

Contents

List of tables • 9

List of figures • 11

Preface • 13

THOMAS PERSSON & MATTI WIBERG

1. The Nordic Model of Parliamentary Government and its Challenges • 17

Introduction • 17

The Nordic parliamentary model • 20

The challenges • 24

Examining parliamentary government • 27

The plan of the book • 30

References • 36

BJØRN ERIK RASCH

2. Why Minority Governments? Executive-Legislative Relations in the Nordic Countries • 41

Introduction • 41

Parliamentarism and Proportional Representation • 42

Government types in Nordic countries • 44

Why minority governments in Scandinavia? • 47

Negative parliamentarism • 49

Strong parliaments • 51

Dominant and central parties • 55

Conclusions • 57

References • 58

FLEMMING JUUL CHRISTIANSEN & RASMUS BRUN PEDERSEN

3. “Europeanisation” and Coalition Patterns in a Minority Parliamentary System • 63
- Introduction* • 63
 - The Hypothesised Dynamics of the European Integration Process* • 64
 - Indicators, Data and Case selection* • 69
 - Empirical analysis* • 72
 - Conclusions* • 79
 - References* • 81

MAGNUS ISBERG

4. Is Sweden Going Majoritarian? • 85
- Introduction* • 85
 - The Purpose* • 87
 - Party System* • 88
 - Cabinets* • 92
 - Executive-Legislative Relations* • 97
 - Electoral System* • 100
 - Majoritarian Tendencies and Pre-electoral Coalitions (PEC)* • 101
 - Majoritarian Tendencies in Denmark and Norway* • 104
 - Conclusions* • 107
 - Postscript: The Swedish Election of 2010 and its Consequences* • 108
 - References* • 110

ASBJØRN SKJÆVELAND

5. The Effect of Parliamentarism on Party Unity • 113
- Introduction* • 113
 - The common understanding of the relationship between parliamentarism and party unity.* • 115
 - Criticism of the common view* • 118
 - Recent investigations* • 120
 - Party unity in the Nordic Countries* • 123
 - Conclusions* • 133
 - References* • 134

HANS HEGELAND

6. The European Union as Foreign Policy or Domestic Policy? EU Affairs in the Swedish Riksdag • 139
- Introduction* • 139
 - Two ideal types* • 141

Constitutional regulation • 142
Information • 143
Participation • 145
Influence • 146
Accountability • 149
Consensus • 150
Timing • 152
Comparison with other Nordic countries • 153
Conclusions • 154
References • 159

THOMAS LARUE

7. Post-Lisbon Subsidiarity Scrutiny and Nordic Parliamentary Government: Challenges and Opportunities of Europeanisation • 161
- Introduction* • 161
Nordic parliaments' scrutiny of EU affairs • 162
Subsidiarity • 164
Developments within EU legislative politics • 178
Conclusions • 181
References • 185
Appendix • 189

PEDER NIELSEN

8. Instruments of Parliamentary Control in Nordic Countries: Political, Legal and Economic Approaches • 191
- Introduction* • 191
What is parliamentary control? • 192
Control instruments in the Nordic countries • 197
Conclusions • 214
References • 218

GUY-ERIK ISAKSSON

9. Presidentialisation of Parliamentary Systems: Reality or Illusion? • 223
- Introduction* • 223
How to measure presidentialisation? • 225
Changes through the decades • 228
Conclusions • 238
References • 241
Appendix • 243

HANNA BÄCK, THOMAS PERSSON, KÅRE VERNBY & LINA WESTIN

10. Presidentialisation from a Historical Perspective: Ministerial Selection and Reshuffling in Swedish Cabinets • 245

Introduction • 245

The Presidentialisation of Politics • 246

Research Design and Data • 255

Presidentialisation Trends in Sweden • 260

Conclusions • 270

References • 273

HANS PETTER SAXI

11. Presidentialisation of the Sub-national Level in Norway? • 277

Introduction • 277

Research questions • 278

The sub-national political level in Norway • 279

From mayors into ministers • 280

Operationalising the presidentialisation hypothesis • 282

The executive face • 284

The party face • 289

The electoral face • 292

Conclusions • 296

References • 298

TAPIO RAUNIO

12. Semi-presidentialism and the Dual Executive in EU Affairs: What Can We Learn from the Finnish Experience? • 301

Introduction • 301

Semi-presidentialism in the EU Context • 303

Case Study of Finland • 311

Conclusions • 319

References • 322

Notes on contributors • 327

Preface

Despite their long tradition of stable parliamentary democracy, the Nordic countries have not gone unaffected by the profound changes taking place in Europe. Nordic countries have had to adapt to the ongoing European integration process, regardless of whether they are members of the European Union (EU) – as in the case of Denmark, Finland, or Sweden – or are still outside the bloc, as in the case of Iceland and Norway.

