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Policy brief

The EU and Climate Security

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Summary:

What does a warmer world mean for European security? This policy brief provides an overview of the strategic landscape that Europe faces and sets out practical recommendations on how European institutions should respond to the risks and opportunities of a changing climate.

Climate change as security risk for the EU

As recognised in the new EU Global Strategy, managing climate change risk is essential to Europe's security and prosperity¹. Overwhelming scientific evidence shows that a continual rise in greenhouse gas emissions is projected to further warm the planet, increase the frequency and impact of extreme weather events, and cause long-lasting climactic changes, threatening severe and irreversible consequences for people and ecosystems. These changes will have significant political, economic, and social impacts by undermining the pillars of stability: food, water and other resources. The World Bank estimates that by 2025, 2.4 billion people will face absolute water scarcity². In 2012, Oxfam estimated that the average price of staple foods such as maize could more than double by 2030³. These stressors are in turn likely to displace millions of people.

This presents a number of challenges for European policymakers. **The first involves systematic identification of the relevant risks for Europe.** This requires understanding both potential mechanisms of disruption as well as the geographies that matter most for Europe – both in terms of where the impacts will affect European interests and where Europe will most effectively be able to respond. It also involves effort to coordinate, streamline, and integrate the different risk assessment and risk management mechanisms used by different institutions and member states (see below).

¹ EEAS, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy," 2016.

https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/eugs_review_web.pdf

² World Bank Group, "At a glance: Water," 2016. <http://water.worldbank.org/node/84122>

³ OXFAM "Extreme weather, extreme prices - The costs of feeding a warming world," Oxfam Issue Briefing September 2012. <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/20120905-ib-extreme-weather-extreme-prices-en.pdf>

For potential mechanisms, decision-makers can draw upon approaches such as that used in *A New Climate for Peace*⁴, which identifies seven compound climate-fragility risks: local resource competition (particularly over water and land), livelihood insecurity and migration, extreme weather events and disasters, volatile food prices, transboundary water management, and rising sea levels. Importantly, climate change is a threat multiplier whose impacts will be felt within a wider context. It must be assessed with other drivers of fragility, such as changing demographics, poor land management, weak governance, and local conflict trends.

Because of its domestic resilience and geographic luck (models predict a higher likelihood of disruptive climate impacts in tropical and subtropical than in temperate regions⁵) the most striking climate security risks for Europe are likely to arise beyond its borders. If Europe wants to ensure long-term stability in its neighbourhood, it needs to address the root causes of instability. Climate change is already a significant migration driver, creating tension in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), which is critical for European interests. As the region suffers its worst drought in 900 years, the potential for conflicts over water, disruptions of food systems, and related mass displacement of people has dramatically increased. Beyond the southern neighbourhood, the EU also has an interest in reducing risks elsewhere which can spread quickly and affect European interests and partnerships.

A second challenge is to define a strategic framework for managing climate risks.

The EU currently does not have an overarching climate security strategy to help prioritise and facilitate the most effective responses to particular risks. Without such a framework, it can be difficult to choose whether clear

⁴ A New Climate for Peace is an independent report and knowledge platform commissioned by members of the G7. See www.newclimateforpeace.org

⁵ IPCC Fifth Assessment Report - Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability – Part B Regional Aspects.

climate change risks require new institutions or processes rather than better integration of climate risk into existing processes. Addressing this requires a clear understanding of European interests and security priorities, including answering the fundamental question of what is the core objective of an EU risk management strategy.

A third challenge is to build political will and member state cooperation so as to effectively implement the best responses.

As the EU Global Strategy makes clear, Europe is facing a long list of foreign policy challenges. It may prove difficult to keep climate risks high on the agenda when there are so many other pressing issues. The EU and its member states also have their own interests, security concerns, and limitations, which will impact where and how they choose to take action.

A fourth major challenge is to equip EU institutions to match appropriate responses to the identified risks.

Because there is such a range of risk mechanisms and geographies, actors working across a wide range of themes and regions are involved. Much of the work being done in development, diplomatic and climate adaptation spheres is undertaken separately, with each actor using their own risk assessments and operational responses. A particular challenge has been the integration of such a complex and cross-cutting issue into an institutional and policy environment that is itself undergoing considerable change. Just as climate security experts are beginning to identify the most important nodes for effective action, the mechanisms to affect those nodes are themselves evolving. This is particularly true for EU external policy, which has been slower to achieve cohesion in setting common priorities and shaping common institutions. A key component of this challenge will be to identify the best opportunities for investment in resilience. This can be especially difficult considering the lack of consensus over defining or measuring resilience.

