

Ministerial Council

**Side Event on Climate Change and Security in Mountain Regions
Łódź, 1 December 2022, 12:00-13:00**

**OPENING REMARKS BY HELGA MARIA SCHMID
OSCE SECRETARY GENERAL**

Excellencies
Dear Colleagues

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this side event on “Climate Change and Security in Mountain Regions”.

Actually, the idea to organize this came up in several meetings: With the German Foreign Minister, I remember we, Annalena, spoke about this at the beginning of the year already, and with the Foreign Minister of Andorra, Maria, when I had the pleasure to visit your country in July, we agreed to focus on the effects of climate change on mountains.

I am very glad, we made this happen; and many are following us online. Climate change is one of the major security challenges of our times.

So, why focus on mountains?

Mountains are providing about 70 percent of the world’s freshwater resources. Half of the world’s population depends on **mountains** for **water** as well as for **food and energy**.

Yet, climate change puts this at a risk.

So, how is the OSCE helping to respond to this challenge?

Climate change, and its impacts on security, **is not new for the OSCE**.

The **Helsinki Final Act** recognized this already in 1975 as a common challenge – I always say this, because it is truly remarkable! The latest highlight is of course the adoption of the **landmark decision on climate change** at the MC in Stockholm last year.

In the OSCE’s, we promote regional cooperation and implement concrete **projects** throughout to

- **raise awareness** on climate and security,
- **identify climate-related security risks** at regional levels,
- and to **explore joint measures** to reduce these risks and strengthen climate resilience and adaptation.

We do this together with our field operations and in cooperation with the **UN, specialized organizations**, and our **donors**. So, we pool resources and expertise.

In our current extra-budgetary funded project on climate change and security, we've identified **42 hotspots** in Central Asia, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, South East Europe. We engaged **over 700 local stakeholders** in this process.

We are now advancing in **selected hotspots**, including those in **mountainous areas**.

In the **Shar/Sara Mountains and Korab Massif area**, we are facilitating co-operation between local stakeholders to develop **a shared vision** for this region, as climate change does not stop at the border, and to identify **steps** to put this vision into practice. Our incoming Chair, North Macedonia, is part of this and will speak about this as well.

In **Central Asia**, we launched a Regional Consultation Process that gathered more than 50 government and NGO representatives from all five states. We identified opportunities for regional co-operation and joint actions. High mountain areas emerged as one of the priority areas to foster transboundary co-operation for joint climate adaptation actions. And we are now preparing for the next steps.

In **Eastern Europe**, we recently commissioned an independent expert study on the analysis of the impact of the war on climate action in Ukraine but also beyond. The study will also include very concrete recommendations for follow-up. And we will soon share it with you to discuss next steps.

To conclude, in all this, we are supporting **young people**. They realised earlier than many others that **Climate change** will determine their future. Next year, we will launch our activities targeting particularly **women**. In many mountain communities, women hold vital knowledge in many areas, such as farming, traditional medicine, biodiversity, culture—an expertise which could help to protect sensitive mountain environments from the effects of climate change.

I am very grateful for the support of so many of you who make this work happen.

Several **participating States** are already in the forefront of mountains-focussed international activities:

- I commend Kyrgyzstan for taking the lead in the designation of 2022 as the **International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development**.
- I also commend Tajikistan for taking the lead, internationally, in preparing a resolution for the UN General Assembly for the declaration of **2025 as the International year of glacier preservation**.

It is important that COP27 took a step towards **climate justice** by agreeing on the long-debated creation of a loss-and damage fund.

But, more **ambitious action** is required to boost climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

And, we in the OSCE are ready to do our share with your support.

Finally, I thank Igli Hasani, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, and his team for all their work and for having organized this event.

Thank you.