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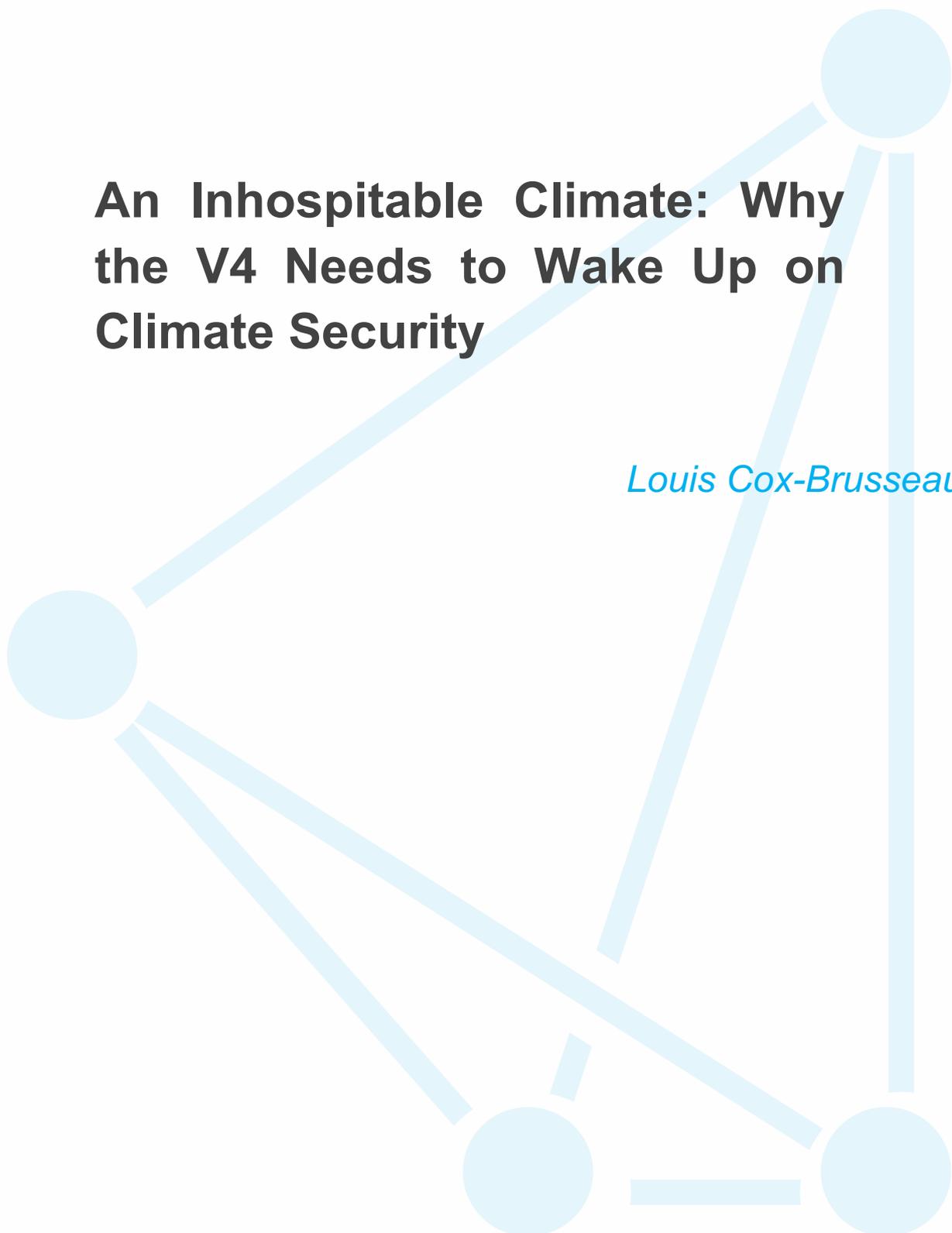
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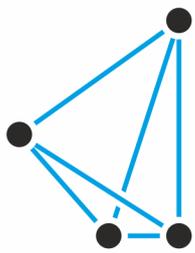
2019/October

Think Visegrad in Brussels

An Inhospitable Climate: Why the V4 Needs to Wake Up on Climate Security

Louis Cox-Brusseau





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Introduction

Climate security is an under-explored and under-addressed topic in international affairs, and all the more critical for being so; the threats it purports to address are holistic and existential, affecting – whether directly or indirectly – human welfare, stability and existence. Where discussion of climate-related security issues has arisen historically in academic and policymaking circles, it has usually been as a subset of the broader topic of climate change, and thus has rarely seen broader debate in mainstream considerations of traditional security.

