



ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND THE OSCE

Report on the proceedings of the expert seminar in the framework of the Helsinki+50 project organised by the Civic Solidarity Platform

5 November 2024, Helsinki

The seminar was held in the framework of the project “Helsinki +50 initiative towards the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act: Reflection process on the future of the OSCE in the times of crises”, implemented by the Civic Solidarity Platform with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany. The seminar was organised in cooperation between the Civic Solidarity Platform and Historians without Borders (Finland) and took place on 5 November at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Helsinki.

The seminar brought together 25 experts from the following organisations, many of whom combine academic expertise with practical experience in the field of environmental and/or human rights and activist background as well strong knowledge of the work of the OSCE and other inter-governmental organisations: Austausch (Germany), Bir Duino (Kyrgyzstan), Crisis Management Centre (Finland), Crude Accountability (USA), Environmental Crisis Group (Russia/The Netherlands), Finnish Institute for International Affairs (Finland), George Washington University (USA), Historians without Borders (Finland), International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium), International Strategic Action Network for Security – iSANS (Poland), KIT Royal Tropical Institute (The Netherlands), Libereco (The Netherlands), Little Earth (Tajikistan), Netherlands Helsinki Committee (the Netherlands), Safer Climate (Finland), Snowchange Cooperative (Finland), Truth Hounds (Ukraine), University of Helsinki (Finland), University of Turku (Finland), World Wide Fund for Nature (Finland) and several independent experts and activists. A representative of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs also participated in the seminar as an observer.

The seminar programme included several sessions: introduction of the Helsinki+50 project, seminar goals, and introduction of the participants (opening session); the OSCE second dimension – background and new opportunities (session 1); the climate crisis as an intersectional challenge (session 2); civil society and environmental justice (session 3); brainstorming on conclusions and recommendations to the OSCE and other actors (session 4). Sessions 1, 2, and 3 started with introductory remarks by experts, followed by a discussion.

The report applies Chatham House rules, meaning that neither the identity nor the affiliation of the participants in the discussions is revealed in referring to statements made at the seminar, except the experts who produced papers for the seminar and delivered introductory remarks if they agreed to have their names and affiliations indicated.

The project organisers take responsibility for the content of the report. The recommendations include suggestions by various participants; not all participants necessarily endorse all of them.

The first session of the seminar was dedicated to the environmental dimension in the work of the OSCE.

In her introductory remarks, expert Emma Hakala (Finnish Institute for International Affairs) gave a historical background of environmental security activities that OSCE has been doing. She became familiar with OSCE security work through the post conflict situation in Western Balkans. At the time, OSCE was one of the organisations that played an important role in developing and implementing the concept of environmental security in regional post conflict reconstruction. That work started because there was a lot of attention to environmental damage in the wake of the NATO bombings during the Kosovo conflict in 1999 in response to ethnic cleansing of Kosovar Albanians by Yugoslavia. Due to that attention, the environmental theme became an integral part of the reconstruction discourse in the Western Balkans. In that framework, the OSCE worked together with the UN Development Program and the UN Environment Program, as well as with the UN Environmental Commission for Europe, which was specifically aimed at bringing together environmental and security themes. With this aim, it worked also in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Emma commented that the environmental security approach of the OSCE differed from the approaches that its other dimensions were built on and could be characterised by an almost academic approach to what it was doing. In the beginning of its work, the OSCE put a lot of effort into developing a concept of environmental security. The OSCE brought in numerous academics to discuss what environmental security actually is, what it consists of, and what it allows one to do. Regional roundtables were organised to provide an opportunity to experts from the Western Balkans and other regions to identify the most important security related environmental problems in each region. One of the aims of these activities was to help the political leaders recognise the environmental problems they were facing. They also aimed to bring together countries of the region, as they were still in tense post-conflict relationships. This way, the topic of the environment was chosen as a non-political one, one that these countries would be able to agree about and possibly cooperate on, even if they were not able to agree about much else. Emma underlined that in her opinion it is very difficult to separate the environment from politics even if we consider it to be a unifying factor. She referred to the example of Western Balkans again, where the idea to set up protected areas in different parts of the region failed because it was difficult to agree about where these protected areas would be set up and to avoid places where tensions between different ethnic groups persisted. This hindered setting up the protected areas. Taking into account all these considerations, which are political in their nature, a situation emerged in which the work was only possible in the areas where there was not that much sense to work. This in turn raises the question of how much value these projects had as a peace-building tool.

The OSCE has not been very active in the field of environmental security in recent years, compared to the work in OSCE first and third dimensions. One of the reasons is the lack of necessary funding, Emma noted. Meanwhile, the OSCE has produced a lot of valuable documents, and it is important to acknowledge the work done, especially taking into consideration that we have an opportunity to learn not only from the mistakes, but also from the achievements.

Emma raised the issue of divergence of the current climate security focus from the previous environmental security work of the OSCE, which was mainly a peace building instrument. Although

some aspects of the previous work can still be observed in the climate security activities the OSCE has undertaken since the 2021 Ministerial Decision on climate change,¹ this may be a sign that now climate security is considered to be a non-political issue, which can bring states to agreement in a different way than, for example, a broader notion of environmental security, which becomes increasingly political, and may allow a kind of work that would otherwise be impossible. This development should be taken into consideration when we plan further work in the area of the second dimension.

The next speaker, Dr. Sebastien Peyrouse (George Washington University, USA) addressed the OSCE's environment-related work through several points. The first was the economic environment. Under the OSCE concept of comprehensive security, he commented, the focus in the economic and environmental field is mainly on factors that threaten stability. They include economic and social disparities, poor governance, corruption, poverty, and high unemployment. But comprehensive security also includes environmental factors, that could lead to instability or conflict, including climate change, natural disasters, water management, and toxic waste. The OSCE undertakes a wide variety of activities in this area. Through the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, missions, conferences, and various projects have been organised and guidelines and studies have been published. The OSCE provides regular platforms for governments to exchange views and share best practices on economic and environmental matters, sometimes (but insufficiently) with the participation of civil society. Each year, a new topic is chosen for a series of preparatory meetings culminating in the annual OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, held in Prague, Czechia. The OSCE also engages in economic and environmental issues directly on the ground through projects implemented by the Secretariat and by the field missions, offering expertise and support to local actors across its regions. Sebastien referred to the network of Aarhus Centres in this regard. The OSCE has been supporting the establishment, operation and networking of 60 Aarhus Centres in 14 countries to assist local authorities, civil society, and citizens in collaborating on environmental issues, including access to environmental information and justice.

Speaking about environmental challenges, Sebastien focused on Central Asia, which faces some of the most serious threats from climate change. There is a mix of historical and contemporary environmental challenges in the region. For example, the legacy of the Soviet era including the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site and uranium pollution, which impacts most of Central Asia. In addition, there are many other issues such as industrial emissions, air pollution (the city of Bishkek is currently ranked one of the world's most polluted cities in the world) due to heating and vehicle emissions. Population growth also exacerbates waste management issues, with open dumping common and legal landfills often not meeting health standards. Desertification and soil degradation are also significant due to intensive cotton farming, which has drained water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. Climate change is significantly impacting the region. The temperature is rising faster than the global average. Water resources and water sharing in this context become a complex challenge that has created dependency, competition, and tensions among states. Natural disasters such as mudslides, earthquakes, and other threats, which frequently impact the region, should also be mentioned. Most of these environmental issues directly impact health, food security, and the well-being of the population and especially of the most vulnerable groups such as the poor, women, and children.

