

EU MONITOR

Examining Central and Eastern Europe's Climate Policy through a Security Lens

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- **As the global community gathers to tackle the current Covid-19 virus, the future of the European Commission's recent European Climate Law and European Green Deal remains unclear. Questioned even further by statements from some Central and Eastern European leaders calling for the green agenda to be abandoned in lieu of economic restoration in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis and causing further divisions within the EU on climate-related issues. However, if anything has taught us through this current crisis, is that global threats affect just that, the globe. The EU needs to find collective and unified approaches to tackle growing climate-related risks that pose both near and long-term security threats for the region.**
- **In addition, the growing links between climate change and security threats are insurmountable. Multilateral institutions like NATO, the EU and UN have made the connection and regard climate-related risks as an emerging threat. While the EU itself has taken the lead with ambitious goals, individual countries need to take a stronger approach including regions like Central and Eastern Europe. For countries in the CEE region where climate and security links are not strongly interconnected, and governments place internal and external security-related issues ahead of climate - can emphasizing the security aspects of climate-related risks help drive a more proactive approach to climate change policies beyond the EU framework? And if so, can it be further integrated into the region's already robust security agenda?**

Acclimating to Climate Change

According to the United Nations, climate change is the defining issue of our time. Possibly challenged now by the mounting Covid-19 pandemic, the short and long-term issues around climate change remain “global in scope and unprecedented in scale.”¹ From rising global temperatures, changing weather patterns to rising sea levels, the UN states that without drastic action today, adapting to these climate-related impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly.”² Currently, climate change continues to dominate the public and policy space particularly in response to a series of natural disasters that have had global repercussions. Namely, Japan’s earthquake prompting Fukushima to the recent California and Australian fires, proves that natural disasters do not discriminate nor recognize borders.

Finding cohesive approaches remain difficult as climate change becomes increasingly politically polarized and worsened by governments moving at glacial speeds to create effective policies and hampered by global leaders taking diverging and controversial positions towards the issue. Some hope remains even when the United States backed out of the Paris Agreement; the EU and other countries have stepped up to tackle climate change by creating progressive policies. However, as the world currently tackles the Covid-19, finding united and coordinated approaches towards both global issues remains challenging.

In addition, climate-related security risks are mounting and are defined by a large range of direct and indirect factors. According to the recently released World Climate and Security Report 2020 (WCSR 2020), climate security is at the intersection of where human security risks spill over into higher-order security risks.³ It has the ability to create political instability or intra-state conflict caused by major natural disasters and scarcity of

resources, involves significant military responses, mass displacements of peoples and threatens access to critical resources and infrastructure.⁴ Climate security has been described by many policy experts as a ‘threat multiplier’ that, in effect, intensifies already existing security risks, which can have a spillover effects in other regions that may not be directly impacted by that climate risk.

For countries in the CEE, climate change is growing in importance, but outside the framework of the EU, it remains a low priority. Instead, issues around growing instability in the EU neighborhood, regional, cyber, and energy security remain high and the link between climate and security has so far made little traction. However, as security institutions such as NATO urges effective climate change action and defines climate-related security risks as an emerging threat, it may create some reaction in Central and Eastern Europe especially as they remain strong members of the alliance and security consumers.

This analysis will outline the recent climate and security debate and propose how Central and Eastern Europe should be more proactive - beyond the EU platform - in integrating climate policy within its already robust security agenda.

Making the climate case

Global attempts have been made to ease the effects of climate change within the legal frameworks of the UN including the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2015 Paris Agreement, which set out to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius (and to pursue efforts to keep it below 1.5 degrees) and was ratified by 186 countries. The Paris Agreement was followed by the recent 2019 Climate Action Summit, which brought world leaders together to discuss “the multilateral process and to increase and accelerate climate action and ambition.”⁵

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>

² <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>

³ https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf

⁴ https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/climate-change/>

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In response, the EU has taken a bold approach by committing to uphold the Paris Agreement by identifying early on the risks associated with climate change and global warming⁶, and recently established the European Climate Law⁷ which proposes a legally binding EU-wide target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. EU Institutions and Member States would be “collectively bound to take the necessary measures at EU and national level to meet the target” which is at the heart of the European Commission’s new European Green Deal. However, as details emerge, backing of the deal has already proven to be controversial among Member States especially in fossil-fuel reliant regions like Central and Eastern Europe.

While the security implications of climate change are not explicitly noted in the European Green Deal nor a distinct policy field within EU foreign and security policy, the European Commission has stated that “doing nothing to combat these changes [climate] could force people to leave their homes and migrate, lead to conflicts and threats to security.”⁸ The EU’s climate security can be understood as a “cluster of different policy fields linked by the EU’s declared ambition to better respond to and ultimately prevent climate-related security risks.”⁹

The EU took efforts early on to integrate climate change into their development and foreign policy, which included an extensive climate diplomacy action plan through the Responsibility to Prepare (R2Prepare) framework.¹⁰ Issues around climate security are also prominently included in the EU’s Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, which states that “climate

change and environmental degradation exacerbate potential conflict” and refers to climate as “a threat multiplier that catalyzes water and food scarcity, pandemics and displacement”.