Responses

The EU's new Global Strategy states that "Climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate potential conflict, in light of their impact on desertification, land degradation, and water and food scarcity". The Strategy considers climate change to be "a threat multiplier that catalyses water and food scarcity, pandemics and displacement".

Climate security challenges entered the European security discourse nearly a decade ago⁶. However, with the financial crisis and the institutional changes from the Lisbon Treaty, the issue did not rise higher on agendas until the last three years as European policymakers have focused more on the security, stability and migration challenges of its neighbourhood. Building on the EU Global Strategy and climate risk statements from the European Council⁷, there is greater emphasis on translating high level recognition of the problem into effective policy. It is encouraging that the EU is mainstreaming climate considerations into all relevant policy areas, and plans to dedicate 20% of its 2014-20 budget (approximately €180 billion) to climate change-related action.

Internally, the **2013 Adaptation Strategy** provides the framework for 'climate-proofing' EU action, ensuring that Europe's infrastructure is resilient, promoting the use of disaster insurance, funding cross-border water management, and expanding protection for areas with drought or fire risks. In terms of disaster management, the **EU Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)** is tasked with monitoring emergencies around the world and coordinating responses within

⁶ Notably via a joint 2008 paper from Javier Solana and the Commission EU, Climate Change and International Security, S113/08 (followed by a 2009 progress report) and via a 2008 review of the European Security Strategy which identified climate change as a threat to European security interests.

⁷ The European Council, for example, has called for the inclusion of climate vulnerability analysis into fragility/security and disasters risk assessments and for greater collaboration on the resulting risk-mitigation efforts.

and outside the EU. This has been buttressed by the new **Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**, “A disaster risk-informed approach for all EU policies”⁸, with a strong focus on resilience. These actions help build climate resilience within Europe and also help buttress external action on a range of climate issues, including by helping European credibility in climate talks.

Externally, climate security issues are on the radar at the EEAS and at the Commission, notably with DGs **DEVCO, ECHO and CLIMA**. A mapping process is underway to determine how the different EU institutions have begun to look at climate security and what initiatives they have in place. Different types of conflict and fragility risk assessments, for example, are undertaken in different DGs within the Commission, with different ways of incorporating climate change impacts.

A range of risk assessment and risk management mechanisms exist, and climate challenges have increasingly been integrated within them, though not always with a climate security focus. With the turbulence of the Middle East more directly affecting European security interests in recent years, efforts at buttressing and streamlining risk assessment and crisis management efforts have taken hold, with climate-related security challenges increasingly being considered.

For the development community, there is a challenge to integrate climate security thinking into established development and humanitarian processes, which are themselves not far removed from debates over the connections between politics, security and their central fields of endeavour⁹. DEVCO, for example, works with the least developed (and least resilient) countries via the **Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA+)** and

supports a variety of activities dealing with adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction and desertification. It also contributed to the **New Climate for Peace** project and has launched a joint EU-UNEP initiative on climate and security in fragile states, using funding from the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace¹⁰.

At the **EEAS**, climate diplomacy has become a distinct issue area, of which climate security is now a central pillar. The latest **Climate Diplomacy Action Plan** is being developed and, with the blessing of the European Council,¹¹ will also prioritise climate security issues for European diplomats to bring to the table at multilateral and bilateral discussions. A focus on resilience is also becoming entrenched, with the resilience of states and societies to the south and east as a key part of the **Global Strategy**

In terms of European cooperation, there is broad agreement at the political level of the importance of climate security (see Council decisions mentioned above). Cooperation on climate issues more broadly has also been facilitated by the rejuvenation of the **green diplomacy network of European diplomats** working on climate issues, a potentially important platform for expanding the discussion of climate security issues. And while European policy cooperation is criticized for foundering on the diverse interests of the 28, the existence of 28 potential centres of excellence can also be an advantage. This is the case for climate security, for example, with German leadership on cross-border water sharing initiatives and Dutch support for the Planetary Security Initiative.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/1_en_document_travail_service_part1_v2.pdf

⁹ See Diane de Gramont and Thomas Carothers, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution*, Carnegie, 2013.

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https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/ics-p-aap2015-climate_change_and_security-20151105_en.pdf

¹¹

<http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6061-2016-INIT/en/pdf>

Potential areas of focus

As the EU seeks to shape responses to the climate security risks that it sees as priorities, four related areas are worth special attention.

(1) Integrating climate security priorities into broader development work. For example, the EU plans to boost investments in Africa and EU Neighbourhood countries through the EU External Investment Plan (EIP) which aims to leverage EUR 88 billion for the region, including through work with the European Investment Bank's Resilience Initiative in the Southern Neighbourhood and Western Balkans. Though the plan has not explicitly targeted climate security, much of its work can be important in addressing climate security risks. EU HR Federica Mogherini has said that these investments "will support our partners' economies and societies, as well as our strategic foreign policy goals, from security to global development."¹² In principle the Fund will support sustainable development, but past support packages have largely focused on incentivizing democratic reforms, building civil society and supporting SMEs. These are important, but it is also important to systematically address other potential instability drivers such as exposure to energy and water shocks.

