



FOI-IES Symposium
on
“The Geopolitics of Climate Change”
Brussels, 23 April 2008



Highlights

What will be the geopolitical consequences of climate change? What does climate change imply in terms of energy security? How should the EU see the Arctic?

After reiterating that, with regards to climate change, the costs of inaction largely outclass the costs of mitigation and adaptation, Peter Halden insisted on the necessity to proceed with caution when linking climate change to 'traditional' security. Militarisation and securisation of climate change may have problematic results on international relations in general as well as on mitigation of and adaptation to climate change in particular, Halden said. He concluded by saying that the climate, in itself, is not a threat. Instead, the consequences of climate change are conditioned by the institutional, social, economic, political and historical context of the societies facing them. Whether climate change will be a causal factor in increasing the risk of conflict depends on existing patterns of intra- and inter-state politics as much as it does on the effects of climate change.

The debate was followed by presentations on the Strategic Importance of the Arctic by John Patrick Crump, the Geopolitics of Energy Security by Lucia van Geuns and the EU Approach to Climate Change and International Security by Ikaros Moushouttas. John Crump introduced the problematic of the Arctic, a vast and resource-rich region in which neighbouring countries show a growing interest. Crump explained that the Arctic is seriously hit by climate change, with a rate of warming twice as high as the rest of the world. The melting of winter ice, however, opens new trade routes as well as new accesses to fossil fuels which will constitute elements of conflicts if no preventive international agreements are reached. In concluding, Crump insisted in the necessity to work in close cooperation with the indigenous people of the Arctic. Finally, Tom Spencer, who moderated the debate, pleaded for a greater integration of the Arctic in the EU Neighbourhood Policy.

Lucia van Geuns approached the problematic of fossil-fuels and fossil-based economies in a context of exploding demand whereas oil and gas fields appear inequitably distributed and state-owned companies predominant. The likely decreasing access to such energies for Western countries should create incentives for energy diversification and the development of new transportation technologies. To this end, one of the participants expressed his thought that oil price should reach even higher levels in order to open new markets for the development of new technologies.

Finally, Ikaros Moushouttas spoke about the high priority given by the EU to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, highlighting though that the security aspects were not yet at the core of the EU strategy. Moushouttas explained that the Commission and Council's secretariat organised a workshop last September in cooperation with international organisations leading to a report which was presented to European leaders last March. Followed by a set of general recommendations, the report pointed that "climate change is already having a profound impact on international security, that this impact will intensify in the years ahead and that we need urgent action to safeguard our own interests while contributing to world peace and stability". In concluding, Moushouttas stressed that this report is not the end of a process but rather the beginning of one, opening the doors for future concerted action across the pillars of the European Union policies. If supported by the EU Presidency, the report will hopefully soon bring the security aspects of climate change on the table of a proposed "European Security Council".