

Two important issues arise in this regard. First, a GEO would need to resolve the question of what degree of international support for an environmental agreement is required for the agreement to qualify as a GEO-sanctioned international agreement. While a consensus would be desirable, in practice a rule of majority (qualified majority?) may be required. Second, countries would need to resolve the question of whether all GEO environmental agreements would apply to all parties of the GEO, or only to the signatories of each specific agreement. The answer to both of these questions is dependent upon the degree of power countries are willing to concede to a multilateral mechanism for resolving environmental problems. The principle of the "single undertaking" developed in the Uruguay Round trade negotiations is relevant here. Pursuant to this concept, all WTO member countries had to accept almost all Uruguay Round agreements and understandings, although with selected, time-limited phase-in provisions for developing countries.

In a larger sense, the underlying emphasis on dispute settlement in a GEO would be on avoidance. This could come about through three channels. First, clear rules not open to widely different interpretation are desirable. If there are differences in view on the intensity of global environmental problems and the solutions to the problems, this can result in environmental and trade tensions.<sup>8</sup> For example, while climate change is universally considered a global commons issue, there is nothing close to a consensus on the degree of global warming that may occur over a given time period, or what economic and social effects such climate change may have. A GEO would contribute to building a consensus of countries' views on what the environmental problems are, and policies to mitigate the environmental stress. By so doing, legitimate differences in national environmental interests and conditions would be identified. This would leave less room for countries to maintain intentionally lower than appropriate environmental policies to promote the competitiveness of certain products, or to be accused of doing so by other countries. Less stringent obligations for developing countries, at least for some initial period, could also be accommodated.

Second, through understandings that GEO scientific work could help to develop, countries would more fully understand that by abiding by GEO rules a country would be acting in its long-term self-interest. Such self-interest applies not only in the direct environmental sense of good national environmental policy, but also in an indirect sense, as an effective GEO would help to reduce the temptation in other countries to

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<sup>8</sup>The introduction to a recent climate change article in the Economist, April 1 1995, captured nicely some of the inherent problems with the nature of environmental stress issues: "The evidence that greenhouse gases are changing the climate is getting stronger. The details of what it means, though, remain blurred."