¹ Decision No. 3/21 – Strengthening Co-operation to Address the Challenges Caused by Climate Change. OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Stockholm, 03.12.2021. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/507050>

Central Asia serves as a microcosm of the broader environmental challenges across the OSCE region, Sebastien stated in his discussion paper. While the region has unique geographic and historical specificities, the interconnected nature of environmental issues, such as climate change, resource management, and the role of governance makes this regional case study relevant for the entire OSCE area. Addressing Central Asia's environmental concerns not only provides critical lessons but also highlights **the urgent need for coordinated international action across the OSCE region**. The OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security and long-standing presence in the region, is uniquely positioned to address these challenges. By leveraging its second dimension, which addresses economic and environmental issues, and fostering cooperation among governments, civil society, and the private sector, the OSCE can potentially play an important role in mitigating environmental risks and promoting sustainable development.

The third point Sebastien made was supported by many participants in their comments throughout the seminar. It was about a necessity **to link the second dimension of the OSCE to its third dimension, in other words, the need to connect environmental issues with civil society and human rights**. Illustrating this point, Sebastien referred to Central Asia again. He noted that all Central Asian states say that they want more focus on environmental issues in international cooperation and assistance. At the same time, they are characterised by a centralised, top-down approach to environmental policies. They have censorship, restrictions of freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, surveillance, suppression of independent civil society, and harassment of civic activists. All of this significantly obstructs the ability of civil society to do research or engage in decision making processes and hold the governments accountable on various issues, including environmental concerns. The lack of independence of the judiciary makes a fair hearing in environmental cases against government or even against businesses highly unlikely.

Another problem that influences the ability of civil society to act is the underdevelopment of NGOs. Many NGOs, including smaller ones with valuable knowledge of the local context, lack the training needed to develop high-quality project proposals and submit them to donors.

And finally, political leaders often use environmental issues to boost their image but not do much in practice. Eager to engage publicly, they highlight what they do on visible issues but avoid less visible and problematic issues or those that challenge their legitimacy, and do not fight corruption. This is especially concerning as **some states have been pressuring inter-governmental organisations, including the OSCE, to prioritise environmental issues as a way to shift attention from human right problems. Therefore, it is essential to avoid instrumentalization of climate and environmental issues**. That is why it is vitally important to ensure that the second dimension is not separated from the third dimension and to highlight the indispensable role of civil society as a safeguard of the environment and do this not only with NGOs but also including all kinds of civil society groups, including local community groups from affected areas, and to advocate for genuinely independent civil society.

Concluding his remarks, Sebastien pointed at the low effectiveness of the work done by the OSCE and other international actors. Although the Economic and Environmental Coordinator appointed last fall plans to work closely with the governments in the region, and the U.S. is also addressing some of the environmental issues in Central Asia, including the water management responses to a natural disaster, all of that could be done with greater impact. Instead of organising numerous

conferences, whose impact is limited as they are often perceived by local stakeholders as a way for foreign stakeholders to enhance their own legitimacy, **it would be more effective for the OSCE to focus on training local actors and implementing programmes that foster regional cooperation.** More thinking should be put into what kind of concrete initiatives we could recommend.

The discussion that followed the presentations included a variety of issues that were planned to be covered within the framework of the other sessions. This in a way proved the relevance and interrelation of the questions posed by the organisers of the seminar.

One of the participants pointed at another worrying example of cross-border environmental threat in Central Asia. In Mailuu-Suu, Kyrgyzstan, which is a home to a former Soviet-era uranium plant, there are numerous tailing dumps and waste rock dumps scattered throughout the area. From 1946-1968, the plant produced and processed more than 10,000 metric tons of uranium ore products, used to create the Soviet Union's first atomic bomb. Uranium ore from Europe and China was also processed in Mailuu-Suu. As a result, a small town with a population of 24,000 people is now surrounded by about 3 million cubic meters of uranium waste left in 23 tailings dumps and 13 landfills. These facilities have polluted the Mailuu-Suu River, the main tributary of the Syr Darya river, which flows through Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan, carrying radioactive waste into the densely populated Ferghana Valley. The combination of unsecured radioactive waste with the region's high seismic activity threatens to contaminate the drinking water supply of the entire Ferghana valley, with inhabitants in the hundreds of thousands, stretching throughout Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. In 2002, a huge mudslide blocked the course of the Mailuu-Suu river and threatened to submerge a toxic waste site. In 2005, after another earthquake and landslide, about 300,000 cubic meters of material fell into the Mailuu-Suu river near the uranium mine tailings. A 1999 study showed that this area's cancer rate was double that of the rest of the country. Uranium is a known carcinogen and mutagen that can additionally damage kidneys, liver, and cardiac tissue. In addition, decay of uranium produces radon gas, which has been found in elevated concentrations at these sites. Radon is also carcinogenic, believed to be the most significant cause of lung cancer other than smoking. Due to these factors, Mailuu-Suu is listed among the most dangerous places in the world. International efforts and cooperation among states in the region should be intensified to mitigate the threat and support the affected communities.

In the discussion, it was noted that environmental security issues require careful and multilateral assessment. For example, speaking about the efficiency of work and the opportunity to learn from past experience, one can cite the example of Aarhus Centres that work on the ground and interact with governments, including in Central Asia. On the one hand, their work can be perceived as a positive experience. On the other hand, their work has often had a chilling effect on actual engagement with independent civil society.

As one of the key problems, **the need to improve engagement between civil society and the OSCE in the environmental sphere, especially in the climate change context,** was identified. Aarhus Centres could play a very important role in this regard, as they are based on the idea of improving access to environmental information and decision making, which represent pillars of environmental security. This way, there is potential within the OSCE to develop the work on climate and environmental security, which would be community-based and inclusive. This, of course, requires deliberate and consistent action towards this aim from civil society itself. We cannot just

say “leave it to the decision-makers”, especially bearing in mind that some of these centres are actually closing because of pressure from the governments who are not willing to circulate information and, instead, put pressure on civil society. We need to put this more actively into the picture, to point out the contradiction between the words and the actions of these governments.

Another issue that gained a lot of attention was **the question of data**, which, as all participants agreed. The notion of “science diplomacy” was mentioned. It was observed that working together with the academic community can bring a lot of potential. Science can reach out, it can build some connections that cannot be established through traditional diplomatic means. Additionally, working with the scientific community and civil society can provide more expert knowledge and contribute to safer civic space. Bearing in mind the importance of the data and the possibility to use it as a leverage point, we need to ensure that we actually get this data. There is a problem with collecting data, as in many cases you cannot just do a one-time data collection project, but, rather, must invest in consistent monitoring and consistent record keeping, which takes significant resources. With this in mind, it makes sense to include more research and data collection activities in recommendations to the OSCE, governments, and civil society actors.

Several participants of the seminar expressed their concerns about the lack of attention and support to local civil society. Effort should be made to connect local civil society with intergovernmental organisations and foreign donors. Today, foreign donors tend to work with the same small circle of organisations in Central Asia, which have institutional capacity and experience necessary to manage projects on a proper level. The desire of donors to have projects realised and reported on in a proper way without additional risk or extra effort restricts the engagement of local actors, which in its turn limits development of activists in Central Asia and other affected regions that would like to be engaged but cannot because they do not have funds. This includes the lack of engagement with civil society activists who do not speak English or Russian and therefore are not able to write project proposals and easily engage with international donors, but who have significant knowledge of the local context. To enforce participation of a wider circle of NGOs it is important to train them in the field of project management. This could be done in the form of online training.

