the EEA-member also had its preferences promoted through proxy yet again. The benefits derived from having a powerful actor within the EU, which frequently saw eye-to-eye with your positions were substantial, particularly for Norway who lacked access to the negotiation. Counterbalancing the lack of formal position held by Norway in Brussels was according to the prime minister herself a large challenge, one which must continuously be overcome.⁶³ Britain leaving the European Union stood to rob Norway of their like-minded champion, this meant that Norway was heavily incentivised to seek to stop Brexit.

When the Norwegian government was not allowed official sway over Britain's potential departure, it interestingly enough sought to influence Brexit in other, more informal ways. Using the attention awarded to the Norway+ model, Solberg and her government used it as an opportunity to actively promote their own interests. Solberg personally took an active part on several occasions, promoting that the Norway+ model as an alternative for full membership should not constitute an argument for Brexit. Norway's model of affiliation was ill suited for Britain, according to Solberg, as the two countries were vastly different and had distinct needs.⁶⁴ Interviews with both the BBC's Hard Talk and Politico saw Solberg warn British voters against voting to leave the EU, stating the troubles Norway faced when attempting to exert influence in Brussels as burdensome hindrances.⁶⁵ Norway were according to Solberg forced to act as a lobby organisation in Brussels, a practise she deemed ill suited to the British.

Erna Solberg's choice to actively engage with the debate in Britain concerning the EEA-agreement may have been a manifestation of the previously expressed preference to keep Britain in the EU. Warning against life on the outside of the EU, the prime minister's insistence that EEA-membership was not an attractive alternative can be interpreted as an attempt to protect Norwegian interests through fearmongering. Alternatively, Solberg's warnings may simply have stemmed from a genuine perception of the EEA-agreement as a poor solution, given her personal preference for EU-membership.⁶⁶

Downplaying the EEA-agreement was however not necessarily synonymous with a genuine distaste. Solberg's warnings may as well have stemmed from the Norwegian desire to keep Britain in the union, rather than a genuine expression of unhappiness with

⁶¹ *NTB*, 2016a.

⁶² *NTB*, 2016a.

⁶³ *Politico*, 2016

⁶⁴ *Klassekampen*, 2016.

⁶⁵ *Klassekampen*, 2016, *Politico*, 2016.

⁶⁶ Upon her accession as party leader, Erna Solberg expressed her intent for Norway to enter the EU before 2009. She remains unsuccessful to this date *VG*, 2004.

Norway's affiliation. As stated by Minister for EEA- and EU affairs Vidar Helgesen; "It matters to us that we have member states at the table that are market-oriented, focused on less regulation ... and the Brits are definitely in that camp".⁶⁷ The perceived advantages of Britain remaining in the EU would rationally motivate Norway's government to advocate against Brexit.

We can establish two things from Solberg's actions. First it is apparent that the attention turned to Norway's EU-affiliation during the Brexit-debate awarded opportunities which could have been used to seek influence. Solberg recognized and actively employed those opportunities to promote the Norwegian preference upon British voters. When the Norwegian government was denied participation in Cameron's negotiations, it sought to influence the upcoming referendum in other manners. The possibilities were however inherently also limited in the sense of their ability, as Norway was not perceived as relevant enough an actor to be deserving of a place in Cameron's negotiations. Additional evidence may be derived from the fact that Solberg's attempts were evidently unsuccessful in swaying the British public.

This conclusion carries some reservations given that the Norwegians did not construct predetermined objectives aimed at the referendum or Cameron's negotiations, but merely held preferences. It is also important to remember Haugevik's claim that the Norwegian government did not perceive a leave win to be a likely outcome of the referendum in Britain. There was more than likely a large increase in focus and efforts once the realisation dawned on the Norwegian government that not only was Brexit happening but that its potential consequences might impact them to a large degree. The conclusion is regardless relevant in the analysis of the role of Norway during the Brexit negotiations. Not only because the two roles were connected but also because of the impact the former held over the latter.

Second, we are provided with an increase of legitimacy connected to the findings regarding Norwegian perception. The findings regarding the Norwegian perception of and public stance on Brexit are strengthened as a consequence of a continued consistency. Where the opposition to Brexit previously may have been the result of a lack of any serious consideration, the evolved state of debate in Britain added pressure. Solberg's active engagement with the debate in Britain proved the resolution of the Norwegian position on Brexit.

⁶⁷ Helgesen in *Politico*, 2016.

2.2 Preparatory Measures Before the Referendum

Having examined motivating factors driving the Norwegian perception of Brexit, sub-chapter 3.2 intends to analyse how these might have been affected by the final stage leading up to the referendum in Britain. The justification of this focus is embedded in three purposes. Firstly, to produce a deeper understanding of the Norwegian perception of Brexit. Second, to assess the impact of Haugevik's claim that Norwegian authorities did not believe Brexit to be a realistic outcome of the referendum. The statement may be truer for different stages leading up to the referendum and is most likely to have been challenged in the period leading up to the vote when the British debate was at its fiercest. Third, to focus on the preparations made by the Norwegian government as the vote moved closer and Brexit undeniably became an increasingly potential outcome.

For Norway, like many other countries, the uncertainty connected to the referendum and any later developments meant there remained little to be done but wait and see. Meeting uncertainty with caution and patience, the Norwegian authorities seem by all indications to primarily have hoped that the Britons would vote to stay, followed by everyone moving on.⁶⁸ The consequence became that very few preparations were conducted before the referendum to prepare for a potential leave-win. It would be natural, given that Norway was particularly prone to be highly impacted by Brexit, that the EEA-member would organize some form of preparations for an unwanted outcome. There is however little to suggest that such preparations took place. A Norwegian government which took little action to prepare for a potential unwanted result would indicate one which did not believe it to be a viable outcome.

Despite repeated calls from Norwegian, Eurosceptic politicians to take advantage of the situation,⁶⁹ Norway did not initiate any action towards Britain before the vote.⁷⁰ According to these calls for opportunism, Norway was specifically suited to benefit from Brexit given its position as an EEA-member. Increased negotiation-power for EFTA and a potential tariff-free trade of seafood to Britain were among the possible rewards imagined for Norway. On the other hand, a large concern⁷¹ was that Norway might fare poorly, and lose the current framework for trade with seafood which was bound through EU-legislation.⁷² Eyeing both gains and losses by becoming increasingly involved, in addition to fearing the uncertainty of any outcome, the Norwegian government largely chose to observe, hope and wait.⁷³

It is not until the last period leading up to the referendum that we find traces of Norwegian preparatory measures. The measures were not in accordance with those who had previously called for Brexit to be used as an opportunity for partnering with Britain outside of European supranationalism, however. They instead aimed to bring Norway closer to Europe through financial supervision.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ For examples see *VG*, 2016, *Aftenposten*, 2016.

⁶⁹ Calls were made to initiate stronger trade relations with Britain outside of Europe, to compete with the EU. *Aftenposten*, 2016a.

⁷⁰ *NTB*, 2016b.

⁷¹ Concerns were expressed publicly both from politicians and academics. For examples see Astrup and Sverdrup in *E24*, 2016.

⁷² *VG*, 2016.

⁷³ *VG*, 2016.

⁷⁴ *ABC Nyheter*, 2016.

Allowing her own parliament five weeks to process a 600-page legislation proposal, Minister of Finance Siv Jensen attracted widespread criticism for what was described as an attempt to fast-track legislation pre-Brexit.⁷⁵ Jensen's decision lacked precedence in Norwegian politics as the loss of sovereignty was of such stature that it required invoking §115 of the constitution, requiring a two-thirds majority in parliament in order to be passed.⁷⁶ The last time a commitment of such stature was passed in Norway's Storting was when the EEA-agreement was first adopted in 1992.⁷⁷ The minister of finance's decision attracted criticism from leading Norwegian economists, resulting in a petition cautioning patience.⁷⁸ The economists argued that Norway should have looked to fellow EFTA-member Iceland, who had scheduled the same vote for after the summer, preferring instead to wait for the result of Britain's referendum.

Why Norway's finance minister felt the need to fast track an almost unprecedentedly large surrender of sovereignty to the EU ten days before the Brexit-referendum, was according to her linked with the importance and nature of the proposal.⁷⁹ According to Jensen it was imperative for Norway to Europeanize the country's financial supervision as the lack thereof led to less harmonization with the European market.⁸⁰ The accumulation of un-passed legislation and harmonization hindered investment and Norway's participation in the internal market according to Jensen.⁸¹

The manner in which Siv Jensen pushed important legislation with elements of supranationalism through parliament did indicate a sense of rushed preparations. Jensen retorted to arguing for the necessity of financial regulatory harmonization. This necessity, nor the longevity of work behind the project would however apparently have been influenced by waiting for the result of Britain's referendum, like Iceland did.

Jensen's actions indicated a need to prepare for an undesired result in the upcoming referendum. There remained little in the finance minister's argumentation nor otherwise to offer another explanation which did not contradict with this sentiment. The different actions taken by Norwegian and Icelandic authorities were particularly damning, both faced with similar prospects yet one elected to wait while the other rushed important legislation. Jensen's actions challenged Haugevik's claim that Norwegian lawmakers did not view Britain leaving as a likely outcome of the referendum.

The action also carried implications for the thesis' research question. The Norwegian government's decision to Europeanize its financial supervision before Brexit indicated a desire to continue their cooperation with the EU despite uncertainty. This was clear from the comparison with Iceland who opted otherwise, to wait and see. The Icelandic decision to postpone their vote to after the referendum indicated a desire to serve national interests. While the Norwegian decision to fast track legislation pointed to a desire to commit to European cooperation, regardless of uncertainty. If this trend continued it would have meant that Norway played a role which prioritized to commit to the EU during the Brexit negotiations, rather than seek national preference.

⁷⁵ *NTB*, 2016c.

⁷⁶ *ABC Nyheter*, 2016.

⁷⁷ *ABC Nyheter*, 2016.

⁷⁸ *Dagsavisen*, 2016.

⁷⁹ Jensen, 2016a.

⁸⁰ Jensen, 2016a.

⁸¹ Jensen, 2016a.

2.3 Implications of the Substitution of Britain as a Leading Star

Haugevik's claim that Britain had prior to Brexit lost its role as a leading star for Norwegian foreign policy decisions might carry implications for the research question. The same may also be said for the more recent and increasing political support for the EU. Combined the two trends would suggest that the role of Norway in the Brexit negotiations was prone to position itself in support of Brussels and not London. The findings from the previous sub-chapter regarding Jensen's decision to fast track legislation support this sentiment. Sub-section 2.3 is devoted to establishing the validity and subsequent implication(s) of this sentiment for the role of Norway during the Brexit negotiations.

