The role of parliament in international relations and WTO negotiations: the case of Norway

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Abstract: According to traditional constitutional theory, foreign affairs is the prerogative of the executive. However, globalisation and the dual process of internationalisation of domestic affairs and domestification of international affairs imply that the days when foreign policy was the exclusive domain of the executive are over. The article explores the effects of globalisation on the role of Parliament in international relations in general, and WTO negotiations specifically, using the Norwegian Parliament as an illustration. Three findings are presented. First, at the international level attempts are made to develop a ‘parliamentary dimension of the WTO’. Second, at the national level the Norwegian Parliament has become more actively engaged in international relations. And, third, the Norwegian Parliament plays an important role in the processes of defining national interests and determining national negotiation positions in the WTO, especially with regard to possible trade-offs between the offensive interests of fisheries and the defensive interests of agriculture.

1. Introduction and perspectives

Globalisation has become one of the buzzwords of modern politics. Most often, globalisation implies that national politics and policies are strongly influenced by international trends and developments. We will argue that what is really going on is a dual process of internationalisation of domestic affairs and domestification of international affairs. Our objective is to explore some of the effects of this dual process on the role of parliaments, using the Norwegian Parliament – the Storting – as an illustrative case.

The point of departure of this article is the attempts made to include parliamentarians at the international level in relation to the political processes in the

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World Trade Organization. Then we discuss theoretical perspectives on international negotiations and trade-offs between various domestic interests. In the subsequent sections, we describe the international relations of the Norwegian Parliament in general, and the role of the Storting in relation to the ongoing trade negotiations in the WTO. With regard to trade-offs between different Norwegian interests, we concentrate on the offensive interests of fisheries and the defensive interests of agriculture. What is the role of the Norwegian Parliament with regard to this trade-off? Does the Parliament actually have an influence on Norwegian bargaining positions in the WTO?

In the concluding discussion we relate our findings to the somewhat paradoxical relationship between consensus and conflict in foreign affairs. Finally, we consider the question of generalisability of the Norwegian findings.

1.1 The parliamentary dimension of the WTO

Since its establishment in 1995, the World Trade Organization has become one of the most important intergovernmental organisations in the world. The increasing impact of the WTO is related to the importance of international trade and the powers that member states have entrusted to the organisation. Due to its binding rule-making and adjudication powers, the WTO has encroached on the traditional domain of national legislatures. Consequently, parliamentarians have emphasised the need for a ‘parliamentary dimension’ of the WTO (Chutikul, 2003).

At the first WTO Ministerial Conference in December 1996 in Singapore, an informal and spontaneous meeting of MPs attending the conference took place. Since then, a number of parliamentary meetings have been organised in order to discuss the role of parliaments and parliamentarians within the WTO. The European Parliament (EP) has proposed the creation of a Parliamentary Assembly in the WTO. So far, this proposal has not been adopted by the WTO, but parliamentarians have decided to hold regular parliamentary meetings once a year and on the occasion of WTO Ministerial Conferences.

In 2003, two parliamentary conferences on the WTO were organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Parliament. The first conference was held in Geneva, 17–18 February, and the second in Cancún on 9 September and 12 September during the 5th WTO Ministerial Conference. In addition to this, a session on ‘Parliaments and the WTO’ was set up by the WTO and the IPU at the WTO Public Symposium ‘Challenges ahead on the road to Cancún’ in Geneva, 16–18 June 2003.

A declaration adopted at the Cancún session\(^1\) states that:

the days when foreign policy, and more specifically trade policy was the exclusive domain of the executive branch are over. The WTO is rapidly becoming more than a mere trade organisation, having an ever growing impact on domestic

\(^{1}\) Cancun Session of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO: Declaration adopted on 12 September 2003. See www.ipu.org
policies. Consequently, we wish to contribute to making it more open, transparent, democratic and responsive to national policy objectives consistent with national sovereignty and international trade obligations.

Furthermore, the parliamentarians stated that:

Our objectives are to oversee WTO activities and to promote their effectiveness and fairness, keeping in mind the original objectives of the WTO set in Marrakech. We also seek to promote the transparency of the WTO procedures, to improve the dialogue between government negotiators, parliaments and civil society, to build capacity in parliaments in matters of international trade and to exert influence on the direction of discussion within the WTO.

Central to any understanding of the processes of internationalisation and globalisation is the assumption that states are brokers or mediators between international and domestic pressures (Clarke, 1997: 201). Nowhere, according to Goldstein, is the interrelationship between domestic politics and international politics more evident than in trade politics (Goldstein, 1998). Internationalisation, however, creates winners and losers (Clarke, 1997; Milner, 1997). In political bargaining the state has to mediate between domestic and external pressures, and to define what the national interest(s) is or are. Internationalisation implies that political institutions, most notably the state, by law and international negotiations, open up the national economy for investments, co-production, and international trade (Hveem, 1998).

The final declaration of the Geneva conference in February 2003 emphasised that:

International relations are shaping domestic policies, and external relations have become part of the domestic agenda. Without the introduction of substantive and procedural checks and balances similar to those that are usually applied to domestic policy-making, this tendency will inevitably cause a deficit in democracy at the international level. Real democratic participation is an important goal which has to be linked with the democratic transformation of the entire structure and content of global economic governance. The present initiative and subsequent work are the necessary foundations for this ultimate democratisation objective. We are thus acutely aware of the need for parliamentarians to participate in the running of public affairs that transcend national borders.

There is no doubt about the importance of the objectives cited above. In this article, we will concentrate on an aspect which, as far as we can see, has not been explicitly stated by the parliamentarians in relation to the WTO.

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1.2 National interests in two-level games

One of the most important roles of parliaments in general is to prioritise and balance conflicting political interests. This task is of the utmost importance in relation to legislation and decision making, but it is also important in relation to international organisations and negotiations. In international negotiations, governments negotiate on behalf of the nation states. Governments are supposed to attend to and safeguard the ‘national interest’, but the definition of the ‘national interest’ in modern democratic societies is not straightforward.

As Trubowitz (1998: 12, 4) argues, ‘there is no single national interest’ as such. The very definition of the national interest is rather ‘a product of politics’, and it is defined by the societal interests which have the power to work within the political system and to make winning coalitions and alliances. Defining the national interest is regarded as an ‘essentially political process’ also by Frankel (1970: 97). Thus, the ‘national interest’ is ‘politically contingent’ and dependent upon the outcomes of political processes. Given the fact that there may be many national interests, the political struggle over national interests has different implications. It can be seen as a struggle over the ranking of different interests in terms of priorities and thus domination over other interests. It can be seen as a fight over trade-offs between different interests where some interests are curtailed in order to achieve possible benefits for other interests. In other words, the definition of national interests is a matter of giving priority to and balancing different domestic interests, and thus lies at the heart of what parliaments are supposed to do in democratic societies.

Moreover, foreign and domestic policies are fundamentally interconnected in international negotiations, and also in the trade negotiations within the WTO. Putnam (1988) argues that instead of explaining foreign policy purely from domestic causes, or explaining foreign policy purely from international causes, international negotiations can ‘usefully be conceived as a two-level game’:

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign. (Putnam, 1988: 434)

Putnam makes an analytical distinction between two phases in this process. The first process (Level-I) takes place at the international level between the negotiating national delegations. The second process (Level-II) takes place at the national level and consists of discussions within each Parliament whether or not to ratify the outcome of the negotiations. Moreover, if there is a large over-lap between possible outcomes of the negotiations at Level I and the possibility of national ratification, this will increase the likelihood of getting an agreement at Level I.
Putnam calls this ‘win-sets’, and a more formal definition is given by Moravcsik (1993: 23) in the following way:

Each state is assumed to have a ‘win-set’ defined as the set of potential agreements that would be ratified by domestic constituencies in a straight up-or-down vote against the status quo of ‘no agreement’. With increases in the benefits of an agreement or the costs of no agreement, the win-set expands. The statesman acts as the agent for the polity, but is constrained only by the win-set – that is, by the nature of the agreements that the domestic polity would ratify.