The creation of a single market and the opening of borders in Europe have not only brought about economic integration, but have also given rise to an increasingly powerful supranational political system. Legislative powers in most policy areas have been entirely or partially transferred from national legislatures to EU-level legislative institutions, such as the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. It thus follows from the Union's construction that national parliaments are tending to lose power in two directions: On the one hand to EU-level organs; on the other to their own country's executive branch (which represents the country in EU-level negotiations). In addition, the chief executives of parliamentary states attending meetings of the influential European Council are becoming increasingly powerful and "presidential". Hence, the effects of European integration on national political systems seem to be profound, and not only restricted to countries within the bloc.

At least, this is what the literature tells us. Notwithstanding this, however, there are major gaps in knowledge about how executive-legislative relations in the Nordic countries have been affected

by the integration process. This book attempts to fill these gaps. Towards this end, the book provides eleven empirical chapters that have been commissioned for this particular purpose. It draws on research and years of experience that each author has studying parliamentary systems of government. It is important to stress, however, that the chapters in this volume are not the result of a joint research project. As the editors of this volume, we would therefore like to thank the authors for their willingness to contribute, and for the time and effort that they have put into this particular project. Without their efforts and enthusiasm, this book would not have been written.

The initial impetus for writing this book came from a workshop on “Parliaments and Governments” at the xv triennial congress of the *Nordic Political Science Association* (NOPSA), held in Tromsø, 6–9 August, 2008. The workshop – chaired by Matti Wiberg and Bjørn Erik Rasch – gathered scholars from the Nordic countries with a common interest in this field. Those attending the workshop identified a need for a comprehensive study of Nordic parliamentary government. Participants concluded that while the challenges to the Nordic parliamentary model are well known, the consequences are not.

As a result we applied for and were granted funding from *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond* in Sweden, which allowed us to organise two workshops in Stockholm on this particular topic. The first workshop was held on 5–6 November 2009, in the Swedish Riksdag, and brought together leading researchers on Nordic parliamentary government. Unfortunately, however, none of our Icelandic colleagues made it to Stockholm, which we regret. The second workshop – which focused on the completion of manuscripts – took place in the same inspiring location on 22–23 April, 2010. We are therefore most grateful for the generous support we received from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. Additionally, *Letterstedska föreningen* provided generous support for putting this volume together in its final stages. In the course of working on the book, Thomas Persson also benefited greatly (together with Hanna Bäck) from a project generously funded by *The Swedish Research Council*, “The Presidentialisation of Parliamentary Democracy”. Without this supporting help from several sources, this book would not have come about.

We wish to express our gratitude to the many colleagues and friends that helped us prepare this volume. We particularly wish to thank Torbjörn Bergman, Ulf Christoffersson, Ingvar Mattsson, Björn von Sydow, and Lina Törner, who helped organise the workshops. Sverker Gustavsson, Christer Karlsson, Karl-Oskar Lindgren, Moa Mårtensson, Helena Wockelberg, (along with other participants in the European Studies seminar at the Department of Government, Uppsala University), also provided valuable input during the later stages of the project. We also want to express our satisfaction at being part of the Nordic Political Science Association, a source of inspiration for cooperative projects of this kind. Our gratitude also goes to the Swedish Riksdag for making their facilities available to us for our workshops.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the supportive publisher Torbjörn Santérus and his colleague Esbjörn Kleist at Santérus Academic Press, and to Judith Mayers, who helped putting the manuscript together.

Uppsala and Turku/Åbo, 20 May 2011

Thomas Persson and Matti Wiberg

1. The Nordic Model of Parliamentary Government and its Challenges

THOMAS PERSSON & MATTI WIBERG

Introduction

The Nordic countries comprise one of the most stable regions in the world of parliamentary democracy. All states in this region adopted parliamentary systems of government and were democratised in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (von Beyme 2000). Each country however, has developed distinctive parliamentary models. Denmark, Norway and Sweden – all parliamentary monarchies – have relied extensively on minority governments, while Finland and Iceland – semi-presidential systems – have relied more on majority coalition cabinets (Rasch 2004).

