Inter-party Cooperation in Scandinavia. Minority Parliamentarism and Strong Parliaments

by

Flemming Juul Christiansen
Ph.D. Scholar
Department of Political Science
University of Aarhus
8000 Aarhus C
Denmark
www.ps.au.dk

fjc@ps.au.dk

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1 Introduction

In classifications of parliaments, the impact of minority government is still under-researched. Minority governments are considered as a precondition for strong parliaments but the impact is dependent on how executive-legislative relations actually form. Here our knowledge is only modest. We need close, and comparative, studies on this topic.

Damgaard defines a mode of executive-legislative relations as ‘a distinct pattern of interaction – one involving cooperation as well as conflict – among MP’s and government ministers’ (Damgaard 2000b, 270). Parliamentary government with coherent political parties render obsolete traditional, dualistic thinking in this regard. Instead, Damgaard enumerates four different executive-legislative modes: A non-party mode, a cross-party mode, an intra-party mode and an inter-party mode. Actually, the inter-party mode appears in two different forms: An intra-coalition mode between cabinet members of one party in government and the MP’s of another cabinet party, and an opposition mode of relations between a minister and the MP’s of non-cabinet parties (Damgaard 2000b, 279). Minority governments need external support, and that makes the latter form a relevant topic of a study.

The parliamentary systems of the Scandinavian countries are often said to represent a distinct model of relations between government and parliament (Damgaard 1994; Sannerstedt 1996; Arter 1999). This model differs from the US Congress, Westminster and Continental Europe by combining party cohesion and specialized, highly institutionalized parliaments with strong formal powers on the one hand and minority government and political negotiations with opposition parties on the other (Sannerstedt 1996, 52). Arter (1999) examines in descriptive detail to which extent the Scandinavian countries actually fit the Scandinavian model as outlined above by Sannerstedt (1996). All in all, this seems to be the case at least regarding the three last decades, when minority government has been predominant and a permanent, specialized committee system has been in function. In the same manner, Damgaard (1994) finds a revitalization of the Scandinavian parliaments. They are looked upon as policy-influencing assemblies and not merely ‘rubberstamps’ or ‘transport companies’ (Arter 1999).

It is well-known that external support to a minority government is either based permanently on one or more external support parties or on shifting majorities found more or less ad hoc (Damgaard 1969; Strom 1990b; Mattson 1996). We know less of how such support arrangements actually work and affect the relative power of parliament and government. Recent developments in the Scandinavian countries provide an opportunity to illuminate the character of external support
arrangements in a comparative perspective. In Sweden, a so-called ‘contract parliamentarism’ has evolved. This is an elaborated agreement on a programme between the governing party and two support parties (Aylott & Bergman 2004). In addition, Sweden and Norway have both introduced budget reforms affecting the formal powers of parliament and government in the process, whereas Denmark in the last two decades has experienced some changes in the practice of how to pass the budget.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate inter-party relations under minority parliamentarism and their effect on executive-legislative relations: To what extent do support agreements strengthen or weaken parliament relative to government? To answer this problem the paper compares external support arrangements including cabinet and non-cabinet parties in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. Singling out differences and similarities in how executive-legislative relations work under minority parliamentarism may add to an overall classification of parliaments. In addition, the paper evaluates institutional and party political explanations of the differences observed.

The next three sections (Sections 2-4) describe in some detail the external support arrangements of contemporary minority governments in Sweden, Denmark and Norway as well as the background for their development. With regard to the three cases, Section 5 presents a number of analytical categories. They are related to a discussion about the classification of parliaments. Section 6 evaluates possible reasons for the observed differences employing a comparative analytical design. A similar method is used in Section 7 where changed budget procedures are used to discern, why political parties commit themselves in formalized agreements. Section 8 concludes.

2 The Cooperation between the Social Democratic government of Sweden and its partners
The Social Democrats have dominated Swedish politics for more than seven decades. In the single chamber system established 1970, the bourgeois parties had majority 1976-1982 and 1991-1994. The rest of time, Social Democratic minority governments have been in power. Sweden operates with a system of negative parliamentarism. According to Bergman, this negative formulation has been important for the Social Democratic grip of power (Bergman 1995). The party could stay in power, as long as the Communists did not vote together with the bourgeois1 parties in a vote of non-confidence. Until 1976, the Social Democrats could rely on the Communists2 not to do so even without offering the latter party major policy concessions in return (Bergman 2000, 218-219). In

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1 In Scandinavia this term is common for non-socialist parties.
2 In 1970 the party was renamed as Left Party Communists and in 1990 only as Left Party.
policy questions, the governments often formed a broad majority with one or more of the bourgeois parties (ibid.). In spite of a quite dominant party in government, Sweden has often been characterized as a ‘consensus democracy’ practicing ‘negotiating parliamentarism’ (Sannerstedt 1996; Mattson 1996; Lewin 1998).

The period from 1970 was characterized by an increasing number of reservations from opposition parties and more bloc politics in general (Sannerstedt & Sjölin 1992). From 1982 it became increasingly difficult for the Social Democrats to deal with a somewhat reformed Left Party Communist without giving it concessions (Arter 1999, 208). An incident occurred in 1990 when the Left Party Communists voted against an economic crisis solution, the government had explicitly turned into a vote of confidence. The government resigned but soon after took office again (ibid.). The bourgeois government 1991-1994 did not have its own majority either. It was dependent on the party New Democracy not to vote against it in order to take office. However, in 1992 the government made a major compromise with the Social Democrats in order to deal with the severe economic crises that struck Sweden at the time (Mattson 1996, 169).

The majority-building under the Social Democratic governments from 1994 has changed compared to the ‘classic’ situation of passive Communist support before 1990, and especially 1976. A form of party cooperation has developed, named ‘contract parliamentarism’ by Aylott and Bergman (Aylott and Bergman 2004). This form of cooperation is characterized by an explicit, written contract that commits the partners beyond a specific deal or a temporary commitment. It must available to the public and it may include representatives to serve in the administration (Bale & Bergman forthcoming).

It all began in 1995 with an agreement of cooperation between the government and the Centre Party. As part of the agreement, the Centre Party appointed one political advisor (politisk sakkunnig) to the Ministries of Finance and Defence respectively. These were the policy areas covered by the oral agreement. It lasted until 1997. Subsequently, the political advisors resigned. In the period from 1994 to 1998, the Social Democrats were actually still able to form a majority with any of the other parties in the Riksdag. The two parties stated as their motivation for the arrangement that a secure majority was needed in order to deal with the evidently severe economic problems the country faced.

After the election of 1998, the Social Democrats needed the support of at least two other parties to obtain a majority, except for a highly unlikely cooperation with the Moderates. The Social Democrats turned to the Greens and the Left Party and found an agreement on five specific areas:
Economy and state budget, employment, distributive justice, gender equality and environment (Bergman 2000). The parties did not commit each other to cooperation on other issues but stated their intentions to work together for a full electoral period. This was stated in a press release only. There was no written programme between the parties. Neither were there appointments of political advisors like in the cooperation with the Centre Party. The party leaders did meet occasionally, however, and a group of cooperation, the SAMS, was established. This group has continued its work after 2002. A group of coordination regarding economic policies, the SVAMP, was also established and still exists (Ullström 2004).

According to Aylott and Bergman, the cooperation between the three parties had its ups and downs but worked more smoothly than expected (Aylott & Bergman 2004). However, discontent was growing within the support parties that they were not given cabinet seats and formal responsibility, and credit, for the results reached. The Greens were most explicit about it, and up to the 2002 election, the party leaders stated, that they would vote against a government, the party did not take part in (ibid.). After the election, this statement was put to a test. The election result left the Social Democrats and the Left Party one seat short of majority. The Social Democrats refused to offer cabinet seats to the Greens. Next, the possibility of a minority coalition government between Liberals, Christian Democrats, the Centre Party and the Greens was tested but eventually rejected by the Centre Party. In this situation, the Greens did not fulfil their pledge to vote for a non-confidence vote to the government if it was not offered cabinet seats. Instead, it accepted another agreement with the Social Democrats and the Left Party (ibid.). This time it was a written and detailed one.