Eleven years after formally being recognised as a global security risk by the European Council, however, climate change is finally picking up greater attention in policymaking circles as a serious contributing factor in future security and defense policy.¹ With 2019 seeing some of the hottest temperatures in history across the globe, and against a backdrop of rising sea levels, melting ice caps and the depletion of the Earth's rainforests, the impact of climate change on natural resources, migratory movements, energy procurement and living space across the Earth is rapidly becoming the dominant issue of modern times.

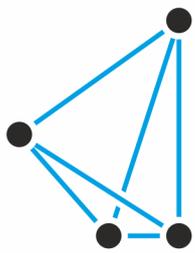
Despite strong indicators that climate change is a growing phenomenon, however, the full impact of a changing climate has not yet been fully understood.² In the short-to-mid-term, it seems extremely likely that climate change will contribute indirectly to resource shortages, forced out-migration of peoples from countries particularly susceptible to climate change, and increased political tension and unrest both in countries vulnerable to climate change and in countries affected by climate migration and secondary effects.³ In the long-term, the threat posed by climate change – even according to conservative estimates – is likely to be existential.⁴ Despite the unprecedented capability of modern society to foresee and adapt to emergent issues, however, climate change has stayed a secondary issue – if not wholly off the radar –

¹ ['Climate Change and International Security: Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council' 14 March 2008](#)

² [Collins, M., R. Knutti, J. Arblaster, J.-L. Dufresne, T. Fichefet, P. Friedlingstein, X. Gao, W.J. Gutowski, T. Johns, G. Krinner, M. Shongwe, C. Tebaldi, A.J. Weaver and M. Wehner, 2013: Long-term Climate Change: Projections, Commitments and Irreversibility. In: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \[Stocker, T.F., D. Qin, G.-K. Plattner, M. Tignor, S.K. Allen, J. Boschung, A. Nauels, Y. Xia, V. Bex and P.M. Midgley \(eds.\)\]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA.](#)

³ 'Europe's Responsibility to Prepare: Managing Climate Security Risks in a Changing World', S. Fetzek and L. van Schaik, The Center for Climate Security, June 2018

⁴ 'SWP Comment 34: Climate and Security Revisited: Germany's Priorities for the 2019/2020 UN Security Council Period' S. Dröge, SWP, August 2018



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for some time in public and private fora.⁵ It is increasingly clear that reticence to consider the longer-term risks of climate change is no longer a feasible approach, and one that smacks of dangerous short-sightedness. Where potential emergent security threats are concerned, even hypothetical risks must be assessed on the basis they might one day develop into real and present dangers. One area in particular where climate change's impact is far from being fully understood is where climate change intersects with traditional considerations of security, defence and stability. This nexus – termed climate security for short – is the focus of this paper.

As an area of policy, in brief, climate security's *raison d'être* is to provide a toolkit for predicting how a changing global climate might create and influence adverse security conditions at local, regional and international levels, with particular consideration given to climate change as a threat multiplier in geographic regions particularly vulnerable to a shifting climate, and how less vulnerable regions might nevertheless be affected by the indirect consequences of climate change. In this sense, as the risks posed by climate change are existential and global, the scope of any study on climate security must be rooted in a broad awareness of climate change's global consequences. Insofar as possible, this study seeks to focus specifically on one particularly climate-sceptic region in the heart of Europe: the Central European nations comprising the Visegrad Four – the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia – or 'V4'.

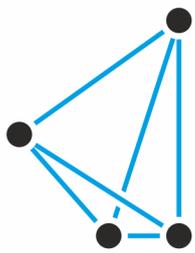
Inertia and Short-Sightedness – The Historical Approach to Climate Security

For all that climate security represents an asset to comprehensive security analysis in the modern era, it is not unanimously accepted as such – not in the wider world, not in the EU, and certainly not among the V4. There is growing assent within the EU for climate to be prioritised, but any progress made is hampered by the reluctance of individual Member States to fully commit to joint cooperation, as seen in the V4's blocking of the EU 2050 carbon neutrality goals in late 2019. Interviews conducted with MEPs and officials of the European institutions during the course of research undertaken for this paper noted that climate security is receiving increasing attention on European agendas, but little in the way of concrete, actionable policy can be undertaken on a Union-wide basis whilst certain Member States – such as Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic – remain reluctant to commit to significant change.⁶

At the United Nations level, with Germany's recent announcement in 2019 that it

⁵ 'Why People Ignore the Science Behind the Climate Crisis', Climate Reality Project Oct 2017

⁶ Interviews conducted in Brussels under Think Visegrad Fund, September 9th-13th 2019



