

Order and Formation

Global Governance as a possible hegemonial discourse of the internationally political

Abstract:

Under the heading of “global governance” a discussion is taking place on changes in the political, and thus in political regulation, particularly at the international level. In this contribution global governance in its “European social-democratic” variation is understood as a discourse which is a part of the search process of emerging post-Fordist politics and its substantiation. This takes place on the basis of the Foucault concept of discourse. After this, it is shown with respect to two number dimensions (globalization and world problems) how global governance is articulated in the dominant transformations of the political, our understanding of the structures of these transformations being based on regulation theory. It becomes clear that this discourse, which legitimizes societal developments and provides a guide for behaviour, is not at all in contradiction to the post-Fordist neoliberal transformation of society, but rather that it serves to make the handling of globalization-induced crises more effective. The text aims neither to represent a contribution to the ontological-epistemological discussion nor to be a precise analysis of the discourse, but to open up a perspective which should serve to stimulate discussion and research.

1. Introduction

The social scientific debate on global governance is certainly at present one of the most absorbing in political science, and the political importance of the term is also increasing. The terms “re-regulation” (of the world economy) and “global governance” are often used synonymously. As a descriptive category of the profound changes in the political and thus in political processes of regulation the concept has provided a fruitful stimulus to the discussion. In particular it has been concerned with the changing role of the state and of international institutions in international politics.

Global governance means more than this, however. This contribution is concerned with the importance of global governance as a discourse in the context of the globalization-based restructuring of the political, particularly at the international level. It is intended in this way to contribute to the analysis of current formation of hegemony. Following the dissolution of the Fordist compromises since the 1980s the issue at stake is now the construction of post-Fordist compromises, particularly in the sphere of the political. Global governance is a part of this constitutional process. As a discourse, according to our central thesis, the concept is a part of the search process of emerging post-Fordist politics and the latter’s scientific and non-scientific substantiation. Especially at the moment in which the negative implications of the present dramatic changes become obvious, i.e. articulate themselves as crises or criticism and protest (e.g. the financial crises in Asia, Russia, Mexico, the increasing criticism of the UNO, growing divisions within society, protests against the MAI or the WTO, as well as more

generally against the worsening of the living conditions of a large number of people), the general concept becomes important.

From this point of view the various contributions on global governance are interesting even although they only represent a partial area of the search for post-Fordist compromises, specific institutional configurations and socially accepted reference points, and have not yet provided a compact definition of “the” hegemonial pattern of the political. At the international level there are a number of approaches towards a definition of the post-Fordist political, and following September 2001 the representatives of a conservatively based US American unilateralism seem to be in the offensive. The viewpoint that international security is to be achieved and secured with force appears to be winning the upper hand again. This is a further reason for the growing importance of global governance: an intensive debate is taking place in the countries of the EU on what could be presented as an alternative to US unilateralism.²

The paper follows the differentiation made by Christoph Scherrer (2000a: 14, 2000b: 55) between the “red-green” and the “neoliberal” versions of global governance. The “neoliberal” variation has been developed conceptionally since the early seventies in the foreign policy forums of internationally oriented capital groupings in the USA and on the basis of regime theory. The issue at stake here was primarily the international securing of private property rights against individual states and international organizations. The essence of global governance as a *discourse* in the discussion in the German-speaking countries is formed by the “red-green” (Scherrer) variation, in which the issue is in particular the treatment of the negative results of neoliberal globalization. In the following this will be referred to as the “European social-democratic” version, firstly, in order to indicate that the Europe of the EU is understood as an important player. Secondly, not only are institutional, procedural and subject-matter viewpoints connected with the concept, but it is intended as an alternative to the US project. Placing the focus on the precarious aspects of present trends does not mean, however, that the neoliberal practices are unimportant. On the contrary, the symbolic and material treatment of the negative consequences and the avoidance of crises contributes – even contrary to their intention – to the stabilizing of the dominant neoliberal trends, because structural issues and societal interests and relationships of power are left out of the picture.¹ The “European social-democratic” variation of global governance will not achieve hegemony on a worldwide scale in the foreseeable future but its progress will be accelerated by political and economic élites within the European Union.²

¹ The criteria for such a questioning would be the pushing back of the strengthening of neoliberal forces and decisive orientations as well as the connected institutional practices, such as privatization, for example. By “neoliberal forces” we do not mean only the hard-liners, but also those conservative and social-democratic forces which do not question the essentials of the neoliberal project (cf. Brand et al. 2000:57ff.)

