: Conference Report

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SEF Expert Workshop 2014

New Alliances for Global Public Goods?
What emerging powers expect of Germany and the EU

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Within only a quarter-century, international relations have changed fundamentally more than just once. The unexpected overcoming of the bipolar world order has not led to an enduring and peaceful hegemony of the USA but to the diffuse multipolar system we live in today. The stability of this particular system is challenged by a wide range of (re-)emerging and newly established actors seeking influence, as well as by an increasing number of problems and conflicts which require global solutions. On the one hand, this increased complexity can be perceived as an obstacle to successful international negotiations and the efficient provision of global public goods (GPGs). On the other hand, a polycentric world order offers great potential. The (re-)emerging powers in particular can potentially contribute to more just and efficient global governance, not only by bringing in new ideas and solutions but also by offering new opportunities to build coalitions for creating and implementing certain norms and agendas.

At the 2014 International sef: Expert Workshop, organised in cooperation with the Käte Hamburger Kolleg/ Centre for Global Cooperation-Research, around 30 stakeholders and researchers from all around the world discussed this potential. The debate focused on the prerequisites for new alliances and coalitions as well as on their impact on the provision of GPGs. Another key question raised in the discussion was whether there is a need for these coalitions to be embedded in a universal institutional framework and if so, what the constitution of this framework ideally would have to be. The role the EU and particularly Germany can play in the process of building new coalitions was intensively discussed as well.

A new landscape of international cooperation?

In the recent past the potential to include ideas and interests of (re-)emerging powers in the process of norm-making and implementation was never fully tapped. On the contrary, as participants from the "global south" emphasised, emerging powers are rather dissatisfied and even frustrated by how GPGs have been provided in the last few decades. Partly they feel discomfort with norms and agendas like the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P) and the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs) per se, partly with the way these were decided on. According to one participant, in the case of R2P the focus on military intervention in the international debate caused a collective southern anxiety about how R2P would affect state sovereignty, and the conditionality to which the implementation of the MDGs is linked was strongly criticised. Even more importantly, (re-) emerging powers feel left out in many norm-making processes, as the most influential bodies in the international arena such as the UN Security Council (UNSC), the Bretton Woods institutions, the G7 and the G20 are highly exclusive. As a result, (re-) emerging powers often assume a blocking rather than a constructive role in international cooperation. Since the inclusion of (re-)emerging powers in the provision of GPGs is inevitable, due to their rising capacities and power as well as for reasons of fairness, a new landscape of international cooperation needs to be created.

One way of reaching this new landscape of cooperation is by forming new alliances and strategic partnerships across former boundaries. However, these two different forms of cooperation need to be clearly distinguished. While alliances usually bring together more than two actors to initiate and push forward one particular issue in a multilateral context, strategic partnerships are bilateral, broad in themes, institutionalised but still rather informal and mainly process-oriented. Whereas strategic partnerships ideally contribute to a better mutual understanding and to confidence-building in international relations, alliances can be a powerful instrument to bring forward the provision of selected global public goods. It is necessary, therefore, to further differentiate between interest groups within formal international negotiation processes and alliances outside the established system. Both types of coalitions could facilitate the breaking free from deadlocked negotiation patterns. But how and between whom can such new alliances be formed?

sef Expert Workshop 2014: Jorge Laguna-Celis and Heiner Janus (f.l.t.r.)

The delicate art of coalition-building

First and foremost, participants underlined that it is a *sine qua non* that established as well as emerging powers are ready to break free from old bloc thinking. Established powers, furthermore, should be prepared to change their role in the system to gain credibility.

There is, of course, no *one-size-fits-all* approach to coalition-building. Its success depends on a range of factors. A great deal of significance was ascribed to potential partners' common interests, particularly those of an economic nature. Values on the other hand – this was the consensus – mainly serve as a cover for interests and are therefore of less importance. States will only truly cooperate if it is for their own benefit, and not solely on the basis of shared values. As important as common interest is the identification of the "right" issue. Collaboration is particularly promising on accepted, publicly visible and narrowly defined issues; in these cases a certain base that negotiations can be built on is already established. Coalitions can be inclusive – or rather exclusive. The latter might make sense in cases where the most important actors in a particular field work together (e.g. the world's largest emitters of CO_2). Participants also agreed that timing matters. Alliances built early on in a multilateral process obviously tend to be more effective. Yet an early start is no guarantee. Often a window of opportunity is needed to advance or even initiate negotiations and actions. This seems to be a factor actors hardly have an impact on.

