



## **Strength in Numbers or Stronger Alone**

How does the Portrayed Idea of Sovereignty influence the Icelandic Political Parties' Stance towards the European Union?

Kolbeinn Atli Björnsson

**Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði**

**Félagsvísindasvið**

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## **Foreword and Acknowledgements**

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## **Abstract**

Sovereignty is a critical concept when it comes to discussion in Iceland about the nation's participation in European cooperation, be it the European Union, the European Free Trade Association or Iceland's involvement in the Schengen Agreement. The sovereignty debate tends to be heavily influenced by references to the country's fight for independence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ideas of nationality, and attitude towards the rest of the world.

In this thesis the focus will be on the four major Icelandic political parties and the question will be put forth, whether each party's use of the concept of sovereignty can explain their stance on the question of Iceland's possible membership to the European Union. For this purpose, official party publications, and other party literature on possible Icelandic membership to the European Union will be studied using critical evaluation and review.

The thesis's main conclusions are that a post-Westphalian view on sovereignty used by the Social Democratic Alliance translates into a positive stance on joining the European Union. The classical Westphalian view, used by the Independence Party and currently the Progressive Party, translates to a negative attitude towards whether Iceland should join the European Union.

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## **Introduction**

In Iceland, the matter of the nation's current accession talks with the European Union is one of the most hotly disputed topics in modern day political discussions. As often when discussing the subject of the EU there seems to exist a typical pro-EU camp in one corner, an EU-sceptic camp in another corner, and the vast majority of people somewhere in between the two. Both the pro-EU camp and the EU-sceptics appear to believe passionately that their stance is the right one and will lead to a prosperous and better future for their fellow countrymen. The rhetoric between the two can often be quite harsh and sometimes even vituperative, where people label their opponents as either isolationists or traitors to their nation, without so much as a flinch.

In this often heated debate, a frequently heard word is sovereignty. It is commonly used by EU-sceptics in such a way where Iceland is to lose or surrender its sovereignty by joining the EU and those in the pro-Euro camp try and use it in their advantage. But what does it mean to be a sovereign nation, and is it in fact possible for a nation to be fully sovereign in the modern world? Any research into sovereignty must begin with the surprisingly laborious task of defining what the concept of sovereignty really means, whether it is a static one, or whether it changes with the passage of time. As this thesis's chapter on sovereignty will reveal, scholars differ greatly on how to define the concept of sovereignty. Traditionally Iceland has been an active, if small, player in the surrounding world, participating in all sorts of international collaboration. To name a few, Iceland is a member of the United Nations, a founding member of NATO, despite not having an army, and has participated in European integration through its participation in EFTA, the EEA and the Schengen agreements.

The Icelandic political party system has remained remarkably stable through the decades. Iceland has a multiparty system that supposedly encourages coalition governments and is often believed to create favourable conditions for the sprouting of small parties. However, this has not been the case in Iceland, where the party system has in effect been frozen for decades on end, with voters being given the choice of more or less the same four ideologically different parties. Although a different fifth party has occasionally been elected into parliament, they have invariably been short-lived and the Icelandic four-party system continues to

dominate the seats of power. As is to be expected, each party has its own stance on the question whether Iceland should join the EU. Regardless of their enthusiasm towards EU membership, all four express a certain view on sovereignty in their manifestos and papers on foreign policy.

In this thesis, official party document of the four largest Icelandic parties will be studied in an effort to see if the parties use different definitions of the concept of sovereignty, and whether these differences can clarify their stance on possible EU membership. As with many concepts of political study there is not a clear agreement on what sovereignty exactly means. Hence, different parties can adopt different definitions of the phenomenon in order to explain their stance towards whether or not Iceland should become a full member of the EU.

Chapter 1 tackles the concept of sovereignty, how it is defined in political science, and how it is changing alongside ever increasing globalization in the modern world. Additionally, theories of international relations will be examined. In Chapter 2 the focus shifts towards Iceland specifically, its struggle for independence is studied as well as its foreign policy and political party system. Chapter 3 looks at the European Union, its history, institutional structure and the nature of the integration. Chapter 4 is a critical discussion of how the concept of sovereignty is used by the four largest Icelandic parties in their manifestos and other official party documents. The findings will finally be summed up in the thesis's conclusion chapter.



## 1. Defining Sovereignty

Sovereignty is an important concept to the nation-state itself, as well as to any discussion of international relations. Deriving from the enlightenment, the concept is a contested one, with opinions differing greatly on whether it still applies in today's highly globalized and interconnected world as it did when monarchs were waging wars against one another in the name of God, during the era that created the nation-state.<sup>1</sup>

The debate inevitably triggers the question whether the concept of sovereignty is a static one, where absolute control of a single state over its own territory, inhabitants and affairs is indeed possible, or whether sovereignty is constantly evolving through the passage of time, with new actors like nongovernmental institutions and transnational corporations now sharing the international stage with the nation-states?

### 1.1. Westphalian Sovereignty

The classic notion of sovereignty has often been called Westphalian sovereignty. In 1648 a number of peace conferences and peace treaties ended wars that had ravaged much of German speaking Europe for 30 years (1618-48). For the most part the conflicts originally stemmed from tension between Protestant and Catholic rulers, centred on the question whether or not a nation could choose its own religion, and whether its neighbours could and should have any say on the matter. In one theory, the Westphalian Peace gave birth to the modern state, as it came to be known from then on, freeing it from the supreme power of the Catholic Church, which had controlled many inter-state dealings.<sup>2</sup>

The general understanding of Westphalian sovereignty is that the state itself holds absolute and uncontested control of its own territory. No longer could the Catholic Church, or any other group, claim to have the right to control internal affairs of a sovereign state. The state no longer needed to answer to anyone regarding what happened within its own borders, and all other states must respect its exclusive rule therein. The same attitude leads to international affairs only being conducted

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Newman, *Democracy, Sovereignty and the European Union* (St. Martin's Press; New York, 1996), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative government and politics: an introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 62-63.

between sovereign nations, excluding all other entities at that stage, as states do not accept any other authority on the international stage but that of one another, individually. This reality of the international realm has been described as being anarchic by the realist school of thought that will be described in more detail later in this chapter. Realists believe there exists no higher authority that states will comply with in the event of aggression of one state towards another, or to act as a mediator in disputes between different states.<sup>3</sup>

As previously stated, the concept of sovereignty is in no way a recent one. It is often contributed to Jean Bodin and Thomas Hobbes. Both concluded that the power should be in the hands of a single, just source. That source was the state. No longer should anyone be in the position to demand obedience in the name of a divine being or ancient kingship. This has been called the doctrine of state sovereignty. John Austin is believed to be the author of a later and hugely influential doctrine of legal sovereignty. There it was argued that all laws of particular territory were the commands of a sovereign, and the inhabitants of that particular territory only needed to obey to only that legislation and no other. The sole reason was that the sovereign had the resources to impose penalties on those who did not comply with its commands. Therefore, notional ideas as international law had no place in the real world as they were not backed by a sovereign in order to enforce the statute on its inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

One need not study the concepts of sovereignty and the nation-state for long to realize that they are highly contested ideas. Jan Aart Scholte discusses the thoughts of scholars who believe state has little influence anymore and, furthermore, that its power has been overestimated in studies of politics and law in the past.<sup>5</sup> However, there is no denying the fact that the system of nation-states that has existed for the last century or so, has been successful enough to eliminate the possibility of other systems. States have grown steadily in numbers as ethnic groups, the moment they have been freed from the shackles of conical control or dictatorship, seem to embrace the idea to have a sovereign nation-state for the inhabitants of this certain territory to call their own.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a critical introduction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ;New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 188-192.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Newman, *Democracy, Sovereignty and the European Union*, 4-7.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a critical introduction*, 190.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen D. Krasner, "Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective," in *The Elusive State*, edited by James A. Caporaso (Sage Publications, 1989), 92-93.

## 1.2. Post-Westphalian Sovereignty

Today's world has changed immensely from the time of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The change can best be conceptualized by looking at the increased communication in the modern world, described as interdependence. Contact and collaboration has increased between states, making it impossible for them to survive on their own within the international system. In this realm there are far more actors to be considered as participants in foreign affairs. Policymaking within each state is influenced by that of other states, nongovernmental organizations and transnational corporations, to name just a few.<sup>7</sup>

The subject is tackled head-on in the work, *The Postnational Constellation* by Jürgen Habermas. In it, Habermas describes how globalisation and especially the global economy reduces autonomy and disempowers the nation-state. The modern state has been evolving for centuries, producing internal systems such as the welfare-state as a safety net. However, modern globalisation poses a threat to it, as different states compete for the business of international corporations – a process he describes as a race to the bottom, where corporate taxes steadily decrease at the expense of the internal structure of the state. In the essay, Habermas portrays the old constellation, with the state based on a certain territory, controlling its economy and other important issues independently. He claims that globalisation has radically changed this reality, creating a new world order that he describes as a postnational constellation.<sup>8</sup> Habermas finds that up until the end of the 1970s, the democratic nation-state could be defined by four factors. Firstly, an administration supported by taxation. Secondly, full sovereignty over a certain territory. Thirdly, the inhabitants' democratic right of self-determination, and finally, their freedom and rights under the rule of law. Habermas finds that globalisation poses an ever-increasing threat to this institutional set-up of nation-states, and that each of the four points mentioned earlier are under increasing pressure by the forces of globalisation.<sup>9</sup> Habermas goes on to refute the classic political realist's description of the international system with its emphasis on the autonomy of the nation-state in an anarchic world system.

