



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Security Implications of Climate Change in the OSCE Region

Opening Remarks

OSCE Secretary General
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Minister Diaconescu,
Ambassador Abatis,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a security organization, some may be tempted to argue that the OSCE stake is not clear on issues related to climate change.

Indeed, until recently, the very notion and scope of climate change was contested.

Today, the picture is becoming more clear. The international community acknowledges the fact that climate change is ongoing and that it is linked to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. It is also recognised that these processes are happening faster than earlier envisaged, and that we have little time to find solutions before we cross critical thresholds. And perhaps most important for the OSCE, it is noted now that this phenomenon has direct implications for the security of our States and societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History has shown how past civilizations coped with environmental change: they adapted to the new circumstances - a colder or warmer climate, water scarcity, floods or desertification - and if they could not cope with the changes, they often migrated to more suitable territories.

Adaptation and migration have defined the evolution of humankind for millennia.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the context is different. Change is happening at unprecedented speed, and it is occurring in a world of 6 billion people, where access to resources and distribution of wealth is unequal. The tried and tested strategies of the past, adaptation and migration, may prove more difficult today.

The 56 participating States of the OSCE and their societies stand on the front lines of change.

In Central and Western Europe, extreme weather events may disrupt the economy, with potential consequences in the tourism sector. In Eastern and South Eastern Europe, floods and droughts already affecting the region could become commonplace. In Central Asia, securing and managing water resources to meet the demands of the population could become far more challenging.

In the far north of the OSCE region, the Arctic could become the source of territorial disputes as new energy resources are made available due to the melting of the ice sheet. In the south, the Mediterranean region is projected to suffer widespread desertification that could lead to mass migration.

These are just a few potential implications of climate change for the OSCE region in the coming decades. The widespread, uneven and still unpredictable impact of the global economic crisis may make a difficult situation worse, challenging both national and international tools of governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to discuss how challenges linked to climate change could exacerbate tensions among and within the participating States, and to explore possible strategies for anticipating problems and offsetting tensions before they unfold.

Our objective is more than a checklist of theoretical links between the environment and security. We seek to explore the role the OSCE can play in coping with such challenges. In so doing, we also seek to learn from the experience of other international organizations.

Our participating States acknowledge the leading role of the United Nations in negotiating a new agreement to decrease carbon emissions, ensure fairness for developing nations, and promote clean technologies. The OSCE has neither the capacity nor the desire to duplicate these efforts.

Rather, the aim of the Organization is to underpin wider international efforts, to help mobilize political will where it is necessary, and to act as a platform for sharing information and experience at the regional level.

The OSCE is well-suited to serve as a clearing-house, where the efforts of specialised agencies, the ideas of research institutes, and the concerns of governments, business and society can be brought together, shared and acted upon.

The presence today of partners from UNECE, the European Commission, the European Environmental Agency, along with high-level representatives from the OSCE's participating States and think tanks working at the cutting edge of this issue pays tribute to the OSCE's potential as a catalyst of networks for innovative cooperation on complex, cross-dimensional security threats. I thank you all for your participation and for the contributions you will make.

The inclusive composition of the OSCE is an undeniable strength. So is the Organization's comprehensive concept of security, which allows us to explore and address different facets of this complex challenge. This concept starts with respect for the

'inherent dignity of the individual' and bridges the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human aspects of complex security problems.

As a Regional Organization under the UN Charter, the OSCE has a primary mandate for early warning and conflict prevention in its region. With this mandate, the OSCE is well placed to monitor and examine how and climate change may act as a threat multiplier -- across the OSCE area, in specific sub-regions and in disputes over critical resources such as water or energy.

The OSCE Secretariat can help the participating States to develop the Organization as a forum where the main security implications of climate change can be debated. One concrete idea to explore could be to organize this type of conference on an annual basis. Such an event could serve as an open forum to initiate contacts, examine the challenges posed by climate change from different perspectives, and resolve potential conflicts before they start.

The OSCE field presences also can play a vital role. They work in close contact with host countries and their societies, providing support and building capacity. They work with youth and experts, and in close collaboration with international partners. In this context, I am pleased that Ambassador Tesoriere will participate in this conference. I am confident that more activities related to coping with the security implications of climate change will be undertaken next year in the OSCE region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenges raised by climate change are challenges also to the existing system of international security governance. This is a global phenomenon that will have consequences for the future security architecture of our planet. It is vital that all international institutions perform at their best and co-operate closely in addressing this crucial challenge.

One final word in this respect on the renewed dialogue on European security that the Greek Chairmanship has initiated at the informal ministerial meeting in Corfu last June. It is time to take stock of old challenges and new threats facing the participating States and societies. The security implications of climate change should form an integral part of the so-called Corfu Process, also as it is taken forward next year. This conference is an important step in this direction.

Thank you for your attention.