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intends for 'climate fragility' to be a priority through its tenure as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2019/20, the case for climate security being institutionalised and integrated into UN security planning and capability building is strengthened. However, this willingness to engage in climate policy and develop climate security capabilities is, once more, limited by a lack of unanimity at the highest level in the UN:

*'The appetite of UNSC members to address non-traditional security risks is mixed...At the latest debate in July 2018, led by Sweden, three groups emerged. France, the United Kingdom, Côte-d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden support establishing climate change as a matter of UNSC involvement. China, the United States, Kuwait, Peru and Sudan were interested; Russia and Bolivia were openly critical.'*⁷

Climate Policy and Awareness in the V4

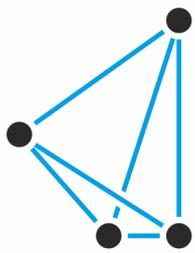
Clearly, the uptake of climate security as an issue in policymaking circles across the globe has been somewhat asymmetric; in Central Europe, where broader policy regarding climate change in general is less than unanimous, it has so far received very little attention indeed. Historically, the nations of the Visegrad Four have taken a sceptic stance on climate policy, where economic growth linked to EU membership has not been balanced by an uptake in energy efficiency or decarbonisation policies.⁸ The emergent exception appears to be Slovakia, whose stance increasingly parallels mainstream European Union policies on reducing emissions and protecting the climate. With the exception of Slovakia, however, climate policy continues to drive a wedge between the V4 and the rest of the EU; at the European Council meeting of 20 June 2019, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, alongside Estonia, vetoed a proposed climate deal that would have bound EU Member States to a dramatic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.⁹ Such a decision was perhaps unsurprising, given that Poland and the Czech Republic (and the rest of the V4 to a lesser extent) rely heavily on fossil fuels in their energy infrastructure.¹⁰ However, this clearly bodes ill for the future of cooperation on climate between the majority of the V4 and the rest of the EU.

⁷ 'SWP Comment 34: Climate and Security Revisited: Germany's Priorities for the 2019/2020 UN Security Council Period' S. Dröge, SWP, August 2018

⁸ 'Central & Eastern Europe Climate Policy Frontiers', *Climate Analytics Project (October 2018-March 2020)*

⁹ 'EU Climate Deal falls at summit, four countries wield the axe' Sam Morgan, EURACTIV.com, June 2019

¹⁰ 'Battling Climate Change on the Other Side of Europe's Coal Curtain', F. Tamás, Index.hu 2019



Most worryingly, it is apparent that the Central European population do not regard climate change as a clear or present danger in the short- or long-term. Whereas Eurobarometer's 2019 surveys indicate European citizens consider climate change the second most critical issue in Union affairs after migration, in the V4 it is significantly lower.¹¹ In Hungary, 22% of respondents consider climate change the most important global issue; in Poland, 17%; and in Slovakia and the Czech Republic (14% and 13% respectively) the number drops even further.¹² This perception is not aided by the fact that studies attempting to discern the potential impact of climate change on the V4 nations are few and far between, despite the V4 being one of the regions most affected by air pollution in the EU.¹³

In lieu of significant interest in the V4 regarding climate change and its impact on human welfare and security, therefore, another avenue for making the case for climate security must be found.

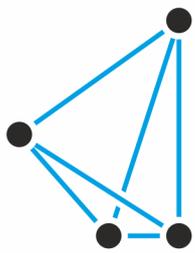
Climate Migration – Avoiding Another 2015

The lack of V4 policymaker interest in climate security is mirrored by general disinterest in broader climate-related issues amongst the governments of the region. However, it is quite possible that Central European security in the near future will be affected by secondary factors related to climate change – particularly where climate refugees from third countries are concerned. With the noted reluctance of the V4 nations to welcome external migration, it is likely that further tension between the EU institutions and Visegrad nations could arise were climate change to place further stress upon EU mechanisms for dealing with a surge in migration. An EU-wide failure to consider the indirect consequences of global warming and climate change may lead, more broadly, to a similar situation as the migration crisis of 2015, should climate change become a serious root cause of forced migration in the coming decades. Should this be the case, it is entirely uncertain whether the European Union has the necessary mechanisms to safely, satisfactorily and humanely deal with another migration crisis, and the political fallout that could emerge from another mismanaged migration crisis could in the mid-to-long term seriously compromise Union integrity and security. Were the V4 to split once more with Union cohesion over migration, as the bloc did in 2015, it is entirely possible that such division could have more drastic consequences.