Examining statements made by Prime Minister Erna Solberg before and after she met with fellow European heads of government in a European People's Party (EPP) meeting in Brussels, might reveal traces of a shift in discourse. Moving away from denouncing Brexit as an undesirable event on the account of Norway losing an inside-partner with influence, the attention was now increasingly focused on financial consequences for Europe.⁸²

In our minds Norwegians are Anglo-Saxon, turned towards the USA and Great Britain. But economically we are closest to Sweden and Germany. If they fair poorer, we fair poorer. ... I am concerned precisely because Germany is concerned.⁸³

Solberg's statements following her attendance at an EPP-meeting two days before the referendum stood out as they explicitly linked Norway's Brexit related concerns to Europe⁸⁴, and not to Britain. The statements need not be read as a sensationalist change of loyalties or strategy, but they were telling of an increased orientation towards Europe. Solberg exemplified Germany's importance by referencing Norway's past connection to their historic security providers Britain and the US, stating the superior economic significance of the former. The rhetoric was undeniably harmonious with Haugevik's substitution. It is also coinciding with the reluctance of the Norwegian government to pursue gain through inviting Britain into EFTA.

While an increased focus in Oslo turned towards the wellbeing of the European Union in the face of Brexit may have been part of a substitution of Britain as strategic ally. It is important to keep in mind that one motivating factor did not necessarily exclude another. The implications for the Norwegian perception of Brexit may also have remained the same, regardless of where emphasis was put, departure was still considered an undesirable outcome.

On the other hand, one could argue that a Norwegian perception of Brexit could have been influenced by an understanding of which actor's welfare carried the most impact in Oslo. A clear-cut example of this appeared in the Norwegian domestic debate regarding Brexit. As previously discussed, there were early on Eurosceptic politicians who viewed a

⁸² *Aftenposten*, 2016c.

⁸³ Quote made by Erna Solberg in *Aftenposten*, 2016c. Translation made by author, for quote in original language see: I hodene våre er nordmenn anglosaksiske og vendt mot USA og Storbritannia. Men økonomisk er vi tettest bundet sammen med Sverige og Tyskland. Går det dårligere med dem, går det dårligere med oss. ... Ja, og jeg er dessuten bekymret nettopp fordi Tyskland er bekymret.

⁸⁴ More specifically Sweden and Germany.

potential Brexit as an opportunity for prosperity outside of Europe, with Britain as a partner.⁸⁵ These actors, not owing any allegiance to Brussels, were apparently more inclined to be positively disposed towards a potential Brexit, where the governing pro-EU party were negative. Extending the logic of this argument, it is entirely possible that a less pro-EU government would be driven by other motivating factors and form a different position.

The consequence becomes that the substitution of the United Kingdom as a leading star inclined the Norwegian government to play a role during the Brexit negotiations which refused to cooperate with Britain at the expense of the EU. Those calling for a more opportunistic approach did so by arguing the potential for partnering with Britain outside of Europe and at the expense of the EU. The Norwegian government's reluctance to entertain such an idea was seemingly linked to its support for European cooperation, although it cannot alone explain the position. The increased inclination towards the EU, which faces little empiric evidence to oppose it, suggested that the Norwegians perceived themselves as superiorly suited with the increased wellbeing of the EU.

This perception would in turn naturally have ruled out any serious possibility of cooperating with Britain outside of European framework. The shift towards Brussels implied that Norway during the Brexit negotiations sought to play a role which acted to preserve the EU's wellbeing. The statement is supported by the Norwegian perception that their economic prosperity was to a greater degree linked to Germany or Sweden than to Britain. This perception was in turn supported by Solberg's statement which quantified and prioritized one cooperation above the other.

⁸⁵ Page 24.

3 The Norwegian Strategy to Manoeuvre Brexit

The thesis' research question naturally limits the scope of analysis to focus on the role which the Norwegian strategy produced and does thereby not leave room for anything else. An analysis of the Norwegian strategy is however made valid by the thesis' employed definition of performance, used to evaluate the role of Norway during the Brexit negotiations. In order to evaluate performance, it is necessary to determine the preset objectives of the Norwegian role. Establishing intent and execution is additionally important in order to not only understand what the Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations produced, but what it was constructed to do.

3.1 Choosing Both Actors

On 23 June 2016, 17.4 million Britons voted to leave the EU.⁸⁶ The wide range of reactions produced around Britain once the result was clear reflected the divisiveness of the topic, but also its profoundly deepfelt importance.⁸⁷ The victors spoke loudly of democracy beating bureaucracy, of the 'real' people defeating a disillusioned elite, of strength, bravery and confidence.⁸⁸ In Berlin, German Chancellor Angela Merkel responded to the result of the referendum with regret, not for her own political project, but for the blow suffered to European unity.⁸⁹ The British Prime Minister David Cameron chose to resign after failing to convince his nation to choose membership, and the deal he had struck.⁹⁰ Cameron successfully avoided becoming known to history as the prime minister who lost Scotland. His second gamble witnessed him instead becoming the man who enabled Brexit.

The reactions in Norway reflected those coming out of Europe. EU-antagonists sang praise to the supreme nation state, asking loudly who would follow Britain in their leap.⁹¹ EU-supporters, like Prime Minister Erna Solberg, were concerned.⁹² For the Norwegian government, two things were very clear amidst the political disarray. Regardless of Britain's future relationship with the EU, it was imperative that Norway maintained cooperation at the contemporary level with both parties⁹³. Secondly, that the success of this ambition would demand considerable effort on political as well as official level.⁹⁴

Though unclear at the time what arrangements would follow Britain's departure from the EU, its potential impact yet remained large. Solberg's expressed concern, both before and after the vote implied that the Norwegian government was very aware it might be

⁸⁶ *BBC*, 2016a.

⁸⁷ *BBC*, 2016b.

⁸⁸ *BBC*, 2016b.

⁸⁹ *BBC*, 2016c.

⁹⁰ *The Guardian*, 2016b.

⁹¹ *Aftenposten*, 2016a.

⁹² *Aftenposten*, 2016b.

⁹³ Jensen, 2016b.

⁹⁴ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

impacted.⁹⁵ Seemingly in spite of this concern however, two different ministers publicly expressed hopes for Norway to remain unscathed by the impact of Brexit.⁹⁶ The desire to escape impact was justified by arguing that Norway was not a part of the EU. Minister for EEA- and EU-affairs Elisabeth Vik Aspaker, informed her parliament's European Consultative Committee of the Norwegian understanding of Brexit. It was important, according to her, to emphasise that Britain did not vote to leave the EEA-agreement.⁹⁷ Nobody who voted to leave the EU did so because of Norwegian labour immigration to Britain, according to the minister.⁹⁸ This was important, according to her, because it enabled a continuation of a status quo with which Norway was well served.

At the time of Vik Aspaker stating Norwegian primary ambitions related to Brexit, there was very little certainty on the nature of Britain's future relationship to the EU. The Norwegians were also acutely aware of this.⁹⁹ Linked to the Norwegian government's ambition to maintain contemporary levels of cooperation was therefore a desire to establish a sense of stability and predictability for Norwegian citizens and market actors.¹⁰⁰ In order to secure this desire, the Norwegian government wishes to maintain its close cooperation with both the departing member, and the states who remained. The Norwegian government has in a way relucted to side with one actor but instead elected to cooperate with both.

The Norwegian ambition may seem out of place given the findings from the previous chapter. When discussing and preparing for a potential leave-win in the referendum, concern was primarily concentrated around the wellbeing of the EU. Whereas after the vote was clear, emphasis was put on protecting cooperation with Britain from any impact. Vik Aspaker's focus on separating between Norway's EEA-membership and the EU member states in a Brexit context was well suited to rationalize her ambition, but also in conflict with Solberg's previously expressed concern for Europe.

The change of rhetoric would seem to indicate that the result of the referendum had shifted focus in Oslo away from how Brexit might impact European solidarity, and towards the potential impact Norwegians might eventually feel themselves. Granted, the minister for EEA- and EU-affairs was not solely focused on maintaining the same level of cooperation with Britain, but also the EU. Fearing a gravitational pull towards either of the two actors would draw Norway away from the other, the desire for status quo was not limited to just Britain. This distinction was important because it complicated any British entry into EFTA. Should Brexit have resulted in EFTA-membership then Norway's relationship with Britain would have been protected, but cooperation with the EU would have been in need of redefinition.

From Vik Aspaker's proclamation of the Norwegian ambition for Brexit we may deduce a weariness of the potential impact inflicted on Norway's cooperation with the EU caused by efforts directed at the British. In addition to the Norwegian ambition excluding any possibility for British EFTA-membership, Theresa May had publicly stated her intent to create a new form of European affiliation.¹⁰¹ The rejection of British EFTA-membership

⁹⁵ Before *Aftenposten*, 2016c. After *Aftenposten*, 2016b.

⁹⁶ Jensen, 2016b and Vik Aspaker 2016a.

⁹⁷ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

⁹⁸ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

⁹⁹ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

¹⁰¹ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

and unclear nature of the island nation's future cooperation with Europe meant, according to Vik Aspaker, that her country had to seek to establish new agreements on a bilateral level across the North Sea.¹⁰²

Norway's projected task was a complicated manoeuvre not merely because it demanded formally re-establishing multilateral framework on a bilateral level. For Norway, regardless of Vik Aspaker's distinction between Norway and EU member states, was after all still an integrated part of the internal market. A market governed by the EU27 who did not share the same ambition, and who may have held much influence over the future standing between the three parties: EEA, EU and Britain. In order to succeed in their ambition to maintain the same level of cooperation with Britain post-Brexit, Norway needed to engage with the forthcoming negotiations between the two major actors, preparing to flexibly succeed in a geopolitical landscape which had not yet been settled.

Amidst disarray, Norwegian authorities did formulate an ambition, to maintain the existing level of cooperation with both Britain and the European Union. Any doubt concerning the accuracy of this statement is refuted by the formal and explicit nature in which Vik Aspaker clearly proclaimed to her own parliament that this was the de facto Norwegian ambition for Brexit.¹⁰³ The ambition also serves as the predetermined objective for the assessment of performance in the Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations. Embedded in the understanding of the preset objectives lies an appreciation of the Norwegian concern that their efforts to maintain cooperation with one actor might have influenced its relationship with the other.

Following the creation of the predetermined objectives, an argument reiterated time and time again by representatives of the Norwegian government was that Britain voted to leave the EU, not Norway. Brexit was thus not directed towards Norway, there was no displeasure with the contemporary state of affairs and the referendum was about EU-membership, not EEA. This perspective was represented by Elisabeth Vik Aspaker in the previous sub-section, it also appeared in interviews conducted with members of the Norwegian Brexit Task Force and government reports on the consequences of Brexit by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).¹⁰⁴

"We have a simple bilateral relationship. We have a close relationship; they have been our closest ally since the second world war. It is very close and uncomplicated. If it ain't broke".¹⁰⁵ The Norwegian cooperation with Britain was not broke, so there was no reason it needed to change. The logic was closely linked to the Norwegian government's predetermined objectives as it rationalizes and motivates Norway's decision to seek continued cooperation with both actors. This was however not as uncomplicated in practise as in theory.