A question of framing the concept of interconnectedness of the second and the third dimensions in a clear and convincing way was the one that the participants returned to many times throughout the day. It was noted that the community of civil society organisations working with the OSCE have always been most successful when they were able to establish strong concepts that were able to change the mindset of decision-makers. Therefore, one of our tasks is **to establish a well-argued concept of the intersection of climate security and human rights** that goes beyond buzzwords and makes things more practical and compelling. This is particularly important within the OSCE reform discussion and the Helsinki+50 project.

There was a debate about the notions of environmental or climate security and the relevance of the security perspective for environmental work. It was suggested that the notion of climate or environmental justice is more appropriate, while the security narrative and the justice narrative are two completely different narratives that cannot be put together, at least from the point of view of the environmental justice movement, which is highly critical of the security discourse. On the other side, it was underlined that the OSCE is a security organisation, which is the main reason for us to talk about the environment from the security point of view. Also, a purely negative categorisation

of security in connection with the environment or climate should be avoided, as there are essential environmental problems coming from climate change that we have to be able to address as a question of security, because that is what it is. That is why **it is also important to talk about security in the environmental field**. The question, however, is how we talk about it and who we talk about it with. The idea of inclusive climate security or inclusive environmental security has a lot of potential in this context exactly because it brings in the human rights dimension.

“Should we continue to be involved with the OSCE or we should rather change the focus?” was one of the most pressing questions of the session. It was noted that the OSCE is one of the rare intergovernmental organisations in which civil society engages in active interaction with states and the bodies and institutions of the organisation, and the Helsinki process was built on the idea that we could all work together. However, now this idea has all but vanished. The problem of blocking consensus by Russia, who objects to everything today, creates terrible obstacles to developing anything new in the OSCE or even preserving good things that exist there. But there is still a possibility to move on by working with non-consensual mechanisms in the OSCE such as the informal “Group of Friends of the Environment”, founded in 2019 by France, Switzerland, and the UK. A question of what exactly can be done through interaction with this group and how, exactly, needs more consideration, based on updated information about the current situation in the Group, which seems to be not very active.

Practical interest by the rest of the world in what happens in Europe was also mentioned in the context of the search for opportunities for influence. China, which was a backward third world country in 1968, is now a major power that wants to keep Europe as its market. For that, it needs peace. Therefore, we should try to “sell” them the understanding that peaceful societies in the case of Europe require strong democracy and vibrant civil society.

Participants also stressed that up-to-date information about debates among OSCE participating States, the positions of the main actors within the OSCE (including the Office of the Coordinator on environmental and economic issues), their mandates, possibilities and constraints, budget issues, and other challenges is necessary for civil society to be able to develop meaningful recommendations to them.

The second session was devoted to the intersectional nature of the climate crisis and the role of local communities in climate change mitigation and adaptation. In her introductory remarks on the subject, Anne Karam (KIT Royal Tropical Institute, the Netherlands) reflected conceptually on how we approach climate change. She noted that although we have become used to certain framings around climate change and climate change solutions, it is important to challenge them. She suggested we look at climate change from an environmental justice perspective, taking into consideration both whom it impacts and how it impacts them, but also the solutions and the projects proposed to either mitigate or adapt to climate change.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation policies are undertaken to minimise harm, but they can also make it worse if they are not developed and implemented with an eye towards justice and fairness and if they do not include the critical engagement in the attribution of marginalisation or marginalised identity to the communities or the people that we are trying to support. This happens at all levels, including local, national, or global. The urgency which is obvious in the case of the climate crisis is often used to justify further marginalisation, ignoring issues of representation and

distribution but also inclusion and justice. It pushes the voices of the disadvantaged further outside the realm of influence.

This is intertwined with a more structural analysis of how we think about climate change in the first place and what is considered progress in this context. Referring to words often used, Anne mentioned vulnerability and resilience. When we talk about vulnerability, we are disempowering and victimising people who are affected, she stressed. We can be erasing their agency and creating an image or a value of an innocent and passive victim in a larger system. Resilience can also be quite contentious because we are not asking ourselves “why do we need to be resilient?”, “what is creating the need for resilience?” and “why are we vulnerable in the first place?” Both vulnerability and resilience erase a more structural critique of climate change and individualise all causes, consequences and solutions to the crisis, which then has an impact on how we can have an intersectional approach to climate change. Therefore, we have to be confident about how we understand them in the first place.

Anne suggested to define intersectionality as the compounding of different social categories, i.e. race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, ability, which can also be levels of education, religion, etc. These categories are dynamic and constructed by society (given value culturally) and play with each other, creating social positions that change over time and place. A feminist approach to intersectionality highlights the relational nature of power. As she commented in her discussion paper, taking the intersectional analysis a step further means directly criticising structures that create and reinforce these categories. Finally, intersectionality is multi-level, it plays into horizontal (inter-community) and vertical (national, regional, local) interactions. A limitation of the concept of intersectionality is that it does not fully know how to account for class, as class is not simply a characteristic of identity – it is a structure.

Speaking about gender, Anne again noted that we are accustomed to hearing about gender and climate change as an intersection, but how we evaluate gender within the context of climate change focuses on gender as binary and stereotypes of two genders. We hear all the time that women are disproportionately affected by climate change, with a lot of research and money in the development sector playing a role at this particular intersection of ‘gender’ and climate change. However, the reality is that it is not focusing on gender, because it does not question why women are more affected: thus, it focuses on a specific characterisation of a woman within the prism of climate change. As such, a woman becomes the perfect, passive victim of climate change, while the man lacks the female sensitivity of caring for the environment. The power relations that have given women an inferior and disadvantaged position in most societies are ignored in favour of using social constructions of gender as the basis for analysis of vulnerability relating to climate change. This means interventions that may well be well intentioned can produce negative effects for women by not carefully analysing the gendered power relations resulting in these inequalities.

Therefore, deconstructing climate change from the gender perspective requires going beyond the effects of the climate on women to the understanding of the gendered construction of nature-society relations and economies that are at the roots of the climate change crisis, Anne explained in her discussion paper. Analysing this issue with the imagery of a tree would place symptomatic responses to gender inequalities above the ground, and the deconstruction of gendered realities and inequalities – at the roots. This analysis does not want to erase the fact that women are often bearing the brunt of climate change. However, it reminds us that these inequalities are a result of

structures that already marginalise them. Therefore, interventions should not only target the above ground symptoms, but the hidden roots as well.

Gender norms and the subsequent gendered division of labour, rather than the attributed gender of a person, can shape ecological knowledge and risk perception. Knowledge around climate change (causes, effects, implications) can be formed through one's daily activities (Thompson-Hall et al, 2016²). If the women in a household deal more with water, they will have a different relationship with water than men who may use it for farming. Therefore, if traditional gender norms mean that women spend more time in the private sphere, busy with household tasks, they prioritise dealing with risks immediately affecting the household unit, while the men prioritise risks to their productive activities, e.g. farming.

