I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to stress once again the importance which my Government attributes to the General Agreement and the comprehensive work which is being carried out in the international sphere by the Contracting Parties. While we shall now for some months to come concentrate our efforts in the tariff field, we must always keep in mind that the tariff question is only one aspect of the work that falls within the scope of the GATT. The tariff negotiations which we are about to begin must be regarded as one step in a concerted effort to bring about a greater freedom of trade between the contracting parties and in the world as a whole. This effort should gain new strength in the future through the entering into force of the revised General Agreement and the setting up of the Organization for Trade Cooperation.

The Norwegian Government has from the very start participated actively in the work of the Contracting Parties and willingly supported all measures aimed at the strengthening of our organization with a view to facilitating the expansion of world trade. In this connection I would remind you that of all the countries in Europe, and perhaps even in the whole world, Norway has the highest foreign trade in proportion to its national product. This fact, added to Norway’s position as a major shipping nation, makes her vitally interested in participating in the common effort to reduce and eliminate the various obstacles to trade existing in the world today.

It is therefore natural that the Norwegian Government has given the question of tariff reductions its particular attention, and my Government carefully studied the different proposals for an automatic reduction of tariff levels, which have been put forward. It has realized, however, that the time is not yet ripe for the establishing of such a system, but is of the opinion that it would be advantageous if those plans could be given further study.
I would also like to mention on this occasion the particular problems which the low tariff countries of Europe have to cope with. The countries concerned are highly developed but comparatively small countries with a limited home market. Their production and exports contribute in no small measure to the development and the general prosperity of other countries. We hope therefore, that the other member countries with whom their exchange of goods is considerable, will recognize the mutual advantages of a reduction of the tariff rates. If this is not the case, it appears difficult to motivate demands to the European low tariff countries for a further liberalisation of their imports while the expansion of their exports is hampered by the high tariff rates of some of their most important trading partners.

Norway is, as I said, in a very high degree dependent on a highly developed and expanding world trade. The Norwegian Government therefore actively participated in drawing up the plans for the present negotiations and the regulations which are to be the basis for the negotiations. The system adopted has to a large degree been influenced by the new Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act, which was passed by the Congress of the United States of America in June 1955. The authority for tariff reductions given to the President of the United States under this Act, which constitutes one of the main reasons for holding the present tariff negotiations, is of course a step in the right direction and is welcomed by my Government as a sign of a positive attitude of the United States in the field of tariff reductions. However, I should like to express the hope that the very limited tariff reductions, which the Act allows, will prove to be only a first step in a renewed effort in this field where international cooperation has not been very vigorously pursued during the last few years. It is likewise our hope that the United States Government will endeavour to prevent other obstacles of an administrative character from unduly hampering the importation of foreign goods to that country.

The solution of Europe's dollar problem fundamentally depends on the possibilities for export to the United States, and it is only natural, therefore that we follow with utmost interest the development of American trade policy.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, we see the present tariff conference as a part of a general effort for the liberalization of world trade, and we feel that the new Organization for Trade Cooperation ought to play a large role in our future work in this direction. I disclose no secret when I say that our feeling is that the effectiveness of this new Organization is dependent on the active participation of the United States, and it is the hope of my Government that the United States Government will soon be in a position to accept the Convention setting up the Organization.

The Norwegian Government has noted with regret that certain countries have not found it possible to participate in the negotiations or have decided to limit their negotiations to a single contracting party. The general importance of the negotiations now about to commence will thus be restricted. My Government will, however, do its utmost to make the result of the negotiations as important and comprehensive as conditions permit.