

## International Conference

# “TRANSCENDING BORDERS- GLOBAL MANAGEMENT SINCE THE SEVENTIES”

**Berlin, November 14-15, 2001**

*organized by:*

*Bundeskanzler-Willy-Brandt-Stiftung, Berlin*

*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn*

*Stiftung Bruno Kreisky Archiv, Wien*

*Bruno Kreisky Forum für internationalen Dialog, Wien*

*Dr. Karl Renner Institut, Wien*

**RONALD W. PRUESSEN**

University of Toronto

**From a Bipolar to a Multipolar World: Form and Function in  
the Architecture of the International Arena**

### **Kontakt**

Akademie für Internationale Politik des Renner-Instituts

Dr. Erich Fröschl

T +43-1-804 65 01-17

froeschl@renner-institut.at

## Overview of Questions and Theses

### ***I. Premises:***

My assumption is that the Berlin conference will seek to study the evolution of “global management” efforts since the 1970s – in order to better prepare for the international challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (including those inherent in any further intensification of “globalization”).

Efforts should be made to define the concept of “global management” – with attention to *goals* and *processes*.

How would we describe – and evaluate – the *goals* of global management advocates or practitioners, for example? As we survey the past 30 years, what problems have dominated agendas? (E.g., what has been the relative significance of attention to conflict resolution, nuclear dangers and proliferation, economic stability and growth, development, health issues, terrorism, etc.?) How has the attention paid to certain goals (and the resources devoted to achieving them) shifted over time – and why? (E.g., whose priorities stood the greatest likelihood of attracting attention and resources?)

What *methods* or *processes* for achieving these global management goals have been developed over the past 30 years? Which methods or processes have proven to be effective – and which have had limited or even deleterious results? How might we explain degrees of success or failure? What have been the roles and relative significance of various “global management” actors – e.g., nation states, international institutions, NGOs, corporations, etc.?

### ***II. How will this paper relate to these conference themes and issues?***

It is frequently assumed that détente and the end of the Cold War signaled or even generated a shift from bipolarity to multipolarity – from a global arena dominated by two superpowers (the U.S. and the Soviet Union) to one in which a larger number of actors have had a significant impact on setting agendas and determining outcomes (e.g., Western Europe, Japan, China; multilateral and international organizations.)

Did the late 20<sup>th</sup> century actually witness a significant change in the structure or architecture of the international arena? And if so, how did the shift affect the practice and results of global management?

a. The aftermath of “September 11” might be seen as a symbol for the way a multipolar environment has proven increasingly conducive to efforts to “manage” what are perceived to be major global problems: it can be argued, that is, that the United States has seen the need to rely on -- and mobilize -- the support of a dramatic range of partners to deal with an open-ended, potentially pervasive crisis. (The fact that the roster of partners includes traditional allies like those in Western Europe as well as more unusual associates like Russia, China, and Iran only increases the distinctive symbolic character of the current arrangements.) From this perspective, the anti-terrorism campaign/coalition could be described as a highly developed outgrowth of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century impulse to develop multilateral global management mechanisms (e.g., the United Nations, the G7-G8, the W.T.O., the I.M.F., etc.)

b. But do the processes and dynamics of multipolarity and collaborative global management suggest deep systemic change *or* shallower adjustments? Are fundamental structural and architectural alterations taking place – or something more like renovations and “retrofitting”?

One example to suggest the possible *limits* of fundamental systemic change: The power of the United States in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – and since September 11 – should prompt attention to “*unipolarity*” as much as “multipolarity.” Have “global management” tools and mechanisms regularly (or often) become tools for strengthening American hegemony in the international arena? Has Washington consciously or unconsciously sought predominance – and have other powerful actors in a seemingly “multipolar” system acquiesced with some degree of comfort or found it impossible to resist?

c. We can best weigh the evidence regarding the significance or limitations of systemic change by *comparing wide-ranging case studies* – and by applying appropriate *questions* across the board.

The program for the Berlin conference offers an excellent sampling of the kind of case studies that would be needed – and individual papers are likely to suggest a variety of searching questions. I will risk repeating observations that may be made in other papers, however, by suggesting at least a few of the questions that I would be most anxious to apply to ongoing analytical efforts:

Does consistency with respect to some features of the international system of the past thirty years outweigh change with respect to other features? E.g., does continuity concerning core structural characteristics like nation-state units, “Great Power” politics, and capitalism limit the significance of any shift from bipolarity to multipolarity – and if so, to what degree?

Do case studies reveal consistency or change if the focus is placed on *goals* as opposed to *methods* – *intentions* as opposed to *structures*? E.g., are powerful states utilizing new techniques to achieve traditional objectives – and if so, do the new techniques show any sign of taking on a powerful transformative role with respect to the nature (and condition) of the international system? (Another way to conceptualize these questions is to think of them as a variation on the debate within the field of architecture concerning “form vs. function.”)

*Es gilt das gesprochene Wort.*