The agreement, called “The 121 points”, is in fact a political programme for cooperation between three parties over four years. The programme is intended for four years with a renegotiation after two years. That happened in the autumn of 2004. The document has been published and the 121 points cover a whole range of domestic policy areas, not least economy and budget, but also a number of points under the headings of female rights, environmental protection, children and family, foreign aid, health, employment, housing and the elderly (Hundratjugoen Punkter 2002). The agreement contains over 4,200 words. Many coalition agreements are not that comprehensive (Strøm & Müller 1999b). It is a mix of declarations of more or less specific intents and initiatives to be taken. EU, defence policies and foreign policies are explicitly excluded but the agreement requires the Minister
of Foreign Affairs to give the coordination parties ‘continuous information’. In addition to the ‘121 points’, the Social Democrats and the Left Party published a short ‘Declaration of Intent’ in which the parties state to have common values concerning full employment, equality between the sexes, ecology and the general welfare policy of reducing cleavages in the society, and they wish to cooperate in general (Avsiktsförklaringen 2002). Unlike ‘the 121 points’, this declaration does not contain specific initiatives. The clear intent is a cooperation that reaches beyond the particular 121 points (Bolin 2004). The Greens have not in the same manner committed themselves beyond the programme (ibid.).

‘The 121 points’ also specifies a number of procedural and organizational arrangements. The details were further elaborated in a separate agreement on the cooperation forms of the three parties (Överenskommelse om samarbetsformer 2002). Like the agreement between the government and Centre Party 1995-1997, the support parties can appoint political advisors, each up to eight to be located after their own choice. The Greens have concentrated their efforts on economic policies and Environment whereas the Left Party has spread out their advisors more. The stated purpose of the advisors is to guarantee influence and insight into to the cooperating parties (Hundratjugoen punkter 2002). Their main function is to control the implementation of the common programme on behalf of their parties. Furthermore, the advisors may work to enable agreements between the three parties. Unlike regular political advisors, the advisors of the Left Party and the Greens take part in negotiations usually together with parliamentarians (Ullström 2004). The advisors are not allowed to be directly involved in the administrative preparation of proposals, but only after this preparation had taken place. To compensate, procedures have occasionally been established securing the involvement of the political advisors of the coordination parties until the government takes a decision to let the civil service prepare a decision (Ullström 2004). It is very much up to the minister to decide how much he or she will let the partners in at these preparing stages of the process (Interviews 5 & 6 by Bolin).

In the Ministry of Finance, two coordination offices have been established taking care of relations between the parties, coordination with the political advisors in the departments, and the implementation of the 121 points, one for each party. The Minister of Finance has a special

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4 In the autumn of 2004 the Social Democrats and The Greens made an agreement regarding defence policies with the rather reluctant support of the Left Party. Previously the government had negotiated with the Centre Party, their erstwhile partner on defence, but in vain.

5 The Left Party has 3 positions in the Ministry of Finance, 2½ in the Ministry of Trade, 1 in the Ministry of Environment, 1 in the Ministry of Education, and ½ in the Ministry of Justice. The Greens have 4 advisors in the Ministry of Finance, 2 in the Ministry of Trade, 1 in the Ministry of Environment, and 1 in the Ministry of Agriculture (Ullström 2004).

6 See note 7.
responsibility for the coordination of the cooperation (Överenskommelse om samarbetsformer 2002). In addition, there are two kinds of coordination groups between the parties, the SAMS and the SVAMP, that both existed prior to 2002. The SAMS is a coordination group with only three representatives just below party leader level. It takes care of problems in the cooperation that has not been solved on a lower level. Besides problem-solving, information is also channelled through this organ being described as having the purpose of creating an atmosphere of trust between the parties (Ullström 2004). Different kinds of intricate troubles are dealt with in the SAMS. The group meets whenever necessary. Every second month the group evaluates the state of implementation of the 121 points programme. The SVAMP takes care of economic coordination between the annual budget negotiations between the parties (Bolin 2004). Members of the group are the junior minister in the Ministry of Finance, the party spoke persons on finance and a few other representatives from the parties, occasionally also the minister. The group meets twice per month. It works with surveillance of the common economic policies, and with preparing the agenda and solving minor difficulties in advance to budget negotiations at party leader level (Ullström 2004). The ‘121 points’ also sets up three coordination committees (on public administration, integration of foreigners and health issues) in order to develop coordination transversely to the departments involving the cooperation parties (Hundratjugoen Punkter 2002). Other political, coordination groups are established temporarily when needed, often including parliamentarians as well as a political advisor (Ullstrøm 2004).

The party leaders, including the Prime Minister, meet for lunch each month (Hundratjugoen punkter). So now these meetings take place more regularly than prior to 2002. The agenda for the meetings is prepared by the SAMS. The ‘121 points’ document specifies common press conferences on common initiatives. The Greens and the Left Party were not satisfied with Social Democratic ministers taking credit for common initiatives, as it should have happened before 2002 (Aylott & Bergman 2004).

The cooperation between the governing Social Democrats and its two partners not in government comes close to a coalition government in many regards. Not only do the parties have a common programme, they have also arranged procedures to monitor the realization of it. That is more than many coalition governments. As described above, the Swedish civil service has had to adjust in order to serve the purposes of the cooperation arrangement of the party in government (cf. Ullström 2004). The lack of cabinet seats for the two small parties makes the arrangement differ from that of a proper coalition government. No representatives of the support parties take formal
part in decisions made on behalf of the government of Sweden. The Social Democrats have committed themselves politically, but they still take the formal decisions, and the civil servants are only instructed by the cabinet.  

Cabinet committees and other coordinating devices are not uncommon in coalition governments (Mackie & Hogdwood 1985; Thies 2001). In Sweden, the bourgeois coalition governments of Fälldin 1976-1978, 1979-1982 and of Bildt 1991-1994 also operated with such arrangements (Bergman 2000). The Fälldin governments established separate coordination offices for each party and its relations with the other parties. The Bildt government instead had one common office in the ministry of Finance (Bergman 2000, 212-213). The coordination offices in the Ministry of Finance after 2002 are kind of mixtures between those former arrangements. Each coordination party has its own office in the Ministry of Finance but supplemented with the SVAMP. The novelty is of course that the purpose of the offices is not coordination between ministers of different parties with separate responsibilities but coordination of policies of the entire cabinet with certain external partners.

The political advisors, who are representatives of parties that are formally not in government, have the opportunity to monitor, and possibly influence, the administration of the politics agreed to. To some extent they may even be able to involve themselves at an early stage when legislation is drafted etc. The interviews made by Niklas Bolin with political advisors of the Green Party and the Left Party clearly indicate that the loyalties of these special political advisors first and foremost are towards the party that has appointed them (Interviews 5, 6 & 7 by Bolin). One might even argue that an ‘intraparty mode’ exists. In the Left Party, the political advisors, of whom several are former bureaucrats for the parliamentary groups, normally participate once a week in meetings of the parliamentary party group (Ullström 2004). According to one source, the contacts with the party group are less systematic in the Greens (ibid.). Another source indicates that the contacts with the parliamentary group are frequent and that decisions taken here are crucial for the work of the advisors (Interview 6 by Bolin). The political advisors have fewer contacts to the party organizations (ibid.).

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7 The Swedish cabinet represents an example of collegial government. According to constitution, each cabinet member has an area of responsibility, assigned by the PM, but the ministers do not formally run the departments in which they find themselves. Instead, the civil service take actions to implement decisions by the government (Regeringsformen 2003; Bergman 2004, 210). Sweden differs from Denmark and Norway on these points.

8 During a five-month stay at the University of Umeå in the end of 2004, the author of this paper had the pleasure to follow ongoing work in the research project ‘Nordic Parliamentary Democracy’ and receive comments from its participants. I was allowed to use interviews with party bureaucrats and political advisors in Sweden and Norway conducted for the purpose of the research project by Niklas Bolin, who also used the interviews for his masters’ thesis (Bolin 2004). The interviewees have been promised anonymity but the author knows their identity.
An assessment of the executive-legislative relations of the described support arrangements has to look at two quite different relationships: One between government and the external support parties; and another between the government (and the support parties) and the proper opposition parties. In the relations of cooperation described, decisive decisions are prepared in formalized and regulated coordination forums between cabinet and non-cabinet parties. The party in government has committed itself on a many important topics. The government has also let representatives of these particular parties into its offices. Undoubtedly, the direct influence of the Left Party and the Greens is far beyond that of the parties of the bourgeois opposition. In a system like this, most important decisions have been taken before they reach the parliament. The three cooperating parties have the upper hand in their dealings with the rest of the parliament. The proper opposition parties often face a solid majority. Likewise, the assessment should be that the bourgeois parties have less influence today than they used to when the Social Democrats ruled by shifting majority, enjoying the passive support of the Communists.

The Left Party and the Greens possess influence but they also have to make compromises in order to get it. Indeed, all parties are expected to be ready to do so, like in a government coalition. The Social Democrats still control the agenda because they have the cabinet seats. Therefore, Bale and Bergman wonder if the support parties really should be addressed as ‘servant parties’, due to their precarious situation (Bale & Bergman forthcoming; cf. Rasmussen 1972, 242). Nevertheless, they are in a better position to influence the decisions of the government from inside than it is usually the case with non-cabinet parties, even under minority government. Today, the Left Party definitely appears to be more involved in decision making, having more direct influence, compared to the passive support it gave the Social Democratic governments as Communists back in the old days.