Speaking about migration, Anne referred to three types of migration with regard to climate change – migration that already exists that is being exacerbated by climate change, migration that is induced by climate change, and climate-reductive migration (i.e. it happens for structural reasons other than climate change). One's ability or need to migrate is fundamentally impacted by one's identity and place in society, calling for an intersectional analysis.

Anne noted that climate-reductive migration is the idea that a pattern of migration is attributed to climate change rather than to the realities of the socio-ecological landscape. She referred to the example of Bangladesh, where because of the legacy of colonialism, there are certain structures around climate that were put in place funded by multilateral agencies, like the World Bank or governments from the West, that either do not consult with people or do not listen to the consultations they conduct. Therefore, they wrongly attribute reasons of migration, based on tropes of Bangladesh as a 'climate change victim', and damage public debate on solutions for, for example, rural underemployment, flood management, and land loss. Such an approach also erases how migration is constrained/enabled by kinship relations.

Turning to land rights and Indigenous rights, Anne claimed this is something that cannot be disentangled from the environmental justice perspective. It is important to consider voices of indigenous communities. Indigenous rights are also inextricably intertwined with land rights. So how do we address this if we don't actually want to consider the original sin of taking land from Indigenous people in the first place. Here, Anne referred to Canada's Land Back movement, which says that the only solution to end state or climate violence against Indigenous people is to give the lands back to them.

Although efforts are made to enshrine Indigenous rights through international human rights, this is not really working. Anne believes it is so because we are upgrading colonial practices using nicer practices and words to describe them, which makes them acceptable to the general population. The example given here was of land grabbing, when land was taken away to build wind farms or solar farms in Norway. The Fosen Wind Farms were built at the tail end of the reindeer herding path for the Sami from the Arctic without consulting the municipality or the Indigenous people. Although there is now the Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous people, which includes the concept of prior and informed consent and an obligation for land planners to consult with Indigenous peoples and include Indigenous perspective in an environmental impact assessment, and even despite the

² Mary Thompson-Hall, Edward R. Carr, Unai Pascual. Enhancing and expanding intersectional research for climate change adaptation in agrarian settings. December 2016. *AMBIO A Journal of the Human Environment* 45(S3):373-382.

ruling of the Supreme Court in favour of the Sami, they still could not attain the stopping of the operation of the wind farms, and all they were offered was financial compensation. There is a huge power imbalance between big players, including governments that are working with private developers in industry, and Indigenous peoples.

There are also problematic statements or approaches when considering how Indigenous peoples are affected by or engaged with climate change, including, as with gender, relying on a categorisation of Indigenous peoples as environmental stewards on the land. We impose Western idea(l)s of what environmental protection looks like on other cultures and livelihoods. An example is in Canada where seal hunting is a central livelihood and cultural component for the Inuit, but environmental groups, such as Greenpeace, criticised them for years for this activity. Therefore, if we designate all Indigenous peoples (also grouping them into a homogenous group, which they are not) as what we see as “environmental stewards,” then we are imposing on them how we think they should be caring for the environment. However, Indigenous approaches to human-nature relations are different from those of non-Indigenous peoples. The value should not be our definition of “environmental protection” but noticing that for centuries, Indigenous peoples have lived and worked with the land, not violently extracting from it, whereas our models have not worked sustainably, Anne concluded in her discussion paper.

Tero Mustonen (Snowchange Cooperative, Finland) in his remarks touched upon the environmental risk question. He pointed out that it was one of the things that the last IPCC cycle AR6³ tried to address. AR6 had to be pushing a lot of the limits off the way before the panel was able to tackle these questions. In terms of how we can attribute fundamental root causes of climate change, which Anne talked about earlier, Tero referred to the Summary for the Policy Makers (SPM)⁴ where for the first time in history it was stated that the climate crisis results from colonial history, from the actions of certain countries exercising power over populations, peoples, and nations. And for the very first time, these countries acknowledged that it is actually a colonial problem both in the past and today. It is remarkable for those people who pay attention to how policy evolves and how these stacked up documents contribute to the structure of risk and root causes.

Tero stressed that the way this phrasing appeared in SPM was included in late night sessions. Participation in preparation and being aware of opportunities and creative ways of re-framing are mechanisms to change things and should also be taken on board in our work more often.

With regard to the idea to “relegate non-contentious issues and call them the environment”, which was voiced during the first session, Tero commented that the evidence from the Arctic Council points out the fact that certain progress can indeed be made this way and this could be the window for work with the OSCE. The Arctic Council is a governmental process. A lot of the security issues were taken off the table to succeed on questions like the environment, cultural issues, Indigenous rights, or Indigenous knowledge stuff and so on. The Council before was able to produce a number of assessments that have been then translated directly into policy over the past 30 years. Tero referred to the ACIA (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment), the Climate Assessment, Biodiversity Assessment, Mercury Assessment, Shipping Assessment, and we should also highlight the role of

³ The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the sixth in a series of reports which assess the available scientific information on climate change.

⁴ SPM is a summary of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports intended to aid policymakers.

the Arctic Council in creating the POPs Treaty (Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants). This way, reflecting on the work of the Arctic Council and some of the experience of the past 30 years, Tero repeated that sometimes you can get things done when you focus and you are clever enough to look at non-political themes first. To succeed, you need good people that understand the aim and the process. As an example, Tero named a “non-sexy working group on Mercury”, that covers all of our countries, which can become a mechanism to bring the scientists of a country, or of a certain civil society, or marginalised groups, to the table and start to exchange. One of the instruments you might need is a baseline and critical information that we are currently lacking from places like Kyrgyzstan. It will allow pressure to be applied and start negotiations with authoritarian governments that do not really cooperate with civil society. This process is not giving us directly a road map on how we reconstruct Ukraine or address the environmental costs of the war when it ends, but it may be those early steps.

Another point Tero made, which was recalled many times in the course of the seminar, was on the notion of oral history. States operate for the most part with the written forms of history. This excludes a large portion of local communities and Indigenous peoples. Protecting oral history and people’s voices in this extremely complex time is what civil society organisations can do. We have to be mindful of the fact that people matter even in the hardest of times. That is what Svetlana Alexievich’s messages from Prayer Rising from Chernobyl talks about – all of those quiet people that nobody will care about, all those thousands who died, should matter. This notion of people’s history, oral history will be elemental in success in creating the second dimension. This, however, should be done in a way that does not tip the boat. There is always the practical side of the policy networks and the institutions like Arctic Council, and if you have a message to convey, some of the working groups of the Arctic Council could be a mechanism to start things. And although none of us will tackle that person who is running the country, one of the things we could try to do is to gather evidence. This is the method that the Arctic Council has been able to successfully work with.

In the following discussion, all participants agreed that in our work we need to have a high degree of sensitivity towards the underrepresented to compensate for their inability to use the stages we have.