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Bernstein and Benjamin Cashore, "Globalization, Four Paths of Internationalization and Domestic Policy Change: The Case of EcoForestry in British Columbia, Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* Vol. 33, No. 1 (Mar., 2000), 72-73.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The postnational constellation: political essays/ Jürgen Habermas; translated, edited and with an introduction by Max Pensky* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 59-62.

<sup>9</sup> Habermas, 62-66.

Although states technically still have monopoly of violence within their territory, decisions in the modern interdependent world often need to be taken at a level higher than the nation-state. The nation-state has become an insufficient vessel for society, giving way to larger power blocks, where common interests are served. Examples of such blocks include entities like NATO, EU or EFTA, where certain autonomy is shared in order to achieve greater control of this highly interdependent world order.<sup>10</sup>

Jan Aart Scholte explores how globalization affects the world we live in today, including the changing idea of a fully sovereign state. Scholte makes a point of describing how the concept of sovereignty is socially constructed and as such is subject to change with the passage of time. He uses the term 'shared' sovereignty to describe how the institutions of the European Union function and where they derive their power from. Finally, Scholte argues that the principle of Westphalian sovereignty has never in history been an actual working concept. In spite of it countless nations have been afflicted by invasions from other states, or having had border layouts ignored by others. Accordingly, small-states have often had no choice but to accept the impingement of superpowers, leaving an international sphere where all states are on equal ground a distant ideal.<sup>11</sup>

Michael Newman's study of the concept of sovereignty leads him to the conclusion that it is actually not a practical concept to use. No country is really in total control of all things within its borders. Constraints and influences always remain, shaping events that are out of the reach of the nation-state. Furthermore many consider that the concept of sovereignty to equals power, but two sovereign nations can be vastly different and unequal in most ways. Therefore Newman views the importance of sovereignty as ever diminishing, concluding that there is far more reason to worry about the concept of democracy or possible threats against a nation state's welfare system, than to focus on idealistic terms like sovereignty as some sort of an ultimate goal for a nation.<sup>12</sup>

Another scholar to look into the elusive subject matter of sovereignty is Chris Brown, in his book, *Sovereignty, Rights, and Justice: International Political Theory*

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas, 68-70.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: a critical introduction*, 190-191.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Newman, *Democracy, Sovereignty and the European Union*, 12-15.

Today. In it he studies how international theory stacks up in today's world. Scolding those who still refuse to accept that the idea of the Westphalian model is obsolete in the highly interdependent world of today, he tries to demonstrate how the line between domestic and foreign policy in modern day politics is getting more and more blurred. Additionally, he expresses the thought that the very concept of a nation is overemphasized in modern day discussion. Recent development has rendered today's world so different from the Westphalian model that we should start referring to it as the post-Westphalian model.<sup>13</sup> Brown's post-Westphalian world system is fundamentally different from the older one. Firstly, despite state borders still being important, there are far more actors of the international realm to consider. Nongovernmental organizations and multinational corporations yield real power without having clear home territory on the world map. Secondly, it is unlikely that any nation-state government can truly lay claim to have complete control over its own territory, as prescribed by the classic Westphalian order. Again, more actors have to be considered with power and authority being shared in a far greater degree than before. Finally, as the world is far more connected than ever before and national governments have had to engage in multilateral cooperation in an effort to influence both domestic and international affairs in a way otherwise unattainable to them. The best examples of situations that tend to leave individual national governments helpless, urging them towards international collaboration, include the threat of international terrorism and environmental hazard.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.3. International Relations Theory: Sovereignty between Anarchy and Interdependence**

When examining a concept like sovereignty, it is important to realise that there is no clear consensus among scholars about its definition. That is where theories of international relations enter the picture. These theories can serve to clarify which facts in fact matter the most in a complex debate. Here, two international relations theories, realism and liberalism, will be discussed in an effort to explain why there is no agreement within the science.

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<sup>13</sup> Chris Brown, *Sovereignty, rights, and justice: international political theory today* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 212-213.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony McGrew, "Globalization and global politics," in, *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*, edited by John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, 16-31 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 23-24.

Realism is in many ways the predominant theory in international relations, rising to prevalence at the end of World War II. As the world was still recovering from the atrocities of the war, strung between the two superpowers of the time, the Soviet Union and the USA, the building tension would later escalate and become a Cold War. The general mood of the time can at best be described as pessimistic and became a fertile ground for realism as an influential theory.<sup>15</sup> There are different strains of realism. People that adhere to classical realism, often refer to the nature of man, as if the actions of men can be explained by looking at men as beasts of nature, seeking survival, as an ultimate goal. As states are governed by men, classical realists feel they can transfer this sole goal of survival to the state itself. Another strain is neo-realism, often attributed to Kenneth Waltz. It emphasises the anarchy of the world system and the capacities of the states within it. Overall, realists feel strongly that nation-states are the key players in the international arena. In fact, no other entity matters on the international stage. Therefore, there is no room for high authority in the anarchic international arena, with each state claiming the position of highest authority. On the world stage, no state can rely on another state for assistance or defence. Here self-sufficiency is a key word for any state's survival in this international anarchy. States desire only more power and authority. Hence, international affairs revolve around the struggle for power and authority between different states in an anarchic system. Realists do not believe that modern day globalization has changed this view of the world in any fundamental way. They tend to view economic matters as low-politics and feel that the term high-politics only applies to political power of politicians. Increased interdependence has in no way altered the realists' view that states remain the only entities that really matter. States only participate in international cooperation of any kind in an effort to increase their own power and influence.<sup>16</sup>

Another influential theory on international relations, liberalism, stands in contrast to realism, in many ways. Classical liberalism can be traced back to John Locke and other champions of liberal thought during the Enlightenment. One was Immanuel Kant, who wrote an essay called, *Perpetual Peace* where he introduces the idea of

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<sup>15</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World politics: trend and transformation* 7. edition (New York, N.Y : Worth Publishers, 1999), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Dunne and Brian C. Schmidt, "Realism," in, *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*, edited by John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, 84-99 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92-95.

cosmopolitan international law that should apply to all world citizens. Individual state legal order was supposed to slowly expand, to form a world legal order, which would create world peace.<sup>17</sup> Not all strains of liberalism are quite so idealistic. Those who adhere to neo-liberalism feel states simply create international institutions because it serves their interests. Overall, liberalism accepts the fact that transnational corporations have become important actors in the international realm, once dominated by states. They regard economic matters as high-politics and, hence, as important as traditional high-politics. Seen through the liberal lens, modern changes to the world created the need for multinational collaboration in order to untangle common problems for the nation-states, brought on by globalisation. Hence, liberal scholars believe the world system has changed from the classic Westphalian system, with states ruling the international system. Growing interdependence brought on by the expansion of capitalism has definitely undermined the autonomy of the nation-state. The way to reclaim that autonomy is to pool the power of many different states together in international institutions.<sup>18</sup>

In summary, the realist view on the state can straightforwardly be connected to the nation-state's representation in Westphalian literature. States are regarded as the only wielders of real power in the international realm. While states are far from powerless today, realists may seem to underestimate the power and autonomy of institutions like the EU and transnational corporations, while overestimating the dominance of modern nation-states. On the other hand, the staunchest liberals might occasionally go overboard in describing the world as equilibrium of power between states, transnational corporations and other bodies. States certainly retain great power and influence in the world, but it can hardly be described as nation-state hegemony on power and influence like realists like to maintain. The theory of liberalism goes a long way to explain the system of post-Westphalia, described by Jurgen Habermas earlier.

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<sup>17</sup> Jurgen Habermas, "Kant's Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years' Hindsight," in, *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, edited by James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, 113-153 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 113.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Dunne, "Liberalism," in, *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*, edited by John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens, 100-113 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106-108.

## **2. Iceland's Path to Independence, Foreign Policy and Party System**

Some scholars, such as Lene Hansen, believe that national identity, national history, and the manner in which a nation-state is originally formed, can provide clues about how a certain nation will approach Europe, even holding the answer to whether the prospect of cooperating in the European integration is possible.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is important to look back at the events that forged Iceland's history and led Iceland as a nation to where it is today.