Notwithstanding these differences, the Nordic countries are generally characterised as “consensual democracies” in which governments are obliged to engage in dialogue with parties in the opposition (Elder, Thomas & Arter 1982; Sannerstedt 1996, 54). A distinctive model of political decision making has evolved with a particular emphasis on “compromise and pragmatic solutions” (Petersson 1994, 33; Arter 2004). The countries of this region have even acquired a reputation as “the home of consensus politics and the Mecca of consensual behaviour” (Arter 2006, 258). This characterisation was perhaps most fully developed by Arndt Lijphart in his seminal work on *Patterns of Democracy*, where he recognises the Nordic countries as consensus model democracies, in sharp contrast with the Westminster style model of majoritarian democracy (Lijphart 1999, 250).

For reasons we shall return to in the next section, we believe that Lijphart's dichotomy is too stark, and that Nordic countries should rather be seen as a mixture of the consensus and majoritarian model. Or put differently, the Nordic countries represent a blend of broad power-sharing between government and opposition, and of concentrating power in the hands of the majority.

Yet, this particular mixture of parliamentary government may now be in decline. In recent years, many scholars have argued that executive-legislative relations in parliamentary systems are undergoing profound changes in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. According to these scholars, more powers are being transferred to political executives at the expense of parliaments, while powers inside government cabinets are increasingly concentrated in the hands of prime ministers (cf. Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2008; Raunio 2009). Two important areas of research point to these developments.

First, researchers studying Europeanisation – that is, the effects of European integration on national political systems – claim that one important consequence of the integration process is that national parliaments tend to lose influence, and the executive to gain it in an emerging multi-level system of governance (Maurer & Wessels 2001). National parliaments have lost out due to the transfer of legislative powers to the EU-level, while at the same time the balance of power at the domestic level has tilted decisively away from parliaments in favour of the executive branch. This has led to a major shift in executive-legislative relations (Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2008, 6). This trend is often denoted as “de-parliamentarisation”, referring to the erosion of parliamentary control over the executive branch of government.

Second, scholars studying political parties have also detected a trend towards “presidentialisation”, where power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of prime ministers whose autonomy vis-à-vis parliamentary party groups and cabinet ministers is greater than ever (Poguntke & Webb 2005). The concept of “presidentialisation” thus entails a strengthened role and status for the prime minister in relation to other political players (a pattern particularly notable in European parliamentary democracies). However, increased chief executive power has not been accompanied by formal changes in the constitutional structures of the countries where executive empowerment has taken place.

Hence, while they depart from different starting points, scholars in both areas of research draw similar conclusions regarding assumed trends towards a strengthened executive branch of government. This volume seeks to address these challenges to the Nordic parliamentary systems. Due to the alleged strong reliance on power-sharing in these countries between the executive (i.e. parties in government) and the legislature (i.e. parties in opposition) on the one hand, and between the PM and his/her cabinet ministers on the other, we believe that the Nordic countries may be particularly resistant to such trends. It seems to be contrary to the foundations of the parliamentary systems in the Nordic countries to put more power in the hands of executives and prime ministers and thereby diminish the role played by consensus decision-making and collegiality (for a similar argument, see Bergman & Strøm 2004, 91).

This book aims, therefore, to provide an empirically well-grounded response to the vital question of whether recent developments endanger parliamentary government in the Nordic countries. To what extent has there been a general strengthening of the executive branch of government in one of the most stable regions of parliamentary democracy in the world? Is this region of consensus-oriented parliamentary government being affected by recent trends of changing executive-legislative relations, and of changing intra-executive relations? In what direction is Nordic parliamentarism heading? These are some of the questions that we hope to answer.

We firmly believe these trends – whatever their full extent – need closer investigation.¹ Research supporting the alleged trends towards executive empowerment has relied on analyses of constitutional rules and on the political and institutional dynamics of the EU policy process (Raunio 2009, 327). We suggest instead that formal and institutional analyses be supplemented with studies of the working practices of parliamentary government. This volume will therefore provide case studies that are based on the examination of changes in rules and practices.

1 For notable exceptions, see Raunio & Wiberg 2000 a, b, c; Raunio & Wiberg 2001, 2003, 2008 a, b, 2010; Ahonen, Wiberg & Raunio 2004; Ahonen & Wiberg 2005; Wiberg 2010 a, b; Bergman & Damgaard 2000; Aylott 2005; Damgaard & Jensen 2005; Bäck *et al.* 2009; Sundström 2009; Johansson & Tallberg 2010; Hermansson & Persson 2010; Bergman & Strøm 2011.

