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Addressing the interdependence between peace and climate change: need for renewed global diplomacy

(own-initiative opinion)

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1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The European Union (EU) must adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach in order to address the increasing interlinkages between climate change, health and security risks and global governance. As international cooperation faces growing challenges from authoritarianism, protectionism and nationalism, the EU should position itself as a credible and resilient leader in global climate diplomacy. It is imperative that climate and security policy are no longer treated in isolation. Instead, they must be viewed as mutually reinforcing elements of a sustainable and peaceful global future: after all, the fundamental mission of the European project is to promote and preserve peace, fundamental rights and democracy.

1.2. In foreign policy, the EU should champion climate diplomacy that links environmental goals with conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This approach must be rooted in renewed global alliances, inclusive partnerships and integrated policy frameworks. The EU's evolving external engagement should reflect the interdependent nature of global challenges, recognising that environmental degradation and instability are deeply connected. By embedding climate security considerations into its diplomatic and development strategies, the EU can help address root causes of conflict while reinforcing global climate commitments.

1.3. Moreover, the EU should position itself as a multiplier of values by promoting climate action that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes investments in good governance, food, water and energy security, safe cities and resilient livelihoods. Humanitarian and adaptation efforts should be inclusive and participatory, engaging grassroots organisations, youth-led and women-targeted initiatives and civil society actors.

1.4. A clear and ambitious domestic agenda remains equally essential. The EU must accelerate the implementation of the European Green Deal through national and union-wide action plans. These plans should address decarbonisation, biodiversity conservation, circular economy practices and sustainable land use. Current economic challenges must not delay this transition; instead, climate investment should be used as a lever for economic recovery, technological leadership and global competitiveness in green and digital innovation.

1.5. Simultaneously, the EU should scale up its Green Deal/SDG diplomacy by leveraging its sustainability expertise to support developing regions. This involves strengthening partnerships through structured cooperation with the Global South. By promoting shared climate frameworks and facilitating technology transfer, Europe can support a just transition in the Global South while reinforcing its global influence.

1.6. In multilateral forums, the EU must remain at the forefront of global climate advocacy. It should lead calls for ambitious action at the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, as well as at key environmental conventions such as the UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD. A robust multilateral presence is particularly crucial in the context of waning US engagement.

1.7. Finally, a renewed EU diplomatic strategy must be grounded in three guiding principles. First, climate considerations should be fully integrated into conflict prevention strategies. This means embedding environmental risk analysis in peacebuilding efforts and proactively addressing resource-based tensions. Second, the EU must prioritise regional and multilateral cooperation that advances both climate resilience and conflict resolution, supporting grassroots and regional adaptation efforts. Third, sustainable development should be promoted as a peace mechanism, with targeted investments in renewable energy, reforestation and climate-smart agriculture helping to reduce vulnerability and prevent conflict.

1.8. With a view to achieving renewed and reinforced diplomacy, the EESC urges the EU to overcome internal fragmentation and take bold steps towards strategic autonomy. However, this strategic autonomy needs to be translated into operational capabilities, concrete policies and coordinated action among the Member States. Without tangible progress in defence, energy independence and economic resilience, the EU risks backtracking in a world that is increasingly shaped by power struggles and unilateral decision-making.

1.9. Only through such an integrated, proactive and values-driven approach can the EU maintain its credibility and leadership in a world facing the dual threats of climate disruption and geopolitical instability. With this aim in mind, the EU could make use of its Trade policy as a tool/instrument to foster sustainable development, to address climate change and peaceful economic growth, as Trade policy is an exclusive EU competence, allowing Europe to speak with one voice and thus ‘export’ European values on human and social rights, environmental protection and climate policy.

2. **Introduction**

2.1. The EESC acknowledges that the inextricable link between climate change and global stability has become undeniable. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events and resource scarcity are not just environmental concerns, but also significant catalysts for conflict. If we are to safeguard peace, we must acknowledge that climate action is a cornerstone of security policy. This pressing reality demands a revitalised commitment to global diplomacy, one that integrates climate resilience into peace-building efforts.