¹¹ [Citizen Support for Climate Action: Country Highlights \[Poland, Czech Republic\] Eurobarometer 2019](#)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 'Battling Climate Change on the Other Side of Europe's Coal Curtain', F. Tamás, Index.hu 2019



Therefore, Central European security policy ought to include a prudent assessment of climate security's potential impact. The governments of the V4 should, firstly, consider climate security to be of particular importance to long-term security assessments within the V4; secondly, the V4 governments should engage more directly with EU assessments and analyses of climate security risks, in order to more accurately gauge the potential of forced climate migration into the V4 and to develop pre-emptive policy blueprints for dealing with such migration should it arise in the long-term.

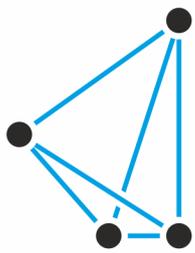
If only through the narrower lens of climate migration, thus far it seems prudent that the Visegrad nations should consider climate security as an emergent security factor worthy of inclusion in the bloc's internal security considerations.

Energy Infrastructure – Why Cohesion with the EU Might Improve Security

Additionally, one of the key issues behind the V4's reluctance to follow EU directions on climate may turn out to be a security risk of sorts in its own right. With the reliance on fossil fuels across the V4 limiting the bloc's options in shifting to sustainable energy sources, the V4 still imports a significant quantity of gas from Russian suppliers (approx. 80% of the bloc's total gas supplies as of Oct 2018).¹⁴ There are some differences between the level of reliance within the V4 – the Czech Republic and Slovakia have better access to alternative gas suppliers – but overall the V4's reliance on Russian gas is considerable. Should the wider EU at some point shift its energy infrastructure to a more sustainable model, the Visegrad Four will be comparatively out of date. Should alternative supplies of gas no longer prove viable, the V4's reliance on Russian gas may pose an uncomfortable issue in future energy security considerations.¹⁵ The issue of V4 reliance – and indeed the much broader issue of European reliance – upon Russian gas is understandably one of the core factors in the EU-Russia relationship that continues to inform security considerations today. However, by advancing its energy infrastructure in cohesion with the rest of the European Union, the Visegrad Four can go some way toward minimising the Russian issue whilst strengthening its position and reputation within the Union's institutions. Furthermore, the risk of being 'outdistanced', so to speak, by energy innovation in the rest of the EU might leave the V4 with obsolete or financially unsustainable artifacts within its energy infrastructure that have resultant negative economic consequences.

¹⁴ 'Beyond gas – energy security issues in the V4 after 2020' Diallo et al., REKK, SFP, AMO, Instytut Jagiellonski 2018

¹⁵ Ibid.



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In this sense, potentially negative economic consequences in the longer-term as well as emergent security risks in the mid-to-long-term should both be considered by V4 policymakers when assessing the potential outcomes of refusing to advance the Visegrad Four's energy infrastructure and shift to alternative, climate-friendly energy sources.

Nevertheless, this will not be an easy route for the Visegrad nations. In Poland, where 80% of the country's electricity production is coal-based, the coal industry maintains approximately 100,000 jobs in the Polish economy, and with a significant part of Polish coal companies owned by the state it will be no easy task to reconfigure the country's economy to more climate-friendly means of energy production. Indeed, such a reconfiguration could prove catastrophic were it conducted improperly, and it is possible that this is one area that European expertise and outreach could assist the V4 in laying the groundwork for a smoother, longer-term transition.

Conclusion: Visegrad Decides Its Own Future

Ultimately, however, it is political will from within the V4 that must pave the way for any significant shift in the Visegrad approach to climate security, let alone the broader issue of climate change. It is currently very difficult to imagine such a change with the likes of Viktor Orbán and Andrej Babiš at the head of the V4. In Poland, where tensions with the EU on separate issues continue to strain relations, it is difficult to foresee a drastic reformation of the economy away from coal-based energy production in the current political climate. Slovakia – as previously mentioned, the outlier in the V4 on climate issues – has made some positive movement toward the more mainstream stances of other Member States, but alone it is unable to shift V4 policy. The bulk of climate policy and research comes from sources external to the V4 and from those sources unaligned with the Visegrad way of thinking or with the bloc's unique considerations. Should there be any question of the bloc coming closer to the EU on climate-related issues, therefore – let alone the issue of climate security – there will have to be significant political developments at the heads of the V4 governments, and likely in tandem with a reconsideration within the EU institutions of European policy toward the V4 intended to positively incentivise fundamental economic change. Without such change, however, it can be virtually guaranteed that another significant crisis between the Visegrad Four and European Union will take place again, whether over climate-induced migration, energy security, or over a broader lack of cohesion. The only question will be when.



Co-funded by the
Europe for Citizens Programme
of the European Union