

# ADVANCING THE ROLE OF THE OSCE IN THE FIELD OF CLIMATE SECURITY

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States and societies face a range of security risks when they are unable to mitigate and adapt to the adverse effects a changing climate has on human lives and livelihoods. These climate-related security risks are often transnational—droughts, water shortages, floods, extreme weather events, natural disasters and sea-level rise can affect several countries in the same region at the same time. The transnational character of these risks is not only linked to environmental and geophysical connectedness through, for instance, shared water basins and coastlines, but also to the transnational flow of goods, capital and people, including forced migration within and between countries.<sup>1</sup> The better states and local communities are at coping with and mitigating climate-related security risks, the higher the chances of alleviating adverse effects on human security and societal stability and preventing them from spilling over state borders. The transnational character of these risks means that researchers and policymakers are now paying increased attention to global and regional cooperation as a way of

addressing climate-related security risks.<sup>2</sup>

The United Nations has paved the way for an enhanced global response to climate-related security risks. For example, the UN established the Climate Security Mechanism to help the UN system address climate-related security risks more systematically.<sup>3</sup> Other international and regional organizations—for example the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union (EU)—have also started to include climate-related security risks in their mandates.<sup>4</sup> Research has highlighted that knowledge

<sup>2</sup> Mobjörk, M. et al., *Climate-related Security Risks: Towards an Integrated Approach* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2016); and Bremberg, N., Mobjörk, M. and Krampe, F., 'Global responses to climate security: A framework for analysis', Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association (ISA), Toronto, 27–30 Mar. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 'Addressing the impact of climate change on peace and security', [n.d.].

<sup>4</sup> Dellmuth, L. et al., 'International governmental organizations and climate security: Advancing the research agenda', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2018); Remling, E. and Barnhoorn, A., 'A reassessment of the European Union's response to climate-related security risks', SIPRI Insight on Peace and Security no. 2021/2; and Aminga, V. and Krampe, F., 'Climate-related security risks and the African Union', SIPRI Policy Brief, May 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Hedlund, J. et al., 'Quantifying transnational climate impact exposure: New perspectives on the global distribution of climate risk', *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 52 (Sep. 2018), pp. 75–85.

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## SUMMARY

● This SIPRI Policy Brief assesses the role of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in the field of climate security, in terms of its current and possible future commitments. Despite growing political momentum among most OSCE participating states about the need to address the issue of climate security, there appear to be divergent views on how to move forward on this important issue. Based on an assessment of recent OSCE activities linked to climate-related security risks and interviews with representatives from OSCE participating states, this policy brief suggests four avenues for the OSCE to advance its role in the field of climate security: (a) agree to new commitments; (b) engage in agenda setting; (c) strengthen the mandate of institutions; and (d) develop existing resources.

**Box 1. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its mandate to address climate-related security risks**

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has 57 participating states in Asia, Europe and North America and has developed a ‘comprehensive approach to security’ that consists of three security dimensions: politico-military; economic and environmental; and human. Looking at these dimensions together allows the OSCE to address a wide range of interlinked security-related concerns (e.g. arms control, confidence-building measures, human rights, democratization, and economic and environmental activities).<sup>a</sup>

The OSCE is recognized as a regional arrangement as defined by Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, and as such it recognizes that the UN Security Council is primarily responsible for maintaining international peace and security. The OSCE’s complementary role to the UN Security Council further underlines its potential not only to contribute to peace, but also to advance regional cooperation on other security matters of concern to its participating states.<sup>b</sup> Importantly, the original mandate of the predecessor of the OSCE, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which was created to facilitate East–West dialogue during the cold war, included cooperation beyond the realm of traditional military security. The CSCE’s Helsinki Final Act of 1975 recognizes the transnational implications of environmental degradation.<sup>c</sup>

As the CSCE was transformed into the OSCE in the 1990s, participating states agreed to expand the OSCE’s mandate to cover conflict prevention and the promotion of democracy. The Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) was created in 1997 ‘to assess potential security risks stemming, wholly or in part, from economic, social and environmental factors’, and to draw on expertise from relevant international and regional organizations in the economic and environmental fields.<sup>d</sup>

In its 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, the OSCE explicitly recognized climate change as a long-term challenge and acknowledged that the organization has ‘a complementary role to play within its mandate in addressing this challenge in its specific region’.<sup>e</sup> The declaration was prepared under the Spanish chairmanship of the OSCE and is a good example of what can be achieved in a consensus-based organization when participating states agree to advance on an issue. Issues related more specifically to the nexus between climate change and security have more recently been addressed in OSCE bodies such as the Permanent Council and the Economic and Environmental Committee.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> OSCE, ‘Who we are’, [n.d.].

