

# IT'S THE SECURITY, STUPID!

## HOW GREENS COULD SHAPE THE EU'S CLIMATE SECURITY POLICY

ARTICLE BY

**DELPHINE  
CHALENÇON &  
TOBIAS HEIDER**

Whether we are comfortable with it or not, security is now a key problem to address, on which European citizens expect their politicians to take the lead and present clear solutions. Yet, despite being the most life-threatening challenge of this century and despite numerous warnings from experts in fields from agriculture and health to the military, the direct and indirect security threats posed by global warming continue to be absent from the public debate.

**T**oday, in every Member State of the European Union, citizens are feeling the effects of what is now becoming an increasingly unstable world. Our times are marked by the Paris, Brussels, and Berlin terrorist attacks, the war in Ukraine, the fall of Aleppo, and most recently by the first political decisions made by the Trump administration.

With a series of important European elections coming up in 2017, and the rise of an emotive public discourse about security and migration, it has become crucial to discuss European perspectives on climate security, particularly if the EU is serious about driving forward the Paris Agreement, the hard-won outcome of the 21st UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 21). Here the Greens can make a contribution and show that they have a broad understanding of today's challenges and can adopt a comprehensive and pragmatic approach towards protecting both our planet and EU citizens.

### **A NEW ERA MEANS NEW RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EU**

The latest geopolitical developments with the election of a climate-sceptic to the head of the US and the rise of new actors on the international

stage, such as China and India, coupled with a worrying rise in global temperatures in recent years, force Europe to assume its role in the fight against climate change and in the protection of democracy and stability.

2018 is supposed to be the year of ambition when it comes to the fight against global warming. At the COP21 in Paris, countries promised to come back to the negotiating table with more ambitious national action plans to reduce their emissions in order to increase the collective effort, as the current pledges still fall short of limiting temperature increases to safe levels.

All these elements, coupled with the upcoming European elections and the growing worries among both citizens and the governments about the migration issue, make it very important for Europe to influence the narrative and the ‘traditional’ focus on the security issue in order to connect the dots and widen its scope.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS OUR SECURITY**

Since the UN Security Council’s first debate on the matter in 2007, climate change has been understood as a threat multiplier, an accelerant of instability and physical and material insecurity. The fact that the Obama Administration was very vocal on the issue also helped to move the discussion forward: many will remember

Secretary of State Kerry addressing Europeans at the 2015 Glacier conference, stressing the direct link between climate change, food security, and armed conflict: “You think migration is a challenge to Europe today because of extremism. Wait until you see what happens when there’s an absence of water, an absence of food, or one tribe fighting against another for mere survival”.

These words are as clear a verbal wake-up call for the EU to address climate change as there could ever be, not only to mitigate its negative effects and improve the quality of life of its citizens but also to increase global security. This requires both vision and the appropriate policy tools. However, on the other side of the coin, it is obvious that, while climate change can generate insecurity, tensions, crisis, and even armed conflict, it is never the one and only factor leading to conflict. Policies that ‘only’ aim at reducing the negative impacts of climate change, or which directly reduce the speed and intensity of climate change, will never automatically become security policies. The issue is far more complex and therefore requires a more precise definition and concrete proposals.

## **THE STATE OF PLAY IN THE EU**

The EU has already engaged in quite a bit of reflection on what a climate security policy is and the role it could play on this matter: in

2008, High Representative Javier Solana and the European Commission presented some recommendations on climate change and international security and in 2012 the Council conclusions on EU Climate Diplomacy were followed by a joint European External Action Service (EEAS) and European Commission reflection paper on the matter. The same year, the European Parliament adopted a report drafted by Greens/EFA Member of European Parliament Indrek Tarand on *The role of the Common Security and Defence Policy in case of climate-driven crises and natural disasters* and the 28 national Parliaments, together with the European Parliament, adopted progressive language on “the security implications of climate change” at a conference on security and defence in 2015.

In 2016, the EU Global Strategy referred to climate change as a challenge similar to terrorism and hybrid threats, and framed climate change as “a threat multiplier that catalyses water and food scarcity, pandemics, and displacement” and promised to “increase climate financing, drive climate mainstreaming in multilateral fora, raise the ambition for review foreseen in the Paris agreement, and work for clean energy cost reductions”. The very same promises were made just after COP21 by the Council of the EU, whose conclusions on European climate diplomacy after COP21 promoted the idea of “climate risk assessments and support to capacity building”.

Unfortunately, while the issue is gaining growing interest within the Council, the Commission and the EEAS, we still lack a proper definition of climate security that could trigger concrete action or develop a well-defined policy. Europeans agree on the problem but have not yet taken sufficient steps to work towards a solution.