Furthermore, and contrary to much work in this field, we do not primarily provide chapters on individual countries. Our approach is instead to focus on certain aspects or features of the claimed trends and draw on empirical experiences from several Nordic countries. Our primary focus will be on developments during the last couple of decades, as it is during this period that the alleged trends are said to appear in this region and elsewhere. In some chapters we cover a longer time period in order to provide a historical dimension to the subject in question.

Before continuing, however, we would like to stress that this is not a book primarily about parliamentary *democracy* but about parliamentary *government*. That is, we will not examine the link between the electorate and their representatives in parliament. Our focus is instead on the parliamentary-executive linkage (the way these trends affect the relation between parliaments and governments), and on the intra-executive dimension (the relation between the PM and his/her cabinet ministers).

Taken together, then, the chapters of this book will provide a broad picture of how the Nordic parliamentary model copes with the challenges of Europeanisation and presidentialisation. The remaining parts of this chapter will be devoted to outlining how this matter should be examined more thoroughly. In order to do this, we will first discuss the main features of Nordic parliamentarism, and then consider the challenges parliamentary systems are currently facing. After this, we will present how we examine the extent to which the Nordic countries are affected by this alleged development. In the final section of the chapter we will provide an outline of the rest of the book, including a short summary of each chapter.

The Nordic parliamentary model

As indicated above, we believe there is reason to question Lijphart's distinction between only two models of democracy: majoritarian and consensual.² If we look more closely at Lijphart's analysis

2 Why, for instance, should majoritarianism (i.e. majority governments) necessarily be combined with parliamentarism, which Lijphart claims? Remember,

it is evident that the five Nordic countries are not only on the consensus side in his majoritarian-consensual dichotomy, but also on the unitary side in his federal-unitary dichotomy. In our view, therefore, it is more accurate to maintain his two-dimensional map – with its four possible outcomes – to characterise different types of democracies.

One analyst for instance, concludes that all the Nordic states are majoritarian democracies, with varying amounts of consensual legislative behaviour (Arter 2006). Similarly, Leif Lewin has argued that Sweden is somewhere between the two models, though he notes that “there is no doubt about the fact that of the two models Sweden is closer to consensus democracy” (Lewin 1998, 204). Olof Ruin has described Sweden’s post-war parliamentary model as one combining “a system of permanent all-party government in a multiparty structure” with “a system of majority rule in a permanent two-party structure” (Ruin 1969, 72), whereas Hilmar Rommetvedt describes Norway’s post-war development as a move from “consensual majority parliamentarism to dissensual minority parliamentarism” (Rommetvedt 2003, Ch. 2).

It is important therefore to acknowledge that countries within the Nordic region can have majoritarian/consensus-oriented parliamentary models of varying degrees. Notwithstanding this, however, all Nordic parliaments are usually seen as prime examples of negotiation and compromise between government and the opposition.³

Similarly the countries may also have unitary/federal-oriented parliamentary models of varying degrees. By that we mean the degree to which separation-of-powers features exist. Such features

once again, that Denmark, Norway and Sweden provide good examples of parliamentary systems that have relied extensively on minority governments? The combination of proportional representation and parliamentarism is in fact the dominant pattern in Western Europe. And similarly, why should proportionalism necessarily go together with separation-of-powers systems? This turns, for instance, the US combination of majoritarianism and a presidential separation-of-powers system into an anomaly (Hermansson 2004; Hermansson & Persson 2010, 16f.).

- 3 For a more thorough discussion on parliamentary government in the Nordic countries, see e.g. Döring 1995; von Sydow 1997; Wiberg 1997; Bergman & Damgaard 2000; Esaiasson & Heidar 2000; Rommetvedt 2003; Rasch 2004; Hermansson & Persson 2010.

governments has, accordingly, promoted broad cooperation among parties and made the parliamentary opposition influential (Juul Christansen & Damgaard 2008).

For the sake of simplicity, however, we show the Nordic parliamentary model (with the above mentioned variation in mind) in the upper left corner in Figure 1.1 (based on Lijphart's two-dimensional conceptual map); that is, countries within this model have primarily features of consensus democracy and unitary government (i.e. the central government holds most of the political power). The challenges this model is now facing (discussed in greater depth in the next section) may, in fact, bring the Nordic model closer to three different models.

The first possible scenario would be a strengthening of the executive branch of government and more *de facto* separation-of-powers. This would imply a closer resemblance to presidential systems of government, such as for instance the US system. A group of researchers argue in a recent book that there has been a "Madisonian turn" in the Nordic states (Bergman & Strøm 2011). Changes of this kind are, for instance, evident in vertical power relations with the European Union.

