"Building Climate Change Institutions: The Case of Environment & Security"

European Parliament, Brussels, 21 March 2012

Summary Report

Re-thinking our Institutions

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 a discussion on climate change and security. 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 to respond efficiently to climate change threats.

Participants at the conference recognised that the debate around the sovereign debt crisis had overshadowed climate change. But CES President, Wilfried Martens, in opening the conference 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".

Noting the slow progress towards a new legally binding agreement on CO2 and other greenhouse gasses, the experts at the conference concluded that the mitigation of short-lived climate forcers (SLCFs) with their key role in air pollution reduction, climate protection and sustainable development could make a major contribution to buying time for more work on CO2. Initiatives such as the Climate & Clean Air Coalition, led by Sweden and Mexico, should be supported.

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 Vulnerability of Europe

The higher temperatures caused by climate change are already redrawing the world map, causing dramatic changes in the environment. The rise in sea levels is threatening to submerge islands and coastal areas. Droughts and floods are affecting river flows on which our economies are reliant. These physical changes are now increasingly understood but little is known of the impacts of these changes on societies. Decision makers in Europe need to understand the relationship between geophysics, geopolitics and geoeconomics. We have built our infrastructure into an existing environment which we assumed would not change. Many European cities are located on river

valleys. They were designed for different population sizes, requiring different sorts of infrastructure. With climate change, they are increasingly subject to flooding. Europe's vulnerability also results from its energy dependency. The melting of the permafrost is damaging Russia's oil and gas pipelines to Europe, thereby threatening our energy supply and security. As the physical environment changes there is no doubt that Europe will be severely affected, especially if the disruption of the Jetstream and the accelerated disintegration of the Greenland Glacier continue at current rates.

Many international legal instruments are not designed to cope with this changing environment. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, for instance, which guarantees a 200 miles Exclusive Economic Zone off coastlines does not foresee the case of disappearing islands or retreating coastlines due to sea level rise. In the same way that physical infrastructure becomes disconnected from our environment, our legal infrastructure becomes disconnected. 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 exempt.

Good news - if we avoid living in silos

Our current institutional framework for dealing with climate change is accidental, inefficient and over-stretched. It encourages a tendency for scientists and decision-takers to live in separate silos, rather than reach for integrated solutions. The classic example of the right approach is the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which entered into force on 1 January 1989. It successfully phased out 100 ozone depleting chemicals from 240 industry sectors by almost 100% and had a considerable "side effect" on climate. Reports show that the Montreal Protocol, between 1990 and 2010, had done about 20 times more for climate protection than we are trying to get from the Kyoto Protocol. It achieved some 200 billion tons of CO2 equivalent mitigation. According to guest experts one of the strengths of the Montreal Protocol is that it started small, learned and strengthened over time. It adjusted quickly as science progressed, changed schedules as well as integrating more chemicals. The Montreal Protocol taught us something important about disaggregating the climate challenge. It is not one monolithic problem; it is a package of problems. CO2 has an extremely long lifetime as 25% of it stays in the atmosphere for many centuries. Curbing CO2 emissions is an extremely important and necessary step for the stability of our climate, but it will only allow us to control our long term temperatures. 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. If HFCs were integrated in the Montreal Protocol, we would avoid the emissions of another 100 billion tons of CO2 equivalent. “That is the biggest, fastest and crispest bite out of the climate problem we can get and the cost for the public would be pennies per ton of CO2 equivalent”, according to Durwood Zaelke, President of the Institute for Governance and Sustainable Development.

The Military Perspective

Traditional paradigms of security are no longer enough in the emerging environment caused by climate change. Both military officers and parliamentarians recognise the importance of developing contingency planning to deal with the consequences of climate change such as extreme weather events and mass migration. Military preparation is key. It was argued that one way to improve military preparation is to increase civilian-military co-operation. The aim of the IES Military Advisory Council, chaired by Air Marshal (ret) AK Singh, is to bridge this gap by promoting

increased communication between the civilian and military worlds as well as encouraging best practice and expertise to be shared amongst the global military.

The military need to analyse better the various connections and manifestations of climate change as a security problem in the long term and to mainstream climate change concerns within their own structures. There should be modules on climate change issues in all military education. A panel of senior officers agreed that the military faced a strategic challenge that requires thinking beyond our normal horizons. It requires cross-government action, public-private partnerships, and new and evolving international institutions. While the military have started to address their own use of energy, a lot of work still needs to be done to decarbonise military operations. "We are the great gas guzzlers of the world", said one naval officer, adding that an "aircraft carrier moves 12 inches on a gallon of fuel". A green revolution in military thinking would significantly reduce its impact on the environment and the climate as well as the cost and risks of operations.

The Choices for Europe

Having heard the evidence, the conference turned to discuss the options for Europe. After interventions from senior members of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Environment Committee and the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence, it was agreed that the subject offered a major opportunity for the European Parliament to ensure that the European External Action Service give these matters the proper and urgent attention which they deserve. It was noted that while Europe had taken the lead on climate change issues with the Solana Report and its support for rapid change on greenhouse gasses, it had recently failed to carry through its economic logic into the world of foreign policy and defence. Concluding the Conference, IES Vice Chairman Tom Spencer and CES Director, Tomi Huhtanen thanked speakers and participants and stressed that the issue of climate and security will remain high on the agendas of CES and IES. They will be publishing a pamphlet on Climate Change & Security in June that will incorporate insights gained at this conference.

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Download Conference Material: http://www.envirosecurity.org/ccis/climateinstitutions/2012.php

"When one has cancer, one doesn't wait for the manifestation of its full dimensions before one begins treatment. The same is true with climate change. We may not know the full dimensions, we don't know everything about it but we do know enough that it is time to take action."

Wendell King, Brigadier General, US Army Retired,
Dean of the US Army Command and General Staff College, Ft Leavenworth