

The G20 at Leaders Level?

Record of the discussion at Bellagio, 9-11 December 2003

This discussion built on points raised at the meeting jointly hosted by the Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Centre for Global Studies in Waterloo, Ontario on 26-27 October, 2003, and looked ahead to the further meeting to be hosted by IDRC in Ottawa on 29 February 2004.

The genesis for the discussion was Paul Martin's proposal that the G20 might meet at Leaders level. He had for some time taken a keen interest in the issue of increased global interdependence, and the machinery for resolving global issues. Many of the globalization processes were unstoppable, and often brought significant benefits. But there were also real problems. Too many people were left behind, with inadequate support. Most leaders in the S

more powerful forum. On this analysis, a G20 might do little to quell the demonstrations and protests that recent G8 Summits had faced.

Against that, it could be argued that the primary chain of accountability was through elected leaders to Parliaments and the people who had elected them. The G20 would have greater legitimacy since it was not restricted to the major industrial countries, and would be a more balanced forum in which to discuss global issues. Meetings of Head of Government could help create a consistency between national positions taken by trade ministers, finance ministers, environment ministers etc at their respective meetings.

The issue of legitimacy was bound up with the issue of membership. There would be problems, for example, if the membership did not include any of the poorest countries. Many of the potential issues that the G20 might address, such as HIV/AIDS, debt or water, had a particular impact on the poorest.

There would be attractions in having a mechanism to handle outreach from the G20 to

The February 29th meeting should avoid getting bogged down in detailed questions of mechanics. This was really something for civil servants to sort out. The February meeting should focus on the evidence as to whether a new body would help solve some of the existing problems which the current international architecture was handling poorly.

Membership of the G20

There were three main options for the nature of membership of a Leaders G20:

- (i) a fixed group of individual countries;
- (ii) a fixed group of members, some there individually, some representing particular constituencies;
- (iii) a group whose composition varied from time to time depending on the issues being addressed.

There were arguments for and against each of these options. To the extent that the objective was to build personal contact among leaders, that pointed to a fixed

might be carried out, given that the objective was not to create a new international secretariat.

This proposal was widely welcomed. One additional point that should be covered in each scenario was the level at which the G20 should meet—in particular the implications of dealing with the issue at the level of Leaders or Finance Ministers.

It was agreed that scenarios should be commissioned for each of the following issues:

- trade (including agricultural reform);
- global public health;
- terrorism and weapons of mass destruction;
- climate change;
- financial crises;
- debt (especially HIPIC debt).

The scenarios should be short (no more than two to three pages) and should follow a common template, which would be worked up by Barry Carin based on the comments that had been made.

These scenarios would be discussed alongside the papers already commissioned for the 29th February meeting, and would help to answer the key question of how a G20 might overcome some of the blockages in the current arrangements, and how it might improve global governance.