The issue of language was the focus of discussion. Four points of view were expressed:

- it is important to find a vocabulary that would not be polarising;
- we need to “sell” the importance of more active and effective work of the OSCE on environmental security and climate security to those who make decisions. This presupposes the need to package it and explain it to them in the language and concepts on which the OSCE is based. But this means that, on the one hand, we should develop our own normal language without putting things into artificial boxes and notions, but at the same time be aware of the ways to explain it to those who make decisions in the OSCE. Our target audiences in terms of advocacy efforts are diplomats and OSCE personnel in Vienna and Warsaw. They are not experts or have less expertise than we do. And they do not change policies. They are essentially messengers, who may or may not have impact on those who make decisions in the capitals or collectively make decisions in the OSCE. So, in that sense, we also need to think of the ways to explain these issues and concepts to them not only on the conceptual level but also in very practical terms;

- we should consider peeling back all of this vocabulary and lingo and jingoisms that we use and just talk about what is happening. Not to create a special vocabulary to talk to diplomats, but to speak as human beings instead, trying to reach the hearts of these people. To do this, we actually should create our own baseline vocabulary, so that we understand what each other is saying. This way, we would return to the roots of oral history;
- words lose their value when they are co-opted by the powers that be. Moreover, such words like “carbon neutral”, “inclusive to communities”, or “gender sensitive” are used by corporations or states to create a perception of their new identity as an environmentally responsible entity. We should fight instrumentalization of environmental discourse.

The issue of securitisation of discourse was brought up once again. It was noted that **the notion of human security rather than state security should be put into focus**. When people are suffering from negative impacts on the environment or from the climate crisis, it is about their human security, security of individuals, collectives, or communities.

A comment was made about the idea of comprehensive security which covers health aspects, social aspects, environmental aspects: a participant pointed out that the same notion can have different meaning in different languages and different fora. In Finnish, for example, there is one word that refers both to security and safety. In the European Commission, climate security is seen rather through “preparedness”; they are prepared to talk about climate change adaptation, risk management, etc.

There was also a voice in favour of conceptualisation of security as a right.

On a positive note, the opinion was voiced that **it is the very first time in history that the Helsinki process goes through such a transformation with the possibility of civil society organisations to influence it**. Back in 1975, all the arrangements were fixed by big politics, through negotiations of representatives of states. Now, we in civil society can influence it. Therefore, it is important to seize the momentum and make our contribution to the rebuilding of the security architecture of Europe.

The third session was aimed at covering issues related to environmental justice in the framework of the OSCE and beyond. There were three presenters. Kate Watters (Crude Accountability, USA, and Founding Member of the Climate Justice Working Group, the Civic Solidarity Platform) started by talking about the experience with environmental security she had as an environmental activist working throughout Eurasia. She understood environmental security as including the changing environment for civil society in authoritarian regimes. Previously, Crude Accountability could work with communities all over Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia. It was possible to train people on air monitoring, to do soil monitoring and blood testing. And although the organisation faced pushback from the governments and its staff members and partners were harassed and detained, they still were able to work. It is close to impossible today. The last time they tried to do that kind of work in Russia, they were detained seven times in the span of five days, in spite of the presence of government officials. This is the context that we should be talking about when we think about how to articulate the concept of environmental security to our partners in the OSCE. It is not about numbers. It is about lives of people and their freedom.

Kate referred to the COP29 conference in Baku. In the leadup to COP29, Azerbaijan held at least 319 political prisoners, including environmental defenders. The numbers are even bigger in Russia

and other places in the region, but it becomes numbing after a while. That is why the earlier **conversation about oral histories, about telling stories and personalising is so important**. That is the story that we need to relay to people when we are talking about security and environmental security. This means that we need to hear from the people who are experiencing persecution.

Another problem that has already been touched upon in previous sessions is the lack of data. On one hand, there is not much data that we can use. On the other hand, there is obfuscation and fakery on the part of some governments. For example, Turkmenistan is creating a story about how it is monitoring the country's methane emissions, which is not happening in reality. Meanwhile, the beauty of science and the beauty of data is that **you can collect facts, and it is really hard for an authoritarian country to dispute them**. The question, however, is how we can work as communities to gather the information, the stories, and the data that are out there, whether that is from Indigenous leaders or from the people who are on the front lines who know what is happening.

Kate's third point was about the **risks to environmental defenders**. In her discussion paper, Kate referred to a report published in February 2024 by Michel Forst, the UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, which shows that environmental activists are increasingly portrayed in a negative light in the media in Europe.⁵ Since 2012, 21,100 environmental and land defenders have been murdered around the world, she noted. That includes activists from far away villages, but also Goldman prize winners.⁶ Titles do not protect you, unfortunately. We need to have mechanisms within the OSCE to protect environment activists and climate defenders in the same way as the UN does. In addition to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention, the UN special procedures include now a Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, a Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, and a Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. We need those types of mandates and tools in the OSCE, and those are hard and fast recommendations that we can make to our partners in the OSCE who are on our side. It is necessary to get the mechanisms that will be able to protect, not just to be a group of 14 people who care about the environment.

As her final point, Kate mentioned **the problem of the weaponisation of environment, climate, and big international fora to co-opt the language and the functions of environmental protection**. This can be well demonstrated by the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Azerbaijan. That is an example of successful whitewashing and greenwashing propaganda campaign. The head of the presidential committee worked for SOCAR, the state oil company of Azerbaijan, for 25 years. The people on that committee are benefiting from their relationships with the first family of Azerbaijan. In the context of COP29, despite Azerbaijan's climate commitments, President Aliyev made a statement that Azerbaijan is going to continue to expand its oil and gas industry. A lot of negotiations on new contracts were held on the margins of the conference. That is another area where we need to come in and talk about environmental security.

⁵ State repression of environmental protest and civil disobedience: a major threat to human rights and democracy. Position Paper by Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders under the Aarhus Convention. February 2024, p. 9. https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/UNSR_EnvDefenders_Aarhus_Position_Paper_Civil_Disobedience_EN.pdf

⁶ Goldman Environmental Prize is the most important international prize in the field of environmental activism, awarded annually to grassroots environmental champions from around the world who take significant action for our planet.

In her discussion paper, Kate underlined that **from its inception, the Helsinki Accords have included environmental considerations as a fundamental priority**. The Helsinki Final Act stated that “...efforts to develop co-operation in the fields of trade, industry, science and technology, the environment and other areas of economic activity contribute to the reinforcement of peace and security in Europe, and in the world as a whole.”⁷ In 2003 in Maastricht, the OSCE committed itself to “co-operate on economic, good governance, sustainable development and environmental protection issues in order to tackle the threats and challenges to security that had emerged over the previous decade.”⁸ This recognition of the growth in security challenges is part of an important dynamic within the OSCE, and similar changes have continued over time. Most recently, in 2021, with the Ministerial Council decision 3/21 to cooperate more closely on challenges caused by climate change, the OSCE has made an even more significant commitment to addressing climate change, and this is a key departure from previous focus on environment and economy as the key elements of the second dimension. Point 9 of this decision “[e]ncourages the participating States to pursue a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling climate change by actively engaging the private sector, academia, civil society and all other relevant stakeholders, including women’s and youth organizations.”⁹ Developing a focus from relating the environment and economics to one that more fully embraces the complexity of environmental security is encouraging. It is an appropriate response to the ever-growing threat of climate change and the increasing intersectional nature of environmental security. Civil society must be an even more integral part of this equation moving forward. To achieve successful climate goals, the next step in the OSCE’s development of its environmental goals must be to fully incorporate civil society into the second dimension, understanding and working to protect the rights of environmental, climate, and human rights defenders working on issues related to climate and the environment. It will require a full engagement of civil society, particularly environmental and climate defenders and independent journalists, to achieve this goal.

Timur Idrisov (The Little Earth, Tajikistan) in his presentation commented that **we should talk not only about environmental justice, but also about (inter)-generational justice – justice for future generations**. Meanwhile in many countries, even in Tajikistan, where the majority of the population are young people, voices of those who will live after us are not heard, and they are practically invisible in environmental or environmental policy development.

