

Climate Change in an EU Security Context - the case of EEAS

The understanding of climate-induced security risks has improved greatly within the European Union since the mid-2000s. The strategic relevance of climate change and the implications it has for other policy areas – humanitarian aid, development and conflict prevention – are being increasingly acknowledged in official documents and European Council conclusions. This policy brief summarises the efforts made in the European Union to develop a narrative on climate security during the past decade and outlines ways in which rhetorical commitment can be translated into practice.

The strength of the EU as a foreign policy actor lies in its ability to combine a wide variety of economic and political policy tools, ranging from aid and trade to military and civilian missions in third countries. As the security implications of climate change for e.g. international relations, global trading systems and people's livelihood are being increasingly acknowledged, the EU has slowly incorporated climate change into its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSFP). The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, can be seen as a response to demands for a more coordinated and visible security and foreign policy. The treaty stands as a cornerstone of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and led to the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The EEAS supports the High Representative (HR) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and is the EU's node for diplomatic and external relations. With this ambition to respond to global issues in a comprehensive way, the EU should be well-equipped to address a cross-cutting issue such as climate change. During the past decade, several important steps have been taken in developing climate security strategies within the EU. A key question concerns the degree to which such formal documents have been translated into efficient and practical responses to climate-induced security risks.

This policy brief summarises a recent analysis of the EU's response to climate security, with the focus on the strategies developed at the EEAS, and examines whether climate security is approached in an integrated manner. The empirical basis for the analysis has been interviews with representatives working at the EEAS, together with official documents indicating the direction in the EU's climate security discourse.

Momentum for climate security

Responding to climate change, especially in terms of mitigating the greenhouse gases causing climate change, has been part of EU foreign policy since the 1990s. Promoting climate change mitigation through multilateral dialogue and technological standards was easily incorporated in a regulatory and civilian power such as the

EU, whereas "hard" security concerns remained a task for national defence ministries or international security organisations such as NATO. Thus environmental and climate issues were remarkably neglected in the EU security discourse in early 2000.

Two distinct policy areas merged into climate security

In 2007, several important initiatives coincided and came to pull two previously distinct policy areas – climate and security – together. Internationally, the IPCC released its fourth assessment report (AR4) and the United Nations Security Council held its first ever debate on climate change. This could to some extent explain the sudden interest in climate security at EU level, manifested in a joint report by Javier Solana, HR at the time, and the European Commission. The report, *Climate Change and International Security*, describes climate change as a "threat multiplier" that "exacerbates existing trends, tensions and instability". It was released in 2008 and is often referred to as the first step towards an integration of policy tools to address climate security in the EU. Shortly after its release, a revised European Security Strategy was published, recognising climate change not only as a global challenge, but also as a "key threat" to EU's own security interests.

Acute crises set the climate security agenda

Along with formal discussions on the role of climate change in foreign and security policies, real-life events also shaped the climate security discourse. It is therefore important to stress that, in contrast to the initiatives taken in 2007-08, the EU's crisis management largely emerged in an *ad hoc* manner, formed by acute crises demanding a response rather than foresight and strategic outlooks. The financial crisis of 2008, Russia's use of energy supplies as political leverage and the increasing numbers of migrants coming to the EU are three examples of more immediate crises that risk crowding out climate security from the political agenda. However, making the EU less dependent on Russian gas or addressing the root causes of migration could have a clear connection with climate policies, but this has not been dealt with coherently to date.

The EU response to climate security

As the “threat multiplier” approach suggests, the response to climate change in EU foreign and security policies has so far been to mainstream climate security into existing strategies and instruments. Three policy areas have been identified as particularly relevant.

Multilateralism and climate diplomacy

In light of the slow pace of progress in international climate negotiations, in 2011 the EEAS and the European Commission jointly produced the paper *EU Climate Diplomacy for 2015 and Beyond* urging for a stronger role of foreign policy in international climate policy. They suggested that this should be done based on three strands of action; promoting climate action, supporting implementation of this action and continuing the work on climate change and international security. Climate diplomacy has since grown into a distinct policy area with regard to strategic priorities in diplomatic dialogue and initiatives, and the security implications are being increasingly acknowledged. The conclusions¹ reached by the Foreign Affairs Council in the aftermath of COP 21 in Paris marked a step forward in emphasising the direct and indirect international security impacts of climate change, highlighting migration, food security and reliable access to resources such as water and energy.

Development and conflict prevention

While there is growing consensus among conflict researchers on pathways linking climate change with increased risks of violent conflict, this has not been translated into a significant change in the ways in which the EU addresses root causes of conflict. In order to find examples of initiatives where climate change is incorporated into the realm of conflict prevention at EU level, it is necessary to examine the policy area of development and the ways in which climate change and variability have an impact on fragility and poverty. The long-term goals of promoting stability and peace through humanitarian aid and assistance are also well-suited to incorporation of goals on long-term challenges such as climate change. Since the EU, together with its member states, constitutes the world’s largest development assistance and humanitarian aid donor, providing more than €1 billion annually, there is great potential for addressing climate security issues. This is already done to some extent through various financial instruments, such as the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), which aims at building capacity in third countries to address specific global and trans-regional threats, including climate change. However, financial instruments seem to be developed in a strategic void. Instead of

compiling development, security and climate change issues into long-term strategies, social, economic and environmental issues are treated individually. Several interviewees in the present analysis stated that the sustainable development goals in Agenda 2030 could have an impact on policy coherence, but the interviewees were also clear that recognition of the links between climate change, poverty and conflict has so far not led to any significant upgrade in the EU’s conflict prevention efforts.