3 Legislative Agreements in Danish Parliamentary Politics

Minority government is common in Denmark. 1945-1973 majority governments ruled the country around half the time. After 1973 only the Nyrup Rasmussen I government possessed a majority 1993-1994 (Damgaard 2000a). Until 1973 several of the minority governments could rely on a secure majority with permanent external partners (Damgaard 1969; Rasmussen 1972). The Social Democratic government and the Socialist People’s Party were the only to institutionalize such cooperation in a coordination committee in 1967 (Mader 1979). After 1973 this has generally no longer been so. The bourgeois minority coalition government 1984-1987 could rely on the Social
Liberals in economic policies but had to live with ‘alternative majorities’ in a number of other questions (Damgaard & Svensson 1989). The Social Liberals have in general played a pivotal role in Danish government formation but lost this role after the 2001 Election. Since then, the Liberal-Conservative minority governments have enjoyed support from the Danish People’s Party. This relationship is not formalized, and the two parties in government refused to offer the support party influence on a new coalition agreement after the recent election in February of 2005.

General support agreements are not common but another form is present. Danish governments and non-cabinets parties frequently take part in a certain type of negotiated agreements regarding legislation. In these ‘legislative accommodations’ (politiske forlig), the parties agree on certain policies to which they commit each other for a period, either fixed in the agreement or running until they are terminated. The policies may cover a single topic or a number of topics. As a general rule of conduct, a party can give notice prior to a general election that it will no longer commit itself to the legislative accommodation after the election (Christiansen 2002, 26). As long as the agreement is valid, the parties are not permitted to support changes in what has been agreed to without unanimous consent among the other parties. In 1976 this basic rule was stated in the following way in an economic crisis agreement between the Social Democratic government and three other parties:

“In order to safeguard the necessary stability of the economic policy laid down in the accommodation, changes concerning the issues of the accommodation can only be carried through jointly. In the same manner, the parties commit themselves to a common position to proposals or measures substantially changing the preconditions of this policy (Folketingsårbog 1975-1976, 410-412 – author’s translation).”

This veto power is one out of a number of informal norms developed over time about what to do in a number of hairsplitting situations (Christiansen 2003). Historically, the development of these norms in Danish parliamentary life can be traced back in detail to the second half of the 19th century (Pedersen 2005). The veto right actually introduces an alternative decision rule, unanimity among the agreeing parties, replacing simple majority in the Folketing.

Mortensen offers a description of how legislative accommodations work regarding media policies. In recent years, perennial legislative accommodations have regulated topics such as the amount and allocation of the license fee, regulation of TV and radio etc. (Mortensen 2004). Since 1990 six agreements have been made; all fixed for a certain number of years but with shifting

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9 Strøm (1990a, 106) uses this term as a translation with this type of Danish agreements specifically in mind.
groups of parties and of varying sizes, see Table 1. In addition, the parties have agreed to a number of supplementary agreements. The agreements are all written down but the length and detail of the content has increased over time. Some points are left open for decision at a later stage. This may be due to uncertainty or disagreement but the parties commit each other that a decision can not be taken without consent among the parties. As a consequence, representatives for the group of parties in the agreement meet with the Minister from time to time, usually in the department. Details in the legislation are worked out here. Mortensen refers to this group as a kind of ‘kitchen cabinet’ or a ‘parliamentary committee outside the Folketing’ (ibid.). He points out how this way of decision-making has delayed introduction of digital television in Denmark, since every partner has to give a green light (ibid.).

Table 1: Media agreements in Danish Parliament 1990-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of agreement</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>UL</th>
<th>SPP</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SL</th>
<th>CD</th>
<th>CPP</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>DPP</th>
<th>PP</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Licence Agreement 1990-1993</td>
<td>June 1990</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish Public Service TV</td>
<td>Jan 1995</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Policies 2001-2004</td>
<td>Mar 2000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Policies 2002-2006</td>
<td>Jun 2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Mortensen 2004; Damgaard 2000, 234-235; author’s collection of written agreements.

G indicates a party in government, + indicates non-cabinet party taking part in the agreement, - indicated party not taking part in agreement, NR indicates party not represented in the Folketing. Seats mean seats out of 179 in the Folketing in support of the agreement. Party abbreviations: UL = Unity List; SPP = Socialist People’s Party; SD = Social Democrats; SL = Social Liberals; CD = Centre Democrats; CPP = Christian People’s Party; C = Conservatives; L = Liberals; DPP = Danish People’s Party; PP = Progress Party.

Legislative agreements are not officially recorded. To get an idea of their frequency, it has been necessary to register information on legislative accommodations in a database from a number of sources. Concerning legislation, the Annual Yearbook of the Folketing often registers if a piece of

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10 The agreement of January 1995 covered topics regarding media policies not included in the agreement of September 1993 but nevertheless touched upon same type of problems, and the same group of parties were included in the agreement. The agreement of September 1996 joined together media policies in a single agreement. The agreement of June 2000 was supposed to last until 2004, but the four parties lost their majority at the elections in November 2001. So, in June 2002 the new government made its own agreement.

11 Among the sources are written texts, different annual yearbooks, historical overviews, speeches in parliament. I intend to produce a list with documentation in another context, discussing the huge number of problems and decisions
legislation is part of a legislative agreement. However, this information has been supplemented by reading of parliamentary debates and committee reports if I had any doubt as to whether a piece of legislation was covered or not. MPs often relate to legislative agreements in their speeches as spoke persons when they motivate their views on behalf of their party. The list of legislative agreements presented in Table 2 is surely not without problems but it should give some impression on the frequency of this phenomenon in Danish politics. The numbers indicate, not surprisingly, that minority governments make more legislative agreements. Over time, there is also an increasing amount of agreements. Budget agreements have probably driven this development. I return to these in Section 7. Around 2/3 of the legislative agreements are ‘oversized’ (cf. Christiansen 2003; cf. Pedersen 2005).

The parties taking part in a legislative accommodation often writes down a document. This probably serves many of the same purposes as coalition agreements. They cement together political parties and prevent them renegade from what has been agreed to (Strom and Muller 1999b). Some of the texts, especially the older, are plain statements of specific points the parties agree to, sometimes supplemented with a short motivation. The size of the documents has increased. 12 texts 1984-1987 had an average length of 550 words whereas 40 texts 1998-2001 had an average length of 2650 words. The texts are now often very detailed and also contain declarations of intents – occasionally window-dressing - and points to be decided at a later stage.

The legislative agreements provide an opportunity for non-cabinet parties to get influence. The partners endow themselves with a veto right regarding the specific policies they have agreed to. It is a quasi-governmental structure but the ‘governing’ parties shift from one policy area to another. Today, all parties in the Folketing occasionally participate in this type of agreements (Christiansen 2002). In this sense, parliament is influential. However, when an agreement has been made, the important negotiations take place among the agreeing parties. When governments present legislation resulting from these agreements, the Folketing can be compared to a ‘transport company’.

12 The Library and Archive of the Danish Folketing has allowed me to copy its collection of such written legislative agreements. See Rasmussen (1998).
13 The author’s own account.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PM</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Party Composition</th>
<th>Government Strength</th>
<th>Legislative Agreements</th>
<th>Acts covered</th>
<th>No of Legislative Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hedtoft III/Hansen I</td>
<td>1953-57</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7,3%</td>
<td>31/426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansen II/Kampmann I</td>
<td>1957-60</td>
<td>SD+SL+JP</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,7%</td>
<td>7/406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampmann II/Krag I</td>
<td>1960-64</td>
<td>SD+SL</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4,9%</td>
<td>24/489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krag II</td>
<td>1964-66</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9,4%</td>
<td>25/266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krag III</td>
<td>1966-68</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14,0%</td>
<td>24/172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baunsgaard</td>
<td>1968-71</td>
<td>SL+C+L</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0,2%</td>
<td>1/632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krag IV/Jørgensen I</td>
<td>1971-73</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10,7%</td>
<td>40/373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartling</td>
<td>1973-75</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14,1%</td>
<td>27/191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgensen II</td>
<td>1975-77</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14,8%</td>
<td>59/399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgensen III</td>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24,5%</td>
<td>71/290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgensen IV</td>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>SD+L</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8,3%</td>
<td>13/156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgensen V</td>
<td>1979-81</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18,5%</td>
<td>60/325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jørgensen VI</td>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19,5%</td>
<td>31/159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlüter I</td>
<td>1982-84</td>
<td>C+L+CD+CPP</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17,6%</td>
<td>32/182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlüter II</td>
<td>1984-87</td>
<td>C+L+CD+CPP</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19,4%</td>
<td>127/653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlüter III</td>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>C+L+CD+CPP</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25,5%</td>
<td>24/94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlüter IV</td>
<td>1988-90</td>
<td>C+L+SL</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24,8%</td>
<td>103/415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schlüter V</td>
<td>1990-93</td>
<td>C+L</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24,0%</td>
<td>118/491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyrup Rasmussen I</td>
<td>1993-94</td>
<td>SD+CD+SL+CPP</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8,0%</td>
<td>32/400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyrup Rasmussen II</td>
<td>1994-96</td>
<td>SD+SL+CD</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19,5%</td>
<td>103/527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyrup Rasmussen III</td>
<td>1996-98</td>
<td>SD+SL</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22,7%</td>
<td>58/255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyrup Rasmussen IV</td>
<td>1998-2001</td>
<td>SD+SL</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>30,0%</td>
<td>237/789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fogh Rasmussen I</td>
<td>2001-2005</td>
<td>L+C</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>(60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Own data; Damgaard 2000, 234-235.