In the second scenario the Nordic countries head toward a Westminster model of majoritarian democracy, such as the UK system of government. Such a development would imply less consensual decision-making and more majoritarian elements in the political system, with most of the power remaining in the hands of the government.

In the third and final scenario the consensus elements are further strengthened, which in practice means greater power-sharing between government and opposition, and perhaps more frequent coalition governments. While the majoritarian model encourages opposition, the consensus model leads to the absence of an opposition. The most extreme real life example of this model is Switzerland.

To exaggerate somewhat, then, it seems that the choice for the Nordic parliamentary systems is to become more like the US, more like the UK, or more like Switzerland. This volume, therefore, acknowledges that Nordic parliamentary *real-types* may move in either direction on Lijphart's two-dimensional map, depending on which traits are strengthened or weakened.

	<i>Consensual</i>	<i>Majoritarian</i>
<i>Unitary</i>	Nordic model (The Nordic countries)	Westminster model (The United Kingdom)
<i>Federal</i>	Consensual model (Switzerland)	Presidential model (The United States)

Figure 1.1 Four models of democracy

Before discussing how to investigate these possible scenarios, we should say more about the challenges faced by the Nordic model.

The challenges

As stated above, two lines of research claim that parliamentary democracy in Europe is experiencing far-reaching changes in executive-legislative relations (cf. Bäck *et al.* 2009, 228; Johansson & Tallberg 2010). In the following section, we will examine these claims more closely and also hypothesise about the possible consequences of these changes for Nordic parliamentary systems.

The claim that European integration is a main driving factor behind the strengthening of executives is well established (for an overview, see Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2008). We will here concentrate our efforts only on the claim that reported changes of executive-legislative relations in response to EU integration has resulted in a weakening of parliamentary democracy within the member states (Maurer & Wessels 2001; Raunio 2009). This claim is based on the insight that national executives represent the most powerful member state institutions in European affairs and play a key role as promoters of EU integration, and as policy brokers at the supranational level (Hoffmann 1982; Milward 1992).

The simple logic behind this reasoning is that policy-making powers previously held by national legislatures have been transferred upwards to the supranational level. This strengthens the executive branch and increases its autonomy from domestic political and societal pressure; it is namely the executive branch that negotiates and bargains in the Council of Ministers and the European Council. In addition, lack of transparency at the EU level makes it difficult to oversee executive action, which in turn creates even greater asymmetries in executive-legislative relations.

As a result, the executive is less and less constrained by legislatures, interest groups and other domestic actors (Moravcsik 1998; Anderson 2002; Johansson & Tallberg 2010).

While claims of growing “deparliamentarisation” have been corroborated in many studies over the years, more recent Europeanisation research “has forced us to reconsider these strong claims about de-parliamentarisation” (Raunio 2009, 327). As noted by Raunio (2009, 327), “parliaments have fought back and have in many ways become better at controlling governments – they have reformed their rules of procedure and committee systems to facilitate oversight of the government, with MPs also making more active use of various control mechanisms.” (See also Damgaard & Jensen 2005). Hence, national parliaments are no longer considered as only “losers” or “victims” of integration, but are now seen to have in many ways enhanced their position within the multi-level system of European governance. Scholars even speak of “re-parliamentarisation” (Goetz & Meyer-Sahling, 2008, 6).

Students of political parties, however, maintain that the role played by chief executives in contemporary parliamentary systems is growing. This trend is commonly referred to as “presidentialisation”. While the term “presidentialisation” has considerable appeal among academics and the public, there is a general vagueness and lack of agreement as to what the term actually means (Helms 2005). In a widely cited study, the phenomenon is defined by Poguntke & Webb (2005, 5) as “the development of increasing leadership power resources and autonomy within the party and the political executive respectively, and increasingly leadership-centered electoral processes”. Thus, the increase of resources and powers at the disposal of the chief executive is believed to indicate a trend towards “presidentialised” executive politics. Clearly, however, this term – presidentialisation – should not be taken literally, but understood metaphorically.

The strengthening of chief executives, and increasing dominance of “presidential” individual leaders can be explained, according to Poguntke & Webb (2005), by the internationalisation of politics – of which European integration is deemed the most significant example. Furthermore, macro-societal factors such as the erosion of cleavage politics, the changing structure of mass communications, and the growth of the state, are all contributing factors to this

trend. While the presidentialisation concept thus combines several empirical trends into a coherent theoretical understanding of current power shifts within parliamentary democracies, we believe, however, that the thesis suffers from a number of conceptual and empirical deficiencies.