The larger the win-set the better chances of getting the needed ratification. The ratification process is the ‘crucial theoretical link’ between domestic and international politics, and national and international ‘phases’ in negotiations are often intertwined (Moravcsik, 1993). As pointed out by Putnam (1988: 436):

In practice, expectational effects will be quite important. There are likely to be prior consultations and bargaining at level II to hammer out an initial position for the level I negotiations. Conversely, the need for level II ratification is certain to affect the level I bargaining.

Milner (1997: 4) agrees that domestic and international politics are strongly interconnected and that political leaders are playing on the domestic and international arenas simultaneously: ‘They are trying to achieve their various goals using these two arenas, and they face different – and sometimes contradictory – pressures and constraints from each. Their behaviour can only be understood when both internal and external factors are considered.’

The following discussion addresses two fundamental aspects of two-level games, the (partial) autonomy of the statesman (in our case Government) and the nature of the domestic ‘win-set’. For both, the role of Parliament is of crucial importance. The two-level games metaphor ‘views the relationship between domestic and international politics through the eyes of the statesman’ (Moravcsik, 1993: 23). The increased involvement of Parliament in foreign affairs and trade policy, however, can be seen as a reaction to international developments and the internationalisation of domestic affairs. The increased influence of Parliament should also be related to domestic developments in the relationships between Parliament and Government. In the case of Norway, minority governments have almost become the rule. The Norwegian Storting has extended its political and administrative capacity and strengthened its power vis-à-vis the executive (Rommetvedt, 2003). This affects the level of executive autonomy in foreign affairs and international negotiations. It also makes it less likely for Government to misjudge what is ratifiable in their own polities, a phenomenon which has been ‘surprisingly likely’ in international negotiations (Evans, 1993: 400).
1.3 The trade-off between offensive and defensive interests

Trade liberalisation affects domestic sectors differently. International bargains are not ‘simply about relations between nations’, but ‘also about the distribution of costs and benefits among domestic groups and domestic opinion’ (Evans, 1993: 397). In Norway, two issues in the trade negotiations in the WTO have been at the centre of the political disputes: agriculture and fisheries. In relation to these industries, Norwegian ‘national interests’ differ. They are almost the opposite of each other in terms of trade liberalisation. In the case of agriculture, Norway has defensive interests with regard to trade liberalisation. Harsh environments and poor conditions for agricultural production make Norwegian agriculture vulnerable to foreign competition and food imports. In the case of fisheries, Norway is one of the largest exporters of fish and fish products in the world. A long coastline, large fisheries stocks and a fast-growing fish farming industry make Norway highly competitive in international markets. Thus, Norway has offensive interests in relation to trade liberalisation for fish and fish products.

A general finding is that the possibility of reaching an agreement in international negotiations is less likely when ‘costs are concentrated and the benefits diffuse’ (Evans, 1993: 400). Seen in isolation, the costs of a new agricultural agreement in the WTO will most likely be highly concentrated, with few or no benefits for the agricultural sector. Agricultural production throughout the country is commonly believed to be possible only with the border protection of high tariffs. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (2001), around 50% of Norway’s domestic agricultural consumption requirements are met through imports. The product range is relatively narrow and subject to high tariff levels. The benefits will be more diffuse, favouring consumers and other sectors. For fisheries, the benefits of an agreement will be concentrated and the costs few or none. The costs of ‘no-agreement’, however, are high for fisheries and low for agriculture. Exports from fish and fish products constituted 5.7% of total exports from Norway in 2002 (Ministry of Fisheries, 2003). If oil and gas exports are excluded, the percentage reaches 14.7. It is believed that the reduction of tariffs and none-tariff barriers to trade in WTO will lead to substantial increases in production and exports of fish and fish products.

The Parliament has been concerned with the need to balance different interests with regard to Norwegian negotiating positions in the WTO. As we shall see, disputes in the Storting have been related to the question of possible inter-linkages and trade-offs between agriculture and fisheries. Issue-linkages can be formally defined as a linking of transaction conditions in one sector to conditions in one or more other sector(s). It implies that actors can exchange interests and control across sectors (Hveem, 1994). The disputes can be seen as a struggle about the definition and ranking of national interests in relation to the realities facing Norway in the international bargaining processes.
Against this background, we expect parliaments to play a more important role in international negotiations. The process of developing a parliamentary dimension of the WTO is in accordance with this expectation. We would, however, endorse the statement made by Mr Michel Hansenne, Member of the European Parliament, at the Geneva symposium in June 2003:

Although the parliamentary dimension of the WTO is indispensable, the real work has to be done at home.\(^3\)

The aim of this article is to show how the ‘real work at home’ can be done, using Norway as an example. We hasten to underline that the involvement of the Norwegian Parliament in WTO negotiations, and in international relations more generally, should be regarded as an empirical illustration, not as a theoretical and normative ideal case.

2. The Norwegian Parliament and international relations: the institutional framework

The institutional framework within which the Storting exercises its role concerning international affairs is specified in the Constitution of Norway and the Rules of Procedures of the Norwegian Parliament.\(^4\) In this section, we will take a closer look at the rules and regulations and the institutionalised practices that complement, and sometimes modify, the written rules.

2.1 The Constitution: foreign affairs – a prerogative of the executive

The Constitution of Norway dates back to 1814. According to Article 3, ‘The Executive Power is vested in the King’, and ‘The King himself chooses a Council [government] from among Norwegian citizens who are entitled to vote’ (Article 12). In practice, however, this is not the case. The principle of separation of powers was abandoned in 1884 when the principle of parliamentarianism achieved its breakthrough after several years of conflict. Norwegian parliamentarianism developed gradually and it is accepted as common law even though it is not written into the Constitution of Norway. The Norwegian version of parliamentarianism is a negative one. Governments need to be accepted by the Storting, but they do not need a positive vote of confidence.\(^5\)

According to traditional constitutional theory, foreign affairs is a prerogative of the executive, i.e. the President in presidential systems and the Government in parliamentary systems.\(^6\) Article 26 in the Constitution of Norway states that: ‘The

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4 The Constitution and Rules of Procedure are available on www.stortinget.no.
5 For details on government formation, see Rommetvedt (2003: 24ff).
6 In theory foreign affairs is a prerogative of the executive, but real world politics may be different, of course. Parliaments have ‘always’ been involved with international matters from time to time.
King has the right to call up troops, to engage in hostilities in defence of the Realm and to make peace, to conclude and denounce conventions, to send and to receive diplomatic envoys.’ (In practice, the King’s right means the right of the Government since the King has no real political power.)

The prerogative of the Government is modified, however, by the principle of parliamentarianism, constitutional practice, and common law. This is to some degree reflected in the Constitution. Article 26 also states that: ‘Treaties on matters of special importance and, in all cases, treaties whose implementation, according to the Constitution, necessitates a new law or a decision by the Storting, are not binding until the Storting has given its consent thereto.’ In addition to this, Article 75 states that: ‘It devolves upon the Storting: ... g) to have communicated to it the conventions and treaties which the King, on behalf of the State, has concluded with foreign powers.’

Conventions and treaties are put before the Parliament, either as separate issues for ratification, or in general accounts for information. Accounts of conventions and treaties are given in yearly letters from the Government to the Storting. The accounts for the three years from 1999 to 2001 comprised a total of 613 conventions and treaties. Of these, 98 conventions had been put before the Storting in separate propositions (Bills). In addition to the accounts of conventions and treaties, the government also presents yearly accounts to the Storting of agreements concerning aid to developing countries. In 1999–2001, 258 development aid agreements came into force.