¹⁰² Vik Aspaker, 2016

¹⁰³ The accuracy of the thesis' analysis of the Norwegian ambition for Brexit is also supported by Interview A. Interview A was conducted with a member of the Norwegian Brexit Task Force, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Interview A and B conducted by author with diplomats working in the BxTF. Report on consequences of Brexit Norwegian MFA, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Quote made in Interview B. Translation made by author, quote in original language goes as follows: Vi har et enkelt bilateralt forhold i utgangspunktet. Vi har et nært forhold, de har vært våre aller nærmeste allierte etter andre verdenskrig. Det er et veldig tett og enkelt forhold. Det er ukomplisert. If it ain't broke.

Norway's cooperation with the EU was not at a surface level prone to be weakened as a consequence of Brexit. Britain was the actor moving away from European multilateralism, an action which initially did not affect Norway's position vis-à-vis the EU. London, actor A, by moving further from Brussels, actor B, was simultaneously extending the distance between itself and Oslo, actor C. But the distance between actor B and C would by the logic of the Norwegian government possibly remain the same regardless of changes between A-B or A-C.

When moving beyond the surface level however, Brexit was neither a static nor simplistic process. In redefining A-B and A-C, all three actors may have moved in different directions from their initial starting points, not just A, meaning B-C may have been influenced as a side-effect. An example of this is the possibility of a British EFTA-membership. In redefining its relationship with Brussels, A-B, Britain would have caused changes in the relationship between itself and Oslo, A-C. Such an outcome would in addition have influenced the distance between Oslo and Brussels, as the dynamic between the two was redefined by the shift in power balances, B-C could thereby have been changed as a consequence.

We can from this fact conclude that the Norwegian predetermined objectives for its role during the Brexit negotiations carried some reservations. The Norwegian role would thereby not solely have been focused on maintaining cooperation but also to balance their efforts between the EU and Britain. The reservation was logically motivated by the importance of participation in the internal market and EU-programs, but also to preserve cooperation with the EU and European member states who were increasing in importance. An increased Norwegian participation in European multilateral cooperation was in direct conflict with a redefinition of B-C caused by Brexit.

3.2 The Execution of the Norwegian Strategy

The Norwegian government has a large amount of experience in attempting to influence EEA-relevant matters. Of Norway's 99 embassies and foreign missions around the globe, the largest one is situated in Brussels. Despite a lack of membership, the vast delegation of competence to its mission in Brussels reflect the Norwegian's perceived importance of taking an active part in the daily goings of the EU.¹⁰⁶ While the competence amassed by Norwegian diplomats in dealing with regular EU-matters certainly may have provided an important foundation to build on, the toll of Brexit exceeded previous requirements. There were few elements of Brexit where business as usual may be used as an apt description, this was also true for the tools employed by the Norwegian government. The perception of Brexit as an extraordinary event was reflected in the ambition constructed to manoeuvre it. The tools chosen to fulfil the formulated ambition would logically have corresponded with the heightened circumstances which it interacted with. The following section is dedicated to analysing what tools were chosen by the Norwegian government to achieve their predetermined objectives.

3.2.1. The Brexit Task Force

Like the EU's Task Force for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom under Article 50 TEU (Task Force 50) and Britain's Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU), the Norwegian BxTF was created to spearhead efforts related to Brexit. Comparing Norway's BxTF with the EU's Task Force 50 and Britain's DExEU might at first glance seem out of place, given the two's primary task of negotiating an exit agreement. This perspective is however flawed by its revisionism and focus on role instead of mission. The rationale behind the creation of the BxTF was similar to that of Britain and the EU, to establish a group holding the competences and mandate to manoeuvre Brexit to a successful degree.

Although not publicly disclosed, the Norwegian BxTF attempted during the early stages to insert themselves into the negotiations as a third party.¹⁰⁷ Arguing the necessity for trilateral negotiations between the EU, Britain and the irregular third-party Norway. The attempt, although unsuccessful following pushback from Brussels, showcased the intentions behind the creation of the BxTF as being well on a par with those of Task Force 50 and the DExEU.¹⁰⁸

The BxTF did however not serve its sole purpose by attempting to assume a role in trilateral negotiations. Examining the group's structure reveals a desire to gather diplomatic competence, but also to create a focal point for a wide coordination including every ministry of Norway's government. The extensive variety and volume of officials

¹⁰⁶ Interview B.

¹⁰⁷ Meeting Summary B attained following a freedom of information request to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Summary of meeting led by Farberg and Leikvoll May 2018 between BxTF members and leading representatives of the Norwegian private sector.

¹⁰⁸ Meeting Summary B.

included in the BxTF reflected an important foundational aspect of Brexit, its far reaching impact.¹⁰⁹ An appreciation of this fact may be found in the composition of the BxTF.¹¹⁰

The composition bore a striking resemblance to the structure of competences in the previously mentioned Norwegian Delegation to the EU. In their largest foreign mission, the Norwegian government had permanent representatives from every ministry save the Ministry of Culture.¹¹¹ Bearing a striking resemblance to the composition of the BxTF, each ministry also elects how many people it stations in Brussels, judging to what degree their field was impacted by the EU.

The composition of the BxTF was also relevant in the analysis of the role of Norway in the Brexit negotiations. The establishment and structure of the BxTF was revealing of an understanding that Norway fully intended to be a participatory actor in Brexit, not lacking in competence when dealing with British or European counterparts. The high degree of identical structure to the Norwegian Delegation to the EU indicated that the Norwegian government simultaneously understood that they might once again be forced to attempt to influence from the outside.

This sentiment was supported by who the Norwegian government anointed to lead the BxTF. Where the EU nominated Michel Barnier and British leaders chose in turn David Davis, Olly Robins and David Frost, the Norwegian government turned to Atle Leikvoll to lead its efforts.¹¹² A veteran diplomat and former ambassador to the EU, Leikvoll's nomination was reflective of a desire to operate on equal terms with the larger actors of Brexit. His experience working with the EU-system and established network were critical aspects to the choice of Leikvoll according to then Minister of EEA- and EU-affairs Frank Bakke-Jensen.¹¹³

Motivating the decision to devote a large amount of competence and resources to Brexit on an official level may have been the Norwegian experience of attempting to exert influence in Brussels, but certainly also the perception of Brexit's potentially far reaching impact. Norway's understanding that every ministry may have been affected by Brexit was not synonymous with the decision to establish a system of working groups, but indicated a devotion to reach the government's ambition regardless of perceived relevance from the other actors. The highly similar composition of competences in the BxTF and the Norwegian Delegation to the EU showcased the intention to influence Brexit using Norway's experience as an EEA-actor in Brussels.

¹⁰⁹ Interview B.

¹¹⁰ The permanent members of the BxTF from other ministries than the MFA were also representatives of separate teams dedicated to monitoring developments within their particular competence. This meant that the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, of Finance would all establish working groups inside their own ministry dedicated to their field of expertise. The size of the group would be determined by ministerial leadership based on their understanding of the acute need for their field (Interview B). Of the personnel in these smaller work groups, at least one would be a permanent member of the BxTF, where the efforts were coordinated by Atle Leikvoll and his team (Interview B).

¹¹¹ Norwegian MFA, 2020d.

¹¹² *Politico*, 2020.

¹¹³ *Aftenposten*, 2017.

3.2.2. Launching Norwegian Preferences into the Brexit Negotiations

As previously disclosed, Norway first attempted to take an active, participative role in the Brexit negotiations. The attempt to launch Norway into the Brexit negotiations was however refuted by the EU who preferred to negotiate solely with Britain whom they viewed as the only other relevant actor. The early rebuke must undeniably have limited Norway's ability to play a role during the Brexit negotiations, forcing the EEA-member to attempt to launch its preferences from the outside.

Using its experience with having preferences promoted inside the EU through proxy by like-minded allies, Norway quickly found it could achieve success by speaking to other actors, in turn acting through them. The importance of keeping a close dialogue with both Britain and the EU was stressed by Vik Aspaker to the Storting's European consultative committee.¹¹⁴ Clearly believing in the intent of both actors to listen to Norwegian positions, the success of dialogue seems according to Vik Aspaker to have been dependant on its level of closeness.¹¹⁵

Vik Aspaker's perception of the effectiveness of dialogue was perfectly in correlation with the Norwegian understanding of themselves as an irregular third party in Brexit, prone to suffer a heavy impact. It was however disproportionate that she expected a meaningful consideration of Norwegian positions given the sensitivity of Brexit, clearly demonstrated by Norway's denied permission to the negotiations. Norway had been the junior partner in its relation to both Britain and the EU, rarely setting the agenda.

A refusal to allow Norway participation in the negotiations was however not necessarily synonyms with a reluctance from the EU or Britain to include the Norwegians and their preferences. Communicating its preferences and positions to other actors may well have been the first step to success where the second and dependant component was gaining an understanding and appreciation. It is also worth noting that despite the apparent disproportion between Vik Aspaker's estimation of the possibility to succeed at the refusal to allow Norway participation, she was basing her strategy on experience. Norway's strategy to seek close dialogue with the other actors of Brexit and through them promote shared preference was based on the Norwegian experience of attempting to influence EU matters as an EEA-country.

From the moment the result of the Brexit referendum was announced, Norwegian authorities launched an extensive strategy of pursuing dialogue with European and British actors, at every possible occasion and on every possible level.¹¹⁶ Rationalised by its perceived benefits, the aim of pursuing extensive dialogue was to position Norway as close to the negotiations as possible, while still officially denied participation.¹¹⁷ The strategy required not only a large degree of flexibility, but also an acceptance from the EU that Norway was cooperating closely with Britain and vice versa.

Following the early rejection from the Brexit negotiations, Norway seem to have chosen a role which relies heavily on acting through other actors. This is suggested by Vik

¹¹⁴ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

¹¹⁵ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Interview A.

¹¹⁷ Interview A.

Aspaker's discussion with her parliament's European Consultative Committee and supported by Interview A as well as the frequency of meetings following the referendum. The BxTF acted this out through supplying any minister or state secretary meeting with a European counterpart with Brexit-material, regardless of the agenda.¹¹⁸ The intent was always to seek to promote Norwegian preferences, thereby hoping to influence through proxy.

Following the British Conservative party's choice of Theresa May as Prime Minister, Erna Solberg quickly established a dialogue with her fresh colleague concerning Brexit, within the end of August.¹¹⁹ Swiftly followed by the Norwegian Minister of Trade and Industry, Monica Mæland, meeting first with Britain's ambassador to Norway to discuss Brexit and then her British counterpart Liam Fox within few days.¹²⁰ Solberg officially met with Theresa May 19 September in New York, less than a month after their initial phone call.¹²¹ The agenda for the meeting was not Brexit but according to statements from interview A Solberg was regardless provided with material in order to discuss Norwegian preferences.

