

**Greek OSCE Chairmanship Conference on  
Security Implications of Climate Change in the OSCE region  
(Bucharest, 5-6 October 2009)**

**Opening remarks  
by Ambassador Louis-Alkiviadis Abatis,  
Deputy Head of  
the OSCE Chairmanship Task Force**

Your Excellency the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Greek OSCE Chairmanship, it is my great pleasure to address the Conference on Security Implications of Climate Change in the OSCE region.

Please allow me to remind the sometimes difficult path that our organization and our society have gone through, to finally acknowledge that climate change is a threat to the entire planet.

In 1975, when the CSCE established the three dimensions or baskets, only a few thought that economic and environmental activities were relevant to our common security. The concept of Sustainable Development was yet to be born and climate change was thought to bring us a new Ice Age. Interestingly enough, the Oil crisis hit the world and that gave a short boost to renewable energy. A boost that was short-lived.

As the years passed, our organization evolved and so did the debate over environmentalism.

Right after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in Europe, while the OSCE was equipping itself with permanent structures and missions, the UN organized the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, setting up the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In 1997, as the Office of the Co-ordinator was established, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had already prepared two scientific reports. I guess no-one could imagine that this UN body would receive the Nobel Peace Prize ten years later.

The first decade of the new millennium witnessed an intensification of the activities related to climate change. As the OSCE's second dimension reinforced its mandate with the Maastricht Strategy, calling for the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol to all participating States, the world was in the middle of a heated debate about the science behind human-induced climate change.

In the last two years, the climate process, as some called it, has gained strength, and, once the science has settled that greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for global warming, the debate has spread to the development and security realms.

It is evident that the world leaders have had a quick glimpse at what expects us in the near future if "business as usual" continues and whatever they have seen, it has scared them.

That is why the UN Security Council launched a debate on climate security in 2007. This was followed by a recent request to its Secretary General to prepare a report on the possible security implications of climate change that has just been published.

Other regional organizations are also paying attention to this issue. 27 Participating States to the OSCE are also members of the EU, while 28 are also members of NATO.

The issue of climate change is also discussed at the meetings of the major economies of the planet. The G8, now superseded by the G20, has also included climate change and the need to curb carbon emission. In its latest meeting in Pittsburgh, world leaders mentioned climate change 11 times in the final statement.

It is clear that the major economies, the main international and regional organizations and research institutions are voicing out that climate change is a serious threat to the stability of our planet.

But what has the OSCE done in the last two years?

In December 2007, the OSCE adopted the Madrid Declaration on environment and security, which recognizes that, I quote: "climate change is a long-term challenge" and acknowledges that, I quote: "the United Nations climate process is the appropriate forum for negotiating future global action on climate change, and the OSCE, as a regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, has a complementary role to play within its mandate in addressing this challenge in its specific region".

I did attend the Ministerial in Madrid and I can personally confirm that even the adoption of such, let me say, rather weak language, was an impressive negotiation result which leads the OSCE towards the right direction.

What was nevertheless most impressive was the fact that in Madrid some states were not even ready to accept the words environment and security in the same sentence!

Luckily we are all able to learn from our mistakes, and reverse positions that just 2 years ago seemed rock solid.

Last year, our Finnish colleagues proposed a Ministerial Council Decision on the security implications of climate change. This decision, a one-page long document stating the obvious, based on recognized evidence and using international agreed language, was not approved, much to the despair of many participating States.

It seems to me that the OSCE is about to miss the train. The climate change security nexus is in front of us, many are already acknowledging it, and a few are leading the discussion.

Can the OSCE afford to miss that debate? How can we keep the organization relevant if we fail to do so?

This is the main reason why the Greek Chairmanship has organized this conference.

We must send a strong signal to our constituency.

Two months before the critical meeting in Copenhagen, the OSCE must speak up and tell the international community that climate change

might have security implications, and therefore we must get our act together!

As a representative of the OSCE chairmanship in 2009, but also as a national of a Mediterranean country, I see the effects of climate change in my every day life: Forest fires have twice devastated large parts of my own country in the last 2 years, bringing death, economic loss, and pushing the environmental resilience of our rich biodiversity to its limits.

Greece is a nation rich in culture, a cradle of modern civilization and rule of law. We have resources to cope with disasters and we belong to an exclusive club, the European Union, which is based on solidarity among its members.

But the OSCE has many other participating States with different degrees of development and economic prosperity.

- What will happen to those who are suffering the consequences of climate change in parts of the world not so developed?
- Isn't it a sour irony that precisely those nations that have less contributed to global warming are going to be the most affected?
- Can we close the doors of our countries to those seeking refugee from climate disasters if we are responsible of those disasters in the first place?

I commend all the participants of this conference to bring together their expertise and suggest concrete proposals for the OSCE to tackle the security implications of climate change.

I will finish my intervention with a word of gratitude for the incoming chairmanship for its presence in this conference, as it will be in 2010 when those proposals will be in effect, and the political support of Kazakhstan will be necessary to ensure its success.

Last but not least let me thank the host country, Romania, for its suggestion to organize this conference, for the devoted team that has facilitated the meeting, and has ensured that we can have fruitful deliberations.

Finally I would like to thank the Office of the Co-ordinator for the support provided in identifying speakers and preparing the background note for the conference.

Thank you very much and let me wish you a successful conference.