² There is another variation which appears to be even less capable of achieving hegemony, the propagators of which are nevertheless among the sharpest critics of global governance. These are the supporters of a world government, who in the Kantian tradition call themselves “world federalists” (Harris/Yunker 1999). They claim that the suggestions of the UN Commission on Global Governance (see below) are completely inadequate because they do not tackle the main problem of international politics: the existence of national sovereignty. The fixation on the toothless UNO is also criticized. There is already a very concrete practical suggestion for putting their ideas into practice, namely the “Federation of Earth” (Harris/Yunker 1999: 183ff.), which should replace the UNO. Such a world government, a “constitutionally authorized legislation with criminal and civil law enforcement” (Harris 1999: 166) would be “genuine global governance” because it would really be capable of enforcing decisions. This position suffers however from the fact that it is characterized by a rather unreal picture of state sovereignty, in that it regards this as given to a large degree. The protagonists of a world federation

The attractiveness of the concept is its very openness and ambiguity. Very different players with their different perceptions of the dominant trends, their partly contrasting interests and strategies, identify themselves with this concept or use it to strengthen their own position as plausible for the development of society as a whole. Within this openness and ambiguity “European social-democratic” interpretations are increasingly winning the upper hand, at least in Germany and the rest of the EU.

Following some methodical-theoretical considerations which guide this contribution and in particular explain the relationship between discourse and structural changes, in the following step we shall list central contributions to the global governance discourse and elaborate its core arguments and assumptions. Following an outline of the radical changes in the international political and its contradictions we shall discuss under a number of headings how discourse and structural changes mutually articulate. The discourse adapts itself, according to our argumentation, (a) to the dominant globalization concept with its specific understanding of the political and the economic, formulates (b) a particular view of the problem and derives political propositions from this, (c) follows a “realpolitik” concept of politics which (d) is connected with the perspective of a “technocratic utopia” and a reduced concept of democracy and (e) formulates a necessary general interest in the effective international treatment of problems.³ Global governance is thus interpreted as a *possible* hegemonial discourse of post-Fordist international politics, precisely because it is capable in central questions of adapting to dominant trends. In this contribution I will focus on (a) and (b).

2. Global governance as a discourse

2.1. Considerations relating to method and theory

Post-positivist approaches have been gaining in importance in international relations for about a decade. In contrast to realism with its state-centred assumptions, which understand interests as existing *a priori* and presume rational behaviour, here – in spite of all differences – we shall pay more attention to players other than states, to interests which constitute themselves and to the role of rules, norms, discourses and ideas.⁴ If global governance is regarded as a discourse which is intended to strengthen a particular understanding of present developments and to give political guidance, this can only be done by means of an interpretative approach. In this paper, however, it is neither intended to present an empirically precise analysis of the discourse nor to make an independent contribution to undoubtedly important epistemological issues. The aim is more modest. Taking the example of several central issues, it is intended to show with which “affiliations” the global governance discourse is gaining in importance, at least in the Europe of the EU, where it follows the dominant interpretations of the structural changes and the associated problems, develops a plausible and broadly accepted concept of

criticize the UNO for its ineffectiveness but do not utter a single word about the aggressive military foreign policy and the unilateralism of the USA. The arguments for a world state are also supported by Hannemann (2000).

³ This contribution will ignore the meanings which are important for the nation-state and the local levels.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Keohane (1989), Wendt (1992), the surveys by Schaber/Ulbert (1994), Zehfuss (1998), Jachtenfuchs (1995), Krell (2001, ch. 10).

politics for this, reconciles existing or emerging contradictions and thus presents a framework for the dominant trends in the political. The concept and the discourse order the complex relationships in a particular way, render them plausible and thus serve as a reference point for political activity. The considerations presented here are intended to stimulate productive debate and could also form a framework of reference for future research.