The importance of the yearly accounts of conventions and development aid agreements is questionable however. The accounts are sent to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs for consideration, but with the exception of a few remarks on development aid agreements in 2001, the committee made no comments to the conventions and agreements in its recommendations concerning the three years from 1999 to 2001. The committee simply concluded by suggesting that the accounts should be attached to the Record of Proceedings. This is mainly due to the fact, already mentioned, that the most important (and potentially controversial) conventions and agreements are put before the Storting in separate propositions.

Normally, when the Government has negotiated and signed a convention or treaty there is little the Parliament can do about it. Rejection of ratification could lead to dramatic consequences, and the Storting would hesitate to take responsibility for such consequences. Even more important in this connection (and in

9 In 1972 and 1994, the Norwegian Government signed agreements on membership in the European Union. The agreements were rejected by the Storting after referendums where the majority of the voters said ‘no’ to membership in the EU. These are exceptional cases however.
accordance with Putnam, 1988) is the fact that when it comes to important conventions and treaties, the Government will have consultations with the Parliament before, and sometimes during, negotiations in order to secure majority support and to make sure that there will be no serious problems during the process of ratification. We will take a closer look at the consultation procedures in the next section. This section presents an overview of the organisation and procedures of the Norwegian Parliament, emphasising the elements of relevance to international relations.

2.2 Organisation and procedures of parliament

Parliamentary committees and consultations

Specialised committees are essential elements of the organisation of parliament (Longley and Davidson, 1998). All the members of the Norwegian Parliament are assigned to one – and only one – of 12 standing committees.10 Party groups should, as far as possible, be proportionally represented in each committee, and the principle of proportionality is also applied when the positions of committee chairs are distributed among the parties (Rommetvedt, 1999: 7).

Virtually all matters to be dealt with by the Storting are first submitted to one of the standing committees for consideration. The standing committees have no decision-making authority on behalf of the Norwegian Parliament. The formal role of the committees is advisory only, but in reality they play an important role in the decision-making process of the Parliament.11 The committees prepare fairly detailed recommendations, with majority and minority proposals and remarks. Plenary debates and voting are based on committee recommendations, and, due to the high degree of cohesiveness of Norwegian political parties, one can normally predict the outcome of plenary decisions on the basis of committee recommendations.

Using Shaw’s typology, we can say that all standing committees have ‘legislative’ as well as ‘financial’ and ‘investigative’ purposes (Shaw, 1979: 370ff). These functions are related to the decision-making process of the Parliament. ‘Administrative oversight’, or parliamentary control of the performance of the executive, is the major responsibility of the Standing Committee of Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs (along with constitutional matters, of course).

The Norwegian Storting has established three committees in order to deal with international relations: A Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, an Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs, and an EEA Consultative Committee (on matters related to the Agreement on the European Economic Area, see below). The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs has the same functions as the other standing committees, but in order to portray the role of the Enlarged Committee

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10 The standing committees are listed in Table 3. See Rommetvedt (2003: chs 2–3) for details.
11 This is still the case, but the relative importance of the party groups as compared with committees has increased, cf. Rommetvedt (2003: 844).
and the EEA Consultative Committee, we need to add a ‘consultative’ role to Shaw’s list (Rommetvedt, 2003: 90, note 38).

According to Section 12 of the Rules of Procedure of the Storting, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs is responsible for ‘Matters relating to foreign affairs, development cooperation, Norwegian interests on Svalbard or in other polar regions and matters in general relating to agreements between Norway and other states or international organizations’.

The Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs consists of the ordinary members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, the President and the Vice President of the Storting, the chairman of the Standing Committee on Defence, and up to 11 members appointed by the election committee of the Storting. Section 13 of the Rules of Procedure states that the task of the Enlarged Committee ‘is to discuss with the Government important foreign policy, trade policy and national security policy issues’. Consultations should ‘take place before important decisions are made’ by the Government. The businesses of the Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs are kept secret. The Enlarged Committee may put recommendations before the Storting, but that is not normally the case. The Committee is convened when the chairman finds it necessary, or at the request of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, or one-third of the members of the committee. From 1993 to 2003, the average number of meetings was nearly 9 per year, ranging from five in 1996 to 14 in 1999.12 The variations from one year to another are related to the occurrence of international events.

The most consequential international agreement that Norway has signed is the Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) between the European Union and the members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The EEA Agreement, which came into force in January 1994, gives Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway access to the internal market of the EU. The three EFTA countries have agreed to implement Community rules and to respect the relevant case law of the European Court of Justice (Sejersted, 1996).

The EEA Agreement established an EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee in order to ‘contribute, through dialogue and debate, to a better understanding between the Community and the EFTA States’. The EU and EFTA members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, including six Norwegian MPs, ‘scrutinize all Community legislation applying to the EEA’.13

Section 13a of the Rules of Procedure of the Norwegian Parliament states that: ‘The Government’s consultations with the Storting on proposals regarding new or amended acts of Community law in a field within the scope of the Agreement on the European Economic Area … shall take place with the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, which in such matters shall be joined by the members of the Norwegian delegation to the EEA Joint Parliamentary Committee. The Foreign

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12 Information given by the Archives of the Storting.
13 http://secretariat.efta.int
Affairs Committee or its chairman may also decide that one or more of the other committees shall take part in specific consultations’.

This body is also called the **EEA Consultative Committee**. Consultations are held when the chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, or a member of the Government, or one-third of the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee so request. The businesses of the EEA Consultative Committee and joint meetings between this body and other committees are kept secret, but the minutes of the secret meetings are published after one year (unless otherwise decided). The committee normally meets once a month (except for the summer months). Matters which are discussed in the consultative body are submitted to a plenary meeting of the Storting if the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs so demands. Whether such a meeting shall be public or held in camera is decided by the Storting (in camera).

The importance of the EEA Agreement is clearly illustrated by the establishment of the EEA Consultative Committee, and by the overviews of conventions and treaties which, according to Article 75 of the Constitution, shall be communicated to the Parliament. As we have mentioned already, accounts of conventions and treaties are given in yearly letters from the Government to the Storting. The total of 613 conventions and treaties accounted for in 1999–2001 included 144 ordinary conventions and treaties that Norway entered into, and 469 decisions that should be implemented by Norway according to the EEA Agreement. Forty-one of the regular treaties and 57 of the EEA decisions had been put before the Storting in separate propositions.  

**International organisations and parliamentary delegations**

Norway is a member of numerous international organisations, a few of which are set up with parliamentary assemblies or committees comprised of members representing the national parliaments of the member states. Table 1 shows the development with regard to permanent delegations to such assemblies and committees.  

As we can see, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of international parliamentary delegations, especially after 1993.

It should be added that members of the Storting are always included in the Norwegian delegations to the general assemblies of the United Nations. They are, however, appointed on a temporary basis by the Government, not by the Parliament. The Government appoints MPs to other temporary delegations as well. In 2001, such appointments included delegations to the UN special session on HIV/AIDS, the sixth and seventh conferences of the parties under the Climate Convention, and a conference in Vilnius on women and democracy.

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15 *Sources*: Nordby (1985) and various editions of *Stortinget i navn og tall*.

The members of committees concerned with foreign affairs and international relations, and of parliamentary delegations to international organisations appointed for the election period 2001–2005, are shown in the Appendix. A total of 122 positions are allocated to 60 MPs. In other words, 36% of the members of the Norwegian Storting are members of one or more committee(s) or delegation(s) dealing with international relations.

Table 2 shows the distribution on standing committees of the holders of what we may call international positions (i.e. membership in one of the committees listed in the Appendix or one of the delegations listed in Table 1). The table shows that the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs has no monopoly with regard to foreign affairs. At least one member of each of the 12 standing committees holds an international position. The number of members of other committees that are involved in international relations (45 MPs altogether) clearly indicates that there is no clear-cut distinction between domestic and international affairs.