First, the thesis suffers from the problem of suggesting far-reaching changes to a system whose definition is subject to considerable debate (see, e.g., Verney 1992/1959; Sartori 1997/1994). There is no scholarly agreement about what defines parliamentary systems, and hence it is difficult to determine what presidentialisation means for these systems. Furthermore, the term “presidentialisation” is mainly used as a metaphor. It essentially means that parliamentary systems become more “like” presidential regimes. We will return to the question of definition and measurement in the next section.

Second, the *presidentialisation* thesis presupposes that prime ministers become more powerful and acquire “presidential” powers. In fact, however, prime ministers in many parliamentary systems are already more powerful than their presidential counterparts (Heffernan 2005). Therefore, the suggestion that presidentialisation makes parliamentary and presidential systems more similar, has to be taken with caution.

Finally, it is still more a possibility than a well-documented fact that presidentialisation occurs in parliamentary states. While the public debate and most research have focused mainly on the electoral dimension (Mughan 2000), it is not clear whether or how these changes in electoral processes actually translate into increased PM power vis-à-vis parliamentary groups and other cabinet ministers. Hence we are inclined to agree with Karvonen that “the general ‘gut impression’ of expert authors seem to be more in favour of the presidentialisation thesis than is warranted from the actual evidence presented in the various country studies” (Karvonen 2010, 20).

In sum, many scholars claim that contemporary parliamentary systems are moving toward the presidential model. However, the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of these claims are vague or weak, and the empirical evidence in support of these claims is both scarce and ambiguous. Nevertheless, we still believe these claims are too important to ignore, and that the Nordic parliamentary systems are a good testing ground for assessing their validity.

ment is responsible to the people; c) governments in parliamentary systems are a collective, whereas executives in presidential systems are individual. Apart from this third point, the definition is similar to Sartori's (Verney 1992/1959).⁴

Similarly, Lijphart (1999, 117–8) suggests that a parliamentary system contains the following components: a) The government must be responsible to parliament (it is dependent on the parliament's confidence and can be removed from office through a vote of no confidence); b) the head of government (normally the PM) is selected by parliament; and c) parliamentary cabinets are collective or collegial. An obvious advantage with such a definition is that it permits a variation in power relations between executives and legislatures, as well as power relations within the executive, regardless of regime type.

As we have already made explicit, however, this book is not about classifying regimes. Rather, we have set out to ask whether the Nordic parliamentary systems are approaching the parliamentary ideal-type (Westminster model), or moving toward a presidential or consociational ideal-type. To this end, we believe that our attention should be directed primarily to the first and third dimensions of Verney's and Lijphart's definitions. An examination of the second dimension – that prime ministers tend to be increasingly in direct touch with voters and to by-pass political parties – would require a totally different research design. Such tendencies would certainly dilute the power of the parliament, but they would also violate the ideal of presidential democracy, which requires that both the president and the parliament have independent electoral mandates.

We will therefore only examine the extent to which the Nordic parliamentary systems are changing in two important areas. We will first consider executive-legislative relations with regard to the degree of executive domination over legislatures. Parliamentary systems requires a set of devices available to the parliament for controlling the PM and his or her cabinet ministers. *In our view, it is appropriate to speak of presidentialisation whenever the parliament's ability to control the government is diminished.*

4 Besides these criteria Verney also recognises some additional ones that define parliamentary government systems, e.g. that the head of government appoints the ministry, that the ministers are usually members of parliament, and that the parliament is the focus of power in the political system.

We will then look at intra-executive relations – between the PM and individual ministers – with respect to the degree of collegiality within the cabinet. Parliamentary cabinets are more collegial and less hierarchical than their presidential counterparts. *In our view, it is therefore appropriate to speak of presidentialisation whenever the prime minister gains more influence at the expense of the cabinet as a whole.*

One can therefore conclude that the more the government disconnects from parliament, and collegiality inside the executive diminishes, the more a system approaches a presidential system without necessarily acquiring its constitutional character. Hence, the ideal-type of parliamentary government requires that neither PM dominance over the cabinet, nor executive dominance over the legislature be a defining feature of a parliamentary system.

Beyond the existing relations between the executive and parliament, or between the PM and his or her ministers, the functioning of a parliamentary system is also dependent on the relationship between parliamentary party groups, on the one hand, and individual MPs in parliament, on the other. However, we will only be able to examine this relationship to a limited extent (see in particular Chapter 5).

This analytical understanding of relations between parliaments and executives, and between PMs and cabinet ministers, resembles a Principal-Agent understanding of parliamentary government (Strøm, Müller & Bergman 2003). According to the P-A approach, parliamentary government can be understood as a system whereby the electorate delegates authority to the parliament, which in turn delegates authority to the government. At this final stage, the PM then delegates authority to the appropriate ministers.

