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## Large-scale European research project led by the University of Oslo

Last updated: 10/02/2011 // What are the possibilities for democracy in Europe? ARENA Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo is in charge of a large-scale research project, which main aim is to examine the opportunities for democracy in Europe.

-The fact that the project has passed through the eye of the needle and receives? funding from EU's framework programme for research is itself an acknowledgement of the project, Marit Eldholm Project Officer at ARENA said.

The research project, 'Reconstructing Democracy in Europe' (RECON), investigates whether or not democracy is possible in a time when globalisation and de-nationalisation causes the decline of a national state's capacity to govern. This occurs at the same time as new institutions, often excepted from citizen influence, are built at the international level. More than 120 researchers from 13 countries are involved in RECON, which is one of the largest research projects within political science to have received funding from EU's sixth framework programme.



Professor John Erik Fossum, originator of RECON and leader of two of the working groups in the project. Photo: Lorenz

### EU-research relevant for Norway

Although the main topic addressed in the research project is democracy in the EU, the findings are still relevant for Norway.

- The majority of the research we conduct in RECON is relevant for Norway because of our strong ties with the EU, Eldholm said.

She refers to Norway's participation in the increasingly extensive single market through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, and that Norway and the EU cooperate extensively within the fields of justice and home affairs. The Schengen

Khazaleh

Agreement, constituting on cooperation in external border control and police cooperation, is a parallel agreement outside the EEA, and is also a framework with running legislation. The Norwegian government also intends to take part in the newly established asylum surveillance mechanism. Furthermore, Norway cooperates closely with the EU on a wide range of foreign policy issues.

- Within the international research community the full participation of Norway in the EU's framework programme for research is widely known, thus no one in academic circles questions why a research project about democracy and the EU is led by a Norwegian university outside the EU, Eldholm explains. ARENA is today a highly acknowledged unit within European research.

### Compares the Norwegian EU debate

Findings from the research project have been published throughout the research period. ARENA researchers John Erik Fossum and Cathrine Holst have analysed the Norwegian EU debate as part of a comparative study about how European integration has been debated by intellectuals in diverging national contexts. Norway has through popular referendums rejected EU-membership both in 1973 and 1994. The conclusions have been published in the book 'European Stories', which came out last autumn. Several comprehensive books based on the RECON research can be expected next year.



Professor Erik O. Eriksen, coordinator for the RECON project. Photo: ARENA, University of Oslo

- The RECON project will be completed by the end of 2011, and the number of publications from the project will escalate until then, Eldholm said.

### EU financial support crucial

- The funding we receive from the EU is very important in order for us to be able to pull through a research project at such scale, Eldholm underlined. She says that the funding has made it possible to employ more researchers, PhD students and research assistants than what would otherwise have been possible. Furthermore, the EU funding has contributed to building up an international network of researchers that will persist even after the project has been finalised. The funding also makes it possible to arrange conferences both in Norway and abroad with the RECON research as a topic. In November 2011, a conference aimed at a Norwegian public will be held on the occasion of the University of Oslo's 200 year anniversary.

- As the field of research is both relevant and interesting also in Norway, the conference in November should have a broad appeal, Eldholm said.

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- RECON seeks to clarify whether democracy is possible under conditions of pluralism, diversity and complex multilevel governance that is found in the EU
- RECON receives funding from the [European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme for Research](#). It is the second largest social science project in its thematic area to receive funding through this framework programme.
- More than 120 researchers from 13 countries participate in the project, most of them associated with one of the project's 21 partner institutions
- The research is inter-disciplinary, and researchers with background in political science, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, information science, law and legal theory and economics are represented
- The total budget for the research project is 12 million Euros, of which the contribution from the EU amounts to five million Euros
- The research project started 1 January 2007 and will be concluded on the 31 December 2011