### **2.1. The Making of the Republic of Iceland**

Iceland is believed to have been originally discovered by settlers sometime around 874 AD. These settlers are mainly believed to have originated in Norway and Ireland. As the number of inhabitants grew, so did the need for some kind of governance. A commonwealth of sorts, without any executive power, became the chosen method of the new Icelanders. A meeting, similar to that of a parliament, was held in Þingvellir, where laws were set and judgements were passed. The lack of an executive power would eventually become the downfall of this interesting set-up, as blood feuds led the nation to what can only be described as civil war. In 1262 Iceland agreed to submit to the Norwegian king, relinquishing its sovereignty in an effort to bring peace to Iceland.<sup>20</sup>

In the period from 1262 to the nineteenth century Iceland obeyed foreign rule, first from the Norwegian king and later the Danish monarch. The hardships visited upon Icelanders during that period are well documented. These include epidemics of many kinds and famines caused by an unforgiving nature. Trade limitations issued by Danish authorities would become edged forever in the common memory of the Icelandic nation. As liberal ideas began to sweep through Europe in the nineteenth century, these ideas were picked up by Icelandic students studying in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen. Among them was Jón Sigurðsson, who would in 1848 write an essay, urging Icelanders to strive towards independence from Denmark. Jón

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<sup>19</sup> Lene Hansen, "Introduction," in *European integration and national identity: the challenge of the Nordic states*, edited by Lene Hansen and Ole Wæver, (London; New York : Routledge, 2002), 11-14.

<sup>20</sup> Auður Styrkársdóttir, *From Feminism to Class Politics* (Umeå, 1998), 69-70.



Sigurðsson would later become an almost mythical person in Iceland's quest for independence. To this day, his memory is often evoked in political discussions.<sup>21</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, the absolute monarchy of the king was abolished in Iceland as well as in Denmark, and Alþingi was established as a legislative assembly. Iceland was granted a constitution, based on the Danish constitution. As a result, Iceland was in control of its intra-state matters, leaving veto power to the king. The constitution brought with it legislative power and authority to appropriate funds. Home rule would follow in 1904, where the position of Minister of Iceland was established, though the power to appoint the minister remained in the hands of the king. No longer was the legislative power of Alþingi subject to the king's veto on internal matters.<sup>22</sup> In 1918 Iceland became a sovereign state as the Act of the Union laws came into effect. Now Iceland fully controlled its internal matters, leaving Denmark the authority to handle Iceland's foreign affairs as Iceland granted each time. With the laws of the Act of the Union the objective of Icelandic independence struggle was de facto met in all but in name.<sup>23</sup>

This contract between Iceland and Denmark was terminable by both parties in the year 1944. As time passed after Iceland got its sovereignty, it soon became apparent that Icelanders would not be willing to extend the agreement between the two nations beyond that date. Icelandic heads of state, though keen on Iceland becoming a fully independent state, had mixed views on how approach that goal. Many did not want the procedure to look like a revolt against the king, but rather hoped for him to relinquish his authority over Iceland voluntarily. Then Denmark was invaded by Germany, which left the king unable to uphold his part of the agreement between the two nations. The Icelandic government itself had to handle its foreign affairs and other issues that used to be in the hands of the king. There were those in Iceland who believed that the agreement between Denmark and Iceland was now void because of Denmark's failure to deliver on their side of the agreement, and that Iceland should go ahead and declare independence with immediate effect. The fact that Iceland itself was occupied by British forces and later the American military made things a bit more complicated, as both nations put pressure on Iceland to wait

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<sup>21</sup> Svanur Kristjánsson, "Ísland á leið til lýðræðis – Frá kvenfrelsi og frjálsslyndi til feðraveldis," in *Ritið*, (2008), 66-67.

<sup>22</sup> Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld* (Reykjavík : Sögufélag, 2002), 18-26.

<sup>23</sup> Kjartansson, 71-77.

until the Act of the Union agreement had expired. So, on the birthday of Jón Sigurðsson, June 17<sup>th</sup> 1944, Iceland declared independence, following a national referendum that accepted independence and a new constitution by an overwhelming majority vote.<sup>24</sup>

## **2.2. Iceland's Foreign Affairs Policy**

Iceland's participation in international collaboration of some kind dates back to the dawn of its independence. As previously mentioned, Iceland declared independence in the midst of the Second World War, in many ways in the shadow of US occupation. At the time, the United States' government regarded Iceland as an important ally, mostly due to Iceland's geographical position. Icelandic leaders seemed to understand from the get go that they had to be fully involved in Western cooperation for Iceland to thrive as an independent nation amidst fear of Communism. As the Allies struggled to rebuild Europe after the war, ideas about the Marshall Plan developed. Named after the current U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall, the plan was to save war-torn Europe from a deep recession following the war, not least to ward off the allure of communism stemming from the USSR. The Marshall Plan would focus on bringing economic and technical assistance to Europe's nations. Iceland would profit greatly from the Marshall Plan. More importantly, however, in many ways it was the beginning of European integration as we came to know it.<sup>25</sup>

When Iceland became a sovereign state in 1918 it adopted a foreign policy of non-alignment and neutrality. However, the onset of the Second World War and the occupation of a foreign military had made this impossible. As the war neared its end many Icelanders expected the policy of neutrality to be reinstated. The government of the United States felt it was important to keep a military base stationed in Iceland and so in 1946 the two states agreed that US forces could maintain certain manpower at the Keflavík Naval Air Base. This led to a breakup of the coalition government in Iceland as the Socialists left the government. The agreement, however, had the backing of the majority of the parliamentarians from the Independence Party and the old People's Alliance Party. As the threat from the

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<sup>24</sup> Kjartansson, 240-244.

<sup>25</sup> Einar Benediktsson, Ketill Sigurjónsson og Sturla Pálsson, Upphaf Evrópusamvinnu Íslands (Reykjavík: Alþjóðamálastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1994), 8-11.

Soviet Union in Europe magnified, the United States and some of its allies formed a military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Among those invited to join were Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The Icelandic government agreed to join NATO in 1949 and the votes of the parliamentarians fell in a similar manner as when the naval base in Keflavík received the go-ahead. The decision to participate in NATO sparked riots, never before seen in Iceland and the nation seemed split in two in its opinion on the issue.<sup>26</sup>

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1960 the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) was founded as a customs alliance of Western European states, which had decided to stay outside of the European Union. The founding members were the United Kingdom, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. Iceland would join EFTA in 1970, Finland in 1985 and lastly Liechtenstein in 1991. The European Free Trade Association did not involve as close a cooperation between the member states as the European Union did. It was purely an agreement on foreign policy and trade between sovereign states, including a free trade agreement with the EU and several other states.<sup>27</sup> Despite success in the beginning of the association it has since then weakened, as more and more states have left it to become full members of the European Union itself. Now it has four remaining states: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.<sup>28</sup>

All EFTA members, with the exception of Switzerland, are members of the European Economic Area (EEA). The EEA was founded on 1st of January 1994. It gives the three nations access to the internal market of the European Union without full membership of the EU. The foundation of the EEA is the four freedoms: the free movement of goods, persons, services, and capital within the EEA countries. The EEA agreement implied that EFTA member states had to implement all EU legislation related to the internal market and the rulings of its institutions. However, agriculture and common fisheries policies were excluded from the EEA agreement.<sup>29</sup> The agreement does not grant the EEA nations any sort of access to many the EU's important institutions such as the European Council and the

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<sup>26</sup> Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld*, 252-260.

<sup>27</sup> Eiríkur Bergmann Einarsson, *Evrópusamruninn og Ísland: leiðarvísir um samrunaþróun Evrópu og stöðu Íslands í evrópsku samstarfi* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2003), 82.

<sup>28</sup> The European Free Trade Association, "About EFTA," <http://www.efta.int/about-efta.aspx> Retrieved on July 17th 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, *Ísland á 20. öld*, 464-467.

European Parliament. Therefore some have pointed to this agreement as in fact creating a double democratic deficit for the EEA nations where they must adopt EU legislation without having any means of influencing their outcome without jeopardising the whole EEA agreement.<sup>30</sup>

Icelandic foreign policy during the twentieth century can therefore be summed up as being quite active in the international arena. Hence one might conclude that Icelanders felt that the best way to safeguard their newfound independence was to be active in international affairs and look for additional strength and cooperation on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Instead of shutting off from the outside world, independence seemed best secured by participating in the international arena and being involved in shaping the international organisations the nation belonged to.

### **2.3. The Icelandic Party System**

The Icelandic political party system is heavily influenced by the other Nordic nations. It can be defined as a multiparty system, where parties have had to come together and create coalition governments after elections, as a single party government is unrealistic under normal circumstances. The Icelandic four-party has been remarkably resilient in maintaining its presence in Icelandic politics. Occasionally new parties emerge, but they have usually been short-lived and will not feature in this paper.