September also witnessed Elisabeth Vik Aspaker travel to France where she met with state secretary for European affairs Harlem Désir.¹²² While in Paris she also saw leader of the European secretariat with the Prime Minister's office Philippe L glise-Costa, leader of the Senate's committee for European affairs Jean Bizet and state secretary from the Ministry of Finance, Axelle Lemaire.¹²³ October saw Vik Aspaker meet and discuss Brexit with the chief negotiator of the Council of the EU, Didier Seeuws as well as the Vice Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki.¹²⁴ She also travelled to meet Brexit-Secretary David Davies and leader of the House David Lidington.¹²⁵ In addition, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs B rge Brende met with his counterpart Boris Johnson.¹²⁶

Various Norwegian ministers met with relevant actors and discussed Brexit a staggering 13 times over the course of the first 3 months following the referendum. Translating to roughly one political meeting concerning Brexit per week, the actions revealed a strong dedication towards the Norwegian strategy to manoeuvre Brexit. The Norwegian role during this stage of Brexit was by all indications focused on promoting Norway's preferences to friendly actors who were part of the negotiations. So high was the frequency of Norway's dialogue with actors regarding Brexit that later Minister of EEA- and EU-Affairs Frank Bakke-Jensen remarked in 2017 that he believed no other country had met with Britain more times since the referendum than Norway.¹²⁷

The high frequency of meetings between Norwegian actors and relevant counterparts regarding Brexit seem by all indications to have been vital parts of Norway's role. Forced to influence the negotiations from the outside, the strategy was reminiscent of Solberg's

¹¹⁸ Interview A.

¹¹⁹ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²⁰ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²¹ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²² Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²³ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²⁴ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²⁵ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²⁶ Norwegian MFA, 2016.

¹²⁷ Haugevik, 2017, p. 162.

description of how Norway attempted to lobby relevant EU-matters in Brussels.¹²⁸ The strategy was meanwhile dependant on gaining an understanding of Norway's role as relevant in a Brexit context. Promoting the idea that Norway, through its EEA-membership, was an actor in the Brexit negotiations was equally important as presenting preferences. The frequency of Norwegian meetings held with other actors reflected the intention both to gain an understanding of the relevance of Norway's role during the Brexit negotiations and to launch the country's preferences through proxies.

Through analysing who the Norwegians met with, we are also provided with an understanding of what actors were deemed particularly viable to share the EEA-member's preferences. The frequent meeting with British representatives, remarked by Bakke-Jensen, was in line with the Norwegian experience where the often like-minded island nation had in the past promoted their shared preferences within the EU.

French actors were also early the target of Norwegian attempts at promoting their preferences. This might have been motivated by the impression that France held the power to successfully promote preferences into the Brexit negotiations, and that some of those preferences might be shared by Norway. France also enjoyed a close cooperation with Britain before Brexit, the reason for Vik Aspaker's visit may have been to understand the degree of shared preferences between the two nations. It is however worth including that the BxTF prepared material for any meeting with a political counterpart, in the event that Brexit should become a topic of discussion.¹²⁹ The communication of Norwegian preferences were also largely conducted through the coordination between the BxTF and Task Force 50 or the DExEU.¹³⁰

3.2.3. The Irregular Third Party

Norway's strategy was inevitably closely linked to the role played by the EEA-member during the Brexit negotiations. Having established the Norwegian predetermined objectives for Brexit, we are also familiar with what the strategy sought to achieve. The Norwegians were from the beginning of the referendum very aware that they would have to recreate their cooperation with Britain on a bilateral level. They were however also equally acknowledging of the uncertainties of Brexit. The chapter's final sub-chapter is devoted to establishing what specific preferences the Norwegians sought to inject into the Brexit negotiations.

This mission is also linked to the thesis' research question as the Norwegian role, and its impact, was connected to their preferences. The Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations sought to promote national preferences through other actors, in doing so achieving their predetermined objectives. To understand the specific preferences is therefore essential in order to understand the Norwegian role played during the Brexit negotiations.

Upon exiting the EU, Britain hoped to re-establish and fortify bilateral trade as a sovereign actor, but the list of deals to strike was long.¹³¹ Norway on the other hand, had

¹²⁸ Page 22.

¹²⁹ Interview B.

¹³⁰ Interview B.

¹³¹ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

a large amount of deals they would need to recreate with just Britain, around 70 including the EEA-agreement.¹³² Norway was as deeply integrated with Britain as any EU-member state, while still lacking the weight of the EU in negotiating a new framework for cooperation. This would logically suggest that Norway would be forced to compromise and enter into agreements with Britain which they benefitted less from than previously. The change from multilateral framework to bilateral cooperation meant that Norway's status as the junior partner among the two countries became more significant.

An important Norwegian perspective from the outset of the Brexit negotiations however was that even though officially a third party, the EEA countries held a similar base in relation to Britain as the EU.¹³³ Following this logic, a similar base should lead to the possibility of reaching the same end, meaning that Norway should have been able to attain a similar deal, where EEA-relevant, as the EU. Using this logic, the Norwegians have throughout the Brexit negotiations pursued a frequent dialog with their EU counterparts, stressing the preservation of internal market integrity as reason to why Norwegian success was actually a shared interest.¹³⁴

Norway's lack of high-profile status may also have served as an aid according to the Norwegian understanding of Brexit.¹³⁵ Continuing the deep level of integration between Norway and Britain was not a controversial issue, as Norway and the EU were two separate actors, and British citizens only voted to leave the latter. Norway's status as a separate, less debated actor therefore had the potential to serve as a blessing in disguise.

Avoiding the controversy attached to negotiations between the delegations of Michel Barnier and David Davis, while still being a member of the internal market constituted a unique dimension of Norway's Brexit strategy. Pursuing continuation and a similar end product as the EU has also aided in making the process between Norway and Britain less complicated and simpler.¹³⁶ In this way it was also a part of gaining acceptance for the flexibility the Norwegian government envisioned when it constructed the ambition to coordinate with both Britain and the EU. The result was a Norwegian attempt to enter into an agreement with Britain which mirrored the EEA-relevant aspects of the deal being negotiated between them and the EU.

Norway did however not only work to mirror relevant parts of the EU's Brexit deal; this was where the two-lane approach came into play. For while much has been made over the EU's strategy to negotiate a withdrawal-agreement before discussing future cooperation with Britain, Norway remained focused on continuation and preservation.¹³⁷ While the EU prioritized other matters above removing the potential impact of Brexit, particularly in a no-deal exit, Norway's strategy sought continuation of the contemporary level of cooperation regardless of outcome.¹³⁸ Given the divergence between the preferences of Oslo and Brussels, solely attaching itself to mirroring the EU's agreement was not an option should a no-deal outcome have arrived.

¹³² Interview A.

¹³³ Interview A.

¹³⁴ Interview A.

¹³⁵ Interview A.

¹³⁶ Interview A.

¹³⁷ Vik Aspaker, 2016.

¹³⁸ Interview A.

Norway's use of a two-lane approach revealed a dedication to their chief ambition, but also important aspects of the country's European affiliation. Norway's affiliation is often portrayed as a compromise - a necessary evil or an undemocratic momentary solution, depending on the opinion-holder's perception of European integration. The two-lane approach however revealed both a flexibility and an increased set of options for the Norwegian government. Showcasing a greatly unexplored aspect of Norway's EEA-affiliation, Brexit as a case, and the two-lane approach, exemplified Norway attempting to use its role to benefit both from being an internal market member, and at the same time a third party with national interests.

The Norwegian role during the Brexit negotiations may therefore not be understood as tied to a singular position. National preferences instead dictated a flexibility which made the most of Norway's EEA-membership, allowing the country to pursue two different roles at once. One role which attempted to mirror relevant parts of the EU's agreement with Britain, closely linked to Norway's access to the internal market. While another role was simultaneously played, one which worked to create bilateral agreements with Britain in the case of a no-deal Brexit. This latter role made use of Norway's lack of full membership to justify a separate approach.

4 Measuring the Effectiveness of the Norwegian Role

I will analyse Norway's degree of success in completing predetermined objectives in two equal outcomes, the no-deal and deal scenario. The EU and Britain did after a series of extended deadlines ultimately manage to enter into a withdrawal agreement which ensured a transition period lasting through the end of 2020. The evasion of a no-deal outcome might lead some readers to question the necessity of including a theoretical scenario in my analysis. One could argue that addressing Norway's degree of success equally in a theoretic outcome and the one which actually transpired is counter to the thesis' mission.

The inclusion of a no-deal outcome is however legitimized by the Norwegian preparation for it. Preparations which were conducted equally with those meant for a deal outcome or a so-called soft Brexit. The Norwegians believed that their preparations for both outcomes were equally vital and both outcomes capable of becoming reality. Analysing achievements intended for both outcomes is necessary because Norwegian efforts are focused on both. The thesis' research question would thereby not be fully answered if a large part of the Norwegian achievements related to Brexit were omitted.¹³⁹

The analysis of the degree of success in completing predetermined objectives is linked to the thesis' assessment of effectiveness. Effectiveness has been operationalized to correspond to the degree of success the Norwegian role had in achieving its predetermined objectives for the Brexit negotiations. Effectiveness is also an indicator used to determine the performance of the role of Norway in the Brexit negotiations.

4.1 The No-Deal Outcome

Vital to Norway's no-deal preparations is the understanding that they lacked precedence in a Norwegian context. They were an attempt to take the legislative framework of Norway's relationship with Britain, which before Brexit passed through Europe, and to the largest degree possible replicate it on a bilateral level. Making the task even more difficult, it required participation and dedication from Britain, since Norway cannot create bilateral agreements on their own. Britain was admittedly equally incentivised as Norway to shield their cooperation from the impact of Brexit, they were however more prone to lack the necessary capacity. Aside from Britain's ongoing negotiations with the EU, a hard Brexit would see the country in need of re-establishing agreements with many partners, some of them being larger and more important actors than Norway.

There were however several factors indicating not merely capacity but also a dedication from London to work with Oslo in preserving cooperation. One of these factors was the

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that the thesis' inclusion of a no-deal scenario analysis is thereby not justified by any understanding or assessment of how close to reality such an outcome came to be, but rather the Norwegian efforts to prepare for it.

creation of unit in Britain's DExEU dedicated to working with the EEA/EFTA countries.¹⁴⁰ During the first stages of Norway's no-deal efforts, the EEA/EFTA-unit in the DExEU demonstrated their compliance with Norwegian preferences by conducting coordinated efforts with the BxTF aimed to map out bilateral agreements predating European cooperation.¹⁴¹

The example demonstrated British officials early dedicating resources to the preservation of a bilateral relationship to Norway. The example neither disparaged nor confirmed the validity of the Norwegian perception that Brexit was not directed towards them. British participation in the joint endeavour indicated a commitment to preserve cooperation with Norway, but not to any specific degree. A preference to significantly lengthen the distance between London and Oslo during Brexit may thus still have been present. The example rather established precedence for the devotion of British resources to partaking in Norwegian preparations for a no-deal outcome. It additionally early demonstrated a benefit gained from Norway's pursuit of close dialogue and coordination.