2.2. Taking stock of previous work, in particular REX/569 ([1]) and REX/578 ([2]), the EESC would like to follow-up and build upon their conclusions and recommendations that, on the one hand underline the importance of understanding the complex links within the climate and security nexus, as climate change and environmental degradation are global challenges whose dynamics, in combination with the agricultural, water ([3]) and infrastructural vulnerabilities affect people in many countries and, on the other, stress the need for urgent resilient responses to those challenges highlighting that the fundamental mission of the European project is to promote and preserve peace, inextricably linked to the preservation and promotion of fundamental rights and democracy. The EESC has also already drawn attention to environmental damage caused by war, including ecosystem degradation, air and water pollution and contamination of arable and pasture fields ([4]).

2.3. Climate change is approaching or surpassing several global tipping points, including: (1) multi-metre sea level rise; (2) dying of major biomes (such as the tipping of the Amazon rainforest into grassland); (3) stoppage of the ocean circulation, accelerating the warming of the Southern Ocean (accelerating destruction of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet) and cooling the North Atlantic; (4) melting of the boreal permafrost and massive boreal forest fires.

2.4. Climate change will increase the frequency, spread and intensity of violent conflicts and can destabilise the climate as follows: (1) destabilise politics and incite social conflict (urban versus rural, sedentary versus nomadic, etc.) within societies; (2) exacerbate the global hunger crisis by lowering crop yields, fragmenting global trade in foodstuffs, and raise food prices; (3) intensify international conflicts over energy and mineral resources; (4) intensify cross-border disputes involving freshwater resources; (5) displace populations; (6) intensify extreme poverty, such as in the conflict-ridden Sahel, Eastern Congo, Ethiopia and Sudan; and (7) open the Arctic region for shipping, mining and other economic development, thereby increasing strategic competition and also possibly conflict among the various players. This is why it is important to stress the need for cohesion between the Member States and the EU's neighbours and partners, in particular to ensure continuity between areas outside inside the European territory.

2.5. Additionally, there are five main ways in which violent conflicts impede the fight against climate change, namely: (1) violent conflicts and military operations more generally are directly responsible for massive environmental harms; (2) violent conflicts prevent government planning and investments in the three critical areas of climate action: mitigation (the implementation of a zero-carbon energy system), adaptation (targeted investments to offset climate harms, such as flood and drought protection), and resilience (holistic investments in warning systems and capacity of human systems to bounce back from climate-related losses and damages); (3) violent conflicts drain government revenues that are needed to undertake critical climate investments; (4) violent conflicts impede inter-state cooperation to overcome the free-rider problem in environmental action. Since violent conflicts pit nations against other nations, the ability to achieve win-win cooperation is impeded or ended; (5) violent conflicts block the inter-state trust needed for regional climate actions, such as cross-border energy cooperation (e.g., pooling renewable energy reservoirs in various countries into a single power pool or jointly governing an endangered biome such as a rainforest or watershed that is shared by two or more neighbouring countries).

2.6. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) acknowledges the urgency of addressing the interdependence between climate change and peace Climate change is increasingly becoming a major driver of global insecurity, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities, contributing to forced displacement and intensifying competition over scarce resources. As climate-related risks intensify, the EU must strengthen its diplomatic and institutional responses to address the impacts of climate on peace and stability, especially in the new geopolitical order. The EESC's work on circular diplomacy can complement the aims of this opinion. The European Defence Agency, for example, is already making efforts internally to use circular economy principles in its procurement (through its LIFE-funded Incubation Forum for Circular Economy in European Defence (IFCeeD)), which creates opportunities for consistent opportunities in this domain.

([1]) Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'EU Climate Diplomacy' (own-initiative opinion) (OJ C, C/2024/1575, 5.3.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/1575/oj).

([2]) Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – "A new outlook on the climate and security nexus: Addressing the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security and defence"' (JOIN(2023) 19 final) (OJ C, C/2024/2106, 26.3.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/2106/oj).

([3]) On water, see the EESC call for an EU Blue Deal and related opinions: EU Blue Deal, EESC.

