

OSCE contribution to UNECE 63rd Session – Panel II

The OSCE CiO, Minister Bakoyannis, stated during her Opening Speech to the OSCE Permanent Council on the 14th January that “Climate change constitutes the most serious long-term environmental threat to our region and beyond” and announced the start of a “multi-level dialogue on this issue, keeping in mind the need to avoid duplication of effort” and “underpin and empower the UN”. That is why I am most grateful to be able to participate in our discussions today, as a further testimony for very close co-operation between the UNECE and the OSCE on crucial issues.

It seems obvious to everyone that in 2009, addressing the security implications of climate change should be a priority for all UNECE member and OSCE participating States.

Together, we need to talk openly about the implications of climate change for instance in the high north, and the need to be prepared as new maritime transport routes open and new energy sources are accessible.

Yet only two months ago, the OSCE failed to adopt a one-page decision on the matter.

Meanwhile, we can feel the impacts of climate change: rising temperatures and extreme weather conditions; and it is clear to everyone that those are potential destabilizing factors: conflicts over access to clean water, migration due to desertification or flooding. This is what climate change might bring to the OSCE area and we cannot hide in front of this reality.

By studying and understanding the security implications that climate change will bring to the UNECE and OSCE area, we will fulfil our respective mandates to monitor economic and environmental challenges and threats to security and stability.

Let me also remind you that the OSCE adopted the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security in December 2007, which recognized that climate change is a long-term challenge and acknowledged that the OSCE has a complementary role to play in addressing this challenge in its specific region.

In essence, we can act together as an early warning watchdog of climate change-induced security threats. We can complement the UN conventions regulating climate change. We can empower them by preparing in depth studies in our region. And we have already been successful in co-operating on a number of issues in this regard. Let me mention in this context in particular, The Water Convention.

The OSCE strongly supports the UNECE in the implementation of the Aarhus Convention through the Aarhus Centres as well as several other joint initiatives including judicial trainings, etc. The Aarhus Centres provide an effective platform for the UNECE to mobilize interest and support of various stakeholders in the society for climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives.

Aarhus Centres are currently operational in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and soon also in Kazakhstan. Most of these centres are also actively involved in the national implementation of the UNECE Espoo Convention and its Strategic Environmental Assessment Protocol.

In this respect, by bringing together the government, civil society and in certain cases the business community, the Aarhus Centres can be instrumental for the UNECE in reaching out to the civil society for addressing challenges poised by climate change. Given the need for enhanced co-ordination and co-operation among relevant organizations in addressing climate change challenges, it is advisable to include in the UNECE Aarhus Convention Capacity Building Co-ordination Group, representatives of the regional/international organizations that are actively involved in the climate change area. The OSCE is already actively involved in this group along with EC, UNEP, REC, UNITAR and some leading NGOs.

Let me also inform you that my office is preparing a project proposal to develop a comprehensive analysis of the security implications of climate change in the OSCE region, with the aim of raising awareness, provide early warning and recommend measures for ensuring security and promoting co-operation among OSCE participating States. We look forward sharing the results of these activities with UNECE colleagues.

As climate change may result in placing more environmental stress on human systems, governments and communities will be challenged to adapt to growing environmental risks. A large portion of the OSCE region is already vulnerable to desertification, forest fires, and flooding which are projected to increase further under the conditions of global warming. These climate events will have transboundary consequences as states will have to grapple with such issues as water scarcity and migration. UNECE and OSCE, together with ENVSEC partners, will continue to provide states with a co-ordinated and co-operative approach to addressing the impacts of this emerging challenge.

Thank you for your attention.