Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov • Vol. 4 (53) No.2. - 2011 • Series IV
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies

SOCIOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE NORWEGIAN MONARCHY

Crina LEON[1]

Abstract: *In this paper, some biographical data are presented about the three kings who ascended the Norwegian throne in the 20th century: King Haakon VII, King Olav V and King Harald V. Although he was an immigrant, King Haakon had a strong relationship with the people, which was due to the egalitarian policy of the Royal House. The Royal Family has always been a national symbol and all the three kings contributed to the increasing popularity of the monarchy by political sagacity and their humane qualities. Although at the beginning of the 21st century a part of the population favours a republic, the monarchy is still strong, with the head of state following the motto "All for Norway" ("Alt for Norge").*

Key words: *Norwegian monarchy, King Haakon VII, King Olav V, King Harald V, national symbol, popularity of monarchy.*

1. Introduction

Norway had not had a king of its own for several hundred years, but in 1905 it became a free, indivisible kingdom when the union with Sweden was dissolved. Norway is a constitutional monarchy, the same as the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, etc. The sovereign has little power regarding the national political decisions, as he or she has only representative and ceremonial duties. Norway's Constitution is based on the laws passed at Eidsvoll on 17 May 1814. Even if some may consider monarchy to be obsolete, a monarch could give a feeling of respect and equilibrium.

2. Three Generations of Kings in Norway

Figure 1 shows the family tree of the Norwegian Royal Family. The names of kings are displayed in bold letters (i.e. Haakon VII, Olav V and Harald V). Those who represent today's Royal Family are King Harald V (born in 1937), Queen Sonja (born in 1937), Crown Prince Haakon (born in 1973), Crown Princess Mette-Marit (born in 1973, also the mother of Marius, born in 1997), Princess Ingrid Alexandra (born in 2004), Prince Sverre Magnus (born in 2005) and Princess Märtha Louise (born in 1971). Moreover, Princess Märtha Louise and her husband, Ari Behn, are the parents of Maud Angelica Behn (born in 2003), Leah Isadora Behn (born in 2005) and Emma Tallulah Behn (born in 2008). King Harald has two elder sisters, who do not have the right of succession to the throne according to the Constitution of 1814: Princess Ragnhild, Mrs. Lorentzen (born in 1930), and Princess Astrid, Mrs. Ferner (born in 1932). Until 1990, it was the eldest male who was entitled to inherit the throne; now it is the eldest child irrespective of gender the one who succeeds to the throne.

[1] "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iaşi.

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

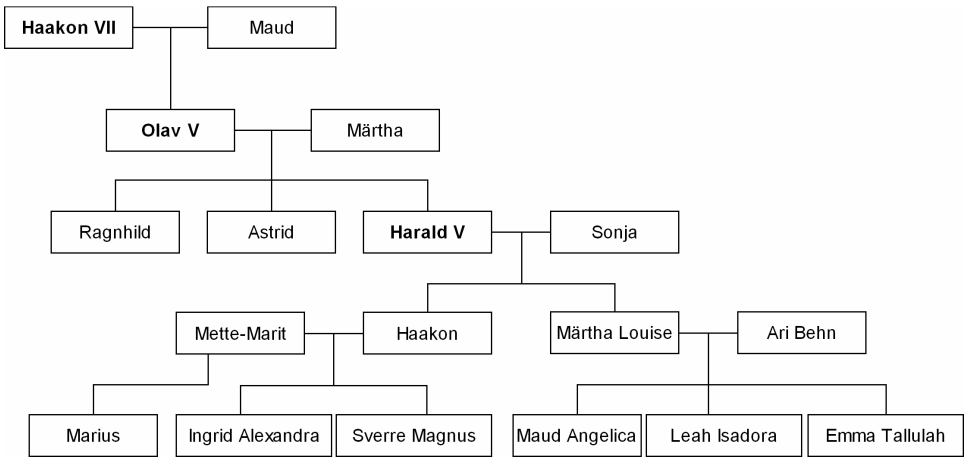


Figure 1. Norwegian Royal Family tree

Carl of Denmark (1872-1957) was connected with the British Royal Family and the British people by his marriage with his cousin, Princess Maud, in 1896. The two were chosen to establish the new Royal House in Norway. Prince Carl became the Norwegian King Haakon VII. This marriage could ensure the maintenance of Norway's independence. Maud Charlotte Mary Victoria, born in 1869, was Queen Victoria's grandchild and the daughter of the British King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. Although he was a controversial candidate to the throne, on the whole, *King Haakon* appeared as a unifying force from the beginning of his reign.