([4]) Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the right to a healthy environment in the European Union, especially in the context of the war in Ukraine (own-initiative opinion) (OJ C 228, 29.6.2023, p. 10).

3. **Background**

3.1. Climate change is a fundamental and urgent security challenge that is reshaping global stability. The cascading effects of climate change are amplifying existing vulnerabilities and creating new security risks, particularly in fragile regions and urban centres.

3.2. Addressing climate challenges and upholding the international rules-based order are interconnected priorities: neither can succeed without the other, and both are fundamental to safeguarding human and national security.

3.3. The objective of addressing climate change is embedded in Article 191(1) of the TFEU as a concept to be promoted in the Union's external action. The 2016 EU Global Strategy states that 'climate change and environmental degradation exacerbate potential conflict, in light of their impact on desertification, land degradation, and water and food scarcity'. The strategy considers climate 'a threat multiplier catalysing water and food scarcity, pandemics and displacement' ([5]).

3.4. Furthermore, the European Green Deal ([6]) should remain a crucial component of the EU's policy framework, aiming to transform the Union into a contemporary, resource-efficient and competitive economy. The Green Deal not only pledges to transform Europe into the first 'carbon neutral continent by 2050' but also aims to unite climate goals with prosperity growth and security strategies. This comprehensive plan showcases the EU's commitment to combating climate change by developing a comprehensive and multi-pronged strategy, taking into consideration geopolitical, economic and environmental factors.

3.5. The EU should also leverage the Global Gateway, linking climate and geo-economic diplomacy by enhancing international cooperation, while integrating SDGs into its flagship projects and initiatives. Its flagship projects should address the combination of peace, conflict and democracy.

3.6. As part of the wider climate-security nexus, the implementation of the Climate Change and Defence Roadmap contributes to the broader EU agenda, most notably the Council conclusions on Climate Diplomacy from January 2020 ([7]).

3.7. In March 2022, the Council of the EU adopted the Strategic Compass ([8]), which was subsequently endorsed by EU leaders. The compass is designed to create a shared strategic vision concerning security challenges, including climate, and to translate that vision into courses of action and deliverables.

3.8. Yet, and notwithstanding all the 'climate policy is now security policy' rhetoric, the EU has retrenched further from having full-spectrum ecological security. The wider climate geopolitical component of EU policy has been oddly inactive amid such momentous change. There have been no major steps forwards and, in some ways, climate geopolitics is being displaced by other geopolitical calculations and a swing back to more traditional security. Both geo-economic and political interests explain this situation.

4. **Comments**

The Urgency of EU Leadership

4.1. The EESC understands that growing authoritarianism, protectionism and nationalism may undermine international cooperation to address the security risks generated by climate change. We are living in an era when the link between climate policy and security policy is becoming increasingly important, yet the link between concerted action and global understanding is getting fragmented and is not to be taken for granted.

([5]) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en.
([6]) https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en.
([7]) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-climate-change-and-defence-roadmap_en.
([8]) https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-1_en.

4.2. The EESC believes that whether it's defence, trade, climate, or diplomacy, Europe faces a monumental challenge: how to position itself as a resilient, autonomous actor in the global arena. Now that the climate agenda is receding in the agenda of the US, Europe must proactively prepare for a world where it cannot take US alignment for granted.

4.3. The EESC strongly believes that, in light of the US's retreat from international climate arrangements and obligations, the EU must not only try to obtain the means to fill the void, but also strengthen alliances that insulate climate policies from geopolitical turbulence. The time for renewed global diplomacy is now. The world cannot afford to address climate change and conflict as isolated issues. A sustainable and peaceful future depends on our ability to bridge these domains and implement integrated solutions that foster both environmental and geopolitical stability.

4.4. The EU has a pivotal role in driving this transformation, ensuring that climate action is no longer seen as separate from peacebuilding but as an essential component of it. The EU's evolving foreign policy must reflect the interconnected nature of global challenges, particularly the links between environmental degradation and conflict. The urgency of this challenge cannot be overstated. As climate-related security threats intensify, diplomacy must evolve to reflect this new reality.

