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## **New Gov**

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Integrated Project

Priority 7 – Citizens and Governance in the Knowledge-based Society

### **New Modes of Civil Society Participation in the WTO**

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#### **“...Summary**

This report reviews new modes of civil society participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO)...It presents various types of consultation and outreach activities that the WTO has organized in recent years to respond to the calls for more public participation in world trade governance...This case study is designed to assess the practice of civil society consultation in one specific - and highly contested – policy field...the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)...The conclusions that we draw from the general overview and the case study are ambivalent. On the one hand, we observe that these new mechanisms in the WTO have increased remarkably over time, as has the transparency of the policy-making process. On the other hand, we observe that these mechanisms remain detached from the intergovernmental

negotiation processes. Therefore, civil society actors have only a very limited chance the formulation of policy proposals, and in fact many of them, do not even aspire to do so. They rather see their role in making the general public more aware of (and more sensitive to) the manifold consequences that WTO policies have on peoples' lives all over the world. (p. 2).

**...Introduction: civil society and international governance**  
(p. 4).

Governance by international organizations is often charged with being undemocratic.

...At the international or even global level of policy-making, however, it is hard to imagine how all stakeholders of governance (and this in many cases will mean citizens) could participate directly in such deliberative processes.

...Some authors have argued that civil society participation is key to the democratization of international governance...Civil society participation holds two major promises. First by taking part in political debates at the global level, civil society organizations have the capacity to transport new issues, interests and concerns from (local) stakeholders to global governance arrangements. Second, their presence contributes to the emergence of a global public sphere in which policy choices are exposed to public scrutiny. Representatives of civil society monitor internationalized policymaking and critically comment on it, often adding counter-expertise and alternative viewpoints. They then disseminate the information on global policy developments to their own constituency, thus triggering the emergence of functionally limited public sphere. At least a certain type of civil society actor, the activist non-governmental organization (NGO), often also seeks to bring such issues on the agenda of the mass media. In doing this they contribute to a broader public sphere, that is, a media debate on global governance that potentially reaches a high number of stakeholders.

Thus, there are several good reasons to believe that civil society has an important role to play in the democratization of governance beyond the nation state. Yet this should not lead us to declare all modes of governance that involve civil society automatically as good or democratic. We always need to investigate carefully if civil society really fulfills the democratizing roles that political scientists envisage for it. This paper presents the results of such a critical enquiry.  
(p. 4).

...We differentiate between the term non-governmental organization (NGO) which is commonly used for public interest organizations and the term civil society organization (CSO) to include industry and academic institutions. (fn 2, p. 5).

**...Conclusion**  
(p. 32)

An evaluation of the relationship between the WTO and civil society yields ambivalent results...Opportunities for civil society to influence the deliberation process at the WTO are quite scarce. Remarkably, little has changed since GATT became operational in 1948. Consultation takes place mainly in the form of so-called outreach activities, such as symposia.

These meetings create a forum for discussion between non-governmental actors, and occasionally, a small number of government representatives. Yet, it has to be stressed that such discussions remain detached from the WTO's regular policy-making process. (p.32).

...The results of the study...reveal that public interest CSOs concentrate on awareness building, addressing the public sphere, and on campaigning, addressing the WTO. It is through informal, personal contacts with state delegations and WTO officials that most civil society representatives seek to influence policy-making. For research-based CSOs, this is especially valid...Yet even those informal ways of interaction that are buttressed by long-standing personal relationships do not seem to result in a two-way dialogue. Interviewed members of research CSOs saw themselves not in the position to transport concerns of civil society *into* the WTO, but only to enhance public knowledge *about* the WTO. Finally, industry CSOs enjoy the most privileged position to influence processes of regulatory decision-making. Their concerns seem to be particularly reflected in WTO deliberations as member states are quite ready to take them up. In their interaction with the WTO though, they too seem to remain focused on informing themselves on WTO activities and current discussions in order to be able to act on contentious issues without delay. So there is very little evidence for a real dialogue between the WTO and organized civil society” (emphasis in original). (p. 33).

## VII. Appendices

### ...3. NGO Position Papers on food safety and GMO regulation submitted to the WTO

Date	CSO	Title/Topic
September 2003	WWF International	Briefing Series on... Ecolabeling Observer status & precaution
September 2004	Consumers International – UK	Consumers Charter for Trade
May 2004	National Foreign Trade Council - USA	Looking behind the curtain: The growth of trade barriers that ignore sound science
		'Enlightened' environmentalism or disguised protectionism: assessing the impact of EU precaution-based standards on developing countries
		EU regulation, standardization and the precautionary principle: The art of crafting a three-dimensional trade strategy that ignores sound science

(p. 39)