4 Norwegian minority governments seeking ad hoc majorities

In Norway, majority governments dominated the post war period until the beginning of the 1970’s. From 1945 to 1961 Labour even controlled a majority on its own. Since 1971, Norway has only had a majority coalition government 1983-1985. Labour has formed single party minority governments
whereas the bourgeois parties have formed coalitions with the exception of the Conservative government 1981-1983. The latter government enjoyed secure support from the Centre Party and The Christian People’s Party, even though the relation was not formalized.\textsuperscript{14} The other minority governments have not enjoyed secure support but the Labour governments 1973-1981 did have a majority with the Socialist Left Party, so it needed joint efforts between this party and the. The Labour governments 1986-1989, 1990-1997 and 2000-2001 faced internally divided non-socialist majorities. These governments did not enjoy secure support but had to build shifting majorities with bourgeois parties. Neither did the bourgeois minority coalitions 1972-1973, 1985-1986, 1989-1990, 1997-2000 and from 2001 (Narud & Strøm 2000).

As mentioned above, Norwegian governments have usually not received permanent support from outside. Except for the budget, questions I return to in Section 7, the parties do not make deals with other parties in advance. According to Nordby, the risk of pre-negotiated agreements is small (Nordby 2004, 156).\textsuperscript{15} Interviews also indicate such agreements do not exist, except for the budget (Interviews 1-4 by Bolin; Bolin 2004).\textsuperscript{16} Governments may also consult non-cabinet parties before presenting its proposals in the legislature with the purpose of exploring what can pass. This form of adapting behaviour has occurred, allegedly more so under Bondevik after 1997, than before 1997 under Labour rule (Nordby 2004). In the 1990s the Storting amended a higher amount of government proposals than used to be the case. These observations correspond with an increasing amount of committee reservations in the same period (Rommetvedt 2003, 51). In addition the Storting from time to time a right to instruct the government on details (Nordby 2004, 146-47). Such a pattern resembles convention government or ‘madisonism’ (Rasmussen 1972, 202; Narud & Strøm 2004). However, it must the stressed that most important legislation is still presented by the government (Narud & Strøm 2004, 179).

Instead of securing support in support agreements, Norwegian minority governments rely on ad hoc parliamentary support (Narud & Strøm 2004, 183). This is also the case for the present Bondevik II government. After the election of 2001, the support of the Progress Party was

\textsuperscript{14} The three parties had negotiated a joint proposal for a coalition government in 1981 but were divided on the abortion issue (Narud & Strøm 2000, 177). When eventually the parties formed a coalition government in 1983, they ‘agreed to disagree’ on abortion, dissent instead of unanimity as coordinating principle in this regard (Rommetvedt 2003, 120). It worked but when the same three parties agreed to disagree on the EU question in the Syse government 1989-1990 it led to a breakdown of the government (ibid). The ensuing division between the Conservatives and the Centre Party is not yet overcome.
\textsuperscript{15} From a normative, democratic standpoint, Nordby presents an elaborate argument against this form of agreements between the parties. Their principal standpoints become blurred (Nordby 2004, 145-154).
\textsuperscript{16} In December 2004, I had talks with a number of Norwegian political scientists in Oslo over the topic. Based on their insight, they also confirmed this impression.
necessary in order to overturn the incumbent Labour government. The Progress Party pointed to a bourgeois coalition government but refused to support a single party Conservative government, when a coalition at one stage did not look like a possibility. Eventually, Conservatives, Christian People’s Party and Liberals agreed to form a coalition. The Progress Party asked 50 questions to the political intends of the proposed coalition government. The three parties answered those questions, the Progress Party nodded, the Labour government resigned, and the new government could form (Aalberg 2002, 1052-1054, Bolin 2004). Still, there was no formal agreement between the government and the Progress Party. Except for the state budget, that is still the case. There are no binding agreements, and the parties in government seek deliberately not to tie their hands but to pursue majorities on an ad hoc basis (Bolin 2004). The Progress Party has from time to time put pressure on the government for more binding agreement on selected topics but the efforts have been fruitless. They meet resistance especially from the Christian People’s Party and the Liberals (Interview 2 conducted by Bolin). The support of the Progress Party definitely can not be taken for granted.

The way of working for Norwegian minority governments opens for parliamentary influence in the parliament. The government presents its legislation and seeks support for it. In this process it will often have to give concessions and accept amendments. It also risks from time to time that the Storting decides against the will of the government. In this sense the Norwegian case is a quite obvious example of minority parliamentarism producing a strong parliament and a weak government. On the other hand the government also gains some manoeuvrability.

5 Categories of support arrangements and their impact on the strength of parliament
We have now in some detail described support arrangements between government and non-cabinet parties as they have developed in recent years in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. In this section, I will classify the cases and discuss their impact on the relations between government and parliament. The parliamentary systems of the Scandinavian countries are all characterized by minority governments and also share other characteristics. The support arrangements differ however.

In Sweden, the Social Democratic government cooperates intimately with two support parties. This comes close to the definition offered by Strøm of external support agreements:

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17 In this case, Labour had probably stayed in office after one of its worst results ever (24,4% down from 35,0% in 1997) (cf. Aalberg 2002, 1052).
18 The independent interviews conducted by Bolin (2004) concur on this issue (interviews). Bolin also supports his observation on other sources.
‘Contracts’ negotiated prior to the formation of the government that are explicit, comprehensive in policy terms, and involve more than short-term commitment to the policies as well as the survival of the government (Strøm 1990b, 62 & 97). The Norwegian case is quite oppositely characterized by majority-building from issue to issue. There we almost find no formalized legislative coalitions. The Danish case falls somewhere in between. Major issues are often decided in ‘legislative accommodations’ in which a group of parties commit each other to policies they have agreed to for more than a short term. Shifting groups of parties take part in these agreements. They represent an example of the first of two types of what Strøm has called ‘bundled’ strategies: Support being cemented ‘from a specific set of parties in a narrow issue for a long period of time, or on a broad range of issues for a short period of time’ (ibid. 68). So, the Danish agreements differ from the Swedish support agreement in two respects. First, they are normally not as broad in their policy range. Second, participants in legislative accommodations can be parties that are not necessarily committed to the survival of the government. On the contrary, they can be outright opposition parties. The Danish legislative accommodations differ from the ad hoc majority building in Norway by the commitment to a period of time in which the parties grant each other veto power. As long such an agreement is running, the group of parties is locked. Many agreements can be ‘valid’ at the same time and form a highly subtle ‘web’. Compared to the open situation in Norway, this limits the freedom to form majorities in any given policy area.

Like government coalitions and pure legislative coalitions, the categories of agreements between governments and non-cabinet parties mentioned above, constitute different types of coalitions utilized by interdependent, competitive political parties that find such arrangements useful in certain situations. Government coalitions represent a high level of commitment between political parties. They do not only share office. They also commit themselves to common policies, or non-policies, regarding nearly every thinkable issue. A legislative coalition in parliament – two parties voting in the same way in a specific roll call – does not in itself represent any common commitment. Support agreements and legislative accommodations may be perceived as

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19 The ‘121 points’ do not directly mention support to the survival of the government. At a vote of non-confidence after the 2002 election, and shortly after the signing of the support agreement, the Left Party voted against and the Greens abstained. Thereby, both parties acted in a way that helped the government survive. In Sweden, a non-confidence vote requires an absolute majority to be approved. Therefore, it will always benefit the government to abstain. The signing of the agreement was clearly linked to the upcoming vote of non-confidence to the incumbent Social Democratic government (Aylott & Bergman 2004). Nevertheless, it is probably not correct that the two small parties with this agreement have promised not to turn over the government. This support is rather independent of, though strongly reinforced by the ‘121 Points’ and the institutions established.