Governmental statements and questions to ministers
Submission of a governmental report or proposition is the principal way of putting an issue on the agenda of the Storting. By consent of the Presidium of the Storting, government ministers may also give an oral account or statement on an issue to a plenary sitting of the Storting. Some of the statements are related to critical events of immediate importance. Others are a matter of routine and are presented
to the Storting once a year. The latter include yearly statements by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of International Development on their respective fields. Most of the statements are debated immediately or at a subsequent sitting.

In 2002, a total of 11 oral accounts were given by government ministers. Five accounts were related to international issues: two statements by the Minister of Foreign Affairs on foreign policy issues, one statement by the Minister of International Development on development policy, one by the Prime Minister on the Johannesburg Summit on sustainable development, and one by the Minister of Petroleum and Energy on the Nordic electricity market.

The 17 oral statements that were given in 2001 included accounts by the Minister of Defence on the use of weapons containing depleted uranium, the Minister of Labour and Government Administration on the strategy of the Nordic Council on sustainable development in the Nordic countries and their surroundings, the Minister of Foreign Affairs on foreign policy, the Minister of International Development on development policy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs on WTO issues prior to the Ministerial Conference in Qatar, the Prime Minister on the terror attack on the USA on 11 September, and the Minister of the Environment on climate negotiations in Marrakesh.

The government does not have a monopoly with regard to agenda setting. Members of Parliament may raise an issue through an interpellation or a question to a minister, or by presenting a private member’s bill. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of questions and private members’ bills over the last few years (Rommetvedt, 2003: 47, 49). In the 1980s and 1990s, the average number of questions and interpellations was 600–900 per year as compared with 200–300 in

Table 2. Distribution of international positions on standing committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standing committee on</th>
<th>No. of committee members holding at least one international position (per cent of each committees’ total no. of members in brackets)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>7 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Research and Church Affairs</td>
<td>7 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Economic Affairs</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs</td>
<td>5 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communications</td>
<td>5 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>4 (36%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Industry</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Affairs</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family, Cultural Affairs and Government Administration</td>
<td>2 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and the Environment</td>
<td>1 (8%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
the 1950s and 1960s. The number of private members’ bills has increased from a handful in the beginning of the 1980s to more than a hundred per year in the second half of the 1990s.

We have no comprehensive overview of the number of questions and private members’ bills concerning international relations, but we would expect similar trends in this area as well. A search on the website of the Storting revealed an increase in the number of questions to the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 145 in the four-year period 1989–1993 to 249 in 1997–2001.

Administrative support

The political and administrative capacity of the Parliament depends, of course, on resources. The administrative staff of the Norwegian Storting has been small compared with other parliaments, but the number of persons employed by the Storting’s administration and the party groups’ secretariats has increased considerably over recent decades. The Storting staff in 1971 comprised 174 people (party group advisers and office staff included). In 1999, a total of 458 persons were employed by the Storting and the party groups. The increase in staff resources and administrative capacity is reflected in the level of activity in the Norwegian Parliament. There has been a substantial increase in the number of dissenting remarks, alternative proposals, questions and private members’ bills.

The increased importance of foreign affairs is reflected in the number of administrative personnel specialised in taking care of international relations. In the middle of the 1990s, the Storting set up an International Department in order to handle the international contacts of the Norwegian Parliament. The department comprises two secretariats: the International Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Norwegian delegation to the Nordic Council. Today, the International Department employs a total of 18 persons including a Head of Department, nine persons in the International Secretariat, and eight persons in the secretariat of the delegation to the Nordic Council. In the middle of the 1970s, only three persons were employed in the secretariat of the delegation to the Nordic Council, which at that time was the only unit within the Storting’s administration that specialised in international relations.

3. The Norwegian Parliament and WTO negotiations

In the previous section we have dealt with the involvement of the Norwegian Parliament in international relations in general. In this section we will turn to the
more specific role of the Storting in relation to the World Trade Organisation. We will pay special attention to the role of Parliament with regard to the trade-off between the offensive interests of Norwegian fisheries and the defensive interests of Norwegian agriculture.

3.1 WTO issues in the Norwegian Parliament

As we have seen in Section 2, the Norwegian Parliament deals with various types of issues: propositions from the government, governmental accounts and statements, private members’ bills, questions from MPs to government ministers, and, with regard to international relations, government consultations with the Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs. Before going into details on substance, we will present an overview of the various WTO-related issues dealt with by the Storting.

Over the last ten years, only seven propositions (bills) concerning GATT/WTO have been submitted to the Storting by the Norwegian Government, cf. Table 3. The propositions were related to ratification of WTO agreements and changes in tariffs etc. as a consequence of these agreements. On four occasions, the Storting made its decisions on the basis of recommendations from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. Two issues were first dealt with by the Standing Committee on Finance, and one by the Standing Committee on Business and Industry.

Table 3. Propositions on WTO matters submitted to the Storting by the Norwegian Government

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storting session</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Dealt with by the standing committee on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>Ratification of an agreement on the establishment of an Advisory Centre for WTO Law</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>Changes in tariffs as a consequence of the result of WTO negotiations on liberalisation of trade in Information Technology Products</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>The result of WTO negotiations on basic telecommunications services and approval of the Fourth Protocol of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–96</td>
<td>Changes in the law on Government procurement as a consequence of the GATT/WTO agreement</td>
<td>Business and Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–96</td>
<td>The result of WTO negotiations on financial services and movement of natural persons and approval of the Second and Third Protocol of the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994–95</td>
<td>Changes in tariffs as a consequence of the GATT/WTO agreement</td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993–94</td>
<td>Ratification of the result of the Uruguay round and the establishment of the World Trade Organization</td>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the ratification stage of the process, there is normally little the Parliament can do but accept the governmental propositions. The consequences could be too severe if the Storting refused ratification and implementation of international agreements. If the Storting wants to have an influence on these matters, it has to be involved at earlier stages of the negotiating process. The Government, on the other hand, has an interest in consulting the Storting at earlier stages in order to make sure that the Government has a ‘mandate’ and majority support from the Parliament, and that there will be no severe problems in the process of ratification.

Consultations between the Government and the Storting on WTO issues have followed the institutional framework described above. A total of 96 meetings were held in the Enlarged Committee of Foreign Affairs from 1993 to 2003. WTO negotiations and implementation of WTO rules were discussed at six meetings in 2003, two in 2002 and one in 1999. In addition to this, the status in the Uruguay round of GATT was discussed in one meeting in 1993.

Since the businesses of the Enlarged Committee on Foreign Affairs are kept secret, we know little about the substance of these consultations. We have, however, interviewed five members of the Enlarged Committee. Their assessments of the influence of the Enlarged Committee varied. Two MPs claimed that the Parliament had only to a limited extent been consulted on WTO issues. One MP was of the opinion that the relations between different government ministries were more important, and that in reality the controversies would be solved in the struggle between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Fisheries, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among others. Two MPs argued, however, that, although there had been few discussions in the Enlarged Committee, its role is very important. First, the Government is very conscious of the fact that it is a minority government and therefore seeks broadest possible support. Second, it is possible to make demands on Government in the committee, and quite easy for the Government to discover whether it has the support of the Parliament or not. It was also argued that it is easier to be frank about opinions in this forum than in Parliamentary debates.

In recent years an increasing number of issues have been put on the Storting agenda by MPs as private members’ bills. However, our search has revealed only three private members’ bills concerning WTO. The first one was tabled in November 2001 by two Centre Party MPs and suggested a comprehensive account of the consequences of WTO on central elements of Norwegian society. The proposal was first dealt with by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, and then rejected by the majority of the Parliament on 31 January 2002. The second bill was tabled in January 2003. Two MPs from the Socialist Left Party and one from the Centre Party asked for more openness with regard to Norwegian negotiating positions in the WTO and GATS. The majority of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs was satisfied with the information given by the Government, and the bill was rejected by the majority of the Storting. The third private
members’ bill was tabled in March 2003 by two MPs from the Socialist Left Party and asked for the withdrawal of Norwegian requests and demands on developing countries to liberalise trade in services. The proposal was again first dealt with by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, and then rejected by Parliament on 17 June 2003.