From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century the focal point of Icelandic politics revolved around the relationship with Denmark and the question of the continued rule of the Danish crown in Icelandic affairs. As time passed it became clear that the relationship with Denmark would change and Iceland would get more self-rule. Icelandic political history has been roughly split up in two separate spells in political science.<sup>31</sup> The first spell, between 1845 and 1918, has been called the period of independence politics, where more or less all efforts focused on the possible independence of Iceland and party politics agreed in many ways on the goals but differed on the means to reach them. In 1918 Iceland became a sovereign state, ushering in the period of class politics. From now on, political parties would fight it out on the grounds of different ideology and philosophy. In July 16<sup>th</sup> 2009

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<sup>30</sup> Eiríkur Bergmann Einarsson, *Evrópusamruninn og Ísland: leiðarvísir um samrunaþróun Evrópu og stöðu Íslands í evrópsku samstarfi*, 89 and 101-102.

<sup>31</sup> Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, *Íslenska stjórnkerfið* (Reykjavík, Háskóli Íslands, 2007), 92.

the Icelandic parliament under parliamentary majority of the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement agreed to apply to join the EU after hard-fought discussions.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Independence Party**

The Independence Party was founded in 1929 when the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party merged to create a large unified right-wing party. It would become Iceland's largest and most influential political party. The party got its strength from the ruling elite and the middle class in Iceland. Additionally, it has always had considerable support in Iceland's rural areas.<sup>33</sup> It has strived to gather strength from a wider constituency and become the party of the masses in Iceland. In later times it has focused on free-market capitalism and the private enterprise. It is safe to say that the Independence Party is the party in power in Iceland. Since the party was founded in 1929, Iceland has had 31 governments; 22 of which have included the Independence Party.<sup>34</sup> Having been so often in control of the executive power, the Independence Party has had lasting effects on foreign affairs and Iceland's foreign policy. Despite generally having been open towards international cooperation the Independence Party has never really been keen on Iceland becoming a full member of the European Union. The closest the party came to agreeing to apply to join the European Union was when its European commission drew up a somewhat positive report, outlining pre-set targets for possible accession negotiations.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Social Democratic Alliance**

In 2000, the parties on the left side of Icelandic politics were unified in the Social Democratic Alliance. These parties were the Social Democratic Party, the People's Alliance, the Women's List and the small party of Þjóðvaki. However, it is widely considered as the continuation of the Social Democratic Party and cooperates with Social Democrat Parties internationally. The Social Democratic Alliance has a detailed manifesto that includes equality and women's liberation very much in line with other Social Democratic parties in other Nordic countries.<sup>36</sup> At the same time it

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<sup>32</sup> Þingsályktun um aðildarumsókn að Evrópusambandinu, þskj. 283, 38. mál, 137. löggjafarþingi, *Vefútgáfa Alþingistíðinda*, <http://www.althingi.is/altxt/137/s/0283.html> (retrieved August 18, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, *Íslenska stjórnkerfið*, 96.

<sup>34</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, "Saga flokksins," <http://www.xd.is/um-flokkinn/saga-flokksins/> (retrieved on June 21, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd Skýrsla Evrópunefndar: lögð fram á 38. landsfundi Sjálfstæðisflokksins 26.-29. mars 2009* (Reykjavík : Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Samfylkingin, "Flokkurinn," <http://www.samfylkingin.is/flokkurinn> (retrieved on June 15, 2011).

championed freedom of the individual and stressed Iceland's need for international cooperation. The question whether Iceland should apply for membership to the European Union was put up to a post survey of its party members in 2002 by a national convention declaration. An overwhelming majority, around 85%, agreed and since then the Alliance has had on its platform that Iceland should apply to join the European Union.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Left-Green Movement**

In the run up to the unification of the left wing parties it became clear that a certain part of the People's Alliance and the Women's Party would break away from the Social Democratic Alliance and start their own party, the Left-Green Movement. It would become a political party with emphases on leftism and wildlife conservation. The Left-Greens' manifesto was in the beginning under considerable influence from the People's Alliance, which was an offspring of the Icelandic Socialist Party and, before that, the Communist Party. The People's Alliance had fought against the United States having a naval air base stationed in Iceland, demanded Iceland's withdrawal from NATO, and were sceptical about unhindered market economy and capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Progressive Party**

In 1916, when the focus of Icelandic politics was shifting from independence politics to class politics, the Progressive Party emerged. It was in many ways a typical farmer's party that highlighted issues of importance to the rural area. As the rural population shrank, the potential votes of the Progressive Party decreased as well. In an attempt to turn the tide, the party tried to redefine itself as a centrist party, potentially more appealing to voters in urban areas. The Progressive Party has, as a centrist party, been able to work with almost all other Icelandic parties regardless of their ideological stance. This has in turn meant that the Progressive Party has been in power far more often than one would think, given its voting strength, and has been a part of surprisingly high number of Icelandic governments.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Eiríkur Bergmann, *Evrópusamruninn og Ísland: leiðarvísir um samrunaþróun Evrópu og stöðu Íslands í evrópsku samstarfi*, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Vinstrihreyfingin - grænt framboð, "Um VG," <http://www.vg.is/um-flokkinn/> (retrieved on June 16, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson, *Íslenska stjórnkerfið*, 98-100.

### **3. The European Union and its Institutions**

The basis of the European Union lies in the bloodshed suffered by the people of Europe in the two World Wars fought in the twentieth century, including the horrors of the holocaust. War was to be avoided by increasing the interdependence between states in Europe to the point where the threat of war in Europe would be eradicated.

The European Union of today is in many ways a unique organization. The cooperation of individual nations is much closer than that of typical intergovernmental organization similar to the United Nations. The difference lies in the fact that parts of the sovereignty of each member state of the EU is pooled together in EU's institutional set-up and hence EU's institutions have more power than witnessed elsewhere. However, unlike the 50 states of the United States of America, the member states of the EU in no way relinquish their status as independent and sovereign nations. Joining the EU nevertheless involves a certain sharing, some would say surrendering, of national sovereignty. It is, however, rationalised by pointing to the fact that the pooled and combined authority of the member states creates a far more powerful and influential unit in world politics, which in turn benefits each member state.<sup>40</sup> In the following chapter the EU, will be studied in an effort to shed a light this ensemble that Icelandic political parties differ so greatly on.

#### **3.1. The History of the European Union**

The origins of the European Union are traced back to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) that was founded in 1951 by the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The founding members were most importantly the old foes, France and West Germany, but Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands also followed suit. This cooperation began as a common market for coal and steel. The rationale behind the formation of the ECSC at the end of the Second World War was that steps had to be taken to ensure that war should not return to Europe, and peace and prosperity would maintain the region. That would best be achieved by interconnecting the economies of the ECSC member states, thus avoiding the pitfalls experienced after World War I, which had led the continent straight into

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<sup>40</sup> Mark A. Pollack, "Theorizing EU Policy-Making" in *Policy-making in the European Union* edited by Helen Wallace, Mark A. Pollack, and Alasdair R. Young, 16-44 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19-20.

another war. In the beginning, the collaboration centred upon economic collaboration and tariffs controls, but as the member states' general experience proved positive, a growing interest emerged to deepen the cooperation and increase its range. The Treaties of Rome were signed in 1957, laying the basis for the common market. The common policy was extended to more areas than before, including agriculture.<sup>41</sup>

This cooperation in Europe continued to grow and despite some bumps in the road, as witnessed with the "Empty Chair" crisis in the 1960s and the reluctance of France to allow Britain to join the union, there was a general satisfaction with the collaboration and a will within the member states to work together even closer than before. A big step in the direction of more cooperation and integration was taken with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. It officially created the European Union, the common European currency, the Euro, and established the monetary union between the member states. The treaty also introduced cooperation in policy fields that had been left out of the cooperation thus far.<sup>42</sup> The European Union suffered a considerable setback in 2005 when the Constitutional Treaty was rejected in national referendums in both France and the Netherlands. The treaty had included important institutional and constitutional changes that did not go down well in all quarters. In the end it did not turn out as a disaster of any sort. The treaty was repacked as the Lisbon Treaty. While the constitutional symbols were left out of it, most of the institutional changes proposed in the Constitution Treaty got through to the Lisbon Treaty.<sup>43</sup>

The nature and the scope of the European Union has changed significantly from what started with the creation of a common market for coal and steel in 1951. Today the European Union's member states total 27, while Croatia, Macedonia, Iceland, Montenegro and Turkey have all applied to join the EU.

### **3.2. The Institutions of the European Union**

The structure of the EU's institutions is in no way set in stone, having evolved alongside changes in European political affairs as time has passed. As the European

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Gallagher, Michael Laver and Peter Mair, *Representative Government in Modern Europe* (McGraw-Hill, 2006), 116-117.