The limitation of British participation was later indicated once preparations reached more tangible stages. It was perhaps no wonder that participation was eased during the earlier stages of Norway's no deal preparations, as conjoined probing required little in terms of commitment. Reservations were, by their nature, more likely to appear once specific terms were on the table. Those terms quickly appeared once an understanding was established of what additional legislation was needed to preserve Norway's cooperation with Britain in a no-deal outcome to the largest degree possible. Initiatives for new agreements were pursued by the BxTF for citizen's rights, freedom of goods, freedom of services, as well as freedom of aviary-, road, and maritime transport.¹⁴² While five of the listed initiatives were met with reciprocity from the British, progress was not achieved in attempting to ensure continued freedom of services.¹⁴³

According to statements made by Atle Leikvoll, the lack of progress was caused by a British unwillingness to approach the subject.¹⁴⁴ 27 February 2019 Atle Leikvoll stated; "[B]y British request the agreement will not include services, we will therefore fall back to GATS [General Agreement on Trade in Services] for a period".¹⁴⁵ Leikvoll explicitly presented the request as British, indicating it was not shared by the Norwegians but nevertheless a condition they were forced to adhere to.¹⁴⁶

The example was in direct conflict with the Norwegian perception that Brexit was not directed towards them. Despite their attempts to ensure continuation of already existing cooperation, Britain wished to retract freedom of services. There were many reasons as to why London may have carried reservations concerning freedom of services, the important lesson is that those reservations were extending themselves to apply to

¹⁴⁰ Interview B.

¹⁴¹ Interview B.

¹⁴² Interview B.

¹⁴³ Meeting Summary E attained following a freedom of information request to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Summary of meeting led by Farberg and Leikvoll February 2019 between BxTF members and leading representatives of the Norwegian private sector.

¹⁴⁴ Meeting Summary E.

¹⁴⁵ Translation conducted by author. Quote in original language goes as follows: «Etter britenes ønske vil avtalen ikke omfatte tjenester, og vi vil derfor falle tilbake på GATS for en periode» - Atle Leikvoll in Meeting Summary E.

¹⁴⁶ Meeting Summary E.

Norway. The Norwegians were not an exception in the eyes of the British, even though they believed themselves to be.

The disparity between the Norwegian expectation of British willingness to negotiate and the reluctance they instead faced indicated a conflict of perceptions. Norway wished for its role during the Brexit negotiations to be an indirectly affected third party, whose efforts were centred around escaping an unintentional impact. The British reluctance to continue a freedom of services cooperation with Norway indicated that the departing EU-member viewed Norway's role differently.

The example of the conjoint probing and that of British restraint together illustrate the duality of British participation in Norwegian preparations for a no-deal Brexit. While one example demonstrated the willingness of Britain to devote resources to the preservation of their cooperation with Norway, the other showed that there were clear and unnegotiable reservations. The lack of progress made by the BxTF in ensuring freedom of services also revealed an important trait in the power dynamic between the two countries, the need for reciprocity. More clearly formulated; where Britain took an active part and desired no-deal preparedness; Norwegian progress was achieved, where reservations were held; the Norwegians faltered.

The consequence of this need for reciprocity was that Norway was not able to dictate the terms of its own no-deal preparations. The lack of ability to impose their own ambition upon Britain made it more difficult to achieve. Not because it necessarily conflicts to a large degree with British preferences, but as a consequence of the different perceptions of Brexit and Norway's role in it. Norway clearly wished to play a role which in a no-deal context was exempt from Brexit, while Britain did not perceive this role as harmonious with their own agenda.

On the other hand, it was not clear whether a specific British agenda, or rather lack thereof limited the Norwegian role. For while Norway from the inception of Britain's unorderly exodus from Europe had remained devoted to a constant ambition, the political chaos ruling London produced less clarity. According to 2017 Minister for EEA- and EU-Affairs Marit Berger Røsland, a large challenge for her ministry in their preparation for Brexit was that British political leadership did not express a clear, desired vision for their future connection to the EU, nor to Norway.¹⁴⁷ As a consequence, reciprocity was troubled to a degree where part of Norway's manoeuvres towards Britain relied on discovering it.

From the Norwegian perspective, they were the ones continuously communicating preferences at both the political and official level.¹⁴⁸ One major example of the dynamic dictating the progress of Norway's no-deal preparations appeared at the first major development in negotiations between Britain and the EU. 8 December 2017 the two parties agreed several terms dictating Britain's continued departure.¹⁴⁹ Erna Solberg had before the development managed to gain assurances from British Prime Minister Theresa May that Norway and its fellow EFTA members would be offered similar terms as the EU, but it was only now apparent what these terms were.¹⁵⁰ While Solberg and her administration had worked for months towards ensuring Norway stability in the face of

¹⁴⁷ Berger Røsland, 2017a.

¹⁴⁸ Berger Røsland, 2017a.

¹⁴⁹ BBC, 2017a.

¹⁵⁰ Berger Røsland, 2017a.

Brexit, the pace of progress was set and dominated by the primary actors, Britain and the European Union. Norway's role was adaptable and flexible, but incapable of setting or adjusting the pace of the negotiations.

4.1.1. Norway's Superior Flexibility

Norway's success in achieving their Brexit related ambitions could be said to have relied on the goodwill and preferences of the two main actors, the EU and Britain. Such a conclusion would however commit injustice towards the extensive lobbying and coordination conducted by Norwegian officials and politicians. The initiatives pursued by the BxTF did result in a series of agreements with Britain which would enter into force should a no-deal Brexit take place. "We were ready for Brexit 29 March 2019 ... in a no-deal scenario, Norway would be better off than the EU".¹⁵¹ Although the EU's lack of preparation for a no-deal outcome was admittedly rather a consequence of chosen strategy than limitation, this does not erase the fact that Norway, in their own view, would have fared better.

The foundation for the view expressed above was tied to Norway's completion of bilateral agreements with Britain securing continuation of cooperation regarding citizen's rights, trade of goods, fisheries, maritime-, aviary- and road-transport.¹⁵² Using these treaties with Britain as a starting point, the Norwegians would, following a no-deal Brexit, then continue to negotiate a more complete and permanent free trade agreement with Britain. Norway would then be better prepared for a no-deal Brexit than any EU member state as they did not coordinate bilaterally with Britain.

The solution was remarkable by nature of its quality, producing in Norway and fellow EEA-member Iceland¹⁵³ not victors, but neither would they remain losers of their circumstances. Brexit for Norway involved facing the loss of all legislative framework governing their cooperation with the nation's most important export market. The loss took place without Norway having a seat at the table in negotiating how it would be lessened or avoided. Despite these initial adversities Norway has produced for itself a medicine to Brexit. Norway's solution was well suited to the nation's predetermined objective. When balanced next to the deliberate choice made by EU leaders to refrain from seeking continuation in a no-deal outcome however, the comparison loses some of its weight. It is not a far-fetched claim that if EU leaders had pursued Norway's ambition to the same length, they may have achieved equal if not greater results.

On the other hand, it is worth noting Norway's preparedness at the original Brexit date 29 March 2019, in comparison with the EU granting Britain several extensions. For while Theresa May, and later unwillingly Boris Johnson, were the ones to request delays of the Brexit deadline, the EU27 never once failed to grant it.¹⁵⁴ In light of the given motivation cited by major news outlets, to avoid a no-deal outcome, one could argue that the

¹⁵¹ Quote made in Interview B. Translation conducted by author, quote in original language goes as follows: "Vi var forberedt på brexit 29. mars 2019 ... i et no deal scenario, så ville jo vi i Norge vært bedre stilt enn EU".

¹⁵² Norwegian MFA, 2020c.

¹⁵³ Liechtenstein joined Switzerland in a separate agreement.

¹⁵⁴ *Politico*, 2020.

decision of the EU27 to refrain from preparing for a hard Brexit left them hostage to their own strategy.¹⁵⁵

This would mean that the reluctance of the EU to prepare for a no-deal outcome resulted in the actor extending itself far longer than it otherwise would in order to avoid the outcome. The EU's member states' lack of no-deal preparation would have, following this logic, left them largely unable to actually go through with a hard Brexit. Norway's strategy, in comparison, resulted in the Nordic nation, while still strongly preferring an orderly exit, actually being prepared for a no-deal Brexit. The increased level of preparedness would have meant that Norway was left with genuine capability, while the EU27 in theory would have treated a hard Brexit as a hollow bargaining tool.

4.1.2. Norway's Role in a No-Deal Outcome

A vital aspect of Norway's no-deal preparations which needs to be addressed, is the way it was so tightly coordinated with other actors. In particular, the Norwegian BxTF had thoroughly communicated their efforts to the EU's Task Force 50.¹⁵⁶ So transparent was their coordination, that Barnier's team even received drafts of every treaty Norway negotiated with Britain, and was subsequently allowed to express preferences should they have any. Norway's pursuit of close dialogue manifested itself in not only close coordination with the DExEU, but also Barnier's Task Force 50. The result of this close coordination of Brexit efforts was that the EU, through Task Force 50, knew every preparatory treaty Norway signed with Britain intimately, agreed to and sanctioned them.¹⁵⁷

This revelation in turn forces the question as to why the EU approved of Norway's no-deal preparations. Should a no-deal Brexit become reality, Norway's prepared agreements with Britain would be breaking with the integrity of the internal market. Granted the EU would more than likely quickly seek to establish their own trade agreements with Britain following a hard Brexit. The Norwegians on the other hand would already be equipped with relatively open trade as a result of their preparations. Norway's no-deal preparations would in theory, for a short period of time, allow Britain somewhat access to the internal market despite a hard Brexit.

The sanctioning of Norway's bilateral agreements meant that the EEA-member was allowed exemption from the solidarity of the EU27 in order to pursue their own national interests. The same integrity which joined the EU27 in their stance throughout Brexit did not extend itself to the Norwegian role. Either reflecting a remarkable flexibility or a need to serve homogeneity strictly among the EU27, the sanctioning of Norway's preparations seems disproportionate. Particularly given the fact that the no-deal preparations of the EEA-country directly collided with the purpose of the chosen strategy of the EU27.

Seeking strength through unity and a united front, the EU27 stood remarkably firm in their joint position throughout their negotiations with Britain, pursuing European ambitions over national interests.¹⁵⁸ This principle is not present in the Norwegian role, which instead sought to soften a potential blow in the interest of the nation state.

¹⁵⁵ See *Politico*, 2020, *New York Times*, 2019, Menon in *Reuters*, 2019 for examples.

¹⁵⁶ Interview A.

¹⁵⁷ Interview A.

¹⁵⁸ Tusk in *BBC*, 2017b.

Norway's access to the internal market was not enough to promote a united strategy with the European Union's member states.

According to interview A, Oslo enjoyed an acknowledgement from Brussels that as a non-member, they were free to pursue national interest. This acknowledgement was very much in harmony with the Norwegian perception of their own role during Brexit, where they constituted an irregular third party. Interviewee A explained the EU's acknowledgement by emphasizing that any deal made by Norway with Britain would only enter into force should a no-deal Brexit have arrived.¹⁵⁹ This distinction was important because it meant that none of Norway's bilateral agreements were made with an active member state but the ex-member Britain.

Brexit may well be a rare case where Norway's EEA-membership has resulted in the nation being left with more flexibility and options in a European context. Norway was able to conduct no-deal preparations which member states were not, because of their commitment to the EU's shared stance. Norway has seemingly recognized this fact and utilized its possibilities when seeking to achieve their predetermined objectives regardless of outcome. Norway has during the Brexit negotiations managed to achieve a role which combined both internal market access and no-deal preparations.