He wanted the Norwegians to choose their system of government. Neither the Norwegian politicians nor the European aristocracy valued that. A plebiscite took place on 12-13 November 1905, and almost 79 percent voted for monarchy with Prince Carl as the head of state. However, the demand for a plebiscite was the first contribution to the fact that the monarchy in Norway should be a popular one.

On 25 November 1905 the new Royal Family came to Norway. Prince Carl chose the old Norwegian kingly name Haakon, and adopted the motto "All for Norway" ("Alt for Norge").

The King felt his being chosen as the head of state as a duty towards the Norwegians. Therefore, he fought for better conditions for the people, and that is why he cancelled for instance the celebration of his 50th birthday in 1922 because of the economic difficulties. Besides his interest in foreign affairs, he was also very gifted regarding the drawing up of documents and notes.

Three 7 June days marked King Haakon's life, as well as Norwegian history in the 20th century:

- *on 7 June 1905 the Parliament (Storting) adopted the dissolution of the union with Sweden, and consequently King Oscar II had to resign as king of Norway. Since the offer to choose a Swedish prince as a Norwegian king was turned down by the Swedish king, this offer was directed towards Prince Carl of Denmark;*
- *on 7 June 1940 King Haakon was forced to run away to the United Kingdom because of the German occupation forces, which intended to take the life of the King and of Crown Prince Olav;*

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

- *on 7 June 1945 King Haakon came back to a free Norway and was warmly received by the people. On that day he was considered Norway's greatest hero – the most courageous and honest one.*

The label "a popular monarchy" was often used after the Second World War when the ties with the Royal Family became much stronger. This is due to the important function of the monarchy during the war. The King experienced the most difficult decision of his life when he refused to accept the government that the German occupation forces wanted to appoint, with Vidkun Quisling as Prime Minister. Quisling was the leader of the Nasjonal Samling party (National Assembly), and he had visited the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler, and told him that their countries ought to collaborate against the Communists and the Jews. The German ambassador had given King Haakon the choice between Quisling as Prime Minister and a destroying war. Thus the King would rather abdicate if the government agreed with the Germans because he regarded this as high treason. The monarch motivated his refusal: "My motto 'All for Norway' has always been and still is decisive for my actions, and if I could be convinced that at that moment I would best serve my people by giving up my royal task, or if I could make sure that there stood a majority of the Norwegian people behind the presidency of the Storting in this matter, I would […] follow that suggestion that the presidency has addressed to me" ("Mitt valgspråk 'Alt for Norge' har alltid vært og er fremdeles bestemmende for mine handlinger, og kunne jeg bli overbevist om at jeg i denne stund ville tjene mitt folk best ved å gi avkall på mitt kongelige verv, eller kunne jeg ha sikkerhet for at det bak Stortingets presidentskap i denne sak stod et flertall av det norske folk, ville jeg […] følge den henstilling, som presidentskapet har rettet til meg", Greve 314).

When the Germans invaded Norway on 9 April 1940, the Norwegian Royal Family had to leave the country and stay in Britain until the end of the Second World War. But King Haakon's radio speeches from London played an important role because in this way the Norwegians got confidence in the monarchy and in themselves. The Royal Family's popularity became a fact during the war due to the King's fight for the liberation of Norway. A daily Norwegian Service got developed and became known in Norway since the summer of 1940 as *London Radio* or "the broadcaster of the Norwegian government".

The passages that were included, also King Haakon's speeches, were thoroughly supervised. As press security did not exist, concrete orders were never given on the radio, except for some instructions from the leadership of the home front in the spring of 1944. The home front was an organization created by several of those who printed illegal newspapers, listened to the British station, gathered weapons, and got in touch with the King and the government in London. BBC continued to broadcast in Norwegian until 1958.

In the radio speech *The King's refusal* (*Kongens nei*), that could be heard on 8 July 1940 all over Norway, the King refused to abdicate by asserting: "By this I would deviate from that principle that has been the guiding thread for my actions throughout my entire reign, namely keeping strictly within the framework of the Constitution" ("Jeg ville derigjennem fravike det prinsipp som gjennom hele min regjeringstid har vært ledetråden for mine handlinger, nemlig strengt å holde meg innenfor rammen av forfatningen", Alnæs 436). Copies of King Haakon's clear refusal circulated in Norway in the summer of 1940. This answer was actually the first resistance piece of writing in the years of German occupation. The answer was both

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

on behalf of the King and the government, but the government was unpopular at that time because of its defence policy, and could not have so much influence on the people as the monarch.