20 However, when an agreement covers general economic policies and defence policies at the same time, as it happened in 1995 and 1977, the agreement is not exactly narrow in its scope. Other examples could also be mentioned.

21 Not all coalition governments work like that, however.
intermediate forms, the former being closest to the coalition government and the latter to the pure legislative coalition (cf. Bale & Bergman forthcoming). What makes them differ is the commitment to the survival of the government. In addition, the scope of policies covered in a support agreement should usually be expected to be broader. The time range of both kinds of arrangements may vary (cf. Strøm 1990b, 97).

The categories of support arrangements between governments and non-cabinet parties described above do not unequivocally correspond to the relative strength of government and parliament. According to Strøm, the stronger the government, the more it will prefer shifting coalitions instead of support agreements (Strøm 1990b, 109). Damgaard, on the other hand, views more minority governments without external support as part of a trend towards weaker governments (Damgaard 1994, 90). They are both right but observe from different perspectives. Minority governments without support agreement can be strong under some circumstances and weak in others. The classic situation in Sweden, in which the Social Democrats could form a majority with any of the parties in the Riksdag, exemplified a strong minority government. It could rely on the Communists not to turn it over without offering anything significant in return (Bergman 1995, 172-173).22 So, the government had a free hand to pursue shifting majorities with only a minor risk of defeat. On the other hand, governments with no support agreements securing a majority are weak if the other parties in parliament are in a position to block, amend or defeat a high number of government bills or even pass legislative decisions against the wish of the government. To a certain extent that was the case for the Norwegian governments of the 1990s and the Danish governments of the 1980s (Nordby 2004; Damgaard & Svensson 1989). Neither does support agreements and legislative accommodations necessarily reveal whether a government is strong or weak relative to parliament. A weak government should be expected to make large concessions in order to reach an agreement; the opposite applies to a strong one. So, a minority can choose to ‘sell’ flexibility if it is offered a lasting agreement, only giving few policy concessions (cf. Pedersen 2005).

The various support arrangements condition executive-legislative relations. The areas covered by support agreements or legislative accommodations are decided between the parties taking part in the agreement. To a certain extent, such cooperation resembles a coalition government. Relations between the minister and representatives of the parties in the agreement, including non-cabinet parties, take on significance. This is by itself one type of executive-legislative relations and resembles the ‘intra-coalition’ mode but nominally it is a cooperative version of the

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22 In that sense it did possess external support. It was just not formalized in any agreement. Warwick (1994) distinguishes between ‘formalized support’, ‘declared support’, and ‘undeclared support’. 
opposition mode. If the parties behind a support agreement possess a majority, and they agree on legislative proposals before they are presented to parliament, then the parliamentary institutions lose significance in the process. The parties not included in the agreement are left to criticize and ask questions with limited options of affecting the legislation presented to them. When the same coalition of cooperating parties coordinates most important matters in advance, as it appears to be the case in Sweden, then the relations with other parties are also structurally similar to those found in parliamentary systems with majority coalition governments. So, policy agreements with long-term commitments place a certain amount of power in the hands of the agreeing parties, including cabinet and non-cabinet parties. Whether, or to what extent, this strengthens the parties in government, the support parties, or both, depends on the power, they would have possessed by staying out of that arrangement. One should expect all the parties to have the perception they improve their goal-seeking if they choose to participate in such an arrangement. The same considerations could be made about participation in a coalition government. With a binding agreement, a minority government will be able to pass ‘its’ proposals, and thus appear as a powerful government, but it really requires an analysis of the particular relations between the government and its support parties to estimate more precisely how powerful the government is in its dealings with non-cabinet parties. Considerable differences are found between Sweden and New Zealand in this regard (Bale & Bergman forthcoming). Therefore, analysis of support arrangements is a valuable tool for a classification of parliaments under conditions of minority government.

6 Reasons for different support arrangements in Scandinavia

In Sections 2-5 we have observed and categorized a number of differences between the support arrangements of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. This section evaluates briefly some possible explanations of the differences between the countries. Why do cabinet and non-cabinet parties involve themselves in support agreements in Sweden, while we find no binding agreements in Norway, and why do we find Denmark somewhere in between?

Strøm discuss how minority governments build up majorities. As he points out, minority governments without support agreements that provide them with a majority constantly need to build majorities from issue to issue (Strøm 1990b, 108). They also risk defeat. Ad hoc coalitions,

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23 According to Strøm, political parties operate with multiple goals that are often not compatible in the long run, so that the parties face a trade-off. Strøm suggests three types of goal-seeking as especially important: Policy-seeking, office-seeking, and vote-seeking. It is empirically difficult to estimate the primary goal of a political party. Instead, Strøm has presented a classification that uses organizational features of the political parties as a proxy (Strøm 1990b).
however, gives the government the opportunity to ‘pick the least “expensive” coalition partner available (ibid. 109). As a consequence, there is a trade-off between office and policy consideration of the political parties. A support agreement adds to the viability of a government but it costs policy influence. Support agreements are ‘the recourse of risk averse parties’ (ibid.). There is a trade off for minority governments between security and flexibility (Pedersen 2005).\footnote{This argument requires that the government has a choice. That is not always the case. As pointed out by Green-Pedersen (2001), the trade-off may also be between occasional defeats and/or paralysis of decision making on the one hand and big concessions to the opposition on the other. Those were the dilemmas, Danish government faced for long periods prior to the 1990s (Green-Pedersen 2001). In such agreements it is really the opposition parties that ties up the government; they are the ‘risk averse’ then, more than the government. A third dilemma is of course for how long a government accepts to rule under such circumstances. The Schlüter governments in Denmark did for six years (1982-1988).}

Strom also proposes two measures to explain cross-country variation in legislative strategies: Bargaining power and agenda control. Bargaining power is positively related to the number of possible coalitions available, the dispersion of the opposition and ideological nearness. It is an advantage not to need the support of multiple partners. Agenda control is concerned with the extent to which a government controls the timing and framing of issues. Strøm operationalizes the term as lax investiture requirements and decentralized legislative committees (ibid.).\footnote{Strøm also points out that these are the same institutional factors that conditions minority government in the first place (Strøm 1990b, 109). This argument is in line with the argument presented in this paper about the classification of support agreements and legislative accommodations.}

Strøm is very focused on the government as an actor and tends to exclude non-cabinet parties in that regard. As other executive-legislative relations, these arrangements are the results of inter-party relation on a general level (Damgaard 1994). Damgaard proposes three factors causing change in inter-party relations, and ultimately change in the power of a parliament: Institutional reforms, election results, and change in party strategies (ibid.). The analytical approach of Strøm is static whereas that of Damgaard is dynamic but it is also possible to use his factors in a static design. As a matter of fact, both authors point to institutional factors and factors related to party politics as explanatory factors.

A measure for the relative, formal institutional strengths of government and parliament ought to include more factors than those suggested by Strøm, like more precise measures of agenda powers. Differences in dissolution powers may also be important. The measures for party system factors suggested by the two authors seem reasonable. In the following, the explanations presented above are briefly evaluated on the background of the present situation in the three countries. First, institutional factors will be considered, next a few number party system differences.
Sweden is the only of the three countries having an investiture requirement. Nevertheless, the country has a negative version of parliamentarism since it requires a majority against the proposed candidate to reject him or her. Denmark and Norway have no investiture requirements.

All of the countries have standing, specialized committees. Scandinavian MP’s are policy experts as members of ‘working parliaments’ (Arter 1999, 211). First and foremost, they are representatives of political parties (Jensen 1995). After thorough investigation of a number of factors, Mattson and Strøm (1995) present a two-dimensional measure for committee powers based on factor analysis with -2 as low score and +2 as high score. The two dimensions represent agenda control and drafting authority. The coordinates for Sweden are (0,88; 1,08), for Norway (-0,33; 0,21), and for Denmark (1,84; -1,71) (Mattson & Strøm 1995, 299). These numbers indicate that the legislative committees are strong on different dimensions. A simple addition of these indicators (S 1,96; N -0,12; DK -0,13) indicates that the committees of Sweden are somewhat stronger than those of the other countries (cf. Arter 1990).

Döring (1995) presents different numbers on governmental powers. One of those is power to determine the plenary agenda. On scale from 1 (strong government control) to 7 (less government control), Sweden and Denmark both score 5, whereas Norway scores 4 (Döring 1995, 225). Danish governments are in a strong position if it wants a bill to die, whereas that is extremely difficult in Sweden (ibid. 242). The Danish government is also stronger when it comes to dissolution powers. The Prime Minister virtually has a free hand. In Sweden, an early election may be called, but ordinary elections are still held. The Storting can not be dissolved prematurely.