Questions to government ministers have been put forward more frequently. A total of 51 questions and interpellations concerning various aspects of the WTO were raised by MPs in the ten-year period from 1993 to 2003, cf. Table 4. The sharp rise in the number of questions during the 2002–2003 session clearly indicates that the Storting has become more interested in WTO-related matters. Naturally, most of the questions were answered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (and the Minister of Trade from 1993 to 1996). The number of questions answered by ministers of various national affairs is striking however. The table clearly demonstrates that international relations are intertwined with domestic policies. It also demonstrates that with regard to questions in relation to the WTO, Norwegian MPs have been more concerned with the defensive interests of agriculture than with the offensive interest of fisheries and fish farming.

The most consistent and comprehensive interaction between the Government and the Parliament on WTO negotiations has been the governmental accounts and statements to the Storting followed by plenary debates in the Parliament. It is on these occasions that the overall framework, negotiating positions, judgements and goals of the Government have been presented to and discussed with the Parliament. From 1999 to 2003, governmental accounts and statements on WTO-related issues were presented to the Storting on six occasions.

Table 5 gives an overview of the accounts and statements presented by different governments from the beginning of the new round of negotiations in the WTO. The timing of the statements should be seen in relation to the Ministerial Conferences in Seattle, USA 30 November–3 December 1999; Doha, Qatar 9–14 November 2001; and Cancún, Mexico 10–14 September 2003. (More detailed accounts of statements are presented in the next section.)

It should be added that WTO questions have been touched on in accounts and debates related to other issues as well. The WTO was discussed in the general statement on foreign policy given by the Foreign Minister, and in statements on their respective jurisdictions presented by the Minister of Fisheries, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Minister of Development.

The question is now: Does the Parliament actually exert an influence on the Government’s bargaining positions in WTO negotiations? In order to answer this question we have to turn to the parliamentary deliberations on the substance of the political issues raised in WTO negotiations. The debates in the Parliament

21 Questions to be answered in writing included.
Table 4. Questions concerning WTO/GATT from MPs to government ministers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storting session</th>
<th>Total no. of questions</th>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>Foreign Affairs*</th>
<th>Trade*</th>
<th>Development Aid*</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Fisheries</th>
<th>Labour, Government Admin.</th>
<th>Education, Research</th>
<th>Finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002–2003</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001–2002</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2001</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999–2000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1997–98</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995–96</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>1994–95</td>
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<td>1993–94</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Until 1996 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had three Ministers: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Aid respectively. From 1996 the Ministry had two Ministers: Foreign Affairs and Development Aid.
on the basis of the governmental accounts and statements on WTO negotiations are the most important ones in that respect.

3.2 Parliamentary debates and influence on Norwegian negotiating positions in the WTO

The Norwegian preparations for the so-called ‘Millennium round’ started in April 1998. The Government initiated a broad mapping of national interests. The work was led by a State Secretary group and involved all affected Ministries. The work was further organised into ten different working groups. In 1999, the State Secretary group published the report ‘The future WTO negotiations – the charting of Norwegian interests’. It stated that, in the process of preparations, the ten working groups had ‘consulted business and labour organisations and other affected groups’. Moreover, it made clear that its conclusions were based on isolated considerations within each subject area of negotiations, and that only ‘to a very limited extent’ were the different areas seen in relation to each other. It was argued, however, that this would ‘have to be given a central place in the further development of Norwegian positions’.

The report concluded that Norway, for the most part, had offensive interests in most areas of negotiations. In some areas the report concluded that Norwegian interests were ‘considerably’ offensive. They included shipping, offshore services, telecom, IT-related services and environmental services within the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Moreover, offensive interests included further liberalisation of trade in industrial products, including fish and fish products. The only area in which the report identified defensive interests was agriculture.

Table 5. The Minister of Foreign Affairs’ accounts and statements to the Storting on WTO issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign Minister, government (parties in government)</th>
<th>Date of statement</th>
<th>Date of discussion in the Storting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Minister Jan Petersen, the Bondevik II government (Christian People’s Party, Conservatives, Liberals)</td>
<td>13 June 2003</td>
<td>17 June 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Minister Thorbjørn Jagland, the Stoltenberg government (Labour)</td>
<td>7 November 2001</td>
<td>7 November 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk, the Bondevik I government (Christian People’s Party, Centre Party, Liberals)</td>
<td>1 June 2001</td>
<td>1 June 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 December 1999</td>
<td>20 December 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 November 1999</td>
<td>23 November 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 May 1999</td>
<td>17 June 1999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 The ten working groups analysed services, agriculture, TRIPS, trade and environment, trade and competition, trade and investments, public procurements, market access, electronic trade, and working standards respectively.
There have been several confrontations in Parliament over Norwegian bargaining positions in the preparations for the present WTO round. In a way, these controversies reflect a comment made by Minister of Foreign Affairs Knut Vollebæk prior to the Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999. He expected that Norway would be confronted with ‘difficult weighting and challenges in the negotiations’.

From the preparations prior to Seattle to the aftermath of the Ministerial conference in Cancún, three different governments were in charge of the negotiations. The first government under the premiership of Kjell Magne Bondevik was a minority coalition between the Christian People’s Party, the Centre Party (formerly the Agrarian Party) and the Liberal Party. After Seattle, in March 2000, this government was replaced by a Labour minority government, headed by Jens Stoltenberg. In October 2001, a new minority coalition government, Bondevik II, was formed, this time without the Centre Party, but with the Christian People’s Party, the Liberal Party, and the Conservative Party.

The debates on the Bondevik I government’s statements
The first governmental account on the present round of negotiations in the WTO was given by Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk in May 1999. The statement was to a large extent based on the mapping of national interests, but also on the preparatory work that was going on in the WTO, and on the declaration on the political basis of the Government which was compiled by the parties as part of the process of coalition formation. The declaration stated that ‘the Government will work to further develop and improve the WTO agreement so that it to a larger extent includes social, environmental and health and consumer concerns’.

Two issues in particular were criticised in the parliamentary debate on the statement. The first was the fact that the Government had decided not to play an active role in getting investments included as a subject in a broad negotiation round. A majority of the Parliament (Labour and the Conservatives) opposed this decision. The second issue was the Norwegian agricultural positions which were also, to some degree, criticised by a majority of the Storting (Labour, the Progress Party).

23 The statements and minutes of the debates can be found on www.stortinget.no.

24 The Norwegian multiparty system is based on cross cutting cleavages (Rokkan and Valen, 1964; Rokkan, 1967). Traditionally, the parties were positioned on the left-right axis like this: Socialist Left, Labour, Liberals, Christian People’s Party, Centre Party, Conservatives, Progress Party. The Centre Party, however, has moved to a position close to the Socialist Left and Labour. The Progress Party is difficult to position due to its populist profile. In some issues they place themselves to the left of the Conservatives. Another important cleavage in Norwegian politics is related to conflicts between centre and periphery. The formerly Agrarian Party has been named the Centre Party since 1959. The name reflects its central position on the left–right dimension, but in fact the Centre Party is a periphery party. It takes an extreme position on the rural periphery side of the centre-periphery cleavage, followed by Christian People’s Party, Socialist Left and Liberals. The Conservatives, Progress Party and Labour are positioned on the urban centre side. The Progress Party, Conservatives and Labour are the parties most positively oriented towards the WTO and trade liberalisation. The Socialist Left and the Centre Party in particular are the most sceptical ones with regard to trade liberalisation.