<sup>b</sup> Charter of the United Nations and the Statute of the International Court of Justice, signed 14 Aug. 1941, entered into force 24 Oct. 1945.

<sup>c</sup> Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Final Act, Helsinki, 1 Aug. 1975.

<sup>d</sup> OSCE, Mandate for a Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, PC.DEC/194, 5 Nov. 1997.

<sup>e</sup> OSCE, Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, 30 Nov. 2007.

<sup>f</sup> Buttanri, E., ‘Climate change, global security and the OSCE’, OSCE Yearbook, 2019 (Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik: Baden-Baden, 2020), pp. 215–29.

exchange between local, national and international actors is key to developing adequate global, regional and local responses to climate-related security risks.<sup>5</sup> Another organization that is increasingly shaping a response to climate-related security risks is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE is the world’s largest regional security organization with a unique role in the European

security architecture.<sup>6</sup> But its potential to promote cooperation on climate-related security risks has not been analysed to the same extent as other organizations.

Following on from recent research about international cooperation on climate security, this SIPRI Policy Brief aims to assess the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security, in terms of its current and possible future commitments. It builds on a mapping of OSCE reports and docu-

<sup>5</sup> Hardt, J. N., *Environmental Security in the Anthropocene: Assessing Theory and Practice* (Routledge: London, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Galbreath, D. J., ‘The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’, eds D. J. Galbreath, J. Mawdsley and L. Chappell, *Contemporary European Security* (Routledge: London, 2019), pp. 68–80.



ments, as well as interviews with officials from OSCE delegations of participating states and the OSCE Secretariat. The main finding is that there is a sense of a growing political momentum around climate security among most OSCE participating states, but there still seem to be divergent views on how to move forward on this important issue. The OSCE has a mandate to address security risks emerging from environmental and climate factors (see box 1). This, together with the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, implies that, if participating states agree, the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security could be further strengthened. The OSCE's broad range of activities and its Secretariat's experience of collaborating with international, national and local authorities provide a strong basis for the OSCE to help its participating states and partners to prepare for and cope with climate-related security risks. In order to further advance the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security this Policy Brief suggests four avenues for the organization: (a) agree to new commitments; (b) engage in agenda setting; (c) strengthen the mandate of institutions; and (d) develop existing resources.

### **RECENT OSCE ACTIVITIES LINKED TO CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS**

The OSCE is paying greater attention to climate-related security risks, which can be seen through recent OSCE activities. Following the OSCE's 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security, the OSCE Ministerial Council took a series of decisions relating to the adverse effects of climate change

(e.g. Athens in 2009; Kyiv in 2013; Basel in 2014; and Hamburg in 2016).<sup>7</sup> The OSCE Secretary General has also organized so-called OSCE Security Days to serve as platforms for debate on emerging themes and issues, including climate-related security risks.<sup>8</sup> In September 2019 an informal OSCE Group of Friends of Environment was launched at the initiative of France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. The group recognizes 'the close connection between the environment and security [and] aims to strengthen co-operation on environmental issues as part of a broader effort to prevent conflicts, build mutual confidence and promote good neighbourly relations'.<sup>9</sup>

In 2020 the OSCE launched an extra-budgetary project focusing on climate-related security risks in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and South Eastern

<sup>7</sup> OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Decision no. 5/09: Migration management', MC.DEC/5/09, 2 Dec. 2009; OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Decision No. 6/09: Strengthening dialogue and co-operation on energy security in the OSCE area', MC.DEC/6/09, 2 Dec. 2009; OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Decision no. 5/13: Improving the environmental footprint of energy-related activities in the OSCE region', MC.DEC/5/13, 6 Dec. 2013; OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Decision no. 6/14: Enhancing disaster risk reduction', MC.DEC/6/14, 5 Dec. 2014; and OSCE, Ministerial Council, 'Decision no. 4/16: Strengthening good governance and promoting connectivity', MC.DEC/4/16, 9 Dec. 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The themes of recent OSCE Security Days include: water diplomacy (2014); climate change and security (2015); migration (2016); sustainable cities (2017); and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2019). See Buttanni, E., 'Climate change, global security and the OSCE', *OSCE Yearbook, 2019* (Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik: Baden-Baden, 2020), pp. 215–29.