Any assessment evaluating whether Norway's position was better than that of a member state will however be stuck debating whether a seat at the table in Brussels was greater in value than Norwegian flexibility. As expressed by interview B in the previous sub-chapter, Norway would be better off than the EU, the day following a hard Brexit, as they would be better prepared. The statement does however carry reservations, as striking a free trade agreement with the EU would more than likely have received greater priority from the British than one struck with Norway, regardless of preparations.

One the other hand, it would be un-nuanced to evaluate Norway's success by comparing its prestige next to that of the EU. The Norwegian chief ambition for Brexit has previously been established in chapter three, it was continuation. Norway's manoeuvres to prepare for a no-deal Brexit left the country in a better position to achieve its ambition than had it been a member state. Therefore, in the context of predetermined ambitions, Norway was better suited with its EEA-affiliation in a Brexit context.

Norway's role in the context of a no-deal scenario had a high level of effectiveness. Although Norway was not able to achieve continuance regarding freedom of services, the other no-deal agreements struck would see large parts of the cooperation with Britain remain temporarily unchanged. The temporary nature of the agreements was an inherent part of them, this aspect is however more relevant to the later assessment of viability. Effectiveness is rather weighed against the ability to achieve predetermined objectives. Norway's no-deal preparations with Britain would ensure a high degree of continuation, although not a complete one.

Norway's no-deal preparations were sanctioned by the EU, this meant that they would more than likely not have extended the distance between Oslo and Brussels. The acknowledgement that any deal would only enter into force with the ex-member Britain had a part in ensuring that Norway did not go too far in pursuit of national interest. Norway would the day following a no-deal Brexit be more prepared than the EU, they would however not have made any arrangements which were clashing with their role as

¹⁵⁹ Interview B.

an EEA-member.¹⁶⁰ The acceptance from the EU for Norway's no-deal preparations were a large part of the effectiveness of the Norwegian role as a vital aspect was continuing cooperation with both Brussels and London.

¹⁶⁰ An example of this would have been a renewal of EFTA caused by British membership.

4.2 A Soft Brexit

While considerable effort was placed into preparing for a no-deal outcome, there can be no doubt that the Norwegian government greatly preferred a solution where the EU and Britain entered into agreement.¹⁶¹ This was clear from the moment the predetermined objectives were constructed. This preference was not unequivocally linked with a normative fondness of actors getting along, but rather the understanding that everyone, Norwegian interests included, were better served with an orderly Brexit.¹⁶² Norway's no-deal preparations would leave them in a more prepared position than EU member states, should a hard Brexit arrive.

Brexit induced chaos and misfortune would however still hurt, and more importantly damage Norway's trading partners, which in turn could potentially deliver an economic impact.¹⁶³ The Norwegian government's desire for a soft Brexit was thereby linked with its high degree of harmony with the motivation behind the creation of their predetermined objectives. It was also linked with the belief that a higher degree of effectiveness was more attainable in a deal scenario.

While Norway's coordination with Britain throughout the Brexit negotiations has proven extensive, their discord with the EU remained equal if not greater.¹⁶⁴ From the beginning and until the end of the Brexit negotiations, Norway has maintained a close dialogue with the EU, communicating their desire and intent to be a part of the European solution to Brexit.¹⁶⁵ This desire carried connotations for the inclusion of a non-member state in EU solutions, if granted however, it would also lead to Norway becoming incentivized to promote their chief ambition of continuation into the negotiations.

Trying to secure their own participation, the Norwegians began by attempting triangular negotiations between the EEA-countries, Britain and the EU.¹⁶⁶ The request was however firmly denied by Brussels, citing a desire to negotiate with London and not any other parties. Suffering a major rebuke, the Norwegians found themselves on the outside. The refusal was troublesome to the Norwegian ambition because it might potentially have extended the distance between Oslo and Brussels as a consequence of different agreements being made with London. Norway was incentivized to pursue a high level of harmony between its own and the EU's future relationship with Britain. The EU's refusal to include Norway as a party in the Brexit negotiations therefore forced the nation to pursue a similar agreement, one conducted on EEA-level.

On 28 January 2020 Norway, along with Iceland, signed their own Brexit treaty with Britain, one which detailed the latter's exit from the European Economic Area.¹⁶⁷ Britain's deal with the EEA-countries was strikingly similar to the one it entered into with the EU, mirroring terms establishing a continuation of shared citizens' rights and a transitional

¹⁶¹ Interview A.

¹⁶² Berger Røsland, 2017b.

¹⁶³ Interview B.

¹⁶⁴ Interview B.

¹⁶⁵ Meeting Summary B.

¹⁶⁶ Meeting Summary D attained following a freedom of information request to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Summary of meeting led by Farberg and Leikvoll November 2018 between BxTF members and leading representatives of the Norwegian private sector.

¹⁶⁷ Norwegian MFA, 2020b.

period where new legislation would be formed.¹⁶⁸ The EEA exit-agreement did not touch upon topics like the Irish backstop, rather focusing on those felt more acutely by Norwegians and Icelanders.

Upon their announcement of the deal being finalized, the Norwegian government presented it as the achievement of their mission - continuation of cooperation particularly within citizens' rights and trade.¹⁶⁹ Norway and Iceland have mirrored relevant parts of the EU's deal with Britain, thereby also ensuring harmony in Brexit-agreements regulation between the EEA and the rest of members of the internal market. The solution was largely one of choice, indicated on both sides by their extensive communication and pursuit of harmony.¹⁷⁰

For Norway and Iceland, who were on the outside of the negotiations between Britain and the EU, to mirror an agreement they were not part of, considerable effort and willingness to share information with other actors had to be essential.¹⁷¹ The solution was one which allowed the EEA-countries to be included in the EU's treaty with Britain, while it simultaneously circumvented Brussels's demand for exclusivity. Central to this process was communication at the official level.

Norway's pursuit of dialogue has resulted in an extensive flow of information between the BxTF and Task Force 50, extending to drafts of the deal itself.¹⁷² The harmony between the EU- and EEA-deals was an important aspect of Norway's success as it protected the country's relationship to both the EU and Britain, thereby ensuring continuation. Denied participation in the deal, but still managing to create an outcome where the difference was not felt, Norway's Brexit solution was one which managed to combine the desire for continuation with both actors.

It was admittedly unlikely that Norway or Iceland would have been able to mirror the EU's Brexit-agreement without meaningful participation from the latter. The level of coordination between Barnier's Task Force 50 and the BxTF needed to construct similar agreements on EU and EEA level regarding Brexit was substantial. This was indicated by the large amount of sensitive information which has been communicated to an actor outside of the negotiations, by the interviews¹⁷³ and statements made by Leikvoll.¹⁷⁴

The realisation that the EU's Task Force 50, through close coordination with the Norwegian BxTF, actively communicated significant information leads us to question why. The motivation for Norway to devote efforts to mirror the EU's agreement was apparent.

¹⁶⁸ Norwegian MFA, 2020c.

¹⁶⁹ Norwegian MFA, 2020b.

¹⁷⁰ Interview B.

¹⁷¹ Interview B.

¹⁷² Interview B.

¹⁷³ Interview A and B are both in agreement concerning the extensiveness of the coordination which took place between Task Force 50 and the BxTF.

¹⁷⁴ Leikvoll's statements are documented in Meeting Summary A, B and C.

Meeting Summary A attained following a freedom of information request to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Summary of meeting led by Farberg and Leikvoll February 2018 between BxTF members and leading representatives of the Norwegian private sector.

Meeting Summary C attained following a freedom of information request to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Summary of meeting led by Farberg and Leikvoll September 2018 between BxTF members and leading representatives of the Norwegian private sector.

The Norwegians were seeking to continue their previous level of cooperation with both the EU and Britain, their agreement helped furthering this ambition. It was less clear however, what the EU stood to gain by coordinating their efforts with Oslo.

The Norwegian perception of their own role offer one explanation. As previously discussed, they believed their similar starting point as that of the EU should correspondingly have resulted in a similar result. The logic was however primarily suited to explain British actions, as they were the ones entering agreements with the EU and Norway. Brussels was dealing with London; the similar starting point of another actor could not have had an impact on that action.

Another explanation may have been a European inclination to preserve harmony within the internal market. The refusal to allow Norway to be an official party in their negotiations with Britain was not synonymous with a European desire to exclude their EEA-partners totally. Norway's increased shift towards Europe, described in chapter two, might lend support to the logic that Brussels wanted to ensure harmony with Oslo. An increasingly stronger relationship between the two capitals would have made it easier for European leaders to extend solidarity to the length of their EEA-partner.

A third answer to the question why the EU would have devoted efforts and shared confidential information with Norway might be the Norwegian strategy. The Norwegians sought to launch their preferences into the Brexit negotiations through proxies, the deal signed by the EEA-members did indicate that they might have succeeded. The deal was after all ideal to match the Norwegian predetermined objectives. It is hard to imagine that an accomplishment which to such a high degree matched the predetermined objectives of the Norwegian government was achieved without efforts specifically targeting it. Vik Aspaker did shortly following the result of the referendum state her desire for Norway to be part of a European solution to Brexit, this was achieved.

To dispel any illusion that Oslo was handed an outcome and simply told what to do by Brussels, one need only consider the lengths Norway went to in order to be included. Demonstrating their remarkable level of effort and flexibility by passing un-precedented legislation permitting the easing of their upcoming transit-period with Britain.¹⁷⁵ Intended to enable the transfer of Norway's European legislation to Britain after Brexit had incurred, the law would ease transitions and erase any significant difference felt by Norwegian actors. Going as far as passing legislation intended for a theoretic outcome demonstrated the extents of Norwegian labour in their preparations. The law was passed in March 2019, it lay dormant for 11 months before the necessary progress had been made between the EU and Britain for it to enter into effect.

The effectiveness of the Norwegian role in a deal outcome was closely linked to the strategy of gaining access to an exclusive process by proxy. The Norwegian government believed their ambition to have been achieved in the deal outcome, regardless of their lack of access. Like in the no-deal outcome, the Norwegians did not manage to achieve a continued cooperation of services with Britain, they were however able to ensure a large degree of harmony between their solution and the EU's. In the deal outcome the achievement of predetermined objectives was greater in that it secured cooperation with the EU to a larger degree than in a no-deal outcome. Despite a high level of effectiveness

¹⁷⁵ *Lovdata*, 2019

achieved, the solution was yet again temporary. This will be assessed in the analysis of viability.

4.2.1. The Limits of Norwegian Effectiveness

Fisheries remained an anomaly among the policy fields which Norway sought to secure against disruptions caused by Brexit. Because of its irregular nature, the topic requires some exploration. The peculiarity of fisheries in an analysis of Norway's Brexit manoeuvres stemmed not from its unsettled nature at the threshold of Britain's transition period. Many other issues are at the time of writing¹⁷⁶ similarly categorized as unresolved, and thereby in need of revision by politicians and officials during the coming months. Fisheries, in somewhat contrast, stood out among the rest of Norway's prioritized policy fields because of the contextually atypical strategy chosen in securing it.