<sup>42</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 95-100.

<sup>43</sup> Dinan, 151-154.



Union has grown in size, so has the cooperation between the member states become deeper and been applied to more policy fields. Sometimes the criticism is voiced that the institutional structure of the EU is overly complicated. For the untrained eye, it can be difficult to understand all the different functions of each institution. While there is some truth to that the institutional development and decision making procedures can be complex, it can be argued that the main EU institutions are in fact just six; the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, the European Council, the European Court of Justice, and finally the European Central Bank. These institutions have somewhat familiar roles, as they bear resemblance to typical domestic political systems, where power is divided between the three branches of government; the executive, legislative, and finally judicial branch.<sup>44</sup> The member states have, as previously described transferred some autonomy and elements of their sovereignty into these institutions.

The European Commission is in many ways a distinct institution in world politics and demonstrates the supranational elements of the EU. Each member state, regardless of its size, is entitled to one member in the Commission, with each member state nominating its own commissioners. As there is no electing of the members by the public, this process has sometimes received criticism for being undemocratic. However, it is emphasised that the Commission acts on behalf of European citizens as a whole, national biases being frowned upon. Recently the Commission has been weakening due to increased influence and power being handed to the European Parliament in recent treaties.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the Commission today can initiate the legislative process, while being dependent on the Council and the European Parliament to agree to them. Hence the Commission has no power to make decisions of its own. In a sense, the Commission is best described as being the European Union's bureaucracy, rather than being the government of the European Union.<sup>46</sup>

The European Parliament (EP) is the European Union's institution that has gained most influence in recent years. Since 1979 the EP's members have been elected in

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<sup>44</sup> Hussein Kassim, "The Institutions of the European Union," i *European Politics*, edited by Colin Hay and Anand Menon, 168-199 (Oxford University Press, 2007), 169.

<sup>45</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 171-172.

<sup>46</sup> Helen Wallace, "An Institutional Anatomy and Five Policy Modes" in *Policy-making in the European Union* edited by Helen Wallace, Mark A. Pollack, and Alasdair R. Young, 69-104 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 71-74.

direct elections by citizens of the member states. While election participation has usually been rather low, the manner of the elections gives the parliamentarians a powerful mandate. The EP is usually not grouped in different national camps, but rather by party ideology typical to that in national parliaments. As previously mentioned, the EP's role within the EU has been becoming ever more important. In recent decades the authority of the EP has gone from being mostly a consultative organization to becoming a real powerhouse of European integration. Today it holds legislative power in many important policy areas, along with vital budgetary powers and a certain influence over the composition of the European Commission.<sup>47</sup>

Those who say that the European Union is still mostly an intergovernmental organization rather than a supranational one would be likely to point to the Council of Ministers as their case in point. In reality there is only one Council, but the structure varies depending on which policy field is under discussion. Hence, ministers of agriculture are present during discussions on matters of agriculture, but if the subject matter is related to finances, it is the turn of finance ministers to sit in. The Commission's president sits in on the meetings but does not have the right to vote. No record is kept of the meetings, which usually take place behind closed doors. The Council of Ministers holds a vital role when it comes to the legislative role of the EU alongside the European Parliament.<sup>48</sup>

The European Council only relatively recently became a formal institution, and remains fundamentally different from other EU institutions. In most ways it is a highly intergovernmental meeting of the leaders of each member state. Its meetings take place twice a year and are attended by the heads of state of each of the 27 member states. The role of the European Council is mainly to set the overall direction of the European Union and to discuss pressing issues. Although the European Council has no formal authority when it comes to decision-making in the EU, it sets the tone for future work of the European Union as a whole.<sup>49</sup>

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) and the European Central Bank (ECB) are highly supranational institutions as their level of authority usually surpasses that of each individual participating member state's domestic judicial and monetary

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<sup>47</sup> Wallace, 82-84.

<sup>48</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 205-206.

<sup>49</sup> Helen Wallace, "An Institutional Anatomy and Five Policy Modes" 81-82.

systems. The ECJ is based in Luxembourg and is composed of 27 judges, one from each member state. It is in most ways comparable to a supreme court, where cases are put before it both directly via national courts and by individuals, companies, or organisations. Rulings handed out by the ECJ supersede those of domestic courts of law, so one could say there is a considerable transfer of autonomy involved.<sup>50</sup> The ECB is responsible for the stability of the common currency and together with national central banks of the member countries of the euro zone oversees the policy creation and its implementation. It is regarded as a highly autonomous institution focusing on the overall health of the euro zone and largely independent of individual state interference.<sup>51</sup>

In conclusion, the power within the EU has been shifting. With increased power being given to the democratically elected European Parliament, the power of unelected entities like the European Commission has been diminishing. Therefore, individual state powers are decreasing as the joint institution of the European Parliament goes from strength to strength. The transfer of power from member states to the institution of the EU can be best seen by the fact that laws in the policy areas the EU handles, passed the EU's institutions surpass those of the individual member states. Hence one could say that transfer of classical Westphalian sovereignty and autonomy of nation-states within the EU to the joint institutions of the EU, a post-Westphalian environment, is clearly visible.<sup>52</sup>

Like most things within the EU, the legislative process has evolved alongside the union itself. The highly supranational European Commission instigates the policy process by implementing the legislative process. But the Commission does not have any decision-making powers beyond its implantation. The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers decide jointly on the legislation. This process has been called co-decision procedure. Here the EP and the Council need to agree on the legislation put forth by the Commission for it to become EU law and implemented in each EU member state.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Wallace, 84-85.

<sup>51</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 397-399.

<sup>52</sup> Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Glatast fullveldið við inngöngu í Evrópusambandið?" in *Ný staða Íslands í utanríkismálum: tengsl við önnur Evrópulönd*, edited by Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir, 123-133 (Reykjavík : Háskólaútgáfan, 2007), 132.

<sup>53</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 303-306.

### 3.3. An Intergovernmental Organization or a Supranational Union?

While discussing the evolution of the EU through recent decades it is necessary to point out that there has always been a continual tug of war between those who adhere to intergovernmentalism and those who regard a supranational structure to be better suited for the future of the European Union and its member states.

Intergovernmentalism is a European integration theory. Those who adhere to it argue for international cooperation between sovereign nation-states and feel that power should be shared sparingly into EU's institutions. The EU should be a place where state governments come together, talk, and come to an agreement. The institutions of the EU should not have individual powers; only majority decisions based on member states' votes. The intergovernmentalists feel the EU should not be able to control the actions of individual states through its institutions. One does not have to view the institutional structure of the EU for long to realise that the EU has moved considerably more towards supranationalism than would have been possible with a purely intergovernmental organisation. However, there are still highly intergovernmental elements to the EU. The European Council and the Council of Ministers are very intergovernmental. As discussed earlier, they are a meeting place for national governments, where decisions are reached on basis of nationality.<sup>54</sup>

Those who argue for the EU to be a supranational entity are sometimes described as being federalists, where the focus is on the EU in its entirety and sovereignty of individual member states is not a key attribute anymore. One could look at the United States of America as an example of where the staunchest supranationalists would like to see the EU in the future. However, this vision is not at all typical for those who would like to see a more supranational European Union. Most merely feel that closer cooperation should be strived towards whenever possible and that Europe should be viewed as a one continuum.<sup>55</sup> The institutions of the EU that most clearly can be viewed as being supranational are in particular the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. Neither makes decisions based

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<sup>54</sup> John McCormick, *Understanding the European Union: a concise introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 5.

<sup>55</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 4-6.

particularly on nationality, but instead focuses on European interests as a whole, including those of its citizens.<sup>56</sup>

Traditionally, the United Kingdom has been a staunch opponent of any ideas of a federal Europe, while Germany has been willing to bring the EU closer to a federal entity. However, the general consensus is that with recent treaty changes, a compromise has been reached between these different groups within the EU, and one can find elements of both intergovernmentalism and supranationalism in the structure of the EU.<sup>57</sup> Having gone through different elements of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, certain parallels are evident between intergovernmentalism and classical ideas of Westphalian sovereignty, where the importance is placed upon the nation-state as the sole source of power and autonomy in international relations. Furthermore, supranationalism fits well with the ideas put forth by scholars belonging to post-Westphalian thought, such as Jurgen Habermas. For them, the nation-state is no longer is the only entity that matters on the world stage and nation-states must cooperate to regain elements lost to globalisation and increased interdependence between different states.

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<sup>56</sup> John McCormick, *Understanding the European Union: a concise introduction*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Desmond Dinan, *Ever closer union: an introduction to European integration*, 4.

