

Building Climate Change Institutions: The Case of Environment and Security

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Press Release

Scientists, policy makers and security experts see hope for effective short-term action on climate change

Brussels, 21 March 2012 - Despite the slow progress towards a new legally binding agreement on climate change, a diverse group of experts believe that vital action for limiting the negative impact of climate change can be achieved in the near term, if key institutions can be adapted or created to address the mitigation of short-lived climate forcers (SLCFs) and its key role in air pollution reduction, climate protection and sustainable development.

The relative success of the climate change talks in Durban offer the world the opportunity to move beyond the discussion about funding and the modalities of mitigation. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations for a binding agreement on climate change in 2015, the world now faces several decades of abrupt climate change with intense climate events. Humanity has no choice but to shape the institutions needed to manage the consequences of climate change on international security.

The Centre for European Studies (CES) and the Institute for Environmental Security (IES) brought together over 100 participants including European parliamentarians, military officers, climate experts and civil society representatives at the European Parliament in Brussels on 21 March 2012 for an interactive discussion. The objectives were to reframe the international discourse on climate change, listen to the concerns and ideas of the security sector and to discuss the need to reform international and European institutions for responding efficiently to climate change threats.

Participants to the conference on "Building Climate Change Institutions: The Case of Environment and Security" recognised that the debate on the sovereign debt crisis has overshadowed climate change, preventing heads of states and governments from setting ambitious targets for limiting the rise of temperature and the risk of abrupt climate change side effects. But CES President Wilfried Martens stated that despite the shift in political attention, "a recent Eurobarometer poll suggests that 89% of European citizens see climate change as a serious problem". And they are right.

The rise of temperature is already redrawing the world map. "The geopolitics, with the geoeconomics and the changing geophysics are coming together to create an entirely new environment", Chatham House Associate Fellow Cleo Paskal explained. The melting of the Arctic sea ice is opening new maritime routes, the rise in sea levels is threatening to submerge islands and coastal areas and droughts and floods are affecting river flows on which our economy is reliant. These changes, for which the system is largely unprepared, carry the seeds of instability and risk prompting dangerous conflicts for resources. In an interconnected and globalised world, Europe will not be exempted. Furthermore, the melting of the permafrost could damage Russia's oil and gas pipelines to Europe, thereby threatening its energy supply.

Traditional paradigms of security are no longer valid in the new emerging environment caused by climate change. Both military officers and parliamentarians recognised the importance of developing contingency planning to deal with the consequences of climate change such as extreme weather events and mass migration. It was argued that this could be achieved through increased civilian-military cooperation and by education. In addition, all speakers agreed that whilst the military have started to address their use of energy there is more work that can be done to decarbonise military operations. Such an approach not only improves the effectiveness of the military and protects them from future rises in the cost of fossil fuels but also significantly reduce its impact on the environment and the climate.

Despite the bad news, speakers expressed serious reasons for hope. Recent studies have shown that acting on a series of short-lived climate forcers such as Hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), black carbon, methane and tropospheric ozone in parallel with the efforts of curbing our CO₂ emissions could cut the rate of global warming in half and up to two thirds in the Arctic for several decades. This could be done with existing technologies and legal frameworks and at a price equalling "pennies per ton of carbon equivalent", said Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development. The first meeting of the new *Climate and Clean Air Coalition* that will take place on 24-25 April in Stockholm to deal with short-lived climate forcers will provide the first major opportunity for action.

Institutional creativity is the key to dealing with the climate crisis. Climate change institutions will need to be "much more flexible and nimble, and be able to deal with issues as they arise but also change their mandate and memberships as the problems continue to evolve", Jason Blackstock, Senior Fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation, argued. The plea for institutional adaptability and continuous improvement was echoed by several speakers, adding that there is still scope for true environment diplomacy on climate change both within the EU and the UN. The next G20 was pinpointed as an important upcoming event where the EU could push things forward.

The issue of climate and security will remain high on CES and IES agendas through their participation at several international events and the publication, in June, of a paper on Climate Change and International Security. Concluding the conference, IES Vice-Chairman Tom Spencer explained that we are hoping to achieve in the near future a larger coming together of serving and retired military officers, a place to interact and debate on these issues across differences of nationality and services to continue raising awareness and promote civilian-military cooperation on climate change issues.

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