## **DEVELOPING A GEOGRAPHIC CLIMATE SECURITY POLICY**

In order to achieve more effective climate security, climate security must be understood in a geographical sense. Here, the report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2011, entitled *Livelihood security: Climate change, conflict and migration in the Sahel*, could serve as a blueprint for defining the parameters of such a policy. In this report, UNEP pointed out that current national, regional, and international conflicts are also climate-driven. This is the case in the Sahel region (which includes everything in and between the Sahara and Sudan), where UNEP found that rising temperatures have led to water shortages and have put several local groups – whose livelihoods are dependent on farming, fishing, or herding – under strong pressure, resulting in cases of violence and armed conflict. Terrorism, migration, and socio-economic tensions in the region are also due to the negative effects of climate change.

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In short, our approach to climate security would mean that a decision to act is dependent on the specific geographical area affected by climate change. Such a geographic climate security policy would first assess how climate change factors intersect with political and security factors in a given territory. Once such an analysis has led to a decision to act concerning a specific territory, the EU would then be able to plan the launch and activation of a variety of instruments. In practice this would mean that the EU would have to consider and integrate climate elements into all its relevant policy instruments, from traditional security and defence to development, energy, trade, agriculture and so on.

## CORNERSTONES OF GREENS' PROPOSALS FOR AN EU CLIMATE SECURITY POLICY

However, such a geographic or geopolitical EU climate security policy will only emerge if a number of institutional and political policies are in place. The Greens have already reflected on a series of concrete tools for the EU to put in place a robust European climate security policy and frame the debate. One fundamental element of this would be designing an EU climate security policy in a similar way as the EU's human rights policy, which would mean that the fight against climate change would be mainstreamed into all major external policy areas, programmes, and funds (such as neighbourhood policy, the development policy, humanitarian aid, the trade policy, but also of course its security and defence missions and operations).

A key measure would be the creation of an EU Special Representative on Climate Security to lead and coordinate. Work on this matter should include the Council, but also the EEAS, given the interrelations between climate, energy-related security, and defence. Support should be given to EU delegations in the countries most at risk so that they can have a better understanding of the situation on the ground and specific climate experts should be present in all relevant bodies of the EEAS. Concretely, Greens have recommended that a specific percentage of

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the budget of all external policies, regulations, funds, and trust funds should be channelled into climate change mitigation and preventive security measures in countries politically destabilised by climate change effects. A scheme based on sound knowledge of which zones are at greatest risk of conflict and instability and most vulnerable to climate change in the next 10 years would be particularly useful for countries such as the small Island States, given that their very existence is threatened by rapidly rising sea levels. The displacement of its people is a real concern that needs to be reflected upon and prevented well before the problem arises. Another element of this approach would require reducing European dependency – notably through divestment – on fossil fuel imports, in particular from certain autocratic countries with an aggressive foreign policy that threatens regional or even global peace and stability. Putting an end to gas and oil imports would contribute to reducing these states' ability to finance aggressive moves that hinder our collective security.

Despite attempts by Greens to put climate security on the EU agenda, this has not yet led to a meaningful definition and implementation. Awareness has been raised among decision-makers but the EU has not proposed anything more concrete. The definition and exact scope of a European climate security policy remains to be seen. Europe should step forward, agree on a geographical climate security policy, and implement concrete measures without further delay. Despite holding a positive view of migration overall, Greens argue that the EU and its Member States have to address the root causes of the forced displacement of people. One of these root causes is the deterioration of livelihoods due to negative climate change effects and in some cases political and security challenges as consequence. If the EU is able, by using all kinds of external instruments, to ease these climate change-induced tensions, the security situation in our neighbourhood will improve and spillovers into EU Member States will be less likely. The world is interdependent: security improvements in Northern Africa for example will automatically lead to security improvements on EU territory.

## THE WAY AHEAD

There is little hope the media or the current governments in place can be relied upon to raise awareness of the fact that climate change will exacerbate security threats across the globe, and thereby impact the EU and the lives of its citizens. This is why the Greens must step into the public debate and remind governments and EU institutions about what scientists and military experts have long been warning us about: that climate change aggravates the challenges and political instability in some foreign countries and that the EU and its citizens will sooner or later be affected and forced to take action.

This dimension of the fight against global warming should not be underestimated, particularly at a time when anger and frustration are growing among some EU citizens who oppose migration and who might support radical or more extreme political movements putting forward populist solutions that promise to put an end to it. It is in the interest of Europe to quickly widen the scope of the current debate on security and take decisive action if it is to live up to its commitments to preserve and defend peace, stability, human rights, and protect our climate.

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**DELPHINE CHALENÇON**

is responsible for the internal work of the Climate working group and the climate campaign for the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament.



**TOBIAS HEIDER**

is an adviser on foreign, security, and military affairs for the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament after having worked as parliamentary assistant, researcher and university teacher. He holds a PhD from the Free University of Berlin.