People could become aware of the King's straight attitude with the help of the radio, and this brought him a much better reputation. Since his radio speeches from London encouraged the people not to give up their wish to live in a free Norway, King Haakon was considered the key symbol of the Norwegians' fight against terror and pressure. He became a national symbol, like Queen Victoria, the most famous and long-serving of Britain's monarchs had been. Her reign, represented by an age of industrial expansion and economic progress, had made the British people aware of their identity.

Germany finally capitulated in May 1945. However, the statement "Never more of 9 April" ("Aldri mer 9. april") became very important for the Norwegians after the Second World War. The date refers to 9 April 1940 when the Germans occupied Norway, and the Norwegian press later compared the significance of 11 September 2001 for USA with that of 9 April 1940 for Norway.

The war had caused much destruction. That is why the King decided to travel around to see by himself what the real situation was, how the people went ahead. He thus wanted to start Norway's revival. This showed the real interest he had in the country, and he received instead people's respect. The journeys were rather long because the Royal Family wouldn't fly. The lack of a period of crisis in Norway in the years after the war led to the strengthening of the monarchy's legitimacy. President Roosevelt considered Norway an example to follow as far as the resistance struggle was concerned.

King Haakon's reputation was strengthened not only by the experience he acquired as a monarch, but also by his personality and good judgement ability. The King wanted to follow the rules of the Constitution, and therefore he never tried to exercise his personal power. He knew what the Constitution meant for the Norwegians, as well as what the Norwegians meant for him.

King Olav is present in the people's memory as "sublimely dignified in his royalty, close and warm in his humanity" ("opphøyet verdig i sin kongelighet, nær og varm i sin menneskelighet") according to the speech of Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg delivered on 17 January 2001 inside Oslo Cathedral, on the occasion of the ten-year commemoration of King Olav's death. During the Second World War he also fought for the country's liberation from abroad.

It was a great pain for both the King and the Crown Prince to leave Norway in hours of distress, and moreover, they were afraid that the people would misunderstand them. They were well received by their relative, King George VI, and by Winston Churchill, and stayed in Britain until the end of the war. There they worked in close connection with the Nygaardsvold government. Johan Nygaardsvold was Prime Minister in Norway between 1935 and 1945.

Olav was King Haakon's closest adviser, and the two supported each other in their restless effort to defend Norway's interests. The Crown Prince wanted to go home as a symbolic proof that the King and the government would one day come back from the exile, but eventually he followed the government's advice not to.

Although he was in exile, his military and diplomatic role was very important. He had an inspiring influence on the Norwegian forces spread in Britain and Canada, and he became Norway's "extraordinary ambassador" in the USA together with Crown Princess Märtha.

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

His speeches, especially the New Year ones, made him popular by their important political message, but also by their wise words, such as "Life and death are parts of the same fantastic whole." ("Livet og døden er deler av den samme eventyrlige helhet.")

Throughout the oil crisis of 1973 the King wanted to be treated as an ordinary person, that is why he insisted on being a simple passenger on the tram and paying for himself as everybody else. He did not have any official life guards, but he had the Norwegians on his side.

King Olav was interested in integrating people who had a foreign cultural background because he wanted to be king for everybody. He called the immigrants "our new compatriots" ("våre nye landsmenn"). He had them learn the Norwegian language, know the Norwegian culture and laws so that they could take part in social activities on the same footing as others. He proved that he also fought for the immigrants' interests and had in mind a positive stress on refugees and asylum seekers.

Throughout his life he appreciated human value and respect for the individual, irrespective of race and religion. The Norwegians ought not to know racism and hatred of the foreigners, but they had to follow such values as tolerance. In this way, difference does not become a reason for enmity.

King Olav got directly involved in the refugees' problems by being the supreme protector of the Refugee Council in April 1970. On the other hand, Crown Princess Sonja was the chairman of the committee for the fund-raising campaign "Refugee 74", a historic private fund-raising on TV, totalling 22,5 million crowns, which got exuberant congratulations. She was as well a member of the campaign's committee in "Refugee 79".

King Harald was the first prince born on Norwegian ground after 567 years. Under the German occupation of Norway, he lived in the USA together with his mother and two sisters. King Harald also shows that the spirit of community is an important element of his reign because the very Norwegian word "sam-funn" ("society") means to have found together. Like his father and grandfather, who were his models in life, he chose the motto "All for Norway".

Despite the fact that there were many critics and sceptics who predicted that the fall of the monarchy was near, the King and Queen Sonja demonstrated that they had all been wrong. Although the Queen did not have blue blood in her veins, she could be an exceptional queen. In addition, the royal couple led to both a social and a political democratization.