Timur noted that improvement of life of people in remote communities is not always costly. Inexpensive solutions can be at the same time gender sensitive. We have to keep that in mind because high-tech solutions are usually discussed, while low-cost, simple but effective technologies and devices are ignored. The importance of policy should also be noted. Inclusiveness should be provided for on a state level and not be left for separate private actors.

Yuriy Uhryn (Truth Hounds, Ukraine) focused on the study of Truth Hounds on the Kakhovka dam breach. The presentation he made demonstrated how the case of an environmental disaster can be addressed through different perspectives and how **environmental destruction can be used**

⁷ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Factsheet: OSCE Economic and Environmental Dimension. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/2/30348.pdf>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Decision No. 3/21 – Strengthening Co-operation to Address the Challenges Caused by Climate Change. OSCE Ministerial Council meeting, Stockholm, 03.12.2021. <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/507050>

as a weapon in war. The study involved several steps starting from the analysis of what was already compiled by others, setting cooperation with the Ukrainian authorities, collection of evidence, including field missions to the affected territories, and then the actual drafting of the report. The photos from the field trips to affected territories, which were taken during the month after the dam breach, as well as interviews with survivors, became the core of the evidence base. The report was published on 6 June 2024, one year after the dam breach. It starts with historical background, describes who committed what, and studies the environmental consequences in detail. The final part of the report is devoted to the overview of a legal strategy aimed at bringing to justice those responsible for the breach. This way the report not only documents the consequences of the breach and demonstrates the weaponisation of environmental destruction during the war, but also provides legal analysis that can be used by the International Criminal Court in its investigations on Ukraine or by national courts, including courts in third states, on the basis of the universal jurisdiction principle.

In the course of the study, it was proved that the breach could not have happened naturally. The dam was breached because it was damaged. It was also proved that the dam was exploded by the soldiers from the 205th motor rifle brigade of Russia. It was established that over 405 square kilometres were flooded due to the Kakhovka dam breach. Satellite images, that were both gathered from open sources and received from NASA, were used to collect the necessary information. The consequences of the breach were horrible. Since the south of Ukraine is an agricultural territory, these consequences impacted not only Ukraine, but also African nations and other countries, to which the food produced in the regions, which are now cut from water, had been previously exported. It is important to note that the Ukrainian prosecutor's office was very cooperative, they used the information from the study and issued an order of suspicion of the Russian general Makarevich. This way, the study was used not only for environmental purposes, but also for criminal justice.

To punish environmental crimes is an ambitious aim, as the international criminal law does not allow to prosecute them. However, some progress has been achieved at the national level: the German International Crimes Code was amended to address the disproportional damage, and environmental crimes can now be prosecuted under this norm. A current plan is to build the case on this basis.

Another project by the Truth Hounds is on its way that will contribute to the development of the legal basis to punish environmental crimes. It is the study of the occupation by Russia of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, located near the city of Enerhodar on the southern shore of the Kakhovka Reservoir on the Dnieper River. According to preliminary conclusions of the study, not only Russia as a state but the Russian corporation, Rosatom, are involved in it. While the legal part of the study is still in process, the information collected for it has been already used for advocacy purposes. Thanks to the information from the study, Greenpeace/Germany successfully halted technical support by Siemens to the Russian construction of the nuclear power plant in Hungary.

Participants of the seminar agreed that the case of the Kakhovka dam breach could be effectively used as a case study to illustrate the connection between the OSCE first dimension of military-political security and the second dimension on the environment and economy.

Much of the following discussion was devoted to the problem of understanding the notion of environmental justice. In legal work, justice is about bringing to account the perpetrators, that is those who created injustice. Another part of justice is fairness and compensation for the victims. But when we talk about environmental justice, we rather have in mind focused support to underprivileged or victimised groups and the fact that this support is paid by those guilty of environmental crimes. An opinion was voiced that to talk about environmental justice, we need to understand environmental injustice. It is important to understand that **environmental justice is a holistic concept, based on the needs of affected people and the idea that their voices should be heard and taken into account. Even more than that: their voices should be in front, and the discussion should be based on their demands and their vision.** We cannot just take this concept and easily adapt it for the use in the security paradigm, including in the OSCE. It took a long time to develop it and introduce it into the international law. For example, it took 15 years to include a line about climate justice in the 2015 Climate Paris Agreement.¹⁰

The discussion also touched upon the introduction of the notion of intergenerational justice within the framework of security discourse. An argument was proposed that the choices that we are making today or choosing not to do are limiting policy options for future generations, which could be viewed as a security issue.

The problem of “hyper shrinking space” clearly resonated with participants and was commented on by many. Some attributed it directly to problems in the functioning of OSCE field missions, which in many places are not working well to uphold Helsinki principles and prefer to secure good relationships with the governments of hosting states instead of supporting civil society organisations. The urgent necessity to look for new leverage was stressed, including finding creative ways to address shrinking civil space. An example of innovative tools to communicate information by Beirut Urban Lab was mentioned, in which they use maps and design tools to spread information about how wartime assaults on the country and on the city are impacting the urban environment. At the same time, it is vital to “localize our effort” and support local activists and those representatives of the authorities that stand for the people.

Finally, **the issue of disinformation and the importance of using data to combat it** was considered from different angles. Disinformation has a huge impact not only on the work related to the environment, but also on the security of local civil society organisations. This is not something new, but there is an impression that the situation is getting worse. Russia spends considerable funds to feed disinformation campaigns discrediting not only the governments of states it perceives as its enemies, but also civil society and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE, on a daily basis. However, the reaction from Western countries and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE, is weak. We need to formulate a recommendation in this regard.

In addition, it should be taken into consideration that the fight against disinformation is a long game. It takes not only actions by intergovernmental organisations and governments, but civil society as well, which should address reputational attacks by continuing working with integrity and in partnership with each other. Data, in this context, can become a game changer. Information is being withheld from local communities, so if you can gather the data, you can hold that data up

¹⁰ The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015.

yourself or put it out to the world, and that is also the fight against disinformation and smear campaigns. If we can organise ourselves around that and then use or participate in the international mechanisms that are out there to distribute that data, to help them understand why that part of the process is so important, then, we can flip the hourglass again and start to have more civil space.

The final session was aimed at brainstorming, making conclusions, and developing recommendations related to the topic of the seminar.

During the concluding session, participants, in an open brainstorming fashion, tried to sum up what do they could take home from the seminar and what could be formulated as analytical reflective conclusions and specific recommendations to different actors. Organisers stressed that not necessarily all the recommendations will align with each other. There may be different and sometimes contradictory ideas, as well as concrete practical recommendations. There are different arrangements and initiatives that can contribute to the process of recommendation drafting in the present project. There is the Helsinki+50 Reflection Group, which will be ultimately responsible for formulating an outcome document of the project in late spring – early summer next year in time to distribute it to key actors ahead of the commemorative conference in the end of July in Helsinki. A final product will likely be shorter, probably around five pages on all topics, while the seminar reports will become background material for those who are interested.

The main question was “do we try to continue working with the OSCE, which uses the security paradigm, as opposed to environmental justice paradigm, or by continuing working with the OSCE we legitimise wrong conceptual approaches and we should better disengage?” It was touched upon in the previous sessions, and the present session confirmed the absence of consensus on this issue. Participants, however, were united in seeing at least some perspectives of investing efforts there.

