



## Common good(s) in a divided world?

### Getting on the road: actors – arrangements – agendas

#### Introduction

The 2009-2010 SID lecture series 'Common Goods in a Divided World' has, in many ways, underlined the necessity to safeguard global common interests through institutional facilities or arrangements. The financial crisis has shown the disastrous shortcomings concerning supervision and regulation on a world-wide scale.

At the same time, the international community seems to be paralysed and finds it hard to effectively deal with these challenges. The process of the structural reform of the United Nations did not come to much; the discussion on the necessary adaptation of the Bretton-Woods system is stagnating; the same applies to the Doha-Round, which should lead the way towards inclusive trade participation, also for emerging countries. Copenhagen has shown that even a life-threatening challenge such as climate change cannot lead to a genuine and obligatory global policy, for which policymakers can be held accountable. While the economic integration of the world is steadily progressing, political globalization seems to have come to a standstill.

Is this reason for cynicism and resignation? Or, maybe institutional reform is not the right way to go. Institutional reform only allows for one direction which is towards global government, i.e. a process in which states are to sacrifice more and more of their sovereignty. For this, consensus is needed, however judging by the past experiences consensus is the recipe for paralysing the negotiations. The laggards determine the agenda.

The lecture series this year has offered some alternative possibilities to build on. Probably, the principal lesson is that the focus should not be on *the* new international order, but on a *workable* international order. The Senate Conference will assemble essential elements for this and it will need to add those elements required to translate the outcomes of the lecture series in a political and public agenda. The political moment of early autumn asks for this agenda to be structured with regard to the Dutch public and political discourse, from a vision on the long term interests of our society and its role in the world.

#### The essence of getting on the road

Our agenda needs to be freed from the *one direction only* road. As proven by so many processes in the past, necessary changes are not the product of a one-sided, simple and targeted action, but of deviations and chances that come up and are recognized during the process. The history of the European unification offers a good example of this; the ideal of *Never another war again!* did not initially translate into the unification of states, not even into a Free Trade Area, but in a Coal and Steel Community. The world order of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not, it seems, be created through diplomacy and think-tanks and especially not following a route that only knows one destination: a global government.

### **The multiplication of international relations**

The lecture series has also made it abundantly clear that states are no longer the only actors that shape the global community and that can offer the necessary institutional arrangements. The annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos is more important than many UN events and the same applies to the World Social Summit. The importance of an initiative such as the Earth Charter overshadows that of many declarations made by official international organizations. Private agreements between banks or international businesses with their soft laws provide crucial contributions to a functioning world community. World religions in dialogue can change a *clash of civilizations* into an *alliance of civilizations* and in that manner contribute to a moral substrate for a global community. Consumer organizations have the potential to improve labour conditions and influence environmental effects, but this potential has barely been used. Human rights organizations and organizations for international solidarity combine their weight and influence with the unlimited possibilities of new communication-methods. In addition, more and more sub-national governments – regional, urban and municipal – appear on the international stage.

This broadening of the participation, according to number, nature and commitment of the participants, as well as the multiplication of forums and meetings, and the intensifying of interaction, are all productive conditions for the creation of a workable international order. In fact: do all these initiatives on their own not already constitute the core of a new, more horizontal, international order?

### **A workable international order**

Despite the ongoing processes, states are not superseded, not in the least because principled questions remain concerning the representativeness and legitimacy of non-state actors. The geo-political world map makes new state alliances necessary and possible; alliances of power under geo-political rivalries in the transition to a multi-polar world order, but also alliances of shared insights. The treaty against landmines or the treaty opposing trade in small weapons has forged powerful alliances between states and between states and international private organizations, with an effect that cannot be denied, not even by those outside such a *coalition of the willing*. Multilateralism seems dead and buried before it ever fully existed, but what about the new phenomenon of *many-lateralism*? Does the road towards global institutions go via regional cooperation and the formation of blocs? Or is a federalization of international consultation, with regional unions such as ASEAN, the African Union, the EU and Mercosur a useful expansion of the repertoire?

SID International has in the past few years systematically asked attention for the necessity of global *convivencia* (living together), instead of global government. The lecture series of the past academic year has shown in all clarity this necessity to be contrary to impotence.

A workable international order is only feasible when all parties or stakeholders feel that they are recognized in their legitimate interests and when they are willing to settle and compromise. Existing barriers for cooperation need to be removed, starting with Western superiority. In Copenhagen, the biggest problem was to find a way to bridge the interests and concerns of developed, emerging and developing countries, between oil producing and oil seeking countries, etc. Developing paths are diverse which holds the risk that common goods are often forgotten. When international politics is about connecting themes with each other so that exchange between domains is possible and negotiations can have breakthroughs (cross-issue bargains), then the current structure of the international order with its compartmentalized discussions and negotiations is dysfunctional. A broad agenda

with many issues increases the chance on continued attention as well as the willingness of the different participants to settle and compromise.

### **Trust is created on the road**

An international order is workable to the extent that it can count on a joint commitment, the engagement and the willingness of parties to find a solution together. For this, trust is required, because only then parties might be willing to refrain from the freedom to let their own self-interest prevail now and opt for a better outcome for all in the future. But it is trust that is missing in international cooperation; how can this deadlock be broken?

Trust is a precondition for as well as it is a product of interaction. Yvo de Boer recounts that during the last months before Copenhagen much was accomplished between all parties, concerning changes in perception, attitudes and the willingness to work together and find a solution. Even though the conference in the end failed to produce a binding document. In the process of working together and negotiating, people generate trust and the preconditions for a continued success. A workable international order is made on the road.

### **Summary**

#### **For a workable international order**

1. Common goods cut across national borders. Biodiversity and climate, security and health, financial stability and open markets - all require trans-national thinking, framing and policy formulation. They also require joint engagement (no one can address them alone) and international coordination and concerted action (policy interdependence).
2. States are no longer the only actors that shape the global policy community. International relations have multiplied, witnessing a plethora of actors, alliances, forums and meetings. Policies, agendas, problem definitions and solutions come up in many, varied ways, places and constellations.
3. Global governance is not to be thought of as global government. Our purpose should not be to produce *the* new international order, but to secure and generate *a workable* international order. A workable international order is made on the road, by people that engage and act together.

#### **The section Foreign Affairs needs to be redesigned**

Classical foreign policy is conceived as a policy of states, designed for the organization of interstate relations, and focused on defending national self-interest, through means of negotiations, exercise of power and the formation of coalitions.

The current situation – see the Summary above - asks for a different scale and for a different timeframe of policy formulation, for a different mindset and for a different approach.

- 1 A different scale and timeframe: the foremost challenges are global and therefore require policy framing and concerted action that suits this scale and term
- 2 A different mindset: not the immediate self-interest should prevail, but the match with collective interest and the common good
- 3 A different approach: not seated on power and force, not focused on organizing distrust; but coordinated, concerted action involving and stimulating non-state actors, and based on – and focused on the generation of more – trust and securing a workable international order.

The Netherlands, so dependent on a workable international order, should especially take the lead in this process.