King Harald has been interested in the people with a foreign cultural background. In his New Year Speech of 1999, he stressed that collision between different cultures could be the reason for an identity crisis that especially the young were not able to master.

He has been more communicative to the mass media than his father, and he generally acted to a greater extent closer to the people, in this way modernizing his role. King Harald has also been considered closer to the people by choosing his life partner from among the people and bringing up his own children as most of the Norwegian parents. "The royal couple are both partners and work companions, a husband and wife enterprise with two parts that complete each other. The Queen is the socially gifted, oriented towards the detail and well-informed, while the King is more retired and formal in his role as head of state, but warm towards the individuals." ("Kongeparet er både ektepar og arbeidskamerater, en mann- og konebedrift med to parter som utfyller hverandre.

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

Dronningen er den sosialt dyktige, detaljorientert og kunnskapsrik, mens Kongen er mer tilbaketrukket og formell i sin rolle som statsoverhode, men varm i møte med enkeltmennesker", *Aftenposten* 17 January 2001.)

3. *The Norwegian Monarchy at the Beginning of the 21st Century*

There are more than 100 years since the Norwegians voted in favour of monarchy. Ever since all the three kings managed to gain the people's respect and admiration. But they developed their role trying to behave as ordinary people especially with a view to education and social attitudes. The more ceremonious function of the monarchy started to weaken after the Second World War.

At the beginning of the 21st century, public debates concerning the Royal Family took place. Many considered the monarchy to be abandoned mostly because of the royal children's love relationships: Crown Prince Haakon married Mette-Marit Tjessem Høiby, an earlier single mother, with a debauched youth, while Princess Märtha Louise married the writer Ari Behn, whom the people did not like among others after TV-passages with drugs and prostitutes in Las Vegas.

Consequently, royal marriages have become rather a private matter, especially given the parliamentary feature of today's monarchy. The right to choose one's partner is no longer a foreign affairs issue. But although these partner choices were untraditional and challenging, the weddings were a success for the monarchy. The Royal Family had not expected such touching wedding days (25 August 2001 and 24 May 2002). That is why it was difficult to be a republican in 2001 and 2002. Erlend Loe wrote: "Writers and single mothers are not the beginning of an end. They are the opening of a refreshing replacement" ("forfattere og alenemødre er ikke begynnelsen på slutten. De er opptakten til en forfriskende fornyelse", *Dagsavisen* 2 January 2002.)

Aftenposten 13 January 2001 showed that while *VG* and *Se & Hør* supported the monarchy as a system of government, *Dagbladet* was a republican newspaper. But not only the faithful royalists, but also the convincing republicans congratulated Crown Prince Haakon on the great day 25 August 2001, which was considered as another 17 May (Norway's national day). The present-day Crown Princess got then the opportunity to demonstrate that she could become a venerable member of the Royal House although she did not have blue blood, despite her past and earlier acquaintances.

Dagbladet stated: "as Mette-Marit has opened herself towards the Norwegian people, we see the shape of a human being with personality, strong feelings and care." ("som Mette-Marit har åpnet seg overfor det norske folk, ser vi konturene av et menneske med personlighet, sterke følelser og omsorg", *Dagbladet* 25 August 2001.) The words of King Harald himself towards the Crown Princess at the wedding were the following: "You are unusually open and honest/ You are unusually committed/ You have an unusual strength of will/ You are unusually courageous/ You have made today an unusual choice/ You are unusually in love with Haakon/ - and today you have chosen to enter into an unusual life." ("Du er ualminnelig åpen og ærlig/ Du er ualminnelig engasjert/ Du har en ualminnelig viljestyrke/ Du er ualminnelig modig/ Du har i dag tatt et ualminnelig valg/ Du er ualminnelig forelsket i Haakon/ - og i dag har du valgt å gå inn i et ualminnelig liv", King Harald of Norway, 2001).

On the other hand, the new royal generation has brought the position of the monarchy to the people's mind. The

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

Crown Prince has been criticized for placing personal happiness above the royal position. The mixture of personal and public matters makes the monarchy nowadays a kind of "entertainment monarchy" in comparison with the popular monarchy that King Haakon and King Olav succeeded in creating. At the beginning of a new century it seems that the motto "All for Norway" has become "Norway for all".

In connection with the year 1991, when King Harald came to the throne, a public opinion poll showed 96% of the population in favour of the monarchy (*BA* 2 August 2001), while *Aftenposten* 18 May 2001 wrote that the monarchy had been favoured by over 90% in all the years after 1945. But there was a higher number of Norwegians than ever before sceptical about the monarchy in the first half year of 2001.