It was noted that the OSCE is not a monolithic thing, even less so than other international arrangements. It does not have a statute, a written treaty of establishment. The Helsinki Final Act is a set of principles and values under which all participating States signed, but not an agreement to establish an organisation. **There is a diversity of actors in the OSCE, which gives us the possibility to concentrate on working with those who can be viewed as the most willing to engage with civil society**, including the environmental and economic program at the Secretariat, which is doing some good work on the ground in different participating States on risk assessments, water, and climate crisis, as was mentioned during the first session. Another good example is the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which has made statements and positioned itself regarding environment more than other bodies in the OSCE. It can do little beyond saying something, but it can translate these ideas into the national parliaments and governments and advocate for policy and legislative change. Another avenue is the Group of Friends of the Environment, which seems to be not doing much at the moment, but the potential is there. For example, states that are its members could provide extra budgetary funds for specific projects implemented by the Secretariat or by civil society. A similar recommendation was in a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), shared with the participants as background reading for the seminar.

Another recommendation by SIPRI, which we could relate to, is establishing a position of a Special representative on the environment or environmental security (there is, however, a question if we

should insist on that knowing that there are plans to introduce a Special Representative on Climate). This is something that could provide leeway to the Chairpersonship, as special representatives are appointed by Chairpersonships and can be extended for a number of years or, alternatively, new people could be appointed to this position. This is something that we have achieved with a Special Representative on civil society two years ago. It still has to become a meaningful mandate, which takes time, but the mandate is already there.

Advocating for establishing a mandate of a Rapporteur on Security of Environmental Defenders was put forward as another idea. It is not clear if environmental defenders can currently use the Helsinki decalogue as human rights defenders did after 1975, or do we need to reconceptualise this for the second dimension because it is a separate basket?

It would be, however, not enough to simply suggest the establishment of a body. Because the work on defining mandates and terms of reference of existing Special Representatives is currently in process, we need to provide the Finnish Chairpersonship with our proposals on the mandate of the Special Representative on Civil Society. This mandate could include the security of environmental defenders, because we are talking about civil society, not just human rights organisations or human rights defenders in a narrow sense. It is important to suggest concrete tools or mechanisms and how the Special Representative will be watching, reacting, alerting, in cooperation with whom and exactly how.

Against the background of a discussion of a Group of Friends of the Environment, it was suggested to have a separate Group of friends on climate change. Although there might be certain competition with the Group of Friends of the Environment, this may contribute to bringing the second dimension higher on the agendas.

It was proposed to recommend **establishing a targeted funding mechanism that is more specific than the traditional grants** given to a whole variety of equally important topics. If we could convince a coalition of like-minded states to invest in the ability of civil society to collect valid data, not only on the topic of environmental security but also on human rights, this could be a targeted instrument to help us in our daily work, and it is a good argument to convince participating States to invest into sustainable security at the same time.

Returning to the issue of targets of recommendations, the respective dimension Committees in Vienna were noted. They are exclusive, in the sense that only representatives of states' delegations in Vienna participate in their meetings, but they also invite outsiders to speak as experts, including civil society representatives. This is clearly a path for us to the Vienna discussions. The CSP has successfully worked with the Human Dimension Committee, which covers the third dimension. The CSP successfully advocated for opening it to civil society and succeeded. Several consecutive chairpersonships of this Committee have been inviting civil society experts, including CSP representatives, to speak on particular items on the agenda. This is a good model of work with the Committees which we should try to reproduce in the second and the first dimension.

Another potential audience for recommendations named by the participants was the field missions and other actors working on the ground. What could be done with them in terms of engagement on environmental issues? For example, we could somehow "translate" the best practices of Aarhus Centres, which work well, to those who do not.

The OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre could be another recipient of our recommendations. It belongs to the first dimension more than to the other two dimensions, as long as its work is about conflict. Their mandate is to do round the clock monitoring and collect early warning signs of possible conflicts. Its work is not very public by definition, but its staff has been rather open for interaction with the Civic Solidarity Platform. In the Helsinki + 50 project, one of the themes of the three remaining seminars is the OSCE work on conflict. Looking into environmental security, early warning signs as part of the conflict cycle work is something that would be quite useful.

The issue of time constraints resurfaced again in the context of our engagement with the OSCE. It was alleged that **because of the growing urgency in addressing climate change we need something more effective than existing OSCE arrangements**, such as limited initiatives by groups of States or research and educational programmes implemented by the Secretariat and the Aarhus Centres focusing on certain subjects. What these new tools could be, in addition to the new mandate of the Special Representative on Climate, and how (if at all) they can be agreed upon between States, is a subject of further discussions. While talking about new tools, we should not forget that there are things at the OSCE that are worth saving such as the ODIHR. But the most important is to save the conceptual thinking behind the original Helsinki process.

Some of the thinking needs to go to civil society itself, which often participates in activities that do not bring any result. We need to do quite fundamental rethinking of our priorities in the context of the OSCE as we feel strong time pressure as regards climate crisis.

We need to articulate first for ourselves what we mean by environmental security and climate justice; we need to decide on our terminology. Comprehensive security indeed encompasses all three dimensions. Environmental security certainly extends beyond the second basket because it concerns not only the natural environment and the economy but also the lives of people and communities. There is also a strong connection with the first basket through conflict, instability, migration, etc. It is not limited to the third basket either, since it is not just about protecting fundamental rights and environmental defenders. It is about protecting the planet as we know it and about our survival.

Also, we need to be more concrete in our recommendations: what does it mean to broaden the understanding of the second basket and how does it differ from what exists now? Maybe a broader definition connects environment and the human dimension? Maybe we should insist that the three dimensions are not separate from each other? Once we understand the concepts better and share the same vision and values together, we can put it in recommendations. Also, having a “clear formula” could contribute to the discussion of the future of the OSCE as an organisation but it also touches upon the question of the future of cooperative security in Europe and beyond.

The following recommendations were suggested:

To OSCE bodies and institutions:

- the OSCE should place environmental security and the climate crisis much higher on the OSCE agenda, substantially activate work in this field and support these efforts by providing the necessary resources;