## **4. How does the Portrayed Idea of Sovereignty influence the Icelandic Political Parties' Stance towards the European Union?**

The focal point of this chapter is to examine how the parties' platforms and other official documents differ on sovereignty and analyse how each one uses the concept of sovereignty in explaining their position on EU membership. Beforehand, one would expect there to be clear differences in the way a pro-European Union party, like the Social Democratic Alliance, would approach the concept of sovereignty, as opposed to the way a party sceptical on the EU would tackle the subject.

### **4.1. The Independence Party**

The Independence Party was formed in 1929 and the party's manifesto dates back to its origins. The manifesto is a short one and does not give specific instructions to individual policy fields. An overall political platform is decided upon by the party's representatives at each national convention, held at regular intervals. As is to be expected, the party's leadership wields considerable influence on what direction these national conventions take. However, no leader can be guaranteed to be able to force his or her will on the national convention, if the overall will of the majority of representatives is against his or her ideas.<sup>58</sup>

The first paragraph of the party's resolution on foreign affairs states: "The Independence Party believes that the focal point of Icelandic foreign policy is to guard Iceland's sovereignty and independence, as well as work with other nations to increase peace, freedom, independence, human rights and prosperity."<sup>59</sup> Here the emphasis is placed on using the foreign policy to safeguard the sovereignty and independence, along the lines of intergovernmentalism. The sixth paragraph of the resolution on foreign policy goes as follows: "Care must be taken to strengthen co-operation with the EU on the basis of the EFTA agreement and each possibility must be ensued to promote Icelandic interests and viewpoints while EU policy is in formulation."<sup>60</sup> Here the national convention members seem keen to participate in European integration, but they feel that the NATO agreement, and presumably the EEA agreement as well, are best suited to ensure that Icelandic interests get the

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<sup>58</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, "Um flokkinn," <http://www.xd.is/um-sjalfstaedisflokkinn/> (retrieved on July 26, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, "Ályktun um utanríkismál," <http://www.xd.is/landsfundur/alyktanir-landsfundar-2009/nr/796> (retrieved on July 26, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, "Ályktun um utanríkismál."

attention they deserve. The third paragraph of the foreign policy resolution is especially interesting. There the Independence party states that Icelandic defences must be ensured at all times through co-operation with the United States of America and NATO.<sup>61</sup> Zygmunt Bauman has wondered if a nation-state can be called truly sovereign, if it lacks the ability to handle its own national defences and defend its citizens against external threats. He also mentions that the nation's economy has to be robust enough for the state to be able to maintain itself.<sup>62</sup> If one should apply such a stringent definition of sovereignty onto Iceland, it would probably never have been considered fully sovereign, as Iceland has never since it became independent been able to take care of its own national defences, often having to look to larger states for economic assistance, as witnessed with the Marshall assistance at the end of WWII.

Prior to the 2009 national convention, the Independence Party's leadership formed a committee on European Affairs. The party held its national convention in the shadow of the then recent collapse of Iceland's economy, where it seemed that the traditional solutions of the Independence Party had failed to stem the tide of recession. The party reacted to the obstacles it faced by launching a more positive stance towards the notion of increasing Iceland's participation in European integration, appointing a committee to tackle the issue. The committee's purpose was to discuss the pros and cons of Iceland joining the EU in an open and honest manner, and to publish its findings in a report preceding the convention.<sup>63</sup> Early on in the report concerns are voiced with regards to the state of the EU's common fisheries policy. The report's authors feel that should the EU's fisheries policy be agreed upon unchanged from the way it was in 2009, it would severely influence Icelandic sovereign rights in a negative way, especially if the right to issue overall quota would go to the EU. Furthermore, it states that any surrendering of quota controls and resources to the EU would equal surrendering a part of Iceland's sovereignty.<sup>64</sup> Here it is clear that the writers of the report relate the right to control Iceland's fisheries conclusively to Icelandic sovereignty. This is very much in line

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<sup>61</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, "Ályktun um utanríkismál."

<sup>62</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: the human consequences* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 62-65.

<sup>63</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd Skýrsla Evrópunefndar: lögð fram á 38. landsfundi Sjálfstæðisflokksins 26.-29. mars 2009*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd Skýrsla Evrópunefndar: lögð fram á 38. landsfundi Sjálfstæðisflokksins 26.-29. mars 2009*, 9-10.

with the Westphalian idea of sovereignty, where a nation has an unlimited right to handle domestic affairs within its territory as the state itself deems fitting. Quite unmistakably, the authors equate Iceland's fisheries with sovereignty. A clear parallel is placed between Icelandic independence and the right of Icelanders themselves to allocate the Icelandic fisheries quota. Any surrendering of this right of self-determination to the hands of EU bureaucrats automatically translates to the loss of Icelandic independence and sovereignty.

The Independence Party's committee on European Affairs spends considerable effort on analysing the very concept of sovereignty. The report quotes an essay on Icelandic sovereignty by Krístrún Heimisdóttir.<sup>65</sup> It leads the committee to conclude that sovereignty is defined by three features. Firstly, the certain powers granted by the constitution to the holder of the state. Secondly, the sovereignty of a state grants it the power to enter into international agreements with other states. Finally, the authority to define the actual power of the state, define what legislation is issued, and the priority of the law of the state.<sup>66</sup>

The report's writers fully acknowledge that considerable authority of the state has already been transferred away from the state. The EEA agreement, the Schengen agreement, and later-time changes to the EEA agreement are named as examples of this transfer of authority to international institutions. Hence Icelandic sovereignty is no way plenary. But the report states that certain conditions have to be met so that any type of transfer of sovereignty can take place. Most importantly, the transfer must be within the law. Not everyone would agree that the EEA agreement fits within the law, but there seems no doubt in the minds of the report's authors that the amount of transfer of sovereignty involved in joining the EU would certainly call for a change in the Icelandic constitution. They do say that should Iceland join the EU, chances are that Iceland's potential to influence the EU's legislation would improve. However, there is no mention of this fact offering Iceland the opportunity

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<sup>65</sup> Krístrún Heimisdóttir, "Stjórnarskrárbundið fullveldi Íslands," in *Tímarit lögfræðinga*, edited by Einar Arnórsson, 19-60 (Reykjavík: Lögmannafélag Íslands, 2003).

<sup>66</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd Skýrsla Evrópunefndar: lögð fram á 38. landsfundi Sjálfstæðisflokksins 26.-29. mars 2009*, 40.



to strengthen its sovereignty and directly influence the EU legislation Iceland has to adopt.<sup>67</sup>

In 2011, in the wake of another national convention, the party distanced itself further from the pro-EU stance. In its political conclusion at the end of the convention the party said the focus should be on rebuilding the economy from within and staying out of the EU. Furthermore, that there should be held a national referendum on whether the accession talks between Iceland and the EU should continue or be terminated.<sup>68</sup>

Overall, the Independence Party seems to connect the concept of sovereignty strongly to Iceland's national resources, though mostly to fisheries. If the right to allocate quota moved abroad or foreign ships began fishing within the Icelandic area of fisheries jurisdiction, it would be perceived as a clear loss of sovereignty and independence. The general consensus in the party seems to be that the authority of the state is of real importance and should not be compromised at any cost. At the same time, the fact that considerable authority has already been transferred is mostly ignored. The focus is mostly on the authority of the state and the fact that domestic power should not be transferred to the EU more than has already been agreed to.

## **4.2. The Social Democratic Alliance**

The Social Democratic Alliance has a considerably detailed manifesto that touches on many policy issues. On top of that, the party holds biannual national conventions, passing political resolutions on current affairs and pressing issues. The Social Democratic Alliance is the only party of the Icelandic four-party system that currently includes EU membership as a part of its policy package. There it states:

The current economic crisis and its consequences go to show that state sovereignty and long-term well-being is best ensured by close cooperation with other states, be it by the regulation of the financial market, emergency response, or by sharing a common currency and a strong central bank as a lender of last resort. The Social Democratic Alliances policy that Iceland's interests are best served by being a

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<sup>67</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd Skýrsla Evrópunefndar: lögð fram á 38. landsfundi Sjálfstæðisflokksins 26.-29. mars 2009*, 41-43.

<sup>68</sup> Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, Stjórn málaályktun 40. landsfundur Sjálfstæðisflokksins dagana 17. til 20. nóvember, 2011.

member of the European Union and the Euro zone, is more fitting today than ever before.<sup>69</sup>

Here it is obvious that the Social Democratic Alliance perceives joining the EU as the answer to Iceland's woes after the economic crisis of 2008. The argument that joining the EU equals losing a part of the state's sovereignty is turned on its head. The Social Democratic Alliance considers that the best way to safeguard sovereignty is by cooperating with other states. This argument is very much in line with the post-Westphalian system and in the spirit of supranationalism, which one could attribute to the ideas of Jurgen Habermas. In order to respond to the world's increasing interdependence, national governments are forced to work together in an effort to be able to influence both domestic and international affairs they otherwise would not be able to do. Thus the line between domestic and foreign policy is getting ever more blurred.

