

## FACT SHEET

### Political system of Norway

#### 1. Overview

1.1 Norway is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democratic system of governance. The king is the head of state, while the Prime Minister is the head of government. According to the *Constitution*, the government structure consists of three branches, which are: (a) the Executive Branch, (b) the Legislative Branch (known as Stortinget which is a unicameral legislature established by the *Constitution*), and (c) the Judicial Branch. This fact sheet provides an overview of the three branches in Norway.

#### 2. The monarchy

2.1 In Norway, the king has a tangible influence as the symbol of national unity. The current monarch is King Harald V who was crowned on 17 January 1991. In practice, the king performs largely ceremonial functions and is empowered to:

- (a) appoint the Ministers of the Council of State (the Cabinet);
- (b) preside over the Council of State;
- (c) sign acts into law and those acts shall be countersigned by the Prime Minister;
- (d) host official visits by foreign heads of state and pay state visits abroad; and
- (e) serve as the Commander-in-Chief.

### **3. Executive Branch**

3.1 Although the *Constitution* grants the important executive powers to the monarch, these are almost always exercised by the Council of State in the name of the king (i.e. King's Council). The Council of State consists of the Prime Minister and at least seven other Ministers. The current Prime Minister is Erna Solberg, the second woman to hold the position.

3.2 The Council of State has the main responsibilities of submitting budget proposals and government bills to the Stortinget for approval and signing the approved bills into law. Some other administrative duties are to appoint and dismiss higher office, pardon criminals and ratify international treaties.

### **4. Legislative Branch**

4.1 Norway's Legislative Branch consists of the Stortinget that has two important functions: enacting legislation and approving the national budget. It also votes on the bills and proposals introduced by the Executive Branch.

4.2 The Stortinget monitors the Executive Branch. It can call a vote of confidence in the ruling government. The Stortinget can also call a vote of impeachment or set up sessions to directly question the ruling government.

#### Parliamentary election

4.3 Election of the Stortinget is held once every four years. Under the *Constitution*, the Stortinget cannot be dissolved within the four-year period and thus no snap election is allowed. The last election was held in September 2013 with the Conservative Party becoming the second largest party with 48 seats. It subsequently formed a centre-right government with the Progress Party.<sup>1</sup> Olemic Thommessen of the Conservative Party became the President of the Stortinget. The Labour Party which won the largest share in the election (55 seats) became the major opposition party. The next election will take place in 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> The Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party have pledged to support the ruling Conservative Party and Progress Party without joining their centre-right government.

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4.4 There are 169 Members in the Stortinget, of which 150 are elected as constituency representatives and 19 as "Members at-large". Norway is divided into 19 constituencies corresponding to the counties, and the number of Members to be returned from each constituency varies from four to 19, determined by the population and area of the county. In each county, voters vote for a party list and the votes cast for each party determine the number of seats the party wins.<sup>2</sup> Norway caps the number of county-based seats at 150.

4.5 After the 150 county-based seats are filled, the remaining 19 "at-large" seats (one for each county) are allocated to party lists based on their national share of the vote and the number of seats they have already filled.<sup>3</sup> Only parties that get at least 4% of the national vote can be awarded "at-large" seats. The above arrangement is to ensure that the entire 169 seats are eventually allocated to parties as proportionately as possible according to their share of the national votes cast.

#### Current party composition

4.6 The composition of the Stortinget by political party is as follows:

- (a) Labour Party (55 Members) which advocates a welfare state and an equitable distribution of wealth;
- (b) Conservative Party (48 Members) which emphasizes personal rights and social responsibility;
- (c) Progress Party (29 Members) which believes laissez-faire principle;
- (d) Centre Party (10 Members) which supports social equality and environmental protection;
- (e) Christian Democratic Party (10 Members) which has conservative opinions (e.g. opposing euthanasia, abortion and same-sex marriage);

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<sup>2</sup> Norway's electoral system is open list proportional representation, under which voters may re-order or cross out candidates on a party list.

<sup>3</sup> Parties that obtain fewer constituency seats than their national share of the vote are allotted "at-large" seats to make up the difference. In each county, the "at-large" seat is allocated to the party which is the closest to winning a constituency seat.

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- (f) Liberal Party (nine Members) which focuses on environmental issues, education, small-business and social issues;
  - (g) Socialist Left Party (seven Members) which favours a welfare state and taxation of the wealthy; and
  - (h) Green Party (one Member) which focuses on environmental protection and ecological sustainability.

## 5. Judicial Branch

5.1 The Judicial Branch comprises ordinary courts and special courts. As for ordinary courts, they have three instances that:

- (a) the District Courts are the courts of the first instance, which handles all civil and criminal cases. All cases have to start in the District Courts;
- (b) the Courts of Appeal are the second instance courts, which adjudicate appeals against decisions from the District Courts; and
- (c) the Supreme Court is the highest court, which is the final court of appeal with jurisdictions over disputes in all areas of law.

5.2 The ordinary courts are supplemented by special courts and special judicial institutions: the High Court of the Realm adjudicating charges against senior government officials; the Labour Court handling all matters concerning relations between employer and employee in both private and public sectors; and, in each community, a Conciliation Council to which most civil disputes are brought prior to formal legal action.

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