In order to grasp global governance more precisely as a possible hegemonial discourse of post-Fordist politics, we use the discourse concept of Michel Foucault. According to Foucault discourses are selective, draw lines and constitute knowledge as to socially “correct” thinking and behaviour (Foucault 1977: 47). The constitution of discourse represents a process which is struggled over, and at the same time it forms “places” and “rules of the game”, in and according to which controversies are settled. Discourses have effects on power when they become institutionalized, are linked to behaviour and become vehicles of valid knowledge (Link 1983: 60). At the same time it is important that the issue is also one of the power over discourses, i.e. over their production. “Discourses exert power, because they transport knowledge which feeds collective and individual consciousness. This emerging knowledge is the basis for individual and collective behaviour and the formation of reality.” (Jäger 2001: 87, our translation).

The profound and dynamic *structural* changes and the post-Fordist international politics to which global governance centrally refers and which is our concern here, cannot however be adequately comprehended by a discourse-theoretical analysis of social reality. The structures of the post-Fordist political emerge in part independently of discourses. This statement does not subscribe to a concept – such as that developed by Jürgen Link, who was quoted above, and which was developed referring to a different subject-matter – which understands discourses as being solely or to a major degree responsible for the structuring of societal reality.⁵ Even if it is plausible that there is no meaningful reality for players outside of discourses, “independent” structures exist which for the players are unchangeable or very difficult to change. Although structures emerge as a result of social behaviour, they become independent and are accessible to intentional behaviour (and to language) only to a limited extent. Structures are a theoretical construction, but – without grasping reality in full – they point to “corridors” for behaviour in the sense of restrictions and opportunities which are beyond non-theoretical discursive practice. The opportunities of certain forms of behaviour to establish themselves are clearly less at certain times, or even non-existent. This could also be dealt with by some constructivist approaches. These often equate structures with institutions, however, which – as a part of behaviour – provide the rules and norms for behaviour. The historical-materialist concept of structure is, in my opinion, more appropriate to the questions discussed here. According to this concept, in bourgeois-capitalist societies structural principles such as the separation of politics and economics, wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production take effect. These are also normed and institutionalized, but they are more deeply anchored than explicit norms. From a historical-

⁵ Foucault pointed out the relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices, which do not form a dichotomy but which presuppose each other (1973: 224ff.) He names economics as a central area of non-discursive practice which nevertheless structures societies. He did have problems, however, with grasping the relationship between discourse (speakable/spoken), non-discursive practices (activities) and products/objects (cf. Jäger 2001: 87-96).

materialist point of view it is therefore a question of more than simply intersubjectivity and communicative behaviour. For communication of the fundamental structures of bourgeois-capitalist socialization as a rule does not take place. In addition, less importance is placed on ideas and interpretations than on societal interests in attempting to understand the general dynamic of (world) societal development.⁶

2.2. Central contributions and core arguments of the global governance discourse

In the following major contributions will be listed and the core arguments of the global governance discourse outlined briefly. It does not make much sense to differentiate absolutely between scientific and non-scientific contributions in a general examination such as this. Contributions will primarily be mentioned which argue systematically and explicitly.⁷

At an early stage Ernst-Otto Czempiel and James Rosenau analysed governance without government (Czempiel/Rosenau 1992) in international politics and the latter developed the research perspective of a postnational paradigm, which would have to take up a multi-centred perspective in addition to a state-centred one (1995). The concept achieved prominence in the last decade in the field of international relationships to describe how an international system of rules had established itself following the end of the US hegemony of the postwar period and to describe the forms and conditions of collective behaviour at the international level. There is an important difference, however, between the largely analytical use of the concept by Rosenau and the normative meaning of global governance in many other contributions (Hummel 2002: 113).⁸

The central “discourse element” in the international discussion is the Report of the UN Commission on Global Governance (CGG, 1995) which made the concept known beyond the confines of the scientific debate and at the same time stimulated the scientific discussion. This approach was concretized for example in the player-centred studies on global public policy networks by state players, NGOs, enterprises and international organizations (Reinike 1998). Their function consists in the effective treatment of problems or in connecting different levels in their role as “multi-level network managers” (Reinike et al. 2001: 12). UNO Secretary-General Kofi Annan refers explicitly to these approaches in his Global Compact Initiative (for a presentation and criticism cf. Paul 2001). Without using this term explicitly, the Group of