Throughout statements made by Norwegian government actors concerning their efforts to mirror the EU-Britain agreement, one key reservation was consistently included: That Norway will mirror the agreement, where EEA-relevant.¹⁷⁷ The distinction was important for several reasons, of which one mainly stood out. Fisheries as a field of policy was not included in the EEA-agreement, and therefore not valid for Norway's mirrored Brexit agreement. While still carrying importance for the Norwegians, fisheries was a field of policy where the need for European harmony was not present, regardless of Brexit outcome. Norway and the EU were to a larger degree two competing actors than they were a multilateral cooperation. Brexit changed this previous dynamic and resulted in that instead of Norway and the EU being the two actors negotiating over fisheries management zones in the North Sea, they were now three.¹⁷⁸

The inevitable development had not been lost on the Norwegians, who instead of pursuing negotiation remained firmly locked to one position – The EU and Britain must negotiate fisheries management zones from their own areas.¹⁷⁹ Meeting with Karmenu Vella, the European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, several times, Norway's Minister of Fisheries Harald T. Nesvik frequently and publicly denounced any willingness to participate in a renegotiation. Fearing such a process would see Norway be forced to yield part of its share of the North Sea.¹⁸⁰ Nesvik's hard stance was an interesting one because it seemingly conflicted with the Norwegian strategy for Brexit. The Norwegian minister of fisheries wished to protect the sector he was tasked with administering; this part of his actions was seemingly uncomplicated. How national preference could be combined with the BxTF simultaneous close coordination with the EU's Task Force 50 was a greater mystery.

From Nesvik's statements we may deduce that in a policy field not included in the EEA-agreement, the dynamic between the EU and Norway changed drastically. Nesvik's position was not only revealing of a different rhetoric than other ministers, but a whole other strategy. Nesvik did seemingly not attempt to be a part of any European solution like Vik Aspaker expressed a desire to be. He rather contrastingly denied any possibility or willingness of Norway being a part of a shared solution or negotiation. Nesvik's

¹⁷⁶ May 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Meeting Summary D.

¹⁷⁸ *E24*, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Nesvik, 2018.

¹⁸⁰ *E24*, 2019.

statements were revealing of a perception of the renegotiation of fisheries management zones as an internal matter between the EU, and Britain, one which Norway wanted no part of. His perception was throughout linked to a fear of losing part of Norway's share as a consequence of becoming a part of a European solution to Brexit.

Speaking to representatives of large Norwegian private actors Atle Leikvoll stated that should the EU's deal with Britain fall through, "it is every man for themselves".¹⁸¹ Regarding fisheries zone management this logic has seemingly extended itself, regardless of outcome. National preference was not merely sought in a no-deal outcome as a cautionary measure, but as the chief approach in a specific policy area. Left with this revelation we have established that the EEA-agreement was highly influential for the Norwegian logic used to manoeuvre Brexit.

It was however noticeable that since Britain's transition period with the EU and EEA began, the Norwegian rhetoric has gone through somewhat of a change. While Nesvik has since left his position for non-Brexit related matters, his successor has publicly admitted the need for the renegotiation of a new fisheries zone management agreement, one made between three parties.¹⁸² The change in rhetoric was an admittance of the possibility that Norway might be forced to abstain part of their share of the North Sea, in order to make space for Britain's new management zones which were independent of the EU's.

Throughout the Brexit negotiations there was little doubt that fisheries would not be included in a European solution for Norway.¹⁸³ Atle Leikvoll stated in February 2018 that fisheries separated itself from other sectors as there was a previously established structure in place, where Britain would come in as a new actor.¹⁸⁴ Despite the Norwegian reluctance to, in the words of Harald Nesvik - pay for Brexit in their fish, the original position has changed. While the thesis is not fortunate enough to have available a finished agreement regarding future cooperation regarding fisheries zone management in the North Sea, the changed Norwegian rhetoric must make do as evidence. This evidence could one day in the near future fall short should Norway manage to abstain from lessening their share of the North Sea. Until that day however, the change in rhetoric will suffice.

The change may have been caused by several factors, it might have been a consequence of a weak Norwegian bargaining position, it might however also be influenced by coordination spilling over between policy areas, regardless of EEA-relevance. Notwithstanding its causal factors it nevertheless indicated a failure or compromise as the Norwegian position had regressed. A comparison made between Norwegian success regarding fisheries and other policy areas which were included in the EEA agreement is a highly interesting one. It demonstrates the value of the EEA agreement as there existed a measurable difference in success concerning excluded and included policy fields. For the thesis's sub-question, the comparison demonstrated the importance of the EEA-agreement for Norway's role in the Brexit negotiations.

¹⁸¹ Translation made by author. Quote in original language goes as follows: ... dersom avtalen mellom EU og Storbritannia ikke går gjennom, er det alle mann for seg selv. Meeting Summary D.

¹⁸² E24, 2020.

¹⁸³ Meeting Summary A.

¹⁸⁴ Meeting Summary A.

5 Key Aspects of Norwegian Performance

5.1 Efficiency

Regardless of outcome, Norway's role in the Brexit negotiations was undeniably always going to be tied to the EEA-agreement. Influencing perception, logic, preference and achievements, the EEA-agreement functioned as a tool, a gateway, a hindrance and an enabler. The EEA-agreement played a role in nearly every singly aspect of Norway's Brexit manoeuvres. Where it did not, like in the domain of fisheries zone management, the roles of the actors changed, along with Norway's performance.

The level of effectiveness of Norway's role regarding policy areas included in the EEA-agreement was greater than the excluded fisheries. This would suggest that the efficiency of the Norwegian role was linked to the EEA-agreement. As the thesis' operationalisation of efficiency as an indicator for performance functions as a comparative tool, it is applicable to measure the difference between their two scenarios and their roles. Once the comparison is made it becomes clear that not only did the EEA-agreement carry an impact on the role of Norway, but also its efficiency. The abandonment of Nesvik's hard-stance approach indicated a low level of efficiency as it apparently failed to secure its policy area-specific predetermined objective.

In the areas included in the EEA-agreement however, where a different role was played by Norway, greater efficiency was achieved. The high degree of effectiveness regardless of Brexit outcome indicated that the efficiency of Norway's role was similarly elevated. Effectiveness is linked to efficiency in that a high degree of achievement of predetermined objectives indicate a successful role. A low degree of achievement of predetermined objectives may still hold a high level of efficiency as circumstances may have carried a negative impact. In the case of the Norwegian role however, there were few other roles which may have produced greater effectiveness, resulting in a high degree of efficiency.

The largest omittance to Norway's effectiveness was the continuation of freedom of services with Britain. As an agreement was not reached per British request, it is hard to imagine an outcome where the Norwegians were able to secure continuation in this area. It is additionally hard to envision any scenario where convincing Britain to change its preference did not include lengthening the distance between Oslo and Brussels. The continuance of Norway's cooperation with Britain had to be balanced next to the need to harmonize framework with the EU, any extension towards one end would thereby further the distance to the other. The balancing aspect of Norway's role increased its efficiency as it was central to the achievement of predetermined objectives.

Norway's efficiency would more than likely had been greater had it been able to participate as an independent actor in the negotiations. While Norway was still able to influence through proxy, mainly through Barnier's Task Force 50, this practise demanded a higher degree of reciprocity than otherwise. There can be no doubt that the Norwegian strategy to promote their preferences through allied actors who shared them was suited to Norway's experiences and competence. Per Solberg's comments regarding her government being forced to act as a lobby organisation in Brussels as a response to a lack of formal voting rights, the practise may hardly be deemed to surpass membership

in terms of influence. Norway's efficiency was thereby lessened by the lack of official participation in the negotiations, but strengthened by the Norwegian experience of influencing from the outside.

5.2 Relevance

Norway's EEA-membership has granted it important access to the internal market and EU-programmes, it nevertheless has left the country without voting rights in European matters.¹⁸⁵ In an interview with *Politico* discussing Norway's ability to influence EU decision making, Solberg herself described her country as being forced to act as a lobby organisation in Brussels.¹⁸⁶ There were identifiable traces of the same mindset being transferred to dealing with Brexit. The structure of the BxTF, closely corresponding to that of the Norwegian delegation to the EU, signified a clear dedication towards influencing Brexit in the same manner. So did the manner in which influence was sought, by promotion through a proxy with access, who held the same preferences.

In achieving their predetermined objectives regardless of outcome, Norway have been successful in imposing themselves upon the Brexit negotiations. Seemingly in spite of this fact, the Norwegian participation in the negotiations was denied, indicating that the EU did not perceive Norway as a relevant actor. The EEA-member was however considered relevant enough to later participate in a coordination which resulted in a mirrored agreement. There was a clear discrepancy between these two actions, given that one perceived Norway as a relevant actor while the other did not. This discrepancy may have been owed to the two actions demanding different levels of perceived relevance, meaning that Norway could have been relevant enough to deserve coordination but not participation. Another explanation is that the perception of Norwegian relevance increased over time.

Norway managed to gain acceptance for a role which was both relevant enough to deserve inclusion, while simultaneously also allowed to pursue national interest in the case of a no-deal outcome. The broad acceptance for Norway's multiple roles was nothing short of remarkable, extending itself to both Britain and the EU taking an active part in the Norwegian simultaneous preparations for both a deal and no-deal outcome. Adding to Norway's impressive feat was the fact that both Britain and the EU actively participated, even when it could potentially weaken their own ambitions.

Britain spent resources and competence on Norway's preparatory work when they had many partners to enter into trade agreements with, several of them larger actors than Norway. This signified that Britain perceived Norway to hold a high degree of relevance. The EU, through Task Force 50 accepted and actively worked to ensure the representation of Norwegian preferences during the negotiations. This signified that the EU perceived Norway as a highly relevant actor as they went to great length in order to include the EEA-member. The lengths both Britain and the EU went to for Norwegian gain supports the idea that there was an increase in the perception of Norwegian relevance among the other actors. It is unlikely that Britain and the EU would have participated in Norway's preparation where it was not beneficial for them and simultaneously deem the country not relevant enough to participate in the negotiations.

Norway's strategy was not aimed at becoming perceived as an increasingly relevant actor, suggesting other forces were at work. The international attention turned towards the EEA-agreement as a consequence of Brexit may be one explanation as to why Norway was perceived as an increasingly relevant actor. Evidence of the importance

¹⁸⁵ Norwegian MFA, 2018.

¹⁸⁶ *Politico*, 2016.

carried by such an increase of attention towards the EEA-agreement, appeared in September 2018. Following an escalation of tariffs on steel and aluminium entering the United States, the EU implemented protective trade barriers of their own.¹⁸⁷

Norway and Switzerland were both tightly connected to the EU, and both exported steel to the internal market. Norway, being affiliated through the EEA-agreement was spared the EU's trade barriers, Switzerland whose formal ties ran through an excess of 120 bilateral agreements, was not.¹⁸⁸ Regarding steel export and trade, there was little to separate the importance of Norway and Switzerland to the EU, yet only one was exempted. This would indicate that the EEA-agreement in September 2018 was significant in awarding a higher perception of Norway as a relevant actor in a European context.