Dagbladet 4 April 2001 rendered a public opinion poll showing that 23% of the people were against the monarchy, while in the autumn of 1998 there had been only about 10% republicans according to *Diaforsk*. However, in comparison with the period before the Crown Prince's wedding, the number of monarchists increased by 6-8% after the ceremony.

But in fact this modern character of monarchy shows open-mindedness. And all the royals ask for is the right to a private life, although they are conscious that it is difficult to draw a line between the private and the public role (e.g. at events such as weddings or births). For the rest, "they want to lay stress on values they themselves highly appreciate such as tolerance, solidarity and environment" ("vil de legge vekt på verdier de selv setter høyt, som toleranse, solidaritet og miljø", *VG* 2 April 2001).

The government should actually give advice and ask the presumptive heir to give up the throne if they do not agree with his partner choice. In 1928 King Haakon had involved the government before he allowed Crown Prince Olav's marriage to Princess Märtha, who belonged to the Swedish Royal Family. This marriage was problematic because there had been only 23 years since the union with Sweden had been dissolved. 40 years later the King (this time King Olav) consulted again his advisers about the Crown Prince's marriage to an ordinary woman.

Since Crown Prince Harald was allowed to marry Sonja Haraldsen in 1968, there are no criteria regarding the Crown Prince's choice of partner, which means that one is not compelled to marry only princesses. Moreover, we cannot compare the present with the remote past. For instance the concept "love marriage" had little to do with the constitutional thinking of the 19th century when princely marriages were related to foreign politics.

4. Conclusions

The three Norwegian kings of the 20th century have been an example of how unelected heads of state may lead to a social and political democratization, and may turn a hereditary system of government into a popular institution.

Despite the public debates concerning the private dimension of the new generation of royals at the beginning of the 21st century, Norway has been a successful monarchy as people have become more aware of their Norwegianness due to a feeling of stability and confidence rendered by all the sovereigns.

References

1. Alnæs, Karsten: *Historien om Norge,* vol. 4: *En ny arbeidsdag*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag ASA, 1999.
2. Benkow, Jo: *Hundre år med konge og folk.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1998.

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)

3. Bogdanor, Vernon: *The Monarchy and the Constitution.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.
4. Bull, Edvard: *Nordmenn før oss.* Oslo: Forlaget Tanum-Norli, 1980.
5. Cannadine, David: *History in Our Time.* London: Penguin Books, 2000.
6. Greve, Tim. *Haakon VII.* Oslo: Gyldendal, 1980.
7. Grimstad, Carl-Erik: *Kongemakten*. Post-Graduate Thesis. University of Oslo: The Institute of Political Science, 2000.
8. Grimstad, Carl-Erik: *Bak Fasaden, Historien om den kongelige væremåten.* Oslo: Cappelen, 1994.
9. Hernes, Gudmund: *Det moderne Norge,* vol. 5: *Makt og styring*. Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1983.
10. Rasch, Bjørn Erik: *Kampen om regjeringsmakten. Norsk parlamentarisme i europeisk perspektiv*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2004.
11. Stoltenberg, Jens: *Tale ved minnemarkeringen av kong Olav Vs død i 1991*. Available at: http://www.regjeringen.no/mobil/nb/dokumentarkiv/Regjeringen-Stoltenberg-I/smk/Taler-og-artikler-arkivert-individuelt/2001/ tale_ved_minnemarkeringen_av_kong.html?id=264615. Accessed: 3-02-2011.
12. Tessem, Liv Berit: *De skaper vårt monarki*. Available at: http://tux1.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/d186041.htm. Accessed: 16-03-2005.
13. Ulateig, Egil: *Den lange reisen hjem: kongefamilien under andre verdenskrig*. Oslo: Vega, 2011.
14. *Aftenposten*, 13 January 2001.
15. *Aftenposten*, 18 May 2001.
16. *BA*, 2 August 2001.
17. *Dagbladet*, 4 April 2001.
18. *Dagsavisen*, 2 January 2002.
19. *De gifter seg*. Available at: http://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/2001/08/25/277061.html. Accessed: 26-11-2005.
20. *H.M. Kongens tale under gallamiddagen*. Available at: http://www.kongehuset.no/c28345/artikkel/vis.html?tid=28394. Accessed: 15-08-2007.
21. *Kronprinsparet vil ut til folket*. Available at: http://www.vg.no/rampelys/artikkel.php?artid=2719792. Accessed: 26-01-2004.
22. *Monarchy of Norway*. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Norway. Accessed: 02-03-2007.

BDD-A20154 © 2011 Transilvania University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 11:07:03 UTC)