

## **Climate Change and Security: Unprecedented impacts, unpredictable risks**

*Vienna, 28 October 2015*

### **Concept Note**

Once only considered as an “environmental issue,” climate change is increasingly being included as an inherent element of national and international security agendas. It is seen as a “threat multiplier,” exacerbating existing threats to security and increasing environmental stress, adding to pressures that can push the responsive capacities of governments to their limits.

Climate change can impact security in a number of ways. Increasing competition over access to natural resources can lead to violent conflict if no effective dispute resolution mechanisms are in place. Increasing frequency of climate-induced extreme weather events and disasters can aggravate political instability and put livelihoods at risk, which in turn can push people to migrate on a large scale or to turn to illegal sources of income. Disruption of food production and increasing food prices can lead to social instability, violent protests and civil unrest. Reduced efficiency of energy production caused by higher temperatures and lower precipitation, as well as threats to energy production and transmission infrastructure from extreme weather events, put supply chains and energy security at risk. Increasing demand for water and an unreliable supply increase pressure on existing water governance arrangements and can complicate political relations, in particular at transboundary basins already affected by tensions.<sup>1</sup>

The OSCE Security Days conference on “**Climate Change and Security: Unprecedented impacts, unpredictable risks**” will provide an important opportunity to discuss both the security risks associated with climate change and the security benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as to identify successful approaches to integrating security considerations into climate change policies. Taking place in the run-up to the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (Paris, 30 November - 11 December), this Security Days event will bring together senior representatives of governments, regional and international organizations, NGOs, academia, philanthropy, business and entrepreneurs for an

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<sup>1</sup> See Adelphi (2015): *A New Climate for Peace. Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*.

open, interactive discussion on one of the most critical challenges of our time. It is also intended to promote opportunities for co-operation in addressing security risks related to climate change and to generate recommendations for conflict prevention and for minimizing security risks of climate change, particularly in the OSCE region.

**Objective and main expected outcomes of the event:**

1. Deepen understanding of the security implications of climate change, as well as the security benefits of climate change mitigation and adaptation
2. Identify approaches for integrating security considerations into climate change policies and take stock of existing best practices in addressing security implications of climate change
3. Generate ideas and recommendations for co-operation and for conflict prevention and confidence-building steps that can help minimize the security risks of climate change in the OSCE region and beyond, particularly in light of the 2015 global processes

The event aims to take stock of what the OSCE has done so far in this field, discuss climate change related outcomes of the post-2015 Development Agenda and prospects for the COP21 and their implications for the OSCE region, and identify the future direction of action for conflict prevention and confidence building.

**Background**

2015 is a year of global processes dealing with various aspects of economic, social and environmental development that are closely interlinked with climate change: *Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction* in Sendai (March 2015), *Third International Conference on Financing for Development* in Addis Ababa (July 2015), *UN Summit to Adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda* in New York (September 2015), *21<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Parties under the UNFCCC* in Paris (December 2015), and the preparations for the *World Humanitarian Summit* in Istanbul (May 2016). Together, these interlinked processes offer a unique opportunity to enhance and bring greater coherence and complementarity to international efforts to reduce the wide spectrum of risks posed by climate change, including those related to security and stability.

Climate change and its security implications have already been discussed in two high-profile debates in the United Nations Security Council in April 2007 and July 2011 and were the subject of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 63/281 in June 2009. Climate change has also been the subject of a number of influential policy papers, academic and scientific research studies, and political and strategic decisions at various levels.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Environmental Justice Foundation (2014): *The Gathering Storm: Climate Change, Security and Conflict*; Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (2014): *Climate Change: Implications for Defence – summary of the IPCC report*; Carnegie Foundation (2014): *Climate Change and EU Security Policy. An Unmet Challenge*; Michael McElroy et al. (2012): *Climate Extremes: Recent Trends with Implications for National Security*; CNA Corporation (2007): *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*; Andrew Holland and Xander Vagg (2013): *The Global Security Defense Index on Climate Change: Preliminary Results*.

In the OSCE context, the 2007 Madrid Ministerial Declaration on *Environment and Security* recognized climate change as a long-term challenge and highlighted the role of the OSCE in addressing this challenge in its region. It also defined climate change as a threat magnifier since environmental degradation can be a contributor to conflict. The 2009 Bucharest conference on the “Security Implications of Climate Change in the OSCE region” discussed the potential impact of climate change on security in the OSCE area, as well as ways to foster dialogue and international co-operation on the security aspects of climate change.

The 2013 Kiev Ministerial Council Decision on *Improving the Environmental Footprint of Energy-related Activities in the OSCE Region* recognized the role of responsible and sustainable management of natural and energy resources in curbing climate change and thus contributing to security and stability. The 2014 Basel Ministerial Council Decision on *Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction* noted the exacerbating effect climate change may have on the frequency and magnitude of disasters, and encouraged development and implementation of climate change adaptation and mitigation plans at all appropriate levels. In 2015, the OSCE’s Economic and Environmental Forum process has been focusing on *Water governance in the OSCE area – increasing security and stability through co-operation* – a topic that is closely linked to climate change.

The OSCE has also taken concrete steps towards promoting dialogue and co-operation on climate change issues by implementing projects on the ground that address security implications of climate change. The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) has been a unique instrument for co-ordinated regional action in this field.<sup>3</sup> In close collaboration with UN Development Programme, UN Environment Programme, UN Economic Commission for Europe, and the Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, the OSCE has since 2013 led the implementation of a multi-stakeholder project to identify the security implications of climate change in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia with the support of European Union Instrument for Stability and the Austrian Development Agency. As a concrete output of this joint work, in April 2015, Moldova and Ukraine endorsed a transboundary climate change adaptation strategy for the Dniester River Basin.

### ***About the OSCE***

*The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is the world’s largest regional security organization, with 57 participating States in Europe, Asia and North America and 11 Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation. OSCE Security Days were launched in 2012 to foster informal, interactive discussions on urgent 21st-century security threats and challenges, and to explore ways to increase co-operation and co-ordination in these areas.*

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<sup>3</sup> The Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) founded in 2003 is a partnership of six international organizations – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an associated partner – with specialized but complementary mandates and expertise that provides an integrated response to environmental and security challenges. The mission of ENVSEC is to contribute to the reduction of environmental and security risks through strengthened co-operation among and within countries in four regions: Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, and South-Eastern Europe.