25 The so-called Voksena˚sen declaration.
Party, and the Conservatives). Despite this, most representatives concluded that there was a broad majority in Parliament that supported the Government’s negotiating positions.

The second statement by Foreign Minister Vollebæk in November 1999, given prior to the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, stressed (like the first one in May) the importance of the WTO for a small country like Norway: ‘In view of our small and very open and outward-oriented economy, the multilateral trading system is of great importance to Norway. It provides common rules for world trade and ensures access for Norwegian goods and services to other countries’ markets on non-discriminatory terms. Further development and strengthening of the WTO rules is in our interest. It is also in our interest that the WTO system functions as the main pillar for international trade. The forthcoming WTO negotiations are therefore of crucial importance to Norway.’

The statement described two main goals for the forthcoming negotiations: ‘One is to facilitate continued growth and value added in the Norwegian economy by means of strong and binding rules that provide predictable conditions for international trade. The other is to further develop the trading system in a way that takes better account of the situation of the developing countries and of qualitative aspects of trade relating to the environment, food security, health, consumer and regional policy considerations and the safeguarding of cultural diversity’.

These two main goals were reflected in eight specific proposals which Norway submitted to be included in the mandate to be agreed upon in Seattle.26 Regarding agriculture and market access for industrial products including fish and fish products, the statement reflected the defensive and offensive Norwegian interests in these sectors. For agriculture, where negotiations were scheduled to start in 2000 regardless of agreement on a new comprehensive round of negotiations (as part of the built-in agenda of the WTO), the Minister acknowledged the reference of Article 20 of the WTO agricultural agreement to the ‘long-term objective of substantial progressive reductions in support and protection’. He also pointed out, however, that further negotiations should take into account ‘non-trade concerns’.

Non-trade concerns, or ‘the multifunctional and multifaceted nature of agriculture as a supplier of public goods such as rural settlements, food security and a living cultural landscape’, have been the key approach of Norway to the negotiations on agriculture. The main goals for agriculture were described by the Foreign Minister as follows: ‘The Government’s goal is to safeguard national room for manoeuvre in relation to the shaping of agricultural policy using the measures necessary to maintain viable agricultural production throughout the country.’ He acknowledged, however, that this could be difficult for

26 The proposals were related to agriculture, services, market access for industrial products including fish and fish products, fisheries subsidies, the environment, competition, and the financing of technical assistance to developing countries.
Norway: ‘Like other countries with a high level of support, we will undoubtedly face very difficult negotiations concerning tariffs as well as domestic support and export subsidies. In the negotiations, the parties must be expected to go beyond the existing commitments.’

Market access and tariff negotiations on industrial products, including fish and fish products, were at this time considered most likely to be part of the new round of negotiations. This was described in the following terms by the Foreign Minister: ‘This is in line with Norwegian industrial interests and is extremely important for those of our industries exposed to international competition, which provide a basis for employment and settlement in many parts of the country. Norway has offensive interests in sectors such as fish and fish products, the engineering and technology industries, and textiles and clothing. So far these interests seem to have been taken into account. In addition to tariff negotiations, a more detailed look at non-tariff barriers to trade that affect trade in goods will be important for Norwegian industry.’

Moreover, the special importance of fish and fish products was further addressed: ‘Norway is currently one of the world’s largest exporters of seafood. The industry has a considerable growth potential and will continue to be a very important factor for ensuring employment and settlement along the coast. A number of countries that are among the main markets for Norwegian fish exports clearly have defensive interests with respect to increased market access. Norway must actively follow up this in order to achieve a substantial degree of improvement in market access for fish and fish products.’

The debate in the Storting a week after Foreign Minister Vollebæk’s second statement was tenser than the first one. Contrary to the first debate, where the balance and possible conflict between offensive fisheries interests and defensive agricultural interests was briefly mentioned by two Members of Parliament only, this became an important theme in the second debate. The question of balancing offensive and defensive interests was addressed by several MPs throughout the debate. The Labour Party opened by stating that there was a need for an overall national strategy for the export of fish and fish products, and a need for balancing offensive and defensive interests. They also pointed out that Article 20 includes a clear commitment to further liberalisation, and that this was important for developing countries. Even the Socialist Left Party argued that free trade for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was important for development and poverty reduction in these countries.

The Progress Party stressed what they saw as the destructive effects of Norwegian agricultural policies for developing countries. It was the first party to argue that Norway would lose credibility in the negotiations by pushing for as much trade liberalisation as possible in fisheries and as little as possible in agriculture.

27 A review of the anti-dumping rules as part of the new round was considered as especially important for the fisheries sector.
The Christian People’s Party stressed, as they also did in the first debate, the difficult dilemma between Norwegian agricultural protection and the expressed need for agricultural exports from developing countries. The Conservative Party argued that the Government was placing too much weight on the defensive agricultural interests, or what the representative called ‘defensive special interests’. The Centre Party stressed the importance of maintaining the opportunity for national solutions in agriculture, and argued that it should be possible to safeguard both defensive and offensive interests without sacrificing any of them.

The Progress Party, the Conservatives and Labour were concerned about the possibility that the defensive interests could contradict the offensive interests. They worried that the Government put too much energy into agriculture at the expense of fisheries, and argued that Norway would have to make priorities. The Minister of Agriculture replied that it would be unreasonable for Norway to give up any of its interests that early in the negotiation process. One Labour MP pointed out that fisheries could also be seen as ‘multifunctional’, contributing to employment opportunities and securing rural settlements in coastal areas. Several MPs asked the Government how they would prioritise if things started to become difficult in the negotiations. The Minister of Foreign Affairs concluded the debate by pointing out that the current question was to secure a general mandate for the negotiations and not to define the specific Norwegian positions in different areas. The point was to get as many as possible of the Norwegian interests included in the negotiating mandate.

The third statement by Foreign Minister Vollebæk on 20 December 1999 was a shorter statement which explained the reasons for the failure of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle. The Ministerial Conference ended on 3 December without any agreement having been reached. The debate in Parliament was also more limited. The Labour Party stated that the Government had its ‘freedom of action’ within the framework discussed in the previous parliamentary debate. The Conservative Party argued that the most important lesson to learn was not to place Norway on the outside of the agricultural negotiations. The Socialist Left Party stated somewhat ironically that the Norwegian positions on agriculture and fisheries were easily understandable for the rest of the world, because there was a fundamental difference between food produced on land and in sea. The Progress Party argued that Norway was on collision course with the developing world. The work of the Government, however, was to be continued along the established lines.

The debate on the Stoltenberg government’s statement
In March 2000, the Bondevik I government resigned, and Labour could return to office under the premiership of Jens Stoltenberg. A new account of WTO

28 The cabinet crisis had nothing to do with WTO matters. A majority of the Storting comprising Labour and Conservatives wanted to instruct the government to permit the construction of gas-heated
negotiations was given to the Storting by the new Foreign Minister, Thorbjørn Jagland, in June 2001. The statement outlined six overriding goals for the work in the WTO, clearly illustrating the complexity of the process:

First, we are supporting the efforts to make the current rules more equitable and predictable. We must avoid a situation where Norway and other small countries are subject to arbitrary actions and unilateral measures, such as protectionism and anti-dumping measures. Second, we want a trading system that continues to ensure that better and more varied goods and services are available to consumers at favourable prices. Third, we are seeking to ensure better market access for Norwegian exports. This applies to goods such as fish and industrial and high-technology products, and to services in important areas ...

Fourth, we consider it important to maintain our national room for manoeuvre so that we can develop our public sector as we see fit and pursue an active agricultural policy. Fifth, we are concerned that the WTO cooperation should take account of environmental considerations ...

And last but not least, we consider that more has to be done to safeguard the legitimate interests of the developing countries, with regard to market access, rules and transfers of expertise.