(2) Climate-smart migration management. Migration can be caused by multiple interacting factors, making it difficult (and pointless) to distinguish "climate refugees" from those more affected by political or economic drivers. However, we must recognize how climate change can exacerbate other drivers of instability which in turn encourage migration. In Syria, for example, a record-long drought drove 1.5 million rural people into urban areas ill equipped to handle them, exacerbating tensions already high in a repressive country with rapid population growth and few jobs. While in Europe, the focus is understandably on the migrants reaching Europe (in 2015, more than one million people arrived from Syria and

elsewhere, while at least 3,700 people lost their lives or went missing at sea)¹³, it is also important to understand that earlier internal migration within Syria and its potential role in instigating the wider crisis. This complexity can create a temptation to try and keep people where they are, which is at best a short term solution so long as root drivers are not addressed. The EU, for example, has in the past made deals with North African states and Turkey to help contain flows to Europe, but policy responses need to be developed that can address underlying drivers, while also providing support to migrants and those affected by their departure, travels and resettlement.

This will require making better information available to policymakers and a new approach to development strategies, notably in the MENA region, which focuses more strongly on building economic and social resilience. There is also a need for better analysis of factors that cause migration which can then be linked to the design of investment packages for regions at risk of instability. Improved capacities for migration management will also be required so that activities can be focused on all parts of the migration cycle: before migration (DRR, policy dialogues, adaptation work and planned migration from degraded lands) during migration (looking at temporary protection rules and mechanisms) and after migration.

(3) Emphasize conflict and crisis prevention. This topic has risen quickly on the EU's political agendas. Unlike the development arena, which has many important programs and initiatives into which climate security concerns can be mainstreamed, there is an underdevelopment of the conflict assessment, conflict prevention, and crisis management fields within European governments. This capacity must be strengthened and will need greater political support. The launch of the new Global Strategy represents a critical opportunity to deliver on promises to integrate climate security risks into a broader strategic

¹² http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-3002_en.htm

¹³ Human Rights Watch (2016), Europe's Migration Crisis

framework of EU foreign, development and security policy.

(4) Understand role of militaries and defence ministries. With the likelihood and severity of climate-related disasters expected to increase over the coming decades, the role of European militaries in disaster prevention and response may grow. The military can provide important search and rescue capacity, logistical support, manpower and material resources. Climate impacts may also affect military capabilities by diverting resources toward disaster response and away from other priorities, as well as putting logistics, infrastructure, and transportation systems at risk (notably in coastal areas), and changing the environmental conditions in which militaries train and operate. But for handling international climate security risks, the important prevention and risk reduction work will be led by development and diplomacy agencies, while militaries are more likely to play a more responsive role in crises. Additionally, while European militaries have increasingly put climate change risks on their radar¹⁴, unlike in the USA, they have been less likely to lead on climate security debates within their governments, much less at the EU level. This transatlantic institutional difference is worth considering when creating strategies for preventing or responding to climate security risks.

(5) Identification and assessment of risks: In the face of serious security threats and uncertainty, EU institutions and member states will need to consider new approaches to managing climate risk. One possible approach would be the creation of an independent body, such as a "European Energy and Climate Risk Observatory". This body would be responsible for monitoring systemic risks and recommending appropriate policy responses with a view of building consensus on the nature of the risk landscape through objective and evidence-based analysis. Without accurate

data and tools, EU decision-makers will fail to identify and address key challenges.

(6) International cooperation and learning: While planning is often only in early stages, some countries are actively integrating climate change into their national defence and security strategies. In the US, for example, Secretary of State Kerry launched a task force to integrate climate change and security issues into U.S. foreign policy; President Obama recently released a Memorandum on Climate Change and National Security to ensure that climate change-related impacts are fully considered in the development of national security doctrine, policies, and plans. While it is unclear whether the new administration will continue these efforts, the institutional knowledge built up over the past several years could still provide valuable lessons for Europe. Climate also featured prominently in the 2015 UK National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review. The G7 Working Group on Climate and Fragility has also made progress in this area including through a review of existing risk assessments of G7 partners and action proposals for the next two years. The EU can learn from and build upon these measures as well as exploring opportunities to collaborate with other partner countries that are pursuing their own climate security objectives.

¹⁴ See <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/la-dgris/evenements/conference-internationale-climat-et-defense-14-octobre-2015>