⁶ A more systematic debate between the constructivist and the historical-materialist approaches, both of which also contain considerable differences within themselves, would certainly be meaningful. Making the ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as the strengths and weaknesses with regard to different research questions more explicit, could contribute to a clearer focusing of the different directions. In my opinion differences, explications and reformulations would be the result, in particular in the definition of structure and of behaviour, in the meaning of reality, in the relationship between ideas, interests and power, in the concept of institutions and in the concept of (world) society itself. Cf. also the ranking of global governance from a constructivist point of view in Brock/Hessler (2002).

⁷ I am aware of the weakness that there is no clear criterion for ascribing contributions to the global governance discourse. This would be the task of a systematic discourse analysis. Here, the classification is done according to the system of Marianne Beisheim and Achim Brunnengräber in the interim and final reports of the Enquete Commission (2002: 453 ff.)

⁸ Achim Brunnengräber and Christian Stock (1999:446) divide the contributions on global governance into empirical-analytical, emphatic and political-strategic variations. We do not use this, however, in view of the question dealt with in this contribution.

Lisbon (1997) with its report “Limits of Competition” made a major contribution to the discussion on the re-regulation of the world economy. For the discussion in the German-speaking countries the contributions by Dirk Messner and Franz Nuscheler of the Duisburg Institute for Development and Peace (Duisburger Institut für Entwicklung und Frieden - INEF) are a central point of reference (Messner/Nuscheler 1996, Hauchler et al. 2001). The concept was treated with a high political ranking in the German Bundestag’s Enquete Commission “Globalization of the World Economy”, which consisted of thirteen members of parliament and thirteen scientists (one of whom was female). In 2001 an interim report was presented and the final report followed in 2002 (Enquete Commission 2001, 2002). The most explicitly expressed theoretical position in the German discussion has been developed by Michael Zürn (1998), although he uses the term “project of complex world government” instead of global governance.

In the discussions on the fringes of political science such as international political economy the concept of global governance is being increasingly used (Altvater/Mahnkopf 1999, Prakash/Hart 1999). Feminist authors are attempting to affiliate to the concept of global governance because it offers the opportunity to break through the “realistic” fixation with the state and the gender-blind conceptualization of international politics this entails (Ruppert 2000: 50-57, Wichterich 2000: 274-276, Ruf 2000: 174ff.) Contributions from a “southern” perspective remain the exception. In a report for the Bundestag Enquete Commission Walden Bello (2001), the director of an NGO think-tank in Thailand, outlined a criticism of the ruling system of “global economic governance” and presented “deglobalization” and pluralistic global governance as an alternative approach. (Bello 2001: 39ff.) A good survey of the discussion is to be found in Mürle 1998; the most detailed discussion of the meaning of the concept in German is to be found in a study financed by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (Brand/Brunnengräber/Schrader/Stock/Wahl 2000).

The scientific or semi-scientific discussion, the latter organized in epistemic communities such as the CGG or the Group of Lisbon, play a major role in the global governance discourse. This is apparently connected, firstly, with the fact that the concept first appeared in scientific papers, and secondly with the considerable complexity of the subject-matter of international politics and the belief that science can deal with this complexity and make it understandable. In the meantime the concept is increasingly referred to in a much wider debate.

What are the “core elements” which can be distilled from the various contributions to the discourse (in a somewhat different form cf. Brand et al. 2000, ch. 2)?⁹ Generally speaking, *first*, it is assumed that many social processes and the problems and policies associated with them have become internationalized. This is the meaning of the term globalization, which is primarily interpreted in an economic sense. It is argued that this process, which of itself is positive, welfare-increasing and inevitable, produces instability and crises and must therefore be politically corrected, particularly within the framework of the UNO. “To reduce it to the lowest common denominator, ‘global governance’ means politically accompanying the process of globalization.” (Enquete Commission 2002: 415, our translation) Order is to be set

⁹ The contributions judged to be dominant are included. Quotes are seldom used because the contributions differ from one another and we are dealing here with general lines.

against global problems and crises, which can be clearly seen in the German translation of the title of the report of the CGG as “world order policy”. Global governance is at the same time a discourse on political form, which takes the political and changes in the political as its subject and will intervene in them. The double perspective prevails of understanding global governance as a process (a) which politically forms international relationships in a desirable direction, namely that of a process of international competition and economic growth which is as crisis-free as possible, and (b) by means of which the “negative consequences of globalization” are dealt with. The Lisbon Group states most clearly and decidedly that the issue is one of humane competition and contrary to aggressive competition ideology.