4.5. The EESC suggests that the EU upholds its position as trusted partner in the fight against climate change by underlining the need to take a leading role and serve as a multiplier of values: This could include investments in broader SDGs (good governance, livelihoods, food security, safe cities), and climate and security sensitive humanitarian efforts must include grassroots organisations, youth led organisations and civil society. Inclusive, diverse and evidenced-based decision making on climate mitigation and adaptation is essential, as well as disaster risk reduction and response and energy and economic security.

4.6. The EESC directs the EU towards overcoming internal fragmentation and taking bold steps toward strategic autonomy. However, this strategic autonomy has to be translated into operational capabilities, concrete policies and coordinated action among the Member States. Without tangible progress in defence, energy independence and economic resilience, the EU risks backtracking in a world increasingly shaped by power struggles and unilateral decisions.

4.7. In particular, the green energy transition is essential for geopolitical stability, self-sufficiency and peacebuilding. While nations must foster a higher degree of economic cooperation across regions, with a focus on transforming the global energy system, Europe must simultaneously invest in domestic renewable capacity to enhance energy decentralisation and self-sufficiency. This dual approach reduces global emissions, while foresting mutual trust, reducing dependency on fossil fuels and mitigating the risk of conflict.

4.8. The EU should develop a three-pronged strategy for climate action. First, it should lay out national and EU-wide plans to achieve the European Green Deal targets for decarbonisation, biodiversity conservation, land use protection, circular economy and other measures. The current economic stagnation in Europe is not a reason for delay, but rather a reason to reinforce action. Investments in climate action will not only address the environmental issues, but will also act as an economic stimulus and as a pathway to Europe's global competitiveness in green and digital technologies.

4.9. The EU should lead in Green Deal/SDG diplomacy (Lafortune et al, 2024 ([9])) with other major countries and regions, in which Europe would use its advances in the European Green Deal to help other regions in the developing world to adopt similar approaches. This should include EU-China, EU-AU, EU-India, EU-ASEAN, and EU-CELAC (Latin America) initiatives and other partners from the Global South.

4.10. The EU should invest in multilateralism and continue to lead globally in the call for climate action, especially considering the withdrawal of the United States from any reasonable responsibility on this issue. Europe should lead the call for accelerated action at the UNGA and UN Security Council, and at the COP meetings of the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD.

([9]) Lafortune, Guillaume, Grayson Fuller, Adolf Kloke-Lesch, Phoebe Koundouri et Angelo Riccaboni (2024) 'European Elections, Europe's Future and the Sustainable Development Goals/Europe Sustainable Development Report 2023/24' Report SDSN Europe, https://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/104407.

4.11. For the UNFCCC process, the completion of the Paris Rulebook can be ascribed to the effectiveness of global climate diplomacy. As we move into a post-negotiation phase, where emerging forms of pluralism, alliances and bilateral partnerships may redefine multilateralism, **the role of civil society will become increasingly vital**. Civil society actors will be essential in leading the way and translating climate agreements into action through sustained diplomatic engagement on the ground.

4.12. A renewed diplomatic strategy must be rooted in three key principles:

4.12.1. Integrating Climate Considerations into Conflict Prevention: Climate security must become a central pillar of peacebuilding efforts. The EU, along with international organisations and governments should incorporate environmental risk assessments in their diplomatic strategies, ensuring that resource-related tensions are addressed proactively.

4.12.2. Strengthening Multilateral Cooperation: The European Union, United Nations and other global actors must forge stronger alliances that prioritise both climate resilience and conflict resolution. Regional partnerships and grassroots collaborations can bolster climate adaptation strategies that reduce instability.

4.12.3. Investing in Green Development as a Peace Mechanism: sustainable economic policies that promote renewable energy, reforestation, and climate-smart agriculture can serve as stabilising forces in fragile regions. By providing communities with sustainable livelihoods, we can diminish the likelihood of resource-driven conflicts.

Brussels, 17 July 2025.

The President
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