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New CER essay

MULTILATERALISM LIGHT

The rise of informal international governance

By Risto Penttilä

A striking feature of international politics over the past twenty years has been the steady rise of ‘informal’ global governance. The economic crisis has accentuated this trend, with bodies such as the G8 and the G20 playing an increasingly important role. Some of these bodies have global responsibilities, while others have a regional focus or deal with specific problems like climate change. Many of these bodies now matter as much as formal, treaty-based organisations.

Risto Penttilä argues that the rise of ‘multilateralism light’ is a development that should be welcomed. One reason is that it brings together key leaders who can change things. Another is that it offers an efficient way of incorporating emerging powers such as India and China into global governance. He explains that informal and formal bodies depend on each other: informal institutions are increasingly responsible for the process of solving problems, while formal, treaty-based bodies often legitimise their results.

He analyses the rise of informal global governance on both economic and security issues, and looks in particular at the competition between the G7, the G8 and the G20, as well as the EU’s role in them. He argues that ‘concert diplomacy’ is here to stay and that small countries will have to become reconciled to their exclusion from many important bodies.

Notes for editors:

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