Secondly, the problems arising are conceived of as “world problems”, a characteristic of which is that they affect all societies and people in a similar way and therefore everyone must have an interest in dealing with them effectively. In addition to the substantiation of international politics by common interests the normative issue is that of the emergence of a “world ethos” or universal rights and of the necessity of new visions for dealing with world problems.

Thirdly, the problems should be dealt with cooperatively and in dialogue. Fundamental differences of interest do not exist, but different players and their interests are prepared to make compromises in the face of serious world problems due to the recognition by the players of the advantages of cooperation. In general and in individual policy fields, “win-win situations” are diagnosed. Furthermore, a major role is played by experts, who have a superior awareness of the problems and the competence for dealing with them. Their type of knowledge and their origin are above all of a “western” character.

Fourthly, the problems cannot be dealt with by the individual nation-state institutional systems because in the process of globalization the latter have lost their ability to exert control in central areas, namely in dealing with the ever more important cross-frontier problems. The contributions to global governance now make suggestions as to how this loss of the ability to control should be dealt with: this is to be done by means of international cooperation and the establishment of an adequate international institutional system, whereby the already existing system is regarded as inadequate. In Messner/Nuscheler this is “global governance architecture”; in the CGG the establishment of a Committee for Economic Security plays a major role. Contributions from Germany are more state-centred than international ones, and the UN Commission of course concentrates on the UNO (CGG 1996: 8).

As a *fifth* aspect, great importance is ascribed to “civil society”, i.e. non-state players such as non-governmental organizations and private enterprises, in the articulation and treatment of problems; politics is (or should be) no longer the concern only of the state institutional system (cf. on NGOs Brand et al. 2001, Brunnengräber et al. 2001).¹⁰ Sometimes civil society is reduced to the function of a “correcting instance” (Messner/Nuscheler 1996: 4), in other

¹⁰ In the debate on the development of a global civil society the term “humane governance” is used (Falk 1995) or as part of the global public in the horizon of a “cosmopolitan democracy” (Held 1996). The term, which is oriented to public regulation has until now found little resonance in the in any case disparate debate on a global civil society. It is to be expected, however, that its importance will increase due to the greater attention paid to non-state players and civil societal processes at an international level.

contributions it is seen emphatically in the sense of self-organization and creativity (CGG 1996: 369).

And *finally* it is established that there is a democracy deficit at the international level. The Lisbon Group states, “that procedures of representative democracy are rescinded at the global level. The global system is directed by oligarchical power structures which tend to merge into ever more efficient and better integrated networks which circumvent nation-state governments.” (1997: 178, our translation) This should be countered by the increased participation of civil society players; participation itself is judged according to its contribution to effective problem-solving. Altogether in the global governance discussion a deliberative concept of democracy is dominant, according to which different social groups negotiate mutually on the problems of the world and both nation-states and international institutions are involved in dealing with the problems (the CGG is an exception here, with its partial reference to a system of “checks and balances”).

3. Global Governance as a potentially hegemonic discourse of postfordist politics

In the following it will now be examined how far central elements of the global governance discourse link up to these changes and strengthen them, i.e. provide a “framework” for the dominant trends and thus attempt to provide them with legitimacy. It is fundamental that the meanings of global governance exclude one fact of capitalist globalization which is, however, of central importance: the – compared to Fordism – tougher competition between different capitals, “locations” and wage earners, which takes place and is accelerated within the framework of a “competition” discourse – which is only heuristically so named here.