Leadership and mutual respect

The opposite is true of yet another factor. There was strong agreement that efficient alliances require leadership. This is particularly true when it comes to breaking free from continued and hardened practices in order to stimulate new strategies and solutions on GPGs. Not every state is, however, capable of assuming such a frontrunner role. A potential leader must possess a minimum amount of resources, primarily economic, but – depending on the issue – also military power and a certain standing in international relations. Yet these resources are only of any worth if a country has the skills to translate them into politics. Under the buzzword *leadership by example* the participants also emphasised the importance of credibility and authenticity. Convincing implementation of a green economy at the domestic level, for instance, can increase an actor's chance of successfully promoting a similar issue in the global arena.

Furthermore, to become a leader you need followers, as one participant put it very clearly. Good ideas and attractive solutions will galvanise external support. Internal support for leadership in global issues, however, can be predominantly achieved by a committed discourse at the domestic level. Finally, as one participant stressed, the forming of new alliances between established and (re-)emerging powers must always be a two-way-process, a coalition of equals. Countries like Brazil, India and South Africa are no longer satisfied with merely acting as norm-takers: they wish to become norm-makers.

Frontrunners, facilitators, spoilers

How can coalitions contribute to the provision of global public goods? Several options were identified during the workshop. They can, first of all, act as frontrunners and commit themselves to contributing to an internationally accepted common goal to a higher extent than they are obliged to. They can allow action where multilateral processes are not

delivering, as is the case with the so-called "multilateral zombies" – negotiations that never die but also never seem to come to an agreement. And they can, of course, contribute to overcoming blockages within international negotiation processes, leading to better results.

One strong argument for coalitions and alliances brought forward in the discussions was the potential for smaller and middle-income countries – as well as non-state actors – to gain influence in international negotiations they would otherwise hardly have a word in. By providing innovative ideas and attractive solutions, alliances allow actors to take a decisive role they would never have been able to assume by themselves. This obviously opens up opportunities for less powerful actors. Prominent examples of this are Canada's initiative for R2P and initiatives of like-minded states to ban landmines or to install an International Criminal Court supported by strong civil society campaigns and eventually being successful against the will of some major powers. All these instruments contribute to the current international security architecture.

It was also argued that alliances can work more efficiently, due to their small size, function, and focus on specific issues. Yet alliances and coalitions are not constructive per se. As the aims and strategies of different alliances and partnerships most likely will not always be complementary to each other and to internationally agreed rules and norms, a state of competition might occur. Coalitions outside the established system might come up with a parallel structure, thereby ignoring what has been common sense so far. One example that figured quite prominently during the discussion in that regard was the BRICS Development Bank. The participants expressed ambivalent assessments of such a rival landscape. On the one hand competition could help to identify the best available solution for a certain issue, which obviously would be in everyone's interest. On the other hand, such a competition could also be counterproductive and lead to fragmentation and setbacks, e.g. with regard to sustainability or coherence.

Another question widely discussed was whether global governance really needs a centre. Should we not think instead of a global governance complex where regional organisations or alliances could play a particular role? To most participants, it seemed very questionable whether regional alliances could autonomously provide GPGs without interfering with other regions' efforts in the very same matter. The idea of universal goals would be fundamentally challenged. Hence, there seems to be a need for a global framework in which the various alliances and strategic partnerships can be embedded and organised without ignoring the importance of local and regional implementation of universal goals. But can current global institutions deliver such a framework effectively?

Global institutions: prepared for the challenge?

The very clear answer was "no", with the exception of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The UN, the most universal institution in the current international system, suffers from institutional weaknesses and working processes that are either not inclusive (as is the case with the UNSC) or not efficient (as with the UN General Assembly – UNGA).

The UNSC, potentially one of the most powerful bodies in the international arena, is not representative of today's power relations and is therefore outdated. This, unfortunately, is not only true of the UN but of many other global organisations. As one participant put it, we cannot solve today's problems with yesterday's institutions.