The WCSR 2020 report highlighted that no country will be spared the direct and indirect effects of climate change. Instead, the dynamics of climate change will impact regions in Europe unevenly due to both differences in “geography as well as policies and capabilities.” It warns that several “near-term” issues such as “growing economic inequality, aging societies, high youth unemployment, aging populations, and stagnant economic growth” will be exacerbated by climate stress in areas such as the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe.¹¹ In addition, many of these issues can lead to the further erosion of rule of law and democracy. CEE remains especially vulnerable as the region faces a rise in extremism, populist rhetoric and growing Euroscepticism. As countries face climate-related risks or even deal with pandemics like Covid-19, weak democracies may further backslide the moment a crisis erupts.

Central and Eastern European’s Increasing ‘Near-Term’ Climate Issues

Central and Eastern Europe have already faced a number of “near-term” issues from often unwarranted fears of migration to an unhealthy reliance on fossil fuels. These climate-related risks, among others, have had clear social and political impact in the CEE region and are only growing in importance especially among its policy community.

In a 2017 survey, respondents from the Visegrad countries considered “climate change to be a “very serious” problem: 70% in Poland, 71% in Czechia, 70% in Slovakia

⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/eu-climate-change/#group-The-facts-ES4bnNGBvG>

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https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_335

⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/eu-climate-change/#group-The-facts-ES4bnNGBvG>

⁹ https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/pb_1911_eu_policy_on_climate-related_security_risks_0.pdf

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<https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/europes-responsibility-to-prepare-managing-climate-security-risks-in-a-changing-world-2018-6.pdf>

¹¹ https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf

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and even 85% in Hungary.¹² Furthermore, according to the recent 2019 Visegrad trends report which surveyed the V4 policy communities, the results indicated the rising importance climate change and is expected to grow in importance on national foreign policy agendas. 87% of respondents thought climate change will gain in importance and priority, alongside with cyber security, asylum and migration policy, energy security and instability in the EU's neighborhood.¹³

The influx of migrants from unstable political areas is a perfect example of how a region that faces economic instability due to climate-related issues such as draught, flooding or fires can fuel political, economic and social unrest – prompts migration to other more economically stable regions. The 2015 migration crisis in Europe created political and security strife among its member states and placed a wedge between the West and Central and Eastern European countries. The CEE region was vocal early on in the crisis using anti-migrant rhetoric that fueled xenophobic attitudes for domestic political gain, a development that has unfortunately become a permanent and prominent fixture in the region. The WCSR 2020 report highlights that climate stressed migration is likely to increase in “scale, scope, and tempo of migration to Europe.”¹⁴ According to experts, migration will likely contribute to ongoing political fragmentation in Europe and has already taken grip in CEE and does not look like it will ease anytime soon.

Another area of near-term threats is linked to the CEE's reliance on “dirty” fuels which have already accounted for higher levels of CO2 emissions, pollution and have “detrimental effects on indoor air quality”¹⁵ and causing respiratory-related health issues that have led some cities to create smog-alerts for when the pollution rate becomes hazardous. According to the World Health Organization in 2016, thirty-three of Europe's fifty most-

polluted towns are in Poland¹⁶ and is primarily due to the countries' heavy reliance on coal. While coal has helped Poland and other countries to achieve energy independence especially from the likes of Russia, economic fears of switching towards renewables or alternative energy sources remain strong. Meanwhile, Poland's neighbors have taken a different approach as Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have “taken strides to cut coal subsidies and bring forward a phase-out date.”¹⁷

The region's divergent approaches towards energy sources is an example of the mixed sentiment towards the EU's ambitious climate policies. In 2019, coal-reliant Poland stated that they could not commit to implementing to a climate-neutral EU by 2050 and stated that “Poland will be reaching climate neutrality at its own pace.”¹⁸ Slovakia's recent elections highlighted the lack of political parties' will to tackle climate change head on, but many did pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Czech Republic and Hungary eventually “dropped their resistance after winning a guarantee that nuclear energy would be recognized as a way for EU states to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”²⁰ However, the Czech Republic Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš recently stated that “Europe should forget about the Green Deal now and focus on the coronavirus instead”²¹ stirring debate on whether the crisis will help to “accelerate the push toward lower-carbon energy resources or slow it down.”²²

¹² <http://www.europeum.org/data/articles/eu-climate-policy-as-a-challenge.pdf>

¹³ http://www.amo.cz/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AMO_Trendy_2019.pdf

¹⁴ https://imccs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/World-Climate-Security-Report-2020_2_13.pdf

¹⁵ https://coebank.org/media/documents/Study_Ageing.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/01/18/why-33-of-the-50-most-polluted-towns-in-europe-are-in-poland>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/dec/14/poland-vean-coal-climate>