What was said in the rest of the statement did not contradict or change previous positions. However, the debate on the same day in the Parliament revealed and made more explicit some of the underlying priorities which were hidden in the previous ‘mandate’ from the Storting. The Christian People’s Party said that they had no objections to the six goals, and that it was important that the rich countries showed flexibility and made necessary allowances towards developing countries. The Conservative Party asked the Foreign Minister if the Government was flexible enough in the agricultural negotiations so that real and open market access for fish and fish products could be achieved.

In the debate, the Foreign Minister replied that ‘at least temporarily, we must regard agriculture to be in a special situation … I am aware of, as pointed out by both the Conservatives and the Progress Party that this depends, of course, on how far we can get with fish and fish products. It is not so that we can take a maximum restrictive attitude when it comes to agriculture, and then the maximum opposite opinion when it comes to fish.’ In this way, the previously underlying priority given to fish and fish products was explicitly stated. Although the positions on agriculture remained more or less the same, the Labour Government signalled increased flexibility in agriculture negotiations, if necessary in order to obtain concessions for fish and fish products. This can be seen as a slight correction of the initial bargaining position in favour of the offensive interests. This correction was determined not only by the change in government, but also by the majority of the Parliament (Langhelle, 2001).
The debates on the Bondevik II government’s statements

After the general election in September 2001, the Labour government was replaced by a new coalition government headed by Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, consisting of the Christian People’s Party, Liberals, and Conservatives. Prior to the Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar in November 2001, the new Foreign Minister Jan Petersen gave a new account of WTO negotiations. The statement provided a broad description of the status of the preparations from the Government’s point of view. Overall, the Government was satisfied with the progress in WTO negotiations. Now in government, Foreign Minister Petersen, who was also the leader of the Conservative Party, spoke less about the need to balance offensive and defensive interests. The ‘mandate’ on agriculture thus remained the same and, although not explicitly stated this time, an underlying priority in case of conflict was given to the offensive interests, including fish and fish products.

During the debate in the Storting, Foreign Minister Petersen concluded, as did the two Foreign Ministers before him, that ‘there is broad support in Parliament for the Norwegian positions in WTO’. The Christian People’s Party argued that ‘there is a line of continuity which characterises the orientations given by Vollebæk, Jagland and today Petersen’. Moreover, former Labour Prime Minister Stoltenberg argued that ‘although governments change, the attitudes towards WTO negotiations remain the same’.

A second statement was given by Foreign Minister Petersen in June 2003. The account presented an overview of the status in the negotiations and the problems that had to be addressed at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancún, Mexico in September 2003. The statement was flavoured by the fact that the proposal for so-called modalities in the agricultural negotiations which was presented by the WTO in February 2003, and a revised proposal in March 2003, was seen as extremely destructive for Norwegian agriculture, and incompatible with Norwegian positions. The Foreign Minister stressed that leaving the WTO is not an option for Norway, and that it should not be forgotten that Norway has strong offensive interests in areas other than agriculture. Moreover, the Governments priorities and trade-offs in further negotiations would be made on the basis of a comprehensive judgement of offensive and defensive interests. The Foreign Minister warned, however, that the outcome of the negotiations could have significant negative impacts on Norwegian agriculture.

The following debate in the Parliament did not bring up any new issues. There was a comment from the Centre Party which indirectly questioned the willingness of the Conservatives to defend Norwegian agricultural positions in the negotiations, positions which the Conservatives would not necessarily defend in a purely national setting. The Foreign Minister concluded, however, that the negotiating positions were supported by a broad majority of the Parliament including the coalition parties, Labour and (with the exception of agricultural positions) the
Progress Party. The only reservations came from the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party.

**Summing up the statements and debates in Parliament**

The governmental statements and following debates in the Norwegian Parliament indicate that the involvement of the Storting in WTO negotiations has been important. Despite the fact that three different governments have been in charge of the negotiations, governments and opposition parties emphasise that there is continuity and broad consensus with regard to Norwegian negotiating positions. There seems to be general agreement in the Storting on what several MPs speak of as ‘the mandate’ from the Parliament.

As the debates in Parliament reveal, however, there are underlying tensions and disputes related to how different Norwegian interests should be weighted and prioritised in the course of the negotiations. The strategy sanctioned by Parliament has been to bring all Norwegian interests – both defensive and offensive – into the negotiation process, with the intention of increasing the likelihood of an outcome that would favour most Norwegian interests. Concessions are to be given only if something can be gained in other areas. This ‘mandate’ evolved partly as a result of the interaction between the different governments and Parliament, and the process has anchored the national positions within the ‘median groups’ or majority in Parliament. In effect, this process has also partly identified the national ‘win-set’. The ‘mandate’ itself, however, seems loose and open to different interpretations, and ultimately the Government has a freedom to act autonomously within the domestic win-set (cf. Moravcsik, 1993: 24). The principal guidelines are set by the Parliament, however, and the Parliament will no doubt follow the development closely when negotiations start moving again after the setback in Cancún.

The slight correction of the negotiating mandate made by Parliament must be seen in relation to the fact that possible issue-linkages at the international level have always been an underlying concern in the national debates. The changes and corrections in national bargaining positions – and also the debates in Parliament – reflect the developments in the international negotiations and the positions of other countries and groupings. These changes are thus fundamentally linked to the dynamics of two-level games where political leaders are playing simultaneously at both domestic and international arenas, and where they face different and contradictory pressures and constraints from each.

For a long time, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the view that there was little to gain from issue-linkages between agriculture and market access for fish and fish products. Norwegian authorities therefore strived to keep agriculture and fisheries on separate tracks. The issue-linkage between agriculture and fisheries occurred first and foremost at the national level, and issue-linkages at the international level have been a serious concern in the national process since it cannot be ruled out in the forthcoming ‘single undertaking’ in the WTO. As
it looks now, trade-offs between agriculture and fisheries through issue-linkages are not only a potential problem, but a reality in the WTO negotiations.

In the meeting of the Negotiating Group on Market Access prior to Cancún, market access and agriculture were explicitly linked to each other by five countries: Thailand, Egypt, Argentina, Uruguay, and Philippines (WTO, 2003). The Philippines argued that ‘the essential linkage of non-agricultural negotiations to agriculture negotiations should never be lost’ (WTO, 2003: 36). The representative from Uruguay evaluated the proposed formula in the market access negotiations ‘on the understanding that the same level of ambition would prevail in other areas of the negotiations, particularly in agriculture’ (WTO, 2003: 33). Argentina argued that they were especially interested in the agricultural negotiations and argued for ‘positive linkages’ in the sense that ‘strong advances in agriculture would lead to equally strong advances in non-agricultural products’ within the framework of a ‘single undertaking’ (WTO, 2003: 30). A statement from Thailand indicates that agriculture – as in the Uruguay round – is effectively blocking progress in all other areas of the negotiations. It is difficult ‘if not impossible for Thailand to accept such elements [the proposed formula, sector elimination, including fish and fish products] without knowing the level of ambition in the agricultural negotiations’ (WTO, 2003: 13). The issue-linkage between agriculture and market access is also implicitly recognised by US Trade Minister Robert B. Zoellick. In a letter to all trade ministers of the WTO countries, he declared that ‘a more concrete understanding in agriculture’ is necessary ‘before the negotiations on market access for manufactured goods can move ahead’ (Zoellick, 2004: 3).

It is difficult to predict what influence these issue-linkages will have on the end-result of the WTO negotiations, but there is no doubt that they are present in the on-going processes, both domestically and internationally.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The above findings clearly indicate that the Norwegian Parliament has become more actively engaged in international affairs. As we have seen, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of international parliamentary delegations. More than one-third of the members of the Storting are members of one or more international delegation(s) or committee(s) dealing with international relations. WTO issues are becoming more and more relevant for various domestic sectors. Naturally, most questions regarding WTO issues are directed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, but the number of questions answered by ministers responsible for various national affairs is increasing. In other words, the Norwegian Parliament is becoming more and more internationalised, and there is an intrusion of international issues into domestic politics, and vice versa.