<sup>9</sup> OSCE, Statement on behalf of the informal Group of Friends of Environment made by the Permanent Representative of France, Ambassador Christine Fages, EEF.DEL/56/19, 16 Sep. 2019.



Europe.<sup>10</sup> The aims of the project include identifying and mapping potential climate-security hotspots, developing and implementing climate change and security risk reduction measures, and raising awareness of the linkages between climate change and security.<sup>11</sup> The initial phase of the project, which concluded in February 2021, involved OSCE participating states in South Eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> A report on climate-security hotspots, regional challenges and opportunities for transboundary cooperation was published in April 2021.<sup>13</sup>

In January 2021 OSCE Secretary General, Helga Maria Schmid, explicitly referred to ‘environmental and climate-related challenges’ in relation to the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security in her inaugural remarks at the Permanent Council.<sup>14</sup> A few months later, Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller, the acting deputy head of the United States delegation to the OSCE, made a statement during a meeting of the Permanent Council urging OSCE participating states to consider steps ‘to address the broader

impacts of climate change on regional security’.<sup>15</sup> The statement is noteworthy due to the political weight of the USA and the detailed proposals it contained. One proposal was for the Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) to assist OSCE participating states by developing a guide of best practice for conducting assessments of national and economic security impacts of climate change and recommending risk management strategies. The US delegation also suggested that OSCE structures and institutions might integrate climate considerations into broader, existing conflict prevention measures (e.g. early warning systems to monitor rising tensions over key resources, including food or water).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in July 2021 the OSCE hosted a high-level conference, bringing together around 150 experts and representatives from participating states and partners, to address the economic and security implications of climate change, among other topics.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the OSCE currently supports 60 Aarhus Centres in 14 participating states, which seek to engage citizens, governments and the private sector in dialogue on environmental challenges.<sup>18</sup> The work at these centres builds on the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security, which recognizes that

<sup>10</sup> The project was funded by Andorra, Austria, Czechia, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Norway. See OSCE Secretariat, ‘OSCE and adelphi conclude first regional consultation on climate change and security in South-Eastern Europe’, Press release, 23 Feb. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> See OSCE Secretariat, ‘Climate change and security in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South Caucasus’, OSCE Project, Environmental activities, [n.d.].

<sup>12</sup> OSCE, ‘OSCE and adelphi launch a regional consultation on climate change and security in South-Eastern Europe’, Press release, 27 May 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Rüttinger, L. et al., *Regional Assessment for South-Eastern Europe: Security Implications of Climate Change* (adelphi and OSCE: Berlin and Vienna, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> OSCE, Inaugural Remarks at the Permanent Council, Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, 21 Jan. 2021.

<sup>15</sup> OSCE, 1310th Plenary Meeting of the Permanent Council, United States Mission to the OSCE, Statement Marking Earth Day, 22 Apr. 2021.

<sup>16</sup> OSCE (note 15).

<sup>17</sup> OSCE, ‘30 years after Bonn: We must continue to invest in dialogue, conflict prevention and fighting transnational threats’, Press release, 5 July 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), signed 25 June 1998, entered into force 30 Oct. 2001.



climate change, environmental degradation, and competition over national and transboundary natural resources can lead to tensions. The OSCE suggests that cooperation on security risks stemming from the environment can help to build trust, and that addressing such risks requires dialogue between as well as within countries and it is this thinking that forms the basis of the work of the Aarhus Centres.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the Aarhus Centres, the OSCE also has a presence in participating states through field missions in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and South Eastern Europe.<sup>20</sup>

### **VIEWS FROM WITHIN: THE ROLE OF THE OSCE IN THE FIELD OF CLIMATE SECURITY**

The semi-structured interviews for this policy brief were conducted virtually in March and April 2021. In total, 17 OSCE delegations were contacted and 13 officials from 10 OSCE delegations were interviewed.<sup>21</sup> One OSCE official at the OCEEA was also interviewed. Interviewees were asked to reflect on three themes in the context of the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security: (a) the current political dynamics in this field; (b) the added value of the OSCE; and (c) key policy challenges.