¹⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-eu/eu-leaves-poland-out-of-2050-climate-deal-after-standoff-idUSKBN1YG01I>

¹⁹ <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22334524/climate-crisis-survey-no-political-party-gets-a.html>

²⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-eu/eu-leaves-poland-out-of-2050-climate-deal-after-standoff-idUSKBN1YG01I>

²¹ <https://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/read/eu-green-deal-should-now-be-canceled-says-czech-pm>

²² <https://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/read/eu-green-deal-should-now-be-canceled-says-czech-pm>

While finding renewable and alternative energy supplies remains a debated issue among CEE countries, security issues remain a driving force for the region. Climate 'security' and 'NATO' may be the key word to invoke action towards further adopting the EU deals and even go beyond EU commitments, although this hypothesis is contingent upon climate awareness becoming more internalized within the electorate of the region; as Hungary and Poland, but to a lesser extent also the Czech Republic and Slovakia, exemplifies, increasingly authoritarian governments will remain recalcitrant as long as there is even a remote chance of proactivity undermining their consolidation of power at the expense of democratic freedoms and rights.

The intersection between climate and security

The WCSR 2020 report stated that in order to further address issues related to climate, identifying security dimensions into "risk assessment, early warning, surveillance, and operational preparations to include adaptation measures to harden infrastructure" is vital in creating integrated approaches to dealing with climate-related risks.

Among these approaches are to use multilateral platforms like the UN, NATO and global forums to create a platform for global discussion and action. The recent Munich Security Forum had sessions dedicated to challenges associated with climate change, which, according to a CNN report, had the "world's most powerful people disagreeing over how to address the climate crisis and youth activists excoriating the international elite for not doing enough to prevent global warming."²³

In December 2019, NATO alliance members gathered to commemorate the alliance's 70th anniversary in London and Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg argued NATO needs "more discussion on how important it is to stop

climate change" and NATO's role is to make sure that they "analyze the root causes for changes in security in different areas." Solberg added that "climate change will lead to more migration. It will lead to more conflicts. It will lead to less sustainable development in all of the African continent, even though, on the soft-power side the European Union is trying to work together with [these] countries to create more development to stop the migration waves."²⁴

Under the mandate of the NATO framework, NATO could help play a role in encouraging Europe's leadership – like those in the CEE region – to tackle issues related to climate-security on a national level especially if it addresses issues around migration and EU instability in Eastern Europe. CEE countries have traditionally been staunch supporters and security consumers of the alliance; by changing the political argument of climate change into a security argument – the CEE region has the potential to further integrate not just the EU climate agenda but also become leaders in mitigating climate change risk.

Recommendations for the way forward

As the EU continues to take ambitious steps towards countering the effects of climate change, a united and coordinated effort within Europe is key. As previously stressed, the security implications on parts of Europe are evident, as international efforts continue to address these issues, individual countries cannot wait for the direct effects to show up on their doorstep. Instead, countries like the CEE, need to further link the effects of climate with security. If the EU and the CEE region can find one area to unite them on, security may be the key.

The following recommendations outline the expanded areas that both the EU and CEE can take in order address and prevent future climate-related security risks:

²³ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/24/business/davos-2020-climate/index.html>

²⁴ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/nato-engages-transcript-heating-up-the-impact-of-climate-security-on-the-alliance/>

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- **Climate = Security:** As the European Green Deal further develops, there should be more security elements integrated into the current EU climate agenda and vice versa, integrate climate into the EU security agenda. By creating stronger linkages to climate-related risks, more countries like the CEE can further integrate climate in their security decision making.
- **Follow the leader:** Use the framework of NATO to further tackle climate-related security threats. By using existing and developing NATO channels such as PESCO and EDF, projects can be tailored to address climate-related threats such as migration. As avid supporters and consumers of the NATO security umbrella, the CEE region may be more susceptible to further adopt climate policies into their regional political agendas if NATO leads the way.
- **Make the business and health case.** By further adopting “green” research, innovation and renewable energy, the CEE region can not only attract investments, but also further boost its economy - an area that the CEE region is lagging the rest of Europe and will only be further impacted by the current Covid-19 crisis. By distancing itself from coal and dirty fossil fuels, it can have improved health, environmental and economic benefits.
- **Going all in, but as equals.** By adopting the EU Green Deal, the CEE region has the opportunity to bridging the growing divide in between the West and East. By stressing the pan-European effects of climate-related-risks as having no borders, the EU could further unite the region but needs to further involve the CEE region as equal partners and stakeholders.
- **Utilize the V4 platform:** The Visegrad 4 can use the climate agenda to become regional leaders on adopting climate change policies both outlined in the recent European Green Deal and beyond. By combining their already existing security politics with climate, the region can have a stronger platform in the EU and global stage, although it is contingent on the platform becoming constructive rather than a vessel for obstruction, as has been the case with migration.



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