In my judgment, the observed structural differences in institutional powers are not considerable. Generally, government is structurally weak compared to legislative committees, maybe a little more so in Sweden than in Denmark with Norway. According to the theory of Strøm (1990b), structurally weak governments cause minority government. However, this brief review has not provided us with variation that can serve as an explanation of the differences in support arrangements observed. Instead, we turn our attention to differences in the party systems.

At the moment, there are seven parties in each of the Scandinavian parliaments, see Table 3). The measure for effective number of parties based on Rae’s F shows more variation: 5,5 for Norway, 5,0 for Denmark, and 4,3 for Sweden. In Denmark and Norway the centre-right

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26 The distances are S-N: 1,49; S-DK: 2,95; N-DK: 2,90. Danish committees are outliers.
27 There are eight parties in Storting if the one-man Coastal Party is counted. In the Folketing, the four representatives of Greenland and the Faroe Islands are not affiliated with the party groups. In recent years, the Progress Party, the Centre Democrats, and the Christian Democrats (until 2003 Christian People’s Party) have lost representation.
governments possess the median legislator on a traditional left-right scale. Aylott and Bergman (2004) argues that is no longer the case with the Social Democrats in Sweden, leaving it vulnerable to ‘alternative majorities’ between Greens and bourgeois parties, unless the Greens are tied up in some way. In addition, the Swedish government faces a united bourgeois opposition, leaving limited room for shifting majorities and strengthening the bargaining position of the parties ready to support the government. 28 To some extent that also applies to Denmark and Norway. In Denmark, the Social Democrats, the leading contender of the government, provide the most realistic alternative to a majority with the Danish People’s Party. This majority was used from time to time 2001-2005 under equivalent majority constellations. In Norway, Labour also provides the government’s only realistic alternative to the Progress Party. This majority has been in use, as we shall see, for one budget agreement. The parties to the left of the government have declared they will take over power after next election even though the parties will seek election on different platforms.29 In Sweden, the government needs the support of two parties, whereas only one party is necessary in the Danish and Norwegian cases.

Table 3: Party Composition of Scandinavian Parliaments after Most Recent Elections

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<thead>
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<td>Greens</td>
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<td>Christian People’s Party</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Conservatives</td>
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<td>Danish People’s Party</td>
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<td>Progress Party</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>Coastal Party</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUM</td>
<td>349</td>
<td></td>
<td>179</td>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Cabinet parties in italic.

28 In September 2004, the four bourgeois parties even issued a common platform (Allians för Sverige) for an intimate policy cooperation and coordination with regular meetings between the party leaders. The purpose of this pre-electoral, opposition alliance is to take over power in the autumn of 2006.

29 This implies that Labour is now ready to enter a coalition government for the first time ever in peace time. By joining this cooperation, the Centre Party has taken a further step away from the other non-socialist parties. Furthermore, if such a government comes about, it will be the first time in Scandinavia a party to the left of the social democratic party joins a peace time government.
The support parties of the Swedish government are ideologically close to the Social Democrats (Aylott & Bergman 2004). They differ, or at least used to differ, on matters of EU, foreign affairs and defence, exactly the points picked out of the agreements. The Left Party is more to the left on a traditional scale. The Greens have the environment as a special issue. In economic policies, the party is probably to the right of the Social Democrats. EU policies also divide the Danish government from the Danish Peoples’ Party. In addition, the latter party is also more pro-welfare than the government. In Norway, there are differences on a number of topics between the government, especially the Christian People’s Party, and the Progress Party (cf. Shaffer 1998).

During the Cold War the Left Party belonged to the communist party family. As such it was considered an anti-system party, disdained by many Social Democrats. In 2002 the party probably did not long for government office to the same extent as the Greens but the party is no longer satisfied with delivering passive support. The ‘mainstream parties’ of Denmark and Norway probably still consider the Danish People’s Party and the Progress Party as too ‘populist’ to participate in government.

The Swedish Social Democrats have not taken part in a coalition government since 1957. The party might have developed a culture of single party government. However, this is an ad hoc-explanation. Strøm argues that large mass-parties are more prone to government office, especially compared to single-issue parties (Strøm 1990b, 112). The legislative accommodations in Denmark have developed over a century with governments most of the time without control of a majority for legislation (Pedersen 2005).30 To some extent such agreements are likely to be sustained by a parliamentary culture (Jensen 1993). One should not expect a similar advanced institution to rise over night somewhere else. Experiments with such arrangements should be expected to occur in ‘primitive versions’ in systems with permanent minority government.

The discussion of party and party system traits single out some Swedish characteristics expected of a situation with support agreement: A large, office-prone mass-party with limited manoeuvrability and ideologically close parties not used to be in office. These factors stand out as important from this analysis. The difference observed between the situations of Denmark and Norway is small. In Norway, however, the policy distance between parts of the government and the

30 Until 1953 Denmark had a bicameral system, and the approval of both chambers was necessary for legislation to pass. In peace time, only the majority governments 1936-1940 controlled a majority in both chambers (cf. Damgaard 1969, note 22). This puts Denmark in a unique position when it comes to almost permanent need of external support for the governments.
support party appear to be too large to let experiments with binding agreements be an option, except for budget agreements that is.

Formal and informal changes in budget procedures in each of the Scandinavian countries have enhanced the significance of the budget approval. Following the reasoning of Strøm, we should expect an increased likelihood of binding agreements if the survival of the government is at stake. The Scandinavian polities provide three cases for evaluation of this line of argument.

7 The impact of changed budget procedures on Scandinavian minority parliamentarism

The origin of many early, representative assemblies was found in the wishes of kings and other rulers to raise revenues for their activities. Today, approval of state budgets still belongs to the most important decisions taken by a parliament. The constitutions of each Scandinavian country only allow taxation or spending with the approval of the parliaments. In Sweden and Norway, the budget must be approved according to a special budget procedure. In Denmark, according to the Constitution, the budget is presented as a bill that follows the same procedure as other bills. Sweden and Norway changed their budget procedures in the end of the 1990’s. In Denmark, changes took place in the 1980’s regarding the informal procedures for passing of the Budget. In this section, I describe these changes taking place within each of the three countries. To the extent the changes affect the survival of the governments, or strengthen the formal position of the government, one should expect an effect on the formalization of the support arrangements of minority governments.

In Sweden, the Riksdag approved a new budget procedure in 1995 (Molander 2001; Mattson 2003). Until the reform, the Riksdag did not at any point decide on the budget in its totality. Instead the committees decided individually on a number of posts adding up to become a full budget (Bergman 2004, 207-208). During minority rule after 1982 Negotiations did take place, the

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31 The regulations are found in Article 9 in the Form of Government in Sweden, Sections 43 and 45-47 in the Danish Constitution, and Section 75 in the Norwegian Constitution.
32 This includes three readings and scrutinizing in a committee of the bill between the readings, in this case the Committee of Finances. The budget procedure does have some special features compared to other types of bills. The Swedish procedure has a semi-constitutional status laid down in the Riksdag Act and in a special Budget Act referred to in the Riksdag Act. Changes must either follow the same rules as other constitutional changes, requiring consecutive majorities with an election in between. Or there must be a 2/3 qualified majority. In Norway, the procedure is regulated by a special Budget regulation. This can be changed with a simple majority.
33 For presentational reasons, Denmark has until now been presented before Norway but the reforms in Sweden and Norway make it more natural to present Norway before Denmark in the following.
34 Before 1976 the government could rely on the Left Party Communists on budget votes when it did not agree with one or more of the bourgeois parties (Mattson 1996, 171). In the bicameral system before 1970, the two chambers voted conjointly in budget matters. In these votes, the governments controlled a majority together with Communists for three decades (Bergman 1995, 62).
government used shifting majorities and had to accept occasional majorities against it (Mattsson 1996, 172). These bottom-up processes usually only led to small changes in the total amounts suggested by the government. Seemingly the average of these was slightly expansive (Mattson 1996, 187). The purpose of the budget reform was to increase coordination and tighten up the procedure in order to reduce unwarranted spending in the state budgets in light of the economic crisis that hit Sweden at the time. After the reform, the Riksdag decides on the state budget in a top-down process (Molander 2001). Expenditures are divided into 27 areas. The Riksdag decides in one vote an economic ceiling and the frames for each expenditure area. One vote means that they decide between different proposals for total budgets (Budgetlagen; Molander 2001). Next, the standing committees work with appropriations, approximately around 20 for each expenditure area. No area is covered by more than committee. A proposal for increased spending within an expenditure area has to allot equivalent cuts within the same area. Like the Riksdag, the committees also decide on appropriations within an expenditure area in a single vote.