#### **Political dynamics in this field**

With regard to the first theme, interviewees reported a sense of growing political momentum

around the issue of climate security among OSCE participating states.<sup>22</sup> One indication cited was the creation of the informal Group of Friends of Environment.<sup>23</sup> Some interviewees placed an emphasis on the new US administration, which is becoming a stronger advocate on addressing climate change.<sup>24</sup> However, it was also suggested that climate security still remains relatively unexplored in the OSCE.<sup>25</sup> Interviewees stressed that it has been several years since participating states have been able to agree on a new Ministerial Council decision that includes the topic of climate security.<sup>26</sup> This can partly be attributed to some participating states being said to argue that the scientific evidence of a link between climate change and security needs to be better understood.<sup>27</sup> Interviewees highlighted that there are a small number of participating states that remain sceptical on the need to further develop the role of the OSCE in relation to climate-related security risks.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Official 1, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; Official 2, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; Official 3, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; and Official 11, Interview with authors, Video call, Apr. 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Official 2 (note 22); Official 4, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; Official 6, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; and Official 11 (note 22).

<sup>24</sup> Official 1 (note 22); Official 2 (note 22); Official 4 (note 23); Official 7, Interview with authors, Video call, Mar. 2021; Official 8, Interview with authors, Video call, Apr. 2021; and Official 11 (note 22).

<sup>25</sup> Official 1 (note 22); and Official 10, Interview with authors, Video call, Apr. 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Official 3 (note 22); Official 7 (note 24); Official 8 (note 24); and Official 11 (note 22).

<sup>27</sup> Official 1 (note 22).

<sup>28</sup> Official 1 (note 22); Official 2 (note 22); Official 3 (note 22); Official 4 (note 23); Official 6 (note 23); Official 8 (note 24); Official 9, Interview with authors, Video call, Apr. 2021; and Official 11 (note 22).

<sup>19</sup> OSCE, 'Aarhus Centres', [n.d.].

<sup>20</sup> See OSCE, 'What is the OSCE', [n.d.].

<sup>21</sup> The interviewees represented Armenia, Azerbaijan, France, Germany, Montenegro, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the USA. One interviewee wished to remain completely anonymous.



### Added value of the OSCE

On the second theme, some interviewees noted that the main added value of the OSCE compared with other international and regional organizations is its ‘convening power’.<sup>29</sup> The organization is able to bring together stakeholders from different policy fields and political levels around common concerns. The OSCE does so by providing forums where knowledge about local vulnerabilities can be developed and information about risk management strategies can be shared, and it does so in ways that few other organizations do.

It was also stressed that the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security allows the organization to address emerging security challenges in a unique way.<sup>30</sup> As environmental security is recognized in several key OSCE documents, almost all the interviewees suggested that the role of the OSCE to address climate-related security risks could be enhanced further. One interviewee also noted that the OSCE is one of few regional organizations with a mandate relating to both environmental and security issues.<sup>31</sup> The OSCE Secretariat has successfully carried out various projects with a focus on climate-related security risks in the OSCE region, such as those in collaboration with the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC).<sup>32</sup> However, these projects were financed by extra-budgetary funds so a few participating states considered this kind of activity to be outside the OSCE’s mandate. According to one

interviewee, this has meant that many of the lessons learned have not informed political discussions within the OSCE to the extent that some other participating states would like.<sup>33</sup>

### Key policy challenges

On the theme of key policy challenges, one interviewee suggested that some participating states might be reluctant to allow relatively new issues in the OSCE, such as climate-related security risks, to overshadow established ones.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, two interviewees argued that a number of participating states do not consider climate security a key priority for the OSCE. They noted that this has been illustrated in recent political discussions where examples of climate-security risks have been taken from outside the OSCE region (e.g. Lake Chad and the Horn of Africa).<sup>35</sup> While it could be argued that this might indicate that some participating states do not acknowledge that climate-related security risks exist in the OSCE region, the more likely explanation is that some states are simply not making full use of the knowledge gathered on these risks in recent years by the OSCE Secretariat. In this context, it was said that some participating states might be comfortably ‘hiding behind’ the more outspokenly sceptical states.<sup>36</sup> This seems to imply that while political change in a consensus-based organization such as the OSCE can occur quickly, it can also be rapidly reversed if it is not anchored broadly among the participating states.

<sup>29</sup> Official 4 (note 23); and Official 6 (note 23).

<sup>30</sup> Official 8 (note 24).

<sup>31</sup> Official 3 (note 22).

<sup>32</sup> Official 3 (note 22); and Official 11 (note 22).