(1) “Globalization” and the relationship between politics and economics

The dominant concept of globalization defines the essence of the process, which is conceived to be economic, as unavoidable (cf. also Röttger 2001: 147-151, and from a feminist point of view Runyan 1999: 213f.) This is made possible by the dichotomization of politics and economics. The economic is conceived as the core process of globalization and precisely because of this as being non-formable by the political. The imperative of competitiveness is central here but the concept of globalization has a much more comprehensive function and serves the justification of certain developments in many areas of society. Thus globalization is a “truth regime” in the sense of Foucault (cf. also Douglas 1999).

The global governance discourse with its orientation towards the political secures the “post-Fordist” frontier between politics and economics. Global governance is increasingly part of the truth regime of globalization. This is accompanied by a fresh upgrading of the state, this time in its “efficient” form (World Bank 1997). This dominant understanding is promoted above all by political and scientific approaches which see the state as the embodiment of the general interest of society and as a neutral player. Its role should be to contain the negative consequences of a basically unassailable (“economic”) globalization. Economics is the place of legitimate competition, politics that of cooperation. The iridescent concept presently in the debate in Germany of the state’s ability to control, or of the regaining of this ability, is based

on this. With the concept of control, however, in a certain sense “politics” is depoliticized, for it is not a question of diverging interests, strategies and relationships of power but, within the global governance discourse, of solutions to problems and of regulation. Outside of the discourse however the creation of competitiveness is becoming the guideline for political activity. Both of these directions have in common that politics is judged according to efficiency criteria. Of course, concepts of efficiency and effectiveness confirm and strengthen relationships of power because “efficiency” itself is a hegemonial construction which is defined essentially by the ruling players (cf. also Baxi 1996: 533), which has been internalized by many players as neoliberal governmentality and which above all serves to justify competitive state politics.¹¹ The transformation of the state to the national competition state, global liberal constitutionalism, the neoimperialist world order and the fundamental power-forming of politics are kept out of the discourse terrain created by global governance.¹²

(2) “World problems” and “global challenge”

“The” globalization, according to the dominant assumption of the global governance discourse, creates and sharpens “world problems” such as economic instability, poverty, wars, environmental destruction, migration etc. These problems are diagnosed, they *exist* and they should be solved efficiently.¹³ In the global governance discourse it is not a question of the causes, of divergent interests or the question for whom which problems are actually important (the CGG 1996 came nearest to this). This means that the priorities of the problems (which is relevant for the “North”) and their treatment (cooperatively) are given, priorities which are connected with the power to interpret. The supposed evidence of the world problems entails the danger that the political controversies over the hegemonial definition of problems will be underestimated. Secondly, there is a threat of a functionalist understanding of international politics as existing *in order to* be able to deal with problems.

Here too, the global governance discourse on problem-solving and order-creating regulation is detached only at first glance from the competition discourse. As already stated, “successful” politics is judged today on the creation of competitiveness and on the improvement of the conditions of dominant economic activities and the utilization of capital. This creates a connection between the solution of problems and the orientation towards competition: world problems such as poverty, climatic change, the erosion of biological diversity and distributional or gender-specific problems, and the “efficient” treatment of them, are interpreted by means of these “hard” criteria. In this way, a particular way of thinking about reality and behaving in that reality is structured.

Finally, the assumption that objective problems and pressure to solve them obviously exist implies that “neutral” knowledge about complex subject-matters and their treatment are of

¹¹ Neoliberals call this “market-conforming” politics and for the justification of politics say: “Global governance should only be extended where market failure exists.” (Diehl 2000).

¹² In addition, a further aspect is ignored which will not be examined in more detail here: the societal, and in particular technological “transformation core” (Becker/Wehling 1993) are today largely removed from the public-political access. Not only the development of the financial markets or genetic technology, to name two current examples, are the subject of political controversy, but the treatment of their consequences.

¹³ Of course, the existence of a multitude of problems on the material level cannot be denied. Their social construction as a specific problem is greatly underestimated, however.

central importance. This applies not only to the content but also to the form of knowledge. Experts (politicians, scientists, usually male and from the First World) are those who know where the problems lie and how to solve them. They imply that there is usually the one solution: best practice. Other forms of knowledge and propositions are thus systematically devalued. Viewpoints which contradict the experts are dismissed as “ideological” and particularist. Global governance is a discourse among experts which grants privilege to a certain type of western, supercilious knowledge.

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