



OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid

OSCE CiO Event

“Advancing the role of the OSCE in the field of climate and security”

Wednesday, 29 September 2021, Schwedenhaus, Vienna 4 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Ambassadors, Colleagues,

I see climate and security as one of the biggest challenges of our times.

So I thank the **Swedish Chairpersonship** for organizing this timely debate, and the **Stockholm International Peace Research Institute** for their work on a *Policy Brief* to inform our discussion.

As **COP 26** approaches, every day we hear new worrying facts, figures and forecasts.

Last month, the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** released an alarming report. Climate change is rapidly intensifying and no region on earth is immune.

More recently, the UN warned us that by the end of this century, the global average temperature could be **2.7 degrees Celsius** higher than the pre-industrial level.

We are clearly off-target toward reaching the Paris Agreement objective of keeping global warming well below 2 C – ideally 1.5 C.

Last week’s **high-level open debate at the UN Security Council** on “climate and security” touched upon various important aspects that I’m sure we’ll get to in the course of this event.

Dear colleagues,

Climate change is already making the achievement of many **Sustainable Development Goals** less likely. So the situation is truly dramatic.

It is affecting everything from geopolitics to financial systems, capital flows to migration.

Take agriculture. The World Economic Forum tells us that 400 billion dollars per year is lost in productivity because already half of our agricultural land is degraded.

Further land degradation could **reduce global food productivity** by 12 percent, thereby **increasing food prices** by 30 percent over the next 25 years.

These are dramatic figures in terms of our ability to feed a growing world population.

Consider also the exponential increase in weather and climate related disasters.

Figures cited by the World Meteorological Organization show that their number has increased fivefold over the past 50 years, killing more than 2 million people and costing 3.64 trillion dollars in total losses.

In the **OSCE region**, it has been a summer of extremes, with unprecedented heatwaves, floods, and wildfires. And according to EU scientists, Europe had its warmest summer on record this year.

Dear colleagues,

Climate change is affecting everyone but not everyone is equally affected.

Vulnerable groups, including women and girls, are at higher risk.

As we speak, young people from all around the world are discussing in Milan concrete proposals on some of the most pressing issues on the climate agenda

There is now compelling evidence that climate change can affect our security, especially when it converges with and multiplies other factors such as inequalities and resource constraints, and when it pushes people to abandon their homes and seek refuge elsewhere.

These **fundamental changes**, along with a **crowded and complex risk landscape**, call for effective **multilateralism** and **comprehensive and co-operative approaches**.

The OSCE has so far shown impressive flexibility and innovation in addressing various global challenges in its region. We need to be prepared to **keep pace with climate change as well**.

Speaking of innovation, let's go back to our founding document – the **Helsinki Final Act**.

Already in 1975, it recognized climate phenomena as a common challenge.

It called on the OSCE participating States to co-operate for research on, I quote, “*changes in climate*” and “*human adaptation to climatic extremes*”.

In 2007, the **Madrid Declaration** described climate change as a “*long-term challenge*” and acknowledged a “*complementary role*” for the OSCE “*as a regional security organization under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter*”.

The time is ripe to develop this role in partnership with the UN and others.

Let's look at **what we have done so far**:

Since 2007, the OSCE has provided a **platform for formal and informal dialogue** on climate change and its implications for security among its 57 participating States and with the Mediterranean and Asian Partners.

Aspects of climate change have regularly featured on the agenda of the Economic and Environmental Forum and the phenomenon itself has been increasingly referred to in many of our discussions.

Climate change has been raised in OSCE Committee meetings, at a dedicated OSCE Security Days event – and, not least, during the Informal Working Group sessions of Structured Dialogue.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has provided further opportunities for debate.

For almost a decade now, we have been working on concrete projects, together with our participating States in **Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe**, and more recently in **South-Eastern Europe**, to raise awareness on climate change and security, and to identify and map climate-related security risks at regional levels.

In terms of transboundary co-operation measures, South-Eastern Europe is now leading the way.

We work in close collaboration with our field operations, regional and international partners, specialized organizations, and our donors.

In our current project, we are partnering with adelphi – a Berlin-based think-tank.

So far, **42 geographical hotspots** and **multiple regional and sub-regional challenges** have been identified in **four regions**.

Over **700 local stakeholders** representing governmental agencies, civil society and academia have been involved.

By the way, 50 percent of these were female.

In our next steps, we will be looking to address **some of the identified challenges in priority hotspot areas and start working with local stakeholders on developing joint co-operation measures**

We will soon start with the Shar/Šara Mountains in South-Eastern Europe to facilitate joint efforts for the conservation of the area to maximize economic, social and environmental benefits.

We will also continue our activities in the South Caucasus and focus on wildfire management in a bilateral context (between Armenia and Georgia and Azerbaijan and Georgia).

As we secure more resources, we will move to fully implementing the regional and cross-regional components of the project in all four project regions, including also Central Asia and Eastern Europe.

Looking at the future, let me give you **seven interrelated/connected thoughts**.

We can advance the role of the OSCE by:

1. **Reinforcing our dialogue** and driving a positive, unified agenda that recognizes the risks but also the opportunities. This includes show-casing the benefits of climate co-operation as a means to build relations of confidence and trust.
2. **Ensuring that climate action is more sensitive to the security issues at play** – after all this is a security organization and we can offer a unique perspective to the debate.
3. **Making our own conflict prevention activities and mechanisms become gradually more sensitive to the risk multiplier effect of climate change**.

4. **Developing our foresight tools** to better assess climate-related security risks, preparedness and early warning
5. **Organising awareness-raising and capacity building activities** for various stakeholders, as we have already started to do.
6. Enhancing **thematic co-operation and partnerships** with relevant regional and international organizations and specialized agencies at headquarters level and in the field (with UNFCCC and UNDPPA to start with).
7. Fully **leveraging our comprehensive approach and broad-ranging expertise**, especially in the Second Dimension.

Let me explain this last point in a little more detail.

Investing in climate is about investing in our prosperity and sustainable growth.

According to an OECD study, drawing together the growth and climate agendas and developing a coherent package of climate protection, structural reforms and fiscal incentives, rather than treating climate as a separate issue, could add 2.8 percent to average economic output in G20 countries by 2050.

Unlocking positive forces should also work in the OSCE context.

The OSCE can be an important platform to exchange know-how, good practices and lessons learned on a wide range of issues, including green transition, technology and innovation, as well as digitalization for strengthening climate resilience, adaptation, sustainable growth and prosperity.

With this final thought, I now look forward to **SIPRI's** presentation, their findings and recommendations, as well as the insights by the **UNFCCC** and **UNDPPA**, and, of course, the views and contributions of our **participating States**.

Thank you.