In 1997, the Storting followed the Swedish example and approved a state budget reform. It was only an experiment to begin with but from 2001 the procedure has been permanent (Rasch 2001, 5). Until the reform, each parliamentary committee suggested expenditure level on its own area (Hagen 1999). According to Nordby, weak minority governments in the 1990s often gave in to pressure for increased spending but there were also a number of informal norms affecting the process (Nordby 2004, 219-230). Before the Storting approved the state budget, it went through a round of ‘balancing the account’ on the floor of the Storting, with the Committee of Finances in a central role (Rasch 1993). In this round, the government had opportunities to establish shifting majorities but also had to accept occasional defeats (Nordby 2004, 225). On other occasions, the parties reached common agreement on the budget. One example was the budget agreement reached up to the Christmas of 1985 regarding the budget for 1986 between the bourgeois minority coalition government and the Progress Party (Rasch 1993, 109). After the reform, the Storting, like the Riksdag, decides on the size of revenues and expenditures and their distribution in a package vote. In Norway, the state budget operates with 21 expenditure frames (Bevillingsreglementet; Helland 2004). The standing committees specify the distribution of expenditures for each frame.

35 When the Riksdag initiated the reform, it bound itself to a ceiling for the entire budget in a so-called Spring Proposition preceding the budget to be approved in the autumn for the next year. After an adjustment of the budget reform in 2001, the Riksdag is no longer obliged to follow the ceiling approved in the Spring Proposition. In this proposition, the government also presents projections three years ahead of the economy.

36 It is a general informal rule to put aside the huge amounts of money injected to the Norwegian state from oil drilling in the North Sea in a ‘petrol fund’ in order to avoid domestic inflation. According to Nordby (2004), parliament and government have difficulties in abiding to this rule.
As already mentioned, the Danish state budget proposal is presented in a bill. The government is obliged by the Constitution to present a bill at least four months before a new budget year begins. For the time being, the Finance Bill consists of 37 sections of which each may contain revenues and expenditures. Government as well as oppositions parties have the right to propose amendments to the proposed bill. When all proposed amendments have been decided upon, the Folketing either approves or rejects the bill in its totality. That is how the formal frame works on parliamentary level. Administrative budget reforms took place in the 1960s and the 1980s leading to a shift in focus from detail to frames (Østergaard 1998, 226). The budget reform of 1984 introduced ceilings for each ministry. The purpose was to enable tight control with expenditures. One should expect this reform to increase the relevance of the Finance Bill and the budget process as a tool for political and economic priorities and governance.

Another change happened almost at the same time, regarding the informal norms for passing the Finance Bill. According to the ‘norm of the Finance Bill’, a ‘responsible’ party always votes yes to the total Finance Bill, with no regard to its content, unless doubt can be raised on the majority behind the government (Rasmussen 1985). The four old parties (Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Conservatives, and Liberals) used to stick to this norm. However, in 1983 and 1989 the Social Democrats voted against the bill, more or less motivated by the content of the Finance Bill (Christiansen 1994). Today, the four ‘old parties’ again seem to follow the norm but a profound change has taken place. Since 1983, the government has to establish every year that a majority will vote in favour of the budget. It does so by working out negotiated agreements with non-cabinet parties. This type of cooperation began with an agreement in the spring of 1984 securing the
support of the Social Liberals for the economic policies of the government in the following years (Mattson 1996, 129).

The thorough budget process reforms and change of practices should be expected to have parliamentary consequences in the three Scandinavian countries. It is not entirely clear to what extent the governments will accept having their budget proposals rejected. In Sweden, a government will most likely resign if the Riksdag rejects the budget proposal of the government and thereby accepts an alternative proposal (Mattson 2003, 233). In Norway it is not clear either what will happen but Helland considers the budget vote under the new rules to be ‘a de facto constructive vote of no confidence’ (Helland 2004). Thereby, he indicates that if an alternative budget proposal than the one of the government is approved, the government can be expected to resign and the next government formed with basis in the majority. In Denmark, it is a long established practice that a government resigns or calls an election, if the Finance Bill is rejected, but this practice is not legally binding and, theoretically, a departure can not be ruled out (Damgaard 1999, 65). With reservations, the approval of the budget is now de fact a positive vote of confidence in every Scandinavian country, at least if any doubt can be raised concerning the parliamentary basis of the government.

As mentioned, Strom expects an increased likelihood of support agreements with security-prone parties. Positive investiture tends to reduce the likelihood of very small minority governments in government formations (Bergman 1993). Demands for absolute majorities, or even qualified majorities, tend to force parties into arrangements in which they cooperate (Mattson 1996, 205). On this background we should expect more binding agreements. In each of the three countries, one should expect the minority governments to possess an increased propensity to involve themselves in arrangements with non-cabinet parties securing the budget vote compared to other types of votes. The same party and party system related factors we discussed in Section 6 above, should also be expected to play a role for the extent of the binding arrangement.

The changes in each country have increased the influence of the government on drafting the budget, more so in Sweden than in Denmark where the formal position of the government has not

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41 In the Swedish voting procedure, the Riksdag makes a pair wise choice between different budget proposals. Therefore, the process will always end up with an approved budget proposal. One thinkable possibility is for the Riksdag to approve a budget being only slightly different from the proposal of the government. There are no cases for ascertaining how a government will act in such a situation. Torbjörn Bergman should be credited for pointing out this.

42 Two special, Norwegian features are noteworthy. First, it is not possible for the Norwegian MP’s to abstain in roll calls. Second, the voting procedure regarding the budget is an open series i.e. either approval or rejection of each proposal. The tradition is for each non-cabinet party to present its own proposal and have it rejected. Therefore, with minority government it is possible that all proposals are rejected. In that case, it can not be ruled out that the government do another attempt. Helland’s remark concerns the approval of another budget proposal than the one of the government getting. Then, he expects at least the party having its proposal approved to be part of a new government.
been strengthened. Nevertheless, stakes have also been raised in this country. The Danish government also need an annual majority to support the Finance Bill in the final vote. It nevertheless possesses some leeway for shifting majorities and for losing votes on proposed amendments in the process. In the two other countries, the former option is only relevant at committee level, and the latter is no longer available. At the same time, non-cabinet parties need to compromise with government if they want direct influence, even though they may also consider the likelihood of bringing down the government and the electoral gain from profiling itself (cf. Strøm & Müller 1999a). In the following, I investigate the support arrangements for each of the Scandinavian countries in recent years.

After the reform, the budget proposals of the Swedish Social Democratic governments have all been approved as part of the support arrangements, these governments have relied upon. Budget matters have made up a central part of each support agreement. The new budget procedure is probably even one of the explanations for the rise of ‘contract parliamentarism’ in Sweden (Aylott & Bergman 2004). Each year, budget negotiations taken place between the cooperating parties, and not always without difficulties (cf. Widfeldt 2002, 1091). The support arrangements do not themselves guarantee a positive result; they signal a readiness in principle to find a result. Nevertheless, agreements have been reached. The political advisors in the Ministry of Finance, as well as the permanent involvement of the partners of the government in economic planning and surveillance in the SVAMP coordination group, have most likely contributed to a smooth cooperation, just like similar groups are supposed to do in proper coalition governments. The cooperation regarding the budget in Sweden is probably quite similar to the functioning of a coalition government where the parties should also be expected to negotiate with each other over budget matters (cf. Thies 2001).

Except for the first state budget of the present three-party minority coalition government in Norway, the one for 2002, when the government made the approval of the budget a vote of confidence, every approved state budget since the introduction of the reform in 1997 has been the result of negotiated agreements, see table 4. Each year, the Bondevik II government has begun negotiations with the Progress Party, which were decisive for the formation of the government (Aalberg 2002; Bolin 2004). In 2004, however, the government ended up making an agreement with the Labour Party. In recent years, written budget agreements have been issued and published.
They are brief documents\(^{43}\) - only a few pages long - and follow a set pattern. First, a declaration of support to the budget proposal of the government with a number of amendments agreed to in the agreement. Next, a number of initiatives are listed that the government is expected to take. Finally, the agreements end with a mousetrap clause in which the partners commit themselves to securing a majority throughout the reading of the budget proposals and only enter alternative majority constellations with the approval of the partners in the budget agreement. Hereby, the parties commit themselves not to defect from the agreement they have agreed to. On the other hand, the agreements do not commit the parties beyond the passing of the budget as is usually case with Danish legislative accommodations.