The comprehensive approach

Interviews with representatives within the EU revealed great awareness at EU level and among member states of the security implications following climate change. What is needed is a strategy explaining why the EU should become more involved in climate security and, particularly, its comparative advantage over other global actors. One such advantage, at least in theory, is the ability of the EU to respond with a comprehensive approach. Defined narrowly, such an approach is evident in civilian-military cooperation in CSDP missions. However, the former HR Catherine Ashton argued for a broader interpretation, letting ‘comprehensive’ epitomise the use of the many various instruments at the disposal of the EU “in a strategically and coherent and effective manner”². In this approach, the CSDP is only one of several instruments.

Nevertheless, the EU is not a strategically and coherent foreign policy actor. There are a vast number of institutional and procedural shortfalls, which have prevented coherent EU external action. The negative effects of climate change, which are non-antagonistic, cross-sectoral and requiring long-term responses, are therefore especially difficult to address. The conceptual confusion between e.g. securitisation and militarisation has reinforced the difficulty. It can be argued that the EU was to some extent over-enthusiastic about the benefits of CSDP missions and military intervention some years ago, only to find itself now at the other end of the spectrum. Thus instead of sending troops all over the world and expecting them to solve all kinds of challenges, the comprehensive approach is now invoked with the opposite argument, that the military can do little or nothing and that post-conflict peace building should be outsourced and handled by regional organisations, with no military engagement from the EU. Recent CSDP missions in the Horn of Africa, or in Sudan and Niger, have been very modest.

¹ *European Climate Diplomacy after COP21* (FAC, 2016)

² *Preparing the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence* (EEAS HR, 2013 p.3)

Implications for policy

Institutional integration requires strategic guidance

Climate change is a cross-cutting issue, spanning several thematic issues such as economics, energy and security, as well as different geographical regions. Thus, crisis management, multilateralism, thematic analysis and geographical coverage are equally important in a comprehensive approach to climate security. However, a comprehensive approach is a method, not a strategy, and it does not specify *how* the EU should respond, but instead presents a platform for cooperation. Several interviewees raise concerns that, despite several initiatives on policy coherence between e.g. development, security and climate action, the EU is still divided into silos and practitioners still think and act in terms of their own mandate and territory. An updated security strategy describing why and when the EU should engage in climate security could contribute to a more coherent EU response. In the absence of such a strategy, the way forward according to the interviewees is to engage in practical projects in regions where climate change will have an effect on security. The development of the Arctic region, migration to the EU and fresh water scarcity in EU's neighbourhood are some examples cited by interviewees of issues that would require an integrated response.

Integrating climate change into conflict analysis requires resources

The interviews revealed that preventative efforts and upstream strategies receive less attention, and fewer resources, than immediate crisis response and geographical coverage. When the EEAS receives additional resources, these are primarily used to strengthen EU delegations rather than thematic expertise. Thus, the problem of personnel is argued to be much more important for resolving the difficulties in addressing climate security than the institutional set-up of the EU. The mandate and the expertise exist today, but given the spatial and temporal complexity of climate change, more immediate issues will require resources dedicated to addressing global and emerging issues. The present analysis identified a need to take into account the implications of climate change at an early stage of analysis and policy work, which would require strengthening of thematic units dealing with conflict prevention and climate change.

There are benefits and shortcomings of securitising climate change

Experts dealing with impacts of climate change come from various backgrounds and organisational settings. This reflects the multifaceted character of the challenges posed by climate change, which is important to bear in mind when framing climate change as a security threat. The present analysis indicated that the inability to reach policy coherence in climate security might be a result not

only of institutional barriers or lack of resources, but also of conceptual confusion and even deliberate efforts to separate the development, security and climate domains. For example in contrast to CSDP, humanitarian aid is based on needs rather than political negotiations and mixing these two issues could risk compromising the underlying principles of e.g. impartiality and neutrality which are central in aid.

About the policy brief

This policy brief is a summary of the report *Climate Change in an EU Security Context – The Case of the European External Action Service*. By analysing official documents and policy papers, the report provides a background of the EU's climate security discourse and describes ongoing efforts to integrate climate change into various tools and instruments for conflict prevention. Through interviews, primarily with representatives from the EEAS, the report provides discussions on the difficulties of translating theoretical knowledge and political ambition into practical application and geographical strategies. The report was produced within a project funded by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

For the full report, see Sonnsjö, H. & Bremberg, N. (forthcoming) *Climate Change in an EU Security Context – The Case of the European External Action Service*. Stockholm: Stockholm University.

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