

# Parliament, Union and a special relationship

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*minister (1996-1997), foreign minister (2000-2001) and Labour Party chairman (1992-2002). Jagland has also played a pivotal role in the party's international work with particular emphasis on the Middle East. First elected MP in 1993, Thorbjørn Jagland was awarded the post as President of the Storting in 2005.*

This year marks the 300 years' anniversary of the establishment of the Union of Great Britain. One of the effects of this was a unified Parliament. In Norway we recently had our anniversary of the dissolution of the union with Sweden. The revolutionary acts of the Storting ensured Norwegian independence in 1905. In our societies, Parliament plays a crucial role, and has done so for a long time. As president of the Storting our common traditions of parliamentary democracy springs to my mind when I take part in the anniversary of Great Britain. I paid my first official visit abroad in my new capacity in 2005 to the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

Norway and the United Kingdom have an excellent bilateral relationship, based on history, our Royal families, economic ties, culture, and much more. At the same time, being neighbours sometimes also means conflicting interests and a scramble for resources.

Some 1220 years ago – in the year 787 – three Viking ships brought the first Norsemen to England. The friendly Anglo-Saxon natives who came to welcome the foreign visitors were immediately cut down with swords. Clearly, the Vikings had not travelled so far crossing the perilous North Sea just to make social contact. Heathen Norsemen went on to plunder monasteries and cause havoc with rape and slaughter.

Ever since, their descendants have kept coming to Britain. Fortunately, the Norsemen have mellowed over the centuries. Civilizing forces have been at work, such as Christianity which was introduced to Norway by the first King Olav. He had been baptized and confirmed while in England.

We have been on opposite sides in war. The blockade of Norway by the British fleet during the Napoleonic war caused hunger and left scars which took a long time to heal. This is at the present day of no relevance to our relationship. But in the years following this event, it contributed to forging Norway's foreign policy orientation. Rather than risking being at war with a powerful nation like the United Kingdom, Norway looked for an ally there.

The first King to occupy the Norwegian throne since Norway regained its independence in 1905, was King Haakon VII, whose Queen Maud was the daughter of King Edward VII. She won a place in her new countrymen's hearts, and strengthened the ties between the Norwegian and British royal families and their people.

In 1908, during a British naval visit, the Norwegian Prime Minister Gunnar Knudsen stated the following regarding Norwegian security interests and their reliance on British naval power in the North Sea: "We think that there never will be trouble [...] and if there is, we shall place our trust in the British nation, mindful of the new link forged by our Queen".

Norway expects a lot from Britain, and we

have done so for many years. Our King and Government resided in Britain at a most difficult time in our history, during the second World War. We hoped for your support, and we got it.

Today, we still expect a lot from Britain. In present days, however, our expectations are rather linked to the role we see that Britain may play at the international level.

Sometimes we need the big players to take a lead. Britain did this for Africa during its G8 chairmanship. Norway is a donor country which spends a substantial proportion of its GDP on development aid, but without the biggest economies of the world on board the volume will never be sufficient. Britain turned G8 focus towards Africa, in full compliance with Norwegian foreign aid priorities.

The world is waiting for progress in the Middle East. During my visit to Israel recently I felt the urgent need for the international community to engage actively in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to do it right now. The people who suffer under the conflict deserve it, and the whole region needs a solution to this conflict in order to stabilise and democratise the rest of the Middle East. It seems to me that we need Europe and in particular countries like the United Kingdom to take a lead. If we wait for the US alone to move, we may wait too long.

More generally, I hope to see the EU develop into a stronger force on the international arena. In the negotiations with Iran on its nuclear programme the EU3 demonstrated what clout the United Kingdom and the other big EU powers may have when they act concertedly.

Energy security is seen to be a major challenge of our time. It is on top of the European agenda. Today, Norway supplies a substantial amount of Britain's petroleum imports, and the operation of the Langeled gas pipeline marks another major step in our bilateral relationship.

Climate change and energy are interlinked. There must be incentives to invest in new technology to reduce emissions. CO2 capture and storage is on top of the bilateral agenda between Norway and Britain. Together we must move Europe forward, and also export our technology to other parts of the world.

The anniversary of the unification of Scotland and England 300 years ago reminds us that Norway is geographically closer to Scotland than to England. Nowhere in the United Kingdom are Norwegian names and vocabulary seen as much as in parts of Scotland. In present days more than 300 Norwegian enterprises are established in the United Kingdom, of which one third are located in Scotland. Parliamentary relations between Norway and the United Kingdom include frequent exchanges with the Scottish Parliament.

From my position as President of the Storting I look forward to enhancing the parliamentary cooperation between Norway and the United Kingdom. Hopefully the 300 years' anniversary of the United Kingdom will provide us with ample opportunities to do so. We should continue to pool our resources in a common European and international engagement for parliamentary democracy, and for peace and development in the world.