Global (G8, G15) and national
Central challenges facing politicians, resumée of an elder statesman

Perhaps it is time to look beyond the ritual of summit meetings and focus on the material aspects. It was a coincidence that the InterAction Council's (IAC) Annual Plenary recently took place in Vienna. The IAC was established in 1983 and its members are for the most part former heads of state and government. The IAC's mandate is to make contributions to threatening problems.

The G7(8) summit, too, was launched to address threatening problems. This resulted from an initiative of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Helmut Schmidt. At the time (1975), the summit's objective was to coordinate the financial and monetary policies of the key industrial nations, and to protect the world from high inflation (oil price shock, 1974/75) and its negative economic consequences.

Many of the IAC's present members participated in the G7(8) talks in the 70s, 80s and 90s.

The keynote speech at this year's Annual Plenary of the IAC was delivered by Helmut Schmidt. In light of the events surrounding (and those on) the Heiligendamm summit, it is a speech which should be read by every active politician (but also by every interested citizen). The speech is really a "contribution to threatening problems" (www.interactioncouncil.org). The following ideas are intended to provide food for thought.

1. **Globalisation:** This cannot be stopped, a re-nationalisation of the economy(ies) is not a realistic strategy; but one should be prepared for the consequences and "direct them into the right channels".

2. **G15 instead of G8?** The G8 countries are today no longer in a position to handle global macroeconomic imbalances on their own. It is illusory to think that a global world can be successfully managed by the G8 countries without including nations such as China, India or Brazil. Similarly, one cannot afford to exclude entire continents such as Africa, or providers of commodities such as the oil-producing countries.

3. **Global challenges:** Those things which Helmut Schmidt identifies as global challenges are not new insights. The minutes of the G8 summit at best show little, but certainly not fundamental progress.

*Exponential growth of the human population:* In the first half of this century, if not earlier, the world's population will reach 9 billion; 9 billion people who need space to live, employment and the possibility to develop.

*Climate change and environmental pollution:* The Kyoto Protocol is not suited as a policy instrument for combating environmental pollution as long as China, India and the US are not included in this process. The G8 summit has not really made any progress here either.

*Clash of civilisations:* People of the Islamic faith, like those of other religions, should be treated with respect and tolerance. The threat that comes from "Islamic terror" on account of the Iraq War is also to be seen in the context of intervention by the West. Neither political nor religious leaders have the right to bring their political ideology or religious convictions to bear on a third party (outside national / religious communities). [This fact should be noted by all politicians].

*Humanitarian interventions:* (so-called) peace-keeping interventions without the approval of the Security
Council are often only a pretext for pursuing other objectives. Anyone who tolerates or ignores this gives the impression that the principle of non-intervention is being forgotten.

This (and more) was the content of the keynote speech of Helmut Schmidt, elder statesman in the true sense of the word (he was born in 1919!). It should be the main task of a G8 (G15 as far as Helmut Schmidt is concerned) summit to closely examine the problems which he addresses.

We may then ask ourselves: And why don't they? Or if they do, then why without any visible signs of success (no binding decision)?

Perhaps because something is missing, something which Helmut Schmidt also describes as the most important quality of a politician, the ability to compromise: “Anyone who, as a matter of principle, cannot or does not want to compromise is of no use to democratic legislation”. This maxim applies at both the national and international levels. “Without the principle of compromise, there can be no principle of democracy”¹. This is not contained in any textbook, but should be. Compromise here means being willing to make concessions and not covering something up with published, empty phrases. This applies not only to international politics but also to national and regional politics, right down to town council offices.

And in view of numerous recent events this is something that should also be noted by Austrian politicians.

---

¹ Helmut Schmidt, “On a Politician’s Ethics”, 7th Global Ethic Lecture, 8 May 2007, Universität Tübingen