- building on existing commitments, starting from the 2007 Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security and all the way to the 2021 Decision on Strengthening Cooperation to Address the Challenges Caused by Climate Change, the OSCE should broaden its concept of environmental security and the climate crisis to highlight and better incorporate into its activities and programming the intersectional and interdimensional nature of the issue, including impacts on migration, gender, minorities, Indigenous rights, conflict, and transboundary issues;
- The OSCE should establish the position of a Rapporteur on Security of Environmental and Climate Defenders or include this problem in the mandate of the CiO Special Representative on Civil Society. For its part, ODIHR should include the situation of environmental and climate defenders in its monitoring of and reporting on security of human rights defenders. Much as the United Nations has expanded its human rights mandate to include environment and climate change specifically, the OSCE should broaden its second and third dimension mandates to include the protection of environmental and climate defenders;
- The OSCE Chairpersonship, in cooperation with the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, should consider creating an online platform or producing a series of publications and/or holding a social media campaign highlighting environmental defenders from around the OSCE area to both protect environmental defenders and promote OSCE visibility on this critical issue;
- The OSCE Chairpersonship of Finland should consider creating a thematic focus on stronger civil society engagement in the second dimension in 2025;
- Relevant OSCE bodies, such as the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities within the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Economic and Environmental Committee should create more opportunities for input from civil society, invite civil society experts and members of affected communities to speak at their meetings, and include their representatives in monitoring, reporting, analysis, deliberations and program development, implementation and assessment;
- The Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities within the OSCE Secretariat and OSCE field operations should be activated in more substantial ways to engage with national and local civil society and local communities in OSCE participating States. This engagement should utilise the resources of the Aarhus Centre Network with its more than 30 centres in all four OSCE sub-regions. Civil society groups and local community members are invaluable sources of data on climate related issues including emissions, resource use, and regional solutions. Civil society should be much more vigorously included in OSCE work on environmental security and climate change to ensure that climate and environmental policy and programs of the OSCE and its participating States help the people and communities that most need support;
- Aarhus Centres are vital tools for collecting and disseminating environmental information, yet many face significant challenges or are not as active as they could be. The OSCE should support strengthening these centres by providing logistical support and working with governments to remove bureaucratic or political obstacles. These centres can play a critical role in enhancing public awareness and facilitating access to environmental data;

- The OSCE should strengthen capacity building for civil society organisations working on environmental and climate issues, similar to its support for human rights organisations. It should also offer training and financial support for local environmental initiatives (this could be done in the form of online trainings);
- The OSCE should conduct a more comprehensive annual review of participating States' records on implementing their second dimension commitments, closer to the review conducted during annual human dimension conferences concerning OSCE third dimension commitments, and involve civil society in this effort. By facilitating transparent reviews and accountability mechanisms, the OSCE can ensure that commitments translate into tangible progress, countering tendencies to neglect or backslide;
- Thinktanks and universities are key to generating knowledge and solutions for environmental issues but face significant limitations in some countries, including a lack of academic freedom, censorship, and government pressure to align with official narratives. The OSCE can support academic independence by fostering collaboration through seminars, information exchanges, and discussions. It also should step up environmental programs within the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. By empowering experts and researchers to go beyond descriptive approaches and address sensitive topics, the OSCE can help generate innovative solutions;
- The OSCE already works on both anti-corruption and environmental issues. Programs linking the two areas would help address situations where corruption undermines environmental policies. Addressing corruption as a cross-cutting issue is critical to ensuring that foreign cooperation efforts achieve their intended impact;
- Environmental awareness remains low among much of the population in Central Asia, despite occasional campaigns focused on specific issues such as nuclear pollution or mining-related hazards. The OSCE should more actively partner with media, independent NGOs, and educational institutions to raise awareness about critical issues like recycling, water conservation, climate change, and actionable solutions. Public education campaigns can help build a broader societal understanding of environmental challenges and foster collective action to address them;
- The OSCE should deepen its engagement, dialogue, and cooperation with businesses, encouraging them to embrace and expand corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Companies often serve as legitimate intermediaries between government authorities and civil society, providing a neutral platform for collaboration. Furthermore, businesses possess the resources, expertise, and innovative capacity to contribute significantly to addressing environmental challenges. This can include: promoting sustainable business practices that align with environmental goals; encouraging investment in green technologies and renewable energy solutions; facilitating knowledge-sharing among businesses, civil society, and policymakers to develop practical and scalable solutions; and advocating for corporate accountability in industries with significant environmental impacts, such as extractives, agriculture, and energy;
- The OSCE should more actively support long-term research and collection of data by civil society groups and research organisations, with an understanding that this work requires investment into consistent data collection and storage; participating States should consider establishing a dedicated fund for financial support of this work.

To OSCE participating States:

- Implement your OSCE commitments to ensure respect for freedom of association and security of environmental and climate defenders, implement the 2014 ODIHR Guidelines on Security of Human Rights Defenders and the 2015 ODIHR and the Venice Commission Guidelines on Freedom of Association, and facilitate civil society engagement in environmental monitoring, policy discussions, and citizen control, including by easing registration requirements, repealing foreign agent style legislation, and opening space for CSO engagement in the policymaking process;
- Reconstitute or activate the work of the informal Group of Friends of the Environment to engage with civil society and community members focused on environmental and climate issues;
- Address the problem of weaponisation of environmental damage and disasters during violent conflict, such as in the course of the Russian large-scale aggression against Ukraine, study documentation by civil society organisations, and focus on using legal instruments to bring perpetrators to account and ensure justice to victims;
- Address the problem of weaponisation of international cooperation in the field of the environment and climate change and of international fora by authoritarian regimes;
- Strengthen response to disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting civil society and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE.

To donors and intergovernmental organisations:

- Donors and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE, are often criticised for engaging with and providing support to primarily well-established or international CSOs. It is crucial to involve a broader range of organisations, including smaller and less known local groups that may lack resources or capacity but have valuable local knowledge. Efforts should also extend beyond urban centres to include rural areas where activists are deeply familiar with regional environmental challenges. Moreover, the OSCE should actively engage with CSOs that operate in local or minority languages, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues across diverse communities;
- Donors and intergovernmental organisations, including the OSCE, should train local NGOs working on environmental and climate issues, especially in the most affected areas, in the field of project management.

To civil society:

- Continue discussions among concerned CSOs and experts to develop a common understanding and a working definition of environmental and climate justice, reflecting its intersectional character and its connection with human rights and civil society work as well as its interconnection with the security framework. In these discussions, put into focus the notion of human security as opposed to state security because when people suffer from the negative impact on the environment or the climate crisis, it is about their human security, security of individuals, collectives, or communities;

- Invest in learning about and understanding the intersectional character of climate change, its impact on individuals and communities in connection with such factors as race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, ability, levels of education, religion, etc.; pay attention to nature-society relations and economies that are at the roots of the climate change crisis; include land rights and Indigenous rights in the concept of climate justice; understand various aspects of migration caused by or related to climate change;
- Work to empower the affected and marginalised communities; give voice to the underrepresented to compensate their inability to use the stages we have; invest in oral history to include local communities and Indigenous peoples;
- Continue discussions among CSOs and experts to develop a clearer and more convincing concept of the interconnectedness of the first, second, and third dimensions of the Helsinki process in the context of environmental security and climate justice, which is particularly important within the OSCE reform discussions. While avoiding technical and formal language in favour of providing human perspective, seek to frame our positions and recommendations in the OSCE context to make them better accepted and understood;
- Continue discussions among concerned CSOs and experts to consider conceptualising security as a human right;
- Keep abreast of up-to-date information about debates on environmental and climate issues among OSCE participating States, positions of the main actors within the OSCE, including the Office of the Coordinator on environmental and economic issues, their mandates, possibilities and constraints, budget issues, and other challenges they face, in order to effectively engage with them and develop meaningful recommendations to them;
- More actively engage with relevant OSCE bodies, such as the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities within the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Economic and Environmental Committee;
- In addition to this engagement, consider the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre and OSCE field missions as interlocutors and recipients of recommendations;
- Work together with the academic community to obtain more expert knowledge and collect environmental data, using it as a leverage to influence policies and decision-making. Invest in consistent monitoring and record keeping of the collected data;
- Establish more active horizontal cooperation on environmental security and justice among civil society organisations; make focus on engaging with local groups working in affected areas, contributing to their capacity building, developing equal participation of all actors in decision making, and ensuring a strong voice and representation of affected communities.