The Social Democratic Alliance dedicates a section of its official webpage to the EU. There it describes the EU as a union of sovereign and independent nations that have decided to share parts of their sovereignty in mutual organizations and institutions in an effort to give everyone within the union the same right to employment and trade. It is stated that this kind of sharing of one's sovereignty does not necessarily constitute a loss or a surrender of sovereignty if done in the right manner. It goes on to compare the sharing of sovereignty to that of Iceland's participation in United Nations' human rights conventions, among others. This comparison seems designed to soften the blow, as the pooling of sovereignty involved in joining is said to have been done numerous times before and by connecting the concept of pooled sovereignty to human rights, a concept widely regarded as positive, thus making it hard for likely voters not to agree with the statement.<sup>70</sup>

In the party's section on the EU, it is argued that by joining the EU, Iceland would in fact strengthen its sovereignty as compared to the way things currently stand with the EFTA and EEA agreements. As Iceland, already adopts three-quarters of EU

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<sup>69</sup> Samfylkingin, "Jafnaðarstefnan," <http://www.samfylkingin.is/Stefnum%C3%A1ll> (retrieved on July 27, 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Samfylkingin, "Um Evrópusambandið," [www.samfylkingin.is/stefnumál/um\\_evrópusambandið](http://www.samfylkingin.is/stefnumál/um_evrópusambandið) (retrieved on July 27, 2011).

legislation without having any means of influencing the decision-making progress in any formal way. Only by joining the EU would Iceland gain the right to influence this legislation. The Social Democratic Alliance makes a point of stating that small states within the EU have been able to exert considerable influence in areas of their expertise.<sup>71</sup> Here the Social Democratic Alliance is pointing to the sharing of sovereignty that has already taken place with the EEA agreement, arguing that it would be far better to at least be involved in the legislative process, despite only having a small say in most matters, than to be forced to adopt legislation without being able to influence it at all, reducing the Icelandic parliament to a reception desk to sign off on legislation packages already agreed upon by the EU.

In 2001 the Social Democratic Alliance issued a publication looking into ideal goals of potential future accession talks between Iceland and the EU. An entire chapter is devoted to the concept of sovereignty. It opens with the following statement by the chapter's author and current parliamentarian for the party, Valgerður Bjarnadóttir. "In times of globalization one can wonder if it is an anachronism to spend a lot of time to look at the issue of sovereignty."<sup>72</sup> This is a clear sign that the author argues that the post-Westphalian model should be applied to the current world order and does not seem to believe that the very concept of sovereignty is as important in modern day politics as some have argued.

She mentions that this would definitely not be the first time Iceland had shared a part of its sovereignty in international cooperation, as Iceland's defence agreements with the United States and its later decision to join NATO should certainly be considered as obvious acts of pooled sovereignty.<sup>73</sup> By pointing to previous acts of pooled sovereignty and the fact that it is almost commonplace in the modern world, the author seems to be trying to downplay the transfer of authority involved in joining the EU, asking what the real difference is between Iceland joining the EU and the many transfers of authority and autonomy to institutions that the Icelandic government has engaged in numerous times before.

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<sup>71</sup> Samfylkingin, "Um Evrópusambandið."

<sup>72</sup> Valgerður Bjarnadóttir, "Fullveldismál," in, *Ísland í Evrópu : greining á samningsmarkmiðum Íslands við hugsanlega aðildarumsókn að ESB: Evrópuúttekt Samfylkingarinnar*, edited by Eiríkur Bergmann Einarsson, 19-28 (Reykjavík: Samfylkingin, 2001), 19.

<sup>73</sup> Bjarnadóttir, 20.

The chapter's author elaborates on a recurrent theme of the Social Democratic Alliance: that Iceland has already through the EEA agreement transferred considerable authority to the EU. She refers to those who claim that the transfer is even more decisive within the EEA than if Iceland would happen to be a full member of the EU. The reasoning is that because the EFTA states can hardly in any way influence EU legislation which they are forced to adopt as their own. If Iceland was to join the EU, it would as a full acting member of EU institutions at least be able to influence and vote on the decisions coming from the EU, as opposed to the way things stand today.<sup>74</sup> Again the Social Democratic Alliance tries to turn the argument that Iceland will lose its independence by joining the EU around, claiming that by joining the EU Iceland would in fact strengthen its independence by regaining control over its affairs lost by the EEA agreement and its NATO membership.

In many ways, any talk about reclaiming or strengthening sovereignty by joining the EU is a compelling argument, challenging the notion that the concept of sovereignty is an absolute one. By applying the sovereignty concept in this way, the Social Democratic Alliance tries to respond to accusations that by wanting to join the EU they are willing to give up on Iceland's cherished and hard-won sovereignty, by forcing the reader to examine it carefully and ponder whether it is in fact a useful or an obsolete concept.

### **4.3. The Left Green Movement**

The Left-Green's Movements original manifesto was the result of the party's inaugural meeting in 1999. Since then additional chapters have been added at national conventions. One of those is dedicated to foreign affairs. Parts of it made its way into the overall manifesto of the Left-Greens, placing emphasis on an independent Icelandic foreign affairs policy and pacifism. The Left-Greens stress the need to fight social globalisation and to struggle against the current emphasis on world-wide capitalism. The Left-Greens feel, however, that Iceland should strive towards increased co-operation and trade arrangements with the European Union when it comes to education policy, labour market issues, and environmental affairs, to name a few. The Left-Greens reject the notion that their stance reflects

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<sup>74</sup> Bjarnadóttir, 21.

isolationism. They feel that Iceland should seek broad cooperation with many different nations and transnational organizations. The party considers the European Union's vested interest to be centred on capitalism and international corporations. Thus the party flatly rejects joining the European Union and feels Icelandic interests are better served by staying outside it.<sup>75</sup> The EU is criticized for being overly neoliberal and caring more for the interests of capital and corporations than for people and the environment.

However, if the policy on foreign affairs is scrutinised, the tone seems slightly different. It states that possible benefits of Iceland joining the EU do not justify further transferring of Iceland's decision rights. It goes on to criticize the EU's institutions for being centralistic, bureaucratic, and lacking in democracy. It declares that EU membership would diminish Icelandic sovereignty even more than already witnessed by the EEA agreement, and would compromise the rule of Icelanders over their own resources. The democratically elected government of Iceland may itself take decisions on amendments similar to those established by the EU, if they so choose, and then based on its own terms.<sup>76</sup> The focus here is clearly not on the concept of sovereignty. The Left-Greens base their opposition against the EU on the perceived lack of democracy within the EU, and feel that its driving force is to ensure the continuation of a capitalist economy. However, if examined carefully, a certain emphasis on the importance of self-rule can be discerned, the notion that the decision-making power should remain in Iceland, and that it should be transferred no further than already witnessed through the EEA agreement.

It is interesting to look at how the Left-Greens approach the concept of sovereignty. While lambasting the EU for being an undemocratic, capitalist federation in the making, a giant with whom Iceland should under no circumstances share its sovereignty or autonomy, the Left-Greens seem to perceive Iceland as a fully sovereign nation, its sovereignty being almost absolute. This stands in stark contrast to the view of many proponents of the post-Westphalian realm, as earlier mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, especially the writings of Jurgen Habermas and Chris Brown.

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<sup>75</sup> Vinstrihreyfingin - grænt framboð, "Stefnan," <http://www.vg.is/stefna> (retrieved on June 16, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Vinstrihreyfingin - grænt framboð, "Sjálfstæð utanríkisstefna, félagsleg alþjóðahyggja," <http://www.vg.is/stefna/utanrikisstefna/> (retrieved on June 16, 2011).

On the whole, the Left-Greens devote far less effort on the concept of sovereignty in their official party documents, than the Independence Party or the Social Democratic Alliance. The party only slightly touches on the matter of sovereignty and self-rule. But when it does, it emphasizes the need for Iceland to run its own affairs without foreign intervention. That the act of joining the EU would involve distinct change from the way things are today in Iceland, in terms of decision-making. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that the Left-Greens, despite not devoting many pages on the matter, find sovereignty to be an important concept and something that can be lost by joining the EU.