### Table 4: Negotiation Rounds and Agreements on the Norwegian State Budget 1998-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Year</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Negotiation 1. Round</th>
<th>Negotiation 2. Round</th>
<th>Negotiation 3. Round</th>
<th>State Budget Agreement Partner(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>CPP, CE, LI</td>
<td>C, PP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C, PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>CPP, CE, LI</td>
<td>C, PP</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>C, PP</td>
<td>C, PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>CPP, CE, LI</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>CPP, CE, LI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPP, CE, LI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>CPP, C, LI</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence vote (PP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>CPP, C, LI</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>CPP, C, LI</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td></td>
<td>LA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>CPP, C, LI</td>
<td>PP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Political data issues – European Journal of Political Research.

Budget year means that the budget is passed in the end of the preceding year.
Party abbreviations: C = Conservatives; CE = Centre Party; CPP = Christian People’s party; LA = Labour; LI = Liberals; PP = Progress Party.

The agreements on the budget have developed over time in Denmark. They became usual in the 1980s. The first ones were single agreements – like their present counterparts in Sweden and Norway – between the government and one or more non-cabinet parties, covering the entire budget. In the last ten years, a majority of the agreements have been so-called ‘patchwork agreements’, a form in which a number of agreements with different parties groups of parties add up to a whole. The negotiations concerning this bill has developed into a forum for decisions regarding major or minor political reforms, often not related to the budget in a strict sense (Loftager 2004, Albrekt Larsen & Goul Andersen 2004). In addition, it has become common to make agreements on the budget for expenditure areas for a number of years, for instance regarding police, defence or...

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\(^{43}\) The author has a collection of these written agreements (\textit{Avtaler om statsbudsjettet}) of which several are also available on the internet.
theatres. The present Liberal-Conservative minority coalition government has made the most important part of its budgets with the Danish People’s Party. Still, the government has also taken part in minor budget agreements with other parties. In connection to the Danish agreements, written documents have been issued. They have increased in size over time and are much longer than their Norwegian counterparts; the 2005 budget agreements have 79 pages. The budget agreements have become important political devices for governance in Danish parliamentary life. The written agreements occasionally include rather detailed remarks on various initiatives and their funding. The procedural remarks are usually rather few but practice is that in budget agreements, political parties commit themselves until the next budget unless otherwise is stated.

We have seen that in recent years every Scandinavian minority government negotiate annual budget agreement with non-cabinet parties. The degree of institutionalization of cooperation regarding the budget is highest in Sweden but pre-negotiated agreements are now even observed in Norway where such agreements apparently are not common otherwise. The Norwegian agreements are short-sighted – they cover the votes in the Storting and its committees - whereas the Danish agreements reach out at least for one budget year. Until the reforms, agreements also existed but they were less comprehensive. So, all three countries operate with negotiated agreements but with differences. The Swedish version comes closest to the working of a majority government. In Norway and Denmark the party group is not fixed for an entire electoral period. Denmark even employs shifting majorities.

In the three cases under study it does seem to be the case that the importance for the governments to survive this vote has increased the propensity of the minority governments to engage in arrangements offering them security, even if it involves making concessions to non-cabinet parties. In Section 6 we found party system related factors to influence the difference in the character of the support arrangements. The same factors may explain the differences in the extent of the support arrangements concerning the budget vote. In Sweden the group of parties is fixed. In Denmark, the governments engage in shifting majorities, also regarding legislative accommodations. In Norway we occasionally find more negotiation rounds before an agreement is reached. This ‘shopping’ behaviour indicates that the governments are less security-prone after all than their Swedish counterparts.

8 Conclusion
In classifications of parliaments, parliamentary democracies dominated by minority governments have often been categorized together. This group of countries is the Scandinavian that also share a
lot of other politically relevant characteristics. Minority government is often seen as related to parliaments that are strong relative to governments. This strength is really dependent on the interaction between the minority government and the other parties in parliament. This paper has focused on this ‘opposition’ variant of the inter-party mode of executive-legislative relations. Some minority governments operate with regular support parties or other types of binding agreements. Others build majorities from issue to issue. In recent years the three countries of Scandinavian have provided us with examples of these kinds of arrangements. By describing these arrangements in some detail, it becomes possible to compare, and thereby gain insight in the effect they have on the relative power of parliament and government.

The Swedish minority government operates with a written agreement with two support parties. This agreement contains a common policy programme, covering a broad range of domestic policy areas. In addition, very elaborate coordination and control arrangements have been established, including political advisors inside the departments. This arrangement resembles the functioning of a majority coalition government in many respects. The Danish minority governments have not established similar close relationships, even though the present government works quite closely with one support party. A special variant of binding agreements with long historical roots is widely used, however, in which parties bind themselves for a period of time to certain policies. As long as such agreements are running, it gives non-cabinet parties influence on the areas covered by the agreement. The other parties are left to pursue opposition policies, however. In Norway, the minority governments rely on ad hoc agreements. This opens for influence to the non-cabinet parties. It also makes the government vulnerable to defeats. So, the minority governments of the Scandinavian countries do not work in the same way when it comes to support arrangements.

Support agreements and legislative agreements can be perceived as related phenomena that are intermediate cases between coalition governments and pure issue-to-issue legislative coalition building. All these forms are really coalitions between parties that are provided with multiple options in this manner. As coalitions they are all derivatives of party interaction under given institutional restraints. This consideration bear an impact when it comes to give an answer on the problem presented in the Introduction: To what extent do support agreements strengthen or weaken parliament relative to government? The answer depends on what is meant by the terms government and parliament, and the character of support involved. With binding support arrangements, the group of parties involved gain power whereas the rest of the parliament loses power. The power of the government relative to the support parties depends on the particular circumstances. The
descriptions indicated an intimate involvement of the Swedish support parties, occasionally even on preparing stages. However, that was also the case regarding Danish media policies. The more a minority government legislates with the same parties, the more the rest of the government are put aside. Support agreements covering a broad range of topics, like the Swedish, makes it more likely that will happen.

Next the paper does a brief attempt to evaluate suggested explanations for the differences observed. The basic argument is that support agreements pose parties in a dilemma between security and flexibility either concerning the survival of the government or what has been agreed to, politically etc. Two types of explanations were considered: Differences in institutions, and differences in party politics. The parliaments of the Scandinavian countries all have quite strong institutional powers compared to other parliamentary democracies. The differences are more modest, however. Analysis of differences in party politics indicated that the Swedish situation possesses some special features that were expected: A large party, assumed to have ambition for office, in a weak bargaining position, since only one coalition is possible. These parties are also ideologically close. The differences between Denmark and Norway were not that easy to explain but the ideological divisions seems larger and old conflicts harder to bridge. The comparative ‘logic’ of this is that this type of party politics explanation seemed to possess some explanation power in this case which strengthens the argument. The logic is not that institutional differences do not matter. The cases simply do not provide an opportunity to evaluate it.

Changed formal and informal procedures for passing the budgets in each of the Scandinavian countries do provide such an opportunity, however. Sweden and Norway have both passed budget reforms changing the process from bottom-up to top-down. In Denmark, informal norms have changed making the approval of the budget an annual test of the majority of the government. As a consequence of these reforms, it seems likely that the vote on the total budget in each Scandinavian country is a ‘de facto’ vote of confidence. By threatening the security of the government, it should be expected to be more inclined to making agreements. In each case, negotiations existed prior to the changes. After the changes they have been the rule with only one exception, Norway in 2001, when the passing was made a vote of confidence. The agreements in Norway are not as comprehensive as the Danish ones. The involvement of the Swedish support parties in the budget policies is very intimate, however. These differences are probably explained by the same factors as the different support arrangements in general.
The Scandinavian democracies may represent a distinct type, characterized by disciplined parties in multiparty systems with minority governments (Damgaard 1994, 101). The executive-legislative arrangements of this category differ, however, and it is useful to differentiate among a number of ‘subcategories’. Elaborate support arrangements, like the present Swedish, approximate majority coalition governments, whereas the ad hoc coalitions of Norway represent a purer type. Denmark falls somewhere in between. The executive-legislative relations of minority governments are ambiguous phenomena when it comes to the effect on the relative power of government and parliament. It really depends on the interactions of the political parties. Support arrangements involving cabinet and non-cabinet parties do exist. They are even organized in different ways, and the uncovering of these arrangements provides valuable information regarding power and decision making. It also provides us with knowledge about coalition building and coalition ‘life’ as general phenomena. This paper has focused solely on executive-legislative relations, and the passing of legislation as activity. Evidently, many other features are important when classifying parliament. Resources, questions, interpellations and formal rules are examples. Likewise are relations to other actors relevant, including interest organisations and groups, international organizations, central banks, and economic actors etc.
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Avsiktsförklaring mellan vänsterpartiet och socialdemokraterne. Oktober 2002

Bевillingsreglementet

Budgetlagen

Danmarks Riges Grundlov

Folketingsårboig 1975-76

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