Consultations between the Parliament and the Government represent an indirect way of exerting parliamentary influence on the outcomes of international
negotiations. It can be described as a go-through-government strategy. This strategy is supplemented by an increased direct involvement of parliamentarians within various international organisations, ranging from ad hoc meetings to the establishment of permanent parliamentary assemblies. Parliaments are increasingly trying to exert direct influence through what we may call a bypass-government strategy. The introduction of a ‘parliamentary dimension of the WTO’ shows that the WTO is no exception. WTO meetings of parliamentarians have been rather informal, but they are now held regularly.

Norwegian MPs have participated in the parliamentary meetings during the Ministerial Conferences of the WTO, but they do not seem to have been particularly active at the WTO level. The Storting does have an impact on Norwegian bargaining positions, but that is mainly due to the work done at home – at the national level. In the case of Norway, the ‘go-through-government’ strategy has been efficient, but that may not necessarily be the case in other political systems. If the executive–legislative relations are dominated by the executive, then MPs may have to turn to ‘bypass-government’ strategies and try to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the WTO. The proposed creation of a Parliamentary Assembly of the WTO, which has been put forward by the European Parliament, can be interpreted as a consequence of the relatively weak position of the EP vis-à-vis the EU Commission. However, so far the direct influence of parliamentarians within the WTO has been rather limited.

There are several factors that may contribute to the increased involvement of parliaments in international affairs. Internationalisation and globalisation is a driving force, but that does not necessarily imply that parliaments become more involved with international affairs. The ‘mechanism’ that involves parliaments is the dual process of internationalisation of domestic affairs and domestification of international affairs. Traditionally, international affairs were matters of national security and defence, and it was fairly easy to isolate security and defence from domestic sectors and policy areas. Today, international affairs also include matters related to various domestic sectors and policies like business policy, environmental policy, etc. Governments are responsible for international negotiations. In two-level games like this, however, trade-offs between various domestic interests are needed, and domestic affairs belong to the domain of the parliaments. Consequently, we expect parliaments to play a more important role in international relations in general, and particularly in relation to the processes of deciding trade-offs and determining national bargaining positions. The data presented in this article seem to confirm these expectations, and the observed tendencies are likely to continue and expand as new issues are addressed in international organisations and negotiations.

Arguably, an important role of Parliament is to contribute to the interpretation of the national interest(s). As we pointed out earlier, ‘the national interest’ is ‘politically contingent’ and depends on the outcomes of political processes, especially when there is more than one national interest. As we have seen, this is
clearly the case with regard to Norway and WTO negotiations. In the parliamentary debates it has become fairly evident that a majority of the Norwegian Parliament ranks offensive interests (trade liberalisation for fish) above defensive interests (protection of agriculture). The priority given to offensive interests therefore implies that agricultural interests may be sacrificed, but only if this is seen as necessary in order to achieve benefits for other interests. In other words, an important role and function of the Parliament has been to rank different interests, and by doing so to define the national interest.

The involvement of the Norwegian Parliament in foreign affairs should also be linked to a somewhat paradoxical relationship between consensus and conflict. Traditionally, Norway has been considered to be a ‘consensual’ democracy (Elder et al., 1982; Luebbert, 1986). Over the last decades, however, the level of conflict in the Storting has increased significantly (Rommetvedt, 2003). Consequently, the definition of ‘national interests’ will be more problematic. On the other hand, consensus has been, and still is, a strong political norm in relation to foreign policy. National unity has been seen as crucial for the protection of the national interests of a small country (Lovold, 2002). The combination of an increased level of conflict in the Storting and the need for, and norm of, consensus in foreign affairs has made it important for the Government to anchor WTO negotiating positions in the Parliament.

This is not self-evident, seen in light of the fact that Norway had three different governments in the period we have analysed. But the three governments were all minority governments. In spite of the principle of parliamentarianism, minority governments have almost become the rule in Norway. Cross-cutting cleavages, fragmentation of the party system, dissolution of traditional socialist and non-socialist party blocks, and increased voter volatility together with the Norwegian version of parliamentarianism have contributed to this. As we have mentioned earlier, Norwegian governments do not need a positive vote of confidence, but they have to be accepted by the Storting. Minority governments are in need of support from other parties in the Parliament, especially when continuity and consistency are needed, as is the case in international negotiations.

No doubt the days when international affairs were a prerogative of the executive are long gone, but parliaments are still searching for an appropriate role in international organisations and negotiations. The different views among MPs still indicate that some feel parliaments are too little involved in WTO negotiations. This holds especially for the MPs who are most critical towards trade liberalisation and the WTO in general. In the case of Norway, however, the majority of the Parliament seems to be fairly satisfied with the information from and consultations with the Government.

In this article, Norway and the WTO have served as illustrations of the internationalisation of parliaments and the role of parliaments in international affairs. Our findings clearly indicate that the Norwegian Parliament plays an important role in international relations and negotiations. But what does this analysis tell us
about the internationalisation of parliaments in general? Can the Norwegian experience be extended to other parliamentary democracies, or is Norway a deviant case with little relevance to other countries?

We believe that the Norwegian experience is relevant to other parliamentary systems as well. The relevance varies, however, and it is dependent on the character of the political system. The general characteristics of executive–legislative relations are perhaps the most import element in this connection. The principle of parliamentarianism strengthens the position of Parliament vis-à-vis Government. Minority governments – whether they are single party or coalition governments – need to make sure that they get support from a majority of Parliament. Consultations with the Parliament are necessary and minority governments have to attach importance to the views of Parliament. The ability of Parliament to exert real influence on the Government depends, however, on the Parliament’s political and administrative capacity. Competence, staff, and other resources are needed for Parliament to be able to realise the potential parliamentary power represented by minority government situations.

In presidential systems with a strong president, on the other hand, the legislature will tend to be weak and to play a minor role in relation to international affairs. The same applies to parliamentary system with cohesive parties and majority governments – especially single party majority governments. There seems to be a widespread norm, however, of consensus and continuity in relation to foreign policy and international affairs. Consequently, even presidents and majority governments tend to have a wish for broader support on international matters. The strength of the norm of consensus and the wish for broad support represents an opportunity for legislatures to play a role in international relations and WTO negotiations.

Comparative analyses are needed, of course, to give a satisfactory answer to the question of generalisability of the Norwegian experience. However, the process of domestification of international affairs and the internationalisation of domestic affairs will continue with increased strength in the future. Most likely in the age of globalisation, various domestic sectors and interests which are affected by international negotiations will increase the pressure on parliaments and parliamentarians, and thus challenge the traditional aloof role of parliaments in international negotiations and organisations.

References


Role of parliament in international relations and WTO negotiations

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## Appendix

*Members of parliamentary committees responsible for international relations and of delegations to international organisations 2001–2005*

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***: Standing Committee

*Committees:*
- SCFA: Scandinavian Committee for Foreign Affairs
- ECFA: European Committee for Foreign Affairs
- EEACC: European and Eastern Association for Committee Cooperation

**Delegations:**
- EFTA/EEA: European Free Trade Association/European Economic Area
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- OSCE: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- EP: European Parliament
- WEU: Western European Union
- IPU: International Parliamentary Union
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***Name. Party***

- SV: Socialist Left Party
- H: Labour Party
- FrP: Fremskrittspartiet
- A: Conservative Party
- KrF: Norwegian People's Party
- EFTA: European Free Trade Association
- EEA: European Economic Area
- NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement
- OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- EP: European Parliament
- WEU: Western European Union
- IPU: Inter-Parliamentary Union
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