Independent Commissions, Reports of

ly in the fields of maritime safety and navigation, mostly due to economic factors: the average age of the world’s ships has risen – old ships are more likely to have accidents; the fleets of traditional maritime countries, which tend to have good safety records, have declined, while many of the flags that are growing rapidly have relatively poor records. Many shipping companies of industrialized countries have “flagged out” their ships, i.e. they have registered their ships in states that are less uncompromising in the implementation of IMO standards.

The IMO therefore is presently concentrating not only on the effective implementation of the technical norms, but also on improving the education and advanced training of the staff of the national maritime institutions.

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Independent Commissions, Reports of

The initiative to establish the Independent Commissions has come from various sources and their working methods and report structures have varied widely. However, all Independent Commissions have had in common that a group of experienced, independent personalities have prepared proposals for the solutions of global problems. They have tried to fill a particular deficit of existing national and international processes, which is a lack of long-term concepts.

The concept of interdependence forms the basis of all reports of the commissions. They begin with an analysis of global problems that cross national boundaries, define common interests and develop solutions derived from the latter (→ Globalization). The commissions’ recommendations aim to give new impulse for important areas of activity. Members of the Independent Commissions are prominent representatives from all regions, with the exception of the South Commission, which consisted only of representatives of the developing countries. The members of the Independent Commissions act as private persons and are independent of any instructions of their home countries. Several governments and foundations have financed the work of the Independent Commissions with financial grants.

The Pearson Commission

In 1969 the Pearson Commission, which is a direct precursor of the Independent Commissions of the late 70s, 80s and 90s, presented its report “Partners in Development”. Pearson, the then president of the World Bank, had initiated this Independent Commission to strike the balance of 20 years of development policy and to work out strategies for the future. The Brandt Commission took up later on the tradition of analyzing the development policy of the Pearson Report and of other Third World development reports.
The Brandt Commission

In 1977 Robert S. McNamara, the then president of the World Bank, proposed the establishment of an Independent Commission on International Development Issues (known as Brandt or North-South Commission). The commission consisted of 18 members, and was headed by Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor. An important aspect of the composition of the Commission was a majority of members (10 of 18) from developing countries. The Commission took up the task of analyzing existing development problems and looking for solutions to overcome poverty. In their report they addressed the political decision makers as well as the public. The Brandt Commission stressed its independence and non-interference with the activities of states and organizations. As the first Independent Commission it was concerned to refute any apprehensions of this new international organ. At the conclusion of its working phase with eight sessions between 1977 and 1980, the North-South Commission presented its report entitled, “North-South: A Programme for Survival”.

The notion of common interests of North and South was the basic idea of the analysis and the recommendations. The need to solve the development problems of the south was for the first time substantiated with the argument of global interdependence on the international level. The Brandt Commission identified a lack of capital transfer to the South, and the existing international economic and monetary system as the major obstacles to the development of the South. Consequently the report called for the establishment of an international tax system to provide new financial means for addressing development issues. These means were to be administered by a new organization which was to be established: the World Development Fund. Concrete steps to implement this were to be taken by a high-level North-South summit.

The North-South Report attained considerable publicity and was discussed broadly. But its recommendations have not been taken up on the political level. In 1981 the North-South Summit which the Commission had proposed took place in Mexico, but it did not produce any concrete results. The members of the North-South Commission were very alarmed by the failure to implement any of their recommendations, and by the worsening of the situation in developing countries at that time. Therefore they presented in 1983 a second report which was intended to function as an emergency programme: “Common Crisis, North-South: Co-operation for World Recovery”. This report contained concrete proposals for the expansion of development financing, for better cooperation among development countries and for the establishment of a constructive North-South dialogue. These recommendations were not put into practice, too. Nevertheless, the work of the North-South Commission did make a difference by establishing new basic concepts for the dialogue between North and South, and by introducing the issue for the first time in the public discussion in the industrialized nations.

The Palme Commission

The Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (known as Palme Commission) was established in 1980. The Commission intended to treat more deeply questions of security policy which had been only touched marginally in the report of the North-South Commission. The former Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme was assigned as the chairperson. A special aspect of the composition of the Palme Commission was the membership of two representatives of the Warsaw Pact states. Further six of the (altogether) 17 members of the commission came from developing countries.

The Palme Commission attempted to formulate a concept of military security complementary to the Brandt Report. It aimed at developing guiding principles for global disarmament and armament control. Central to its concern were nuclear weapons, due to their global risk