However, our main concern here is the impact of IGOs on states themselves. At the very least, belonging to IGOs complicates the task of governance. States must arrange to pay their subscriptions, attend meetings, identify their national interest, consult with domestic interest groups, initiate some proposals, respond to others and implement agreements. IGOs bore into the daily activities of national governments, posing a particular challenge to the resources and capacities of small, low-income states.

Even for large countries, IGOs dilute the distinction between domestic and foreign policy, giving an international dimension to many, perhaps most, government activities. IGOs are often centrally involved in formulating the agreements which must then be implemented locally by national governments. It is one thing to agree to new international standards on animal welfare; it is quite another to draft, agree and enforce national regulations giving effect to the new regime. As Zelikow (2011) puts the point:

In the past foreign policy mainly consisted of adjusting relations between states – what they do with or to each other. Now foreign policy consists mainly of adjusting the domestic policies of states – of what they do with or to their own people.

In addition, IGOs have affected the balance of forces within national political systems. Specifically, they tend to fragment domestic policy-making. Slaughter (2004), in particular, has emphasized the segmenting effect of public officials communicating with colleagues from other countries. Noting how judges, administrators, regulators, central bankers, legislators, police forces and heads of state ‘are all networking with their foreign counterparts’, she suggests that:

the state is not disappearing; it is disaggregating into its component institutions. The primary state actors in the international realm are no longer foreign ministries and heads of state but the same government institutions that dominate domestic politics. The disaggregated state, as opposed to the mythical unitary state, is thus hydra-headed, represented and governed by multiple institutions in complex interaction with one another abroad and at home. (Slaughter, 2004, p. 190)

These linkages between departments in different countries deepen as a club-like spirit develops among ministers in ‘their’ IGO. For instance, finance ministers – never popular at home – are among friends at meetings of bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (Figure 2.1). Domestically, ministers of agriculture must defend the farmers’ interests against other departments, but at IGO meetings they meet only other ministers of agriculture, all of whom agree on farming’s importance (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009, p. 169).

Given such fragmentation within national political systems, we must ask which governing institutions gain, and which lose, from such interdependence. The main winners are surely the executive and the bureaucracy. These bodies provide the representatives who attend IGO meetings and conduct negotiations; they therefore occupy pole position.

The judiciary is also growing in significance as a result of IGO activity, partly because some influential IGOs, such as the World Trade Organization, themselves adopt a highly judicial style, issuing judgements on the basis of reviewing cases. In addition, national judges are increasingly willing to use international agreements to strike down the policies of their home government.