#### **4.4. The Progressive Party**

The Progressive Party's platform states the party's fundamental *raison d'être*. The platform does change from time to time, but the changes are few and far-between. The party responds to calls for change in current affairs by resolutions issued at its biannual national conventions. Furthermore, the party issues election policies for each election where it highlights the issues its members feel should be in the spotlight before each election campaign.<sup>77</sup>

The Progressive Party has in some ways gone full circle in its attitude towards whether or not Iceland should become a member of the European Union. As is common with parties close to the roots of the rural areas, the Progressive Party was for a long time highly unconvinced of Iceland's participation in the European integration, unless rigid conditions were fulfilled. In the 1990s, however, a very pro-European leadership gained control of the party. In some ways, not even the Social Democratic Alliance went as far as the Progressive Party when it came to the issue of possible membership to the European Union.<sup>78</sup> Since the economic collapse in 2008 the Progressive Party has seen a considerable renewal of its leadership and its parliamentarians. The current leadership seems far more sceptical of joining the European Union than the party line has been for decades. Despite this, the party has a pro-European minority, which it has been careful not to alienate in the past. However, as the leadership has become increasingly outspoken about its Euro-scepticism, there has been considerable unrest on the pro-European arm, with one

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<sup>77</sup> Framsóknarflokkurinn, "Stefnan," <http://www.framsokn.is/Stefnan/> (retrieved on June 20, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Eiríkur Bergmann, *Evrópusamruninn og Ísland: leiðarvísir um samrunaþróun Evrópu og stöðu Íslands í evrópsku samstarfi*, 137.

parliamentarian abandoning the party. Therefore it is safe to say the Progressive Party is clearly split in its views towards the European Union.

In the Progressive Party's Manifesto, a section is devoted to the international community. It states; "we have a great responsibility to cooperate with other nations towards the solution of common problems. We want our participation on the international stage to be based on the recognition of the right of nations to independence and self-determination."<sup>79</sup> The statement is rather straightforward, with the party declaring it willing to involve Iceland in international collaboration as a sovereign, independent nation. Meanwhile, the party is unwilling to participate in any cooperation where Iceland's right to self-determination or independence is to be transferred away from the Icelandic state. This stance is along the line of the post-Westphalian view and that of intergovernmentalism. One has to wonder how the Progressive Party feels about the current level of sovereignty transfer that the nation has undertaken through the EEA and Schengen agreements. Would the party indeed prefer to opt out from those agreements and any other that might diminish Icelandic sovereignty in any way?

As previously mentioned, the Progressive Party has changed its mind on the EU on more than one occasion. When former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Halldór Ásgrímsson, led the party, it was quite positive towards the EU, although a section remained that opposed further European integration vigorously. During this time the party put together a European Committee to study possible future options for Icelandic relations with the rest of Europe. This committee issued a report on its findings in January 2001. Among its conclusions was that the then new institutions within the EU, such as the European Parliament, were gaining influence from what once was. Hence the EEA agreement would grant EEA member-states less power than before, diminishing their ability to influence lawmaking. Therefore it could be said that the sovereign rights of the EEA nations were being disturbed.<sup>80</sup> Here the committee takes an almost realist viewpoint on joining the EU in saying that the very nature of the EEA agreement has changed alongside the changes in the structure of the EU itself. As the decision-making procedures within the EU have

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<sup>79</sup> Framsóknarflokkurinn, „Stefnan,“ <http://www.framsokn.is/Stefnan> (retrieved on July 30, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Framsóknarflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd framsóknarmanna: Nefndarálit*, (Reykjavík: Framsóknarflokkurinn, 2001) 7.

changed, so has the ability of the EEA-states to influence the very legislation they are forced adopt as their own, diminished. This point can be seen today used by the Social Democratic Alliance in their argumentation for why Iceland should join the EU.

Later on in the report, in a section devoted to sovereignty, it is alleged that the realities of modern day foreign affairs have changed the very nature of the original idea of sovereignty, as interdependence between nations has grown. This increased interdependence and subsequent boom in international business and trade have made the interest of different nations more intertwined than ever before in history. This reasoning is very much in line with the writings of Jan Aart Scholte, described in the chapter on post-Westphalian sovereignty. The report states that full membership to the EU would definitely impact Icelandic sovereignty, but points to the fact that so did the membership to the EEA and even NATO. Finally the report states that there are those who say political independence would in fact increase should Iceland decide to join the EU.<sup>81</sup> Here we again see a definite trend when an Icelandic pro-EU party tackles the issue of sovereignty. An effort is made to distance the present time from the old Westphalian concept of sovereignty. The emphasis is placed on a post-Westphalian concept, where the increase of interdependence in the world is seen to force modern-day states to collaborate, which is perceived as the democratic way to go about governance in today's globalised world.

In 2011 the Progressive Party held its 31st National Convention under the rule of a more EU-sceptical leadership than before. There the party agreed to a resolution on foreign affairs, stating that Iceland's interest are best served by remaining outside the EU. The rationale behind this decision is that Iceland's national resources are the backbone of the nation's wellbeing and its full and undisputed legal custody is a precondition for national prosperity in the future.<sup>82</sup> Here the belief is put forth that joining the EU would inescapably involve transfer of authority of the nation's national resources, both fisheries and geothermal power, to common EU institutions.

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<sup>81</sup> Framsóknarflokkurinn, *Evrópunefnd framsóknarmanna: Nefndarálit*, 13.

<sup>82</sup> Framsóknarflokkurinn, "Ályktanir 31. flokksþings Framsóknarmanna," [http://www.framsokn.is/files/Alyktanir\\_2011.pdf](http://www.framsokn.is/files/Alyktanir_2011.pdf) (retrieved on July 30, 2011).



To sum up, the Progressive Party has gone back and forth on the question of Iceland joining the EU. In the early 2000s the party advocated membership on the grounds of supranationalism, where states stood a better chance of thriving by working together in a world of post-Westphalian sovereignty. Later the party would change its mind on the possibility of membership. Now the full control of Icelandic resources within its territory is a top priority, and international cooperation should be based on independence and self-determination. Here the connection to post-Westphalian sovereignty and intergovernmentalism is obvious for the reader.

## **Conclusion**

Having studied how the concept of sovereignty is used by the Icelandic four-party, it seems clear that a clear emphasis is placed on sovereignty in modern Icelandic political discussion. Parties that are against Icelandic membership to the EU readily bring up the independence struggle and ask if those who are keen on Icelandic membership are willing to surrender the sovereignty that Jón Sigurðsson had fought so hard for to EU's institutions and other member states. Those who feel that EU membership is the right step forward for Iceland also use the concept. They claim that membership will in fact strengthen Icelandic sovereignty as Icelanders will be able to directly influence EU decisions in a way impossible for them under the current EEA agreement.

However, clear distinctions are evident on how the concept is applied by parties that have a positive stance towards the EU, compared with those who are against EU membership. The Independence Party and current Progressive Party leadership seem to share a similar interpretation of the concept. Both focus on the autonomy of the state and its absolute control over a certain territory with regards to the national resources such as geothermal energy and Icelandic fisheries jurisdiction. This is similar to realist interpretation of the concept. International cooperation is encouraged but on the grounds of nation-state sovereignty and independence, very much in the spirit of intergovernmentalism. This emphasis on the power of the state on the grounds of territory and intergovernmentalism goes in line with the classical Westphalian system described in chapter one.

The Left-Green Movement's stance on the subject is somewhat more complicated, as it really does not devote as much effort on the concept as the other three parties do. There is a mention of the subject of sovereignty, as EU membership is considered to weaken Icelandic sovereignty, and the opinion is stated that the Icelandic government should rather be in control of its own matters rather than joining the EU. However, it cannot realistically be said that the Left-Green Movement's view on sovereignty leads to a particularly negative stance towards the EU. The Left-Green Movement's negative stance towards EU membership in the party publications seems to be mostly on the ground of ideology, where the EU is criticized for being overly neoliberal and capitalist driven.

The only Icelandic party currently positive towards EU membership, the Social Democratic Alliance's stance on sovereignty stands out. The party advocates supranationalism and says that the only way to combat certain challenges facing Iceland is through cooperation. It uses the concept often in its publications, both in the regard where Iceland will regain sovereignty by joining the EU as opposed to being a member of the EEA Agreement, and by using the liberal international relations' theory's post-Westphalian definition of the concept, rather than the classical Westphalian definition, which is more in line with the realist premises. Some of the Progressive Party's older publications, dating from its pro-European past, are of the same nature as that of the Social Democratic Alliance today.

Therefore, in the interpretation of the four parties, a post-Westphalian view on sovereignty, as envisioned by Jurgen Habermas, translates into a positive stance on joining the EU, as is evident by the Social Democratic Alliance and the Progressive Party of the early 2000s. Classical Westphalian view as witnessed by the publications of the Independence Party and the current leadership of the Progressive Party translates to a negative stance on whether Iceland should join the EU.

Despite this, all four parties agree on one point, that a certain transfer of decision rights and sovereignty has already taken place, and thus in a way agreeing with authors who have described the post-Westphalian world order. Therefore, one could ask if it is then possible to talk about a nation-state as being a little sovereign or very sovereign? Or, is it either absolutely sovereign or not sovereign at all? Rather, when discussing possible EU membership the reader might look to Michael Newman's writings, described earlier in this thesis. There he said the discussion should allow real issues, such as democracy to take centre stage and let the slightly idealist concept of sovereignty play a supporting role, rather than the leading role.

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