On the other hand, the distinction between the two countries need not explicitly lie in their difference in European affiliation. As we know Norway was at the time working closely with EU officials to mirror their Brexit agreement, while Switzerland was conducting separate efforts with Britain, less dependent on the EU. Norway was additionally in the process of a strategical shift towards the EU, one which saw the Nordic nation frequently seek to strengthen their European cooperation. Both of these elements might have played a role in the distinction between Norway and Switzerland, resulting in a European desire to exempt their EEA-partners from steel barriers.

When examining Norwegian perception however, there was a clear belief that Norway's exception was explicitly linked to the increased attention directed towards the EEA-agreement. Speaking to representatives of Norway's private sector Jan Farberg, deputy leader of the BxTF, stated that Brexit had led to an increased appreciation of the special nature of the EEA-agreement.¹⁸⁹ The spotlight put on the EEA-agreement had according to him played a vital part in Norway being exempt from the EU's counter measures to the US imposed tariff on steel import.¹⁹⁰ Farberg even went on to state that an additional consequence was an added sense of priority received from Britain. In explaining how beneficial the notoriety of the EEA-agreement had proven, the official recited a British promise that the Norwegians were among their top five priorities for future trade agreements.¹⁹¹

The latter was admittedly grace received from Britain and not the EU, but the example adds to the same point. Norway's star, as a consequence of increased attention diverted to the EEA-agreement, had risen. The sentiment was supported by the Norwegian toll exemption and evidently felt by the Norwegians themselves, proven by statements made by Farberg as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Søreide.¹⁹² The Norwegian perception supported the notion that Norway was increasingly perceived by both Britain and the EU as relevant actor as a consequence of the attention brought to the EEA-agreement.

¹⁸⁷ Meeting Summary C.

¹⁸⁸ Meeting Summary C.

¹⁸⁹ Meeting Summary C.

¹⁹⁰ Meeting Summary C.

¹⁹¹ Meeting Summary C.

¹⁹² Eriksen Søreide, 2018a.

5.3 Viability

Viability may at first glance seem to have been the weakest indicator of the performance of the role of Norway during the Brexit negotiations. Given the temporary nature of Norway's agreements, they were always going to be short lived, regardless of the outcome of Brexit. Both the no-deal preparatory agreements and the mirrored deal agreement were meant to function as placeholders, serving their use by ensuring to lessen the immediate impact of Brexit.¹⁹³ To replace them with more permanent agreements during the transition year which would follow was always a part of the strategy.¹⁹⁴ The agreements were instead intended to soften the impact during the transition period and eventually bridge over into less temporary arrangements.

An interesting approach for further analysis at a later time would be to examine to what degree the temporary agreements struck for the transition period following Brexit survived into later framework. It is possible that Norway maintained their ambition and sought to extend the agreements struck with Britain for the transition period further into the future. Should they be successful in achieving this the viability for the role played during the Brexit negotiations would greatly rise. At the current state of affairs however it is unfortunately not possible to establish whether Norway's Brexit agreements will continue after the transition period.

An assessment of viability which is aimed at analysing how long the agreements have the potential to last may produce a different result. A hinderance of analysis due to the lack of necessary progress is however not sufficient reason to allow the analysis of such a highly theoretical outcome. As opposed to the analysis of Norway's no-deal preparations which were conducted from a belief that they might be needed, the temporary deals somehow extending themselves to permanence is more theoretical and therefore less beneficial. The viability of Norway's achievement of predetermined objectives remains low.

¹⁹³ Norwegian MFA, 2020c.

¹⁹⁴ Norwegian MFA, 2020c.

6 Conclusion

Despite some prospects of potential gain, chapter one found that the Norwegian government never viewed Brexit as an opportunity for enrichment, neither before nor after the referendum took place. For Norway, the value of having Britain inside the union was too great to entertain any possibility of an opportunistic approach. The like mindedness of Norway and Britain regarding EU matters was demonstrated in Cameron's agreement, carrying terms which would have ultimately benefited both countries.

The Norwegian government was additionally at the time led by a pro-EU party which was drawn towards the appeal of multilateral, European cooperation. This increasingly outspoken appreciation of Norway's European cooperation has in turn resulted in an added opposition towards Brexit. The Norwegian government, led by Solberg, feared the potential economic, symbolic and influence losses which may have been inflicted upon the EU as a consequence of Brexit.

Solberg's ruling conservative party was a member of the EPP despite the Norwegian lack of European membership. Following the attendance at an EPP party leaders summit a few days before Brexit, Solberg herself demonstrated an increasingly European orientation towards Brexit. The national perspective was however not put aside in favour of a European one, the two were rather seen as highly connected in a Brexit context. Should the EU suffer economically, the Norwegian government believed the impact would have transferred itself to them.

There were a few examples of Norwegian actors attempting to influence the referendum, chief among which we find Solberg's warnings of life outside the EU. Though sparse, these few traces of action were mainly focused towards advising against Brexit. There was little to separate Norway's position and actions towards the referendum from that of an EU member state. Norwegian concerns regarding Brexit were both expressed from a national and European perspective.

Siv Jensen's rushing of legislation before the referendum indicated a Norwegian intent to stand with the EU, regardless of the outcome of Britain's upcoming referendum. The incident again showcased the Norwegian perception that European and national concerns were closely linked. The wellbeing of the EU was in itself a national concern, there was, following this logic little sense in seeking to profit nationally, while Europe was impacted.

Once the referendum was conducted and Brexit became an inevitable fact the logic and perception stating Norway's role was extended. Attention was now gradually directed towards a national Norwegian impact induced from change in its cooperation with Britain. Norway was still closely connected to and impacted by the wellbeing of the EU, the distinction that Brexit was not directed towards them however, now grows in importance. The understanding of Norway's role as an irregular third party in the Brexit negotiations was now born.

Following the creation of an understanding of their own role, a Norwegian ambition for Brexit was formulated. To the largest degree possible, maintain cooperation at the contemporary level with both Britain and the EU. The ambition was closely connected to both the Norwegian perception of their own role, and their historic relationship to both actors.

Britain was Norway's most important single market for exports, the country's former security provider and an important strategical ally. Energy export across the North Sea was essential to the Norwegian economy, enjoying a level of trust higher than any other market. Despite the increasingly, politically uncelebrated nature of Norway's cooperation with Britain it remained of paramount importance, and downscaling as a consequence of Brexit was therefore not a desirable outcome.

The pro-EU ruling party's perception that national fortunes were interlocked with those of Europe naturally ruled out any inclination towards lessening their cooperation with the European Union. The firm belief in multilateral cooperation developed following the EU's handling of the Crimea, migration and financial crises saw Oslo growing ever closer to Brussels. Fears that Norway's cooperation with the EU might change form or nature following Brexit efforts directed at Britain also motivated the ambition to include both actors.

Following a European refusal to allow Norway to be part of trilateral Brexit negotiations between themselves and Britain it became clear that the perception of the irregular third party was not fully shared. Despite the early rebuke Norway sought to create solutions for both outcomes which would see their ambition achieved. An important part of Norway's ability to achieve this became the strategy to promote their preferences through proxy, a process which Norway had developed through its EEA-membership. Regardless of outcome it became clear for the Norwegian government that a re-establishment of their cooperation with Britain must be constructed at a bilateral level.

Drawing on the experience developed from being an EEA-country, Norway constructed a structure, competence and strategy devoted to achieving their ambition. Norway has since the creation of the EEA agreement in 1992 been heavily affected by EU legislation due to their participation in European cooperation. The Nordic nation had however also frequently lacked voting rights and representation in the EU system, as a consequence of the nature of their affiliation. Following 25 years as an EEA-member Norway has garnered much experience in how to influence EU matters.

Norway managed to achieve its predetermined objectives for Brexit regardless of outcome, while doing so using their strategy to secure necessary, reciprocal participation from the EU and Britain. While there were certainly benefits included for the other actors in choosing to aid Norway, the length to which they were willing to go extends any direct benefit gained. The ability to secure participation from Britain and the EU in its Brexit preparations where it did not benefit them and may even have worked counter to the two's own ambitions adds to Norway's performance.

Given Norway's inferior economic and strategic importance to the other actors, the achievement presented above appears as the irregular third-party punching above its weight. Adding to Norway's achievement of securing participation was gaining an acceptance for the EEA-member's right to pursue national interest and receive the benefits of European cooperation at the same time. It is this acceptance which allowed Norway to play a role which flexibly prepared for either outcome in correspondence with the nation's particular predetermined objectives. The flexibility arguably afforded Norway a greater possibility to escape Brexit-induced consequences than an EU member state.

The fact that no other country¹⁹⁵ was able to achieve the same flexibility and preparedness in a Brexit context speaks volumes about the Norwegian role.

Key to this achievement was obviously the EEA-agreement. While definitely more suited to Norway's needs, there are grounds to argue that its nature was more fitted to the Brexit context than full membership. EEA-membership did after all allow Norway the same conditions determined in the EU's agreement with Britain, while also permitting no-deal preparations. One could counter this statement by arguing that member states held more influence over the negotiations and Barnier's team. This argument is however rendered weakened following the realisation that Norway was allowed to communicate preferences to Barnier's team. There was admittedly no guarantee that Barnier respected said preferences, then again neither would there be in a scenario where Norway was a junior member state. We also know that not only were preferences communicated, but that the Norwegians perceived them as respected.

Effectiveness, efficiency and perceived relevance were all highly scoring indicators of the performance of the role of Norway. Although all three indicators admittedly held possibilities of scoring higher, they could have performed much worse. As the Brexit negotiations were not a static event but an evolutionary process it is complicated to determine the specific standing of the indicators. They like the role of Norway, evolved with the negotiations as they developed. In an analysis oriented towards the level of effectiveness produced at the end of the negotiations however, Norway's role held a high performance. Lessening performance was viability, however. An analysis which focuses on the ability of Norway to continue their effectiveness into the post-Brexit period might be able to conclude that Norway's role during the negotiations produced a higher viability. At the time of writing the agreements remain temporary.

Any conclusion regarding key aspects of Norway's achievement would be remiss not to include the strategy chosen. The choice to pursue close dialogue with relevant actors combined with the experience of attempting to influence EU matters seemingly bore fruit in the coordination between the BxTF and Task Force 50. The thesis finds that the success of Norway's strategy was also aided by an increase of attention brought to the EEA-agreement during Brexit. The increased attention has not functioned as a part of the strategy, but rather boosted and helped further Norwegian efforts. The effectiveness of the Norwegian achievement of their predetermined objectives was thereby aided unintentionally. While consequences may be felt across Europe for many years to come, Norway's role saw the country successfully manoeuvre the withdrawal negotiations and prepared them for the aftermath of Brexit.

¹⁹⁵ Except for Iceland to a certain degree.

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