Other than alliances, the UN does not offer a real chance for (re-)emerging and middle-income countries to play a significant role. Even more, the UN seems to be more of an obstacle than an instrument when it comes to bringing in initiatives on the provision of GPGs, as one participant sharply summarised. Therefore, it seems to be more and more the case that initiatives are taken outside the UN system, ideally being brought back in a more or less loose way at the end, as was the case with the International Criminal Court.

Participants, especially those from the "global south", were strongly in favour of the UNSC becoming more inclusive, also because this would lead to higher legitimacy. This again, others replied, might lead to a lack of efficiency. The more actors involved, the messier the negotiation process and the more difficult it is to find consensus.

One participant criticised the global institution's lack of penetrability, in the sense that good work by member states is only rarely rewarded with more responsibility and influence. Given that most global institutions are Western in their origin, it is disappointing that this liberal principle of linking performance with possibilities of impact seems to be of no importance.

An urgent need for structural reforms is evident, even more so as institutions are important also with regard to permanency, monitoring and implementation. But how would global institutions have to change in order to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world? A variety of proposals was offered during the workshop, some of which seemed to be feasible, others somewhat optimistic. One participant called for democratic election of the UNSC, as this would be the only way to effectively legitimise it. Such a democratisation of global institutions would most likely lead to an international arena that is more representative of its time as well as adaptable

to future changes. But the realisation of such drastic measures appears to be highly unlikely in the foreseeable future, as the powerful agents seek to remain in their privileged positions and therefore lack political will to change.

A more pragmatic approach of incremental change was therefore favoured by most participants. Instead of revolutionising the UNSC, expanding it step by step by including semi-permanent members or introducing a rotating system might be more feasible. Another promising proposal was to make global institutions more accountable by establishing or improving monitoring procedures. This increase in transparency could put pressure on established powers, ideally forcing them to include (re-)emerging powers to a much higher degree. Furthermore, not only structural changes but also alterations in working processes could contribute to the improvement of global institutions. In this regard a more open discourse which pays attention to a greater variety of ideas and opinions, including those coming from the "global south", is required. Although such an incremental and pragmatic approach to reform appears lengthy and exhausting, especially to those who currently suffer from the imbalances within global institutions, it is probably the most effective way of moving towards change.

Advice for the EU and Germany

Today, hardly any country in the world can effectively influence international politics without cooperating with (re-)emerging powers such as India, South Africa, Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia, just to mention a few. But how can the European Union (EU) and Germany build up mutually beneficial and trustful partnerships and alliances with the (re-)emerging powers? Next to the abstract factors discussed above, some more concrete advice was given during the concluding session.

First and foremost, the EU and Germany should play the role of "constructive" global powers. In practice, this could mean the EU and Germany reconciling their interests with those of (re-)emerging powers. One example is Germany's attempt to secure a permanent seat on the UNSC. Instead of unilaterally aiming for this rather hopeless goal, Germany should promote a reform of the whole UNSC, which is in its own interests and in the interests of (re-)emerging powers. The EU and Germany should not take a wait-and-see position but engage proactively, in particular in a normative discourse but also in building up learning partnerships and communities, eventually leading to networked governance structures.

Furthermore, it is important to keep constantly engaged to build up trust. With regard to trust-building, one piece of practical advice was to avoid focusing on critical points such as (re)-emerging powers' obligation to take more responsibility with regard to finances or military engagement. This is not to say that these issues should not be discussed at all, but that they should be addressed at a later point in time when a certain level of trust has been built. The debate about R2P and its implementation was cited as a good example. Instead of highlighting the humanitarian aspects of this particular concept, the debate was almost exclusively driven by arguments about military intervention. This discourse not only made (re-)emerging countries feel uncomfortable with R2P but eventually undermined the whole idea of it.

Finally, it is not a world of states. Participants called again and again for engagement with civil society organisations. They have an increasing influence on foreign policies, and in some fields have taken over the setting of global rules, particularly in fields where national borders are irrelevant (as is true of the cyberspace, for example). We therefore not only need state alliances but also public policy coalitions with the global south to bring issues forward.

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