



"Climate Change and Security: Unprecedented impacts, unpredictable risks"

Vienna, 28 October 2015

Report

Overview

On 28 October 2015, OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier hosted an OSCE Security Days event on the topic of "*Climate Change and Security: Unprecedented impacts, unpredictable risks*" at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna. In an open and interactive debate, more than 140 participants from governments, regional and international organizations, NGOs, the academic community and the media discussed the impacts and risks of climate change for security, approaches for effectively addressing these risks, and the role of the OSCE. The event reached over 30,000 people through Facebook and more than 1.6 million through Twitter.

Participants in the discussions agreed that climate change presents a serious challenge to human security that cannot be addressed by unilateral action alone and they called for closer regional and global co-operation. Stressing the need for urgent action, speakers noted that experts increasingly consider climate change as a “threat catalyst” rather than a mere “threat multiplier”. While many sensed growing awareness in policy circles and among the public about the security implications of climate change, they noted that this awareness still needs to be translated into concrete and co-ordinated action. Participants emphasized that the multidimensional risks posed by climate change require multidimensional responses. In this respect, integrated, multi-sectoral and comprehensive policies that include preventive diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, foreign policy, security policies and development co-operation are needed. Regional and international organizations have an important role to play in this context, among them the OSCE.

Among other high-level speakers, Andrä Rupprechter, Austrian Federal Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, and Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals, contributed to the debate.

Minister Rupprechter outlined the climate change policy of the Austrian Government and stressed the need for a legally binding global agreement at the COP21 in Paris. He expressed full support for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular its defined goal for climate action, and called for concerted action at the national, regional and international levels to ensure sustainable development and maintain international peace and security

Prof. Sachs, via video-link, stressed the centrality of decarbonization alongside resilience measures to reduce vulnerability and enhance disaster preparedness and relief. He highlighted the role of ecological shocks as contributing factors to crises and resultant migration flows. He noted that the strongest statements on the destabilization risks of climate change often

come from the defense and intelligence community but sensed growing awareness and a willingness to take action among the political leadership world-wide. Prof. Sachs saw great potential for moving the sustainable development agenda forward through regional co-operation. By contrast, a new “cold war” would divert attention and resources to cope with short-term crises instead of focusing on long-term goals. Prof. Sachs advocated for regional and transnational cooperation on crucial projects such as developing an integrated power distribution system. At the same time he stressed the importance of involving communities and bottom-up approaches, as well as partnerships with industry and the private sector.

The debate also identified security benefits stemming from co-operative climate policies. There are already good practices in the OSCE region where joint climate action has been an effective catalyst for transboundary co-operation, such as the co-operation between Ukraine and Moldova for transboundary climate change adaptation in the Dniester River Basin, which is supported by the OSCE and UNECE. Climate change co-operation was seen as a good entry point for conflict prevention and confidence-building with significant potential benefits for the broader relations between countries.

Main conclusions and recommendations

- *Climate change risks* affect human security but also raise hard security issues at the national, regional and global levels. Key areas where security implications are already visible include extreme weather events, food security, transboundary water management, energy production, climate-induced mass migration and increased competition over natural resources.
- *Compound risks*: Climate change is not a direct cause, but a contributor to security risks and even violent conflict. Climate change is no longer considered merely a threat multiplier but more a catalyst for conflict, as climate change impacts tend to accelerate instability in vulnerable areas of the world. Addressing these compound risks is important for preventive diplomacy, climate diplomacy and a more proactive risk management. The compound risks are interlinked, are driven by socio-economic, environmental and political pressures across sectors and intensify each other.
- While *awareness* about the security implications of climate change has been growing, there is still a need for clear communication and political will to translate this into action. There is a clear need for reconciling long-term commitments in the field of climate change with near-term political objectives. There is also a need for *mainstreaming climate change and security* and for *governance mechanisms at the global level*.
- *Transboundary co-operation and trust-building*: There are already examples of good practices in the OSCE region where joint climate action has been an effective catalyst for transboundary co-operation. Climate change co-operation and climate diplomacy are also good entry points for contributing to preventing conflict situations and strengthening trust. They can also have significant benefits for broader relations between countries. This, however, requires a different level of engagement from foreign policymakers. Technical assistance to transboundary co-operation, e.g., in shared river basins, has to be accompanied by high-level political processes and complemented through multiple tracks in order to lead to political co-operation, at the same time including more informal settings with civil society and international and regional organizations such as the OSCE.

- *Multi-dimensional responses*: In order to ensure ownership and effective policies to address the security impacts of climate change, integrated, multi-sectoral and comprehensive policies among foreign affairs, humanitarian action, development and security communities are needed. International and regional organizations have an important role to play in this context. The emerging discourse on “resilience” could be used as an umbrella to integrate different policy fields such as foreign policy and preventative diplomacy, peace building, climate change adaptation and humanitarian assistance. The OSCE could contribute in this regard by inter alia providing security perspectives and by continuing to provide an inclusive platform for dialogue among heterogeneous stakeholders.
- *Nexus approach*: The climate-water-food-energy nexus is a useful approach to assess and address multi-dimensional security impacts and balance the interests of different sectors.
- *Systematic dialogue*: There is a need for more awareness about climate change and more systematic dialogue between different sectors and with international organizations such as the OSCE. This includes a common terminology and improved information flow among the various stakeholders, in particular policymakers, the scientific community and experts.
- *Partnerships*: Although time-consuming and resource-intensive, partnerships and co-operation at all levels are essential and should include civil society, academia, the private sector and the public at large. The OSCE should explore opportunities for co-operation, including through partnering with relevant business and academic networks.
- *Broad participation and local action*: Active involvement of civil society organizations, community level action and bottom-up approaches to climate change mitigation and reducing vulnerabilities are important, which also necessitates adequate tools to understand risks at the local level. Broad engagement of people in addressing climate change, including in climate-related disaster risk management, can become an important confidence-building measure.
- *Regional action*: Addressing climate change at the regional level is critical as it links the efforts undertaken at the global and national levels. For climate change mitigation, enhancing regional co-operation on sustainable infrastructure and integrated energy systems is essential.
- *Decarbonization is a priority*: If human impact on climate change is not mitigated, it will not be possible to manage the crisis only by addressing emergencies and increasing resilience. Therefore, de-carbonization is a priority of the first order.
- *Renewable energy*: Technologies such as hydropower are important for climate change mitigation and sustainable development. However, it is important to make use of tools such as environmental impact assessments to balance benefits and possible negative effects on the environment.
- *Better analysis*: A better understanding of the drivers of instability, including those related to climate change, can contribute to developing more effective security policies. The tremendous analytical, research and development capacities of the

military and intelligence community should be used for development and civilian purposes such as the mapping of environmental risks. The OSCE could engage in assessing and mapping climate change hot-spots.

- *Role of the OSCE:* Due to its experience in crisis management, conflict prevention and confidence-building, as well as its comprehensive security approach, the OSCE is well placed to identify and act on the security implications of climate change. The OSCE can also play a meaningful role in supporting implementation of relevant global commitments by its participating States. The OSCE's experience in addressing climate change is considered valuable beyond the OSCE area, including in the Southern Mediterranean region.