In the following chapters we will test the general hypothesis of a weakened parliamentary government, but will of course not be able to reach a definite conclusion. However, as the Nordic region is considered a stronghold of parliamentary government, and thus may be expected to persevere in its efforts to meet the challenges confronting it, we will at least be able to draw some conclusions with general validity. If we find evidence in favour of the thesis in the Nordic region – with its collegiality and its power sharing between executives and parliaments – then the thesis probably holds good in other parliamentary systems as well.

In our assessment we will study the empirical processes of forming cabinets and coalitions, in general, and of forming parliamentary coalitions in the EU, specifically. Additionally, we will examine the impact of European affairs on parliamentary-executive relations, and the ways parliaments may (still) manage to control the executive branch at the national and EU level. We will also assess how party unity is affected by different regime types.

Our inquiry will be based on a mix of comparative and individual country studies, and covers both the national and regional/local government levels. We do not attempt, however, to examine all these aspects for all countries at all levels. Our study is not meant to be exhaustive; much of this work remains to be done.

The plan of the book

After this introductory first chapter in which we describe contemporary challenges to Nordic parliamentary government, there follows a number of chapters that assess the validity of the claims of executive empowerment.

In Chapter 2, Bjørn Erik Rasch discusses executive-legislative relations in the Nordic region, and sheds light on the distinctly Scandinavian form of minority governance. Rasch explains why minority governments occur so frequently in some Nordic countries while broad majority coalitions are more common in others. He concludes that minority governments are more likely in systems with one relatively large party. Such a pattern has been visible in Scandinavian countries for decades, even if it is currently eroding. Additionally, Scandinavian countries have strong parliaments, which mean that opposition parties can gain influence, which makes minority governments more likely. Strong parliaments, however, are also characteristic for those countries in the region with a tradition of majority coalitions.

In Chapter 3, Flemming Juul Christiansen and Rasmus Brun Pedersen investigate how Europeanisation affects coalition governments in minority parliamentary systems. The authors argue that Europeanisation increases executive authority vis-à-vis parliament, at the same time that it increases the executive's need for stable and long lasting coalitions in EU-affairs. According to the two authors,

this may lead to variations in coalition patterns, whether the legislation in question is related to the EU or not. In accordance with the hypothesis, the authors find that coalitions involving implementation of EU legislation are both broader and more enduring than coalitions in domestic policy.

In Chapter 4 Magnus Isberg asks whether Sweden is going majoritarian. Isberg considers two different models of democracy – Westminster (or majoritarian) and consensual – and assesses whether the development of parliamentary government in Sweden is moving toward majoritarianism. Isberg shows that there has been a trend among political parties in Sweden towards forming pre-electoral coalitions in order to secure a majority in parliament. He concludes that the majoritarian tendencies can partly be explained by two important structural changes in the Scandinavian political systems – the diminishing role of the parliament, and the decreasing policy differences between parties. The author discusses how these findings relate to parliamentary reform and Europeanisation of national politics, and compares developments in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway.

In Chapter 5, Asbjørn Skjæveland investigates the effect of parliamentarism and presidentialism on party unity in parliament voting. It is commonly assumed that party unity is higher in parliamentary than in presidential systems. Although this assumption has been challenged as of late, recent empirical investigations support the assumption with modifications. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the mechanism creating the differential effect may be the strength or weakness of presidents rather than the presence or absence of parliamentarism. Contrary to this suggestion, however, Skjæveland notes that Finnish party unity did not increase with the new constitution in 2000 which substantially weakened the president. An analysis of Danish party unity also shows consistently strong voting unity, which further supports the view that parliamentary systems exhibit high degrees of party unity.

In Chapter 6, Hans Hegeland focuses on the handling of EU affairs in the Swedish parliament. Hegeland considers whether the parliamentary model for domestic policy or the parliamentary model for foreign policy is the most relevant when describing the role of the Riksdag in EU matters. Hegeland concludes that the Riksdag plays a weaker role in EU-related issues than

in domestic questions, but that its role in EU matters is greater than in traditional foreign policy matters. Over time, there has been a tendency to handle EU affairs more like domestic policy; however, EU affairs are still handled in a separate way. The conclusion is that Europeanisation will persist but its forms may change over time.