<sup>33</sup> Official 7 (note 24).

<sup>34</sup> Official 7 (note 24).

<sup>35</sup> Official 1 (note 22); and Official 2 (note 22).

<sup>36</sup> Official 8 (note 24).



## RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need for enhanced international cooperation to equip countries better to handle the security risks associated with climate change. At the same time, post-Covid-19 pandemic recovery efforts provide significant new opportunities for states to help to build societal resilience and promote sustainable societies in the OSCE region and beyond. The OSCE is in a position to contribute to this. The analysis above highlights that there is political momentum around climate-related security risks within the OSCE. This political momentum, in combination with the OSCE's convening power and its complementary role to the UN Security Council, means there is potential for the OSCE to enhance its role in advancing international cooperation to address these risks. However, there are still divergent views among the participating states on possible ways forward. This SIPRI Policy Brief aims to contribute to the policy debate in the OSCE by way of the following recommendations for the OSCE that suggest four avenues for advancing its role: (a) agree to new commitments; (b) engage in agenda setting; (c) strengthen the mandate of institutions; and (d) develop existing resources.

**Agree to new commitments.** No Ministerial Council decisions have been taken in recent years to further enhance the OSCE's existing commitments to addressing the adverse effects of climate change and climate-related security risks, including environmental degradation, natural disasters and forced migration. The above analysis suggests that if OSCE

participating states would agree on further specifying the complementary role of the organization particularly with regard to the UN, it would no doubt represent a significant step forward for international cooperation on climate security. Any further commitment that OSCE participating states can agree on at the organization's highest political level would send a strong signal to national and local actors in participating states as well as to partner countries and organizations that climate-related security risks can be addressed through coordinated political action, and that the OSCE aims to be part of such efforts. OSCE participating states should therefore commit to adopting a new Ministerial Council Decision to strengthen the OSCE's risk assessment and knowledge exchange capacities both among participating states and in relation to international partners, not least the UN.

**Engage in agenda setting.** The creation of the OSCE informal Group of Friends of Environment suggests that, even though it might currently be difficult for OSCE participating states to reach consensus on new commitments at the highest political level, constellations of participating states can come together in advocacy coalitions around specific issues covered by the OSCE's mandate. The informal group has expanded as members have been brought together by their shared understanding of the close connection between environmental, climate and security issues, as well as the view that regional cooperation on environmental issues can enhance

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conflict prevention and confidence building in the OSCE region. The membership of this group could be expanded further and the group could agree to fund additional extra-budgetary projects specifically to assess climate-related security risks in various parts of the OSCE region. Members of the group could also explore ways to bring national and international climate security experts together with national governments and local stakeholders to facilitate knowledge exchange on risks and strategies in smaller yet non-exclusionary networks.

***Strengthen the mandate of institutions.*** The OSCE Secretariat has already proved capable of conducting extra-budgetary projects in the field of climate security and there are ways in which these efforts could be strengthened further. For example, the USA has already suggested that the OCEEA could be tasked to assist participating states by developing a guide of best practice to assess national and economic security impacts of climate change and to recommend risk management strategies. This seems very reasonable given that the OCEEA has already been involved in several projects on climate-related security risks. The suggestion that OSCE institutions and bodies could integrate climate-related security risk assessments into broader, existing conflict prevention measures, such as early warning systems to monitor rising tensions over key resources (particularly food or water), appears to be both

practical and achievable. Given that the OSCE Secretariat has a history of cooperation with several UN organs (e.g. the UN Development Programme and the UN Environment Programme), it also seems highly relevant to explore ways in which the OSCE can contribute to the UN Climate Security Mechanism, not least by providing knowledge on specific climate-related security risks in the OSCE region.

### ***Develop existing resources.***

The significant resources that the OSCE already has could be further enhanced. The OSCE-supported Aarhus Centres in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and South Eastern Europe raise awareness and foster societal dialogue around issues on access to information, public participation in environmental decision making and access to justice in environmental matters. This work could contribute to addressing climate-related security risks as well. The role of OSCE field missions could also be enhanced to address climate-related security risks, particularly if assessing these risks is built into the mandates of ongoing missions or considered for future missions. The OSCE could also appoint a senior diplomat from one of its participating states to act as a special representative with a focus on climate-related security risks as a liaison between participating states, the OSCE Secretariat, local stakeholders and other international organizations.