In Chapter 7, Thomas Larue writes about subsidiarity control and parliamentarism. Larue discusses the expected consequences of the newly introduced subsidiarity oversight (following the Lisbon Treaty) in the Nordic member states. He also discusses the effects of developments within EU legislative politics on national parliaments and their changing roles. By comparing the way subsidiarity oversight operates in three Nordic countries – with a special focus on Sweden – Larue concludes that there are notable differences between countries. In general, however, Nordic parliaments are well-equipped to handle pressure from Europeanisation, as they have strong EU oversight systems to begin with. Ultimately, then, subsidiarity oversight puts a new tool at the parliaments' disposal, although the impact of this tool is still unknown.

In Chapter 8, Peder Nielsen discusses different ways for parliaments to compensate for their alleged decline in influence, such as by putting a greater emphasis on oversight and control. Nielsen identifies and classifies different instruments of parliamentary control – political, legal and economic – in four Nordic countries. He concludes that there are many similarities between the Nordic countries, although there are also important differences in how parliamentary control is organised. Sweden stands out from the other countries with a great number of interpellations, whereas submitting a no-confidence motion seems to be a less dramatic act in Finland and to some extent Norway. These differences may potentially affect the parliament's ability to control governments, although more research needs to be done on this topic.

In Chapter 9, Guy-Erik Isaksson examines whether the presidentialisation of parliamentary systems is a reality or an illusion. He compares cabinet stability and relative size of prime minister's party in Nordic and other western European countries. Rather little evidence of presidentialisation is found in the empirical analyses, although there are essential variations in the trends exhibited by the different indicators. Isaksson argues, however, that the

coordinated at the EU level, and foreign and EU policies are becoming difficult to separate from one another.

To anticipate the main findings of the chapters in this volume, we find that parliamentary government in the Nordic countries appears to be undergoing significant changes. Three main results support this conclusion.

First, the traditional system of minority governments in the Scandinavian countries (i.e. Denmark, Norway and Sweden) is less evident now than in the past. In other words, our country studies indicate clear majoritarian tendencies. This development implies that decisive negotiations and political settlements increasingly take place within government rather than in parliamentary committees—thereby reducing opposition influence in the decision making process. It thus becomes increasingly important for political parties to be part of the government in order to gain influence, at the same time that parliament's role as an important political arena is at risk of being weakened. It may be premature, however, to draw such a far-reaching conclusion, as countries already characterised by broad majority governments (for instance Finland) may still be regarded as having strong parliaments. More research in this area is needed.

One should note, however, that this development does not necessarily mean that Nordic parliamentary governments are becoming more “presidential”. The majoritarian features that Nordic governments increasingly display are as characteristic of the Westminster model as they are of the presidential model.

Second, coalition patterns appear to vary depending on whether policy issues are EU-related or domestic. Coalitions for negotiate and implementing EU legislation are both broader and longer lasting than coalitions in domestic policy. This suggests that on EU-related issues, consensual decision-making across bloc boundaries is the standard decision-making model, and that governments seek broad and lasting settlements on EU policy. This model, however, prevents the opposition from criticising the government's EU policy, which is actually the quintessence of Lijphart's consociational model.

Once again it must be stressed that this tendency does not automatically imply a move towards presidentialism; rather, it may indicate that the Nordic countries are approaching a consociational model, at least in this regard.

It should also be emphasised, however, that parliaments have sought – and in part found – new ways to control governments, particularly with regard to EU affairs. Nordic parliaments have government oversight mechanisms, including powerful EU-affairs committees; and the Lisbon Treaty introduced new mechanisms of subsidiarity oversight for reviewing EU legislative proposals. These mechanisms provide parliaments an “emergency brake” against excessive appropriation of power by the executive. Again further research in this area is required.

Third, we find little evidence of presidentialisation in our comparative study. Neither at national level, nor at regional/local levels do we find compelling evidence of significantly stronger chief executives. This does not mean that such tendencies are absent, but rather that they are inconsistent. Above all it appears that a stronger chief executive is due more to special – and in many cases individual – circumstances than to structural changes. We therefore find it hard to conclude that the Nordic countries are approaching the presidential model.

To summarise then, it appears that the Nordic parliamentary systems are now at an important crossroads. The evidence presented in this volume is too ambiguous to draw any definitive conclusions; it yields, rather, a mixed picture of developments. It is clear that much more research in the field is needed. More systematic comparisons between the Nordic states, as well as between countries in this region and other parliamentary countries, would be particularly useful.

Although long-term developments in the Nordic region are characterised mainly by democratisation and stronger parliamentary government, we now see signs that this trend may be ending. If so, we face significant challenges, not only as social scientists but also as citizens of this region.