

United States Mission to the OSCE



Session 6: Promoting Cooperation on Security Aspects of the Environment

by, inter alia, sustainable use and management of natural resources and preventing pollution, land degradation, ecological risks, natural and man-made disasters

As delivered by Charles Hornbostel
OSCE Review Conference
Vienna, Austria
October 25, 2010

For 35 years this Organization has been a leader in considering the security implications of trans-border environmental events, both natural and manmade, and has explored where and how to cooperate in preventing or responding to these events. Last year marked the 20th anniversary of the Sofia meeting on the environment, which reaffirmed the importance of cooperation in the environmental sphere, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, and made a renewed push to bring the human impact on the environment to the same level of attention as other security considerations. We have returned to this subject a number of times in the intervening years, most notably in the Environment and Security Initiative that we pledged at Maastricht to develop further.

The strength of the OSCE lies in its regional scope and comprehensive concept of security. It reminds us that environmental issues are not separate from security, economic development or human rights. The global and regional organizations involved in monitoring the environment can record a number of successes. Acid rain and the hole in the ozone layer are problems the international community has addressed and largely reversed in the past 20 years. The OSCE in particular has assisted in setting norms and sharing information on handling transnational industrial accidents in the OSCE space. Yet every day the evidence mounts that much more must be done internationally – cooperatively – to avoid irreparable damage to our planet.

The United States agrees that what we call “national” security must be viewed much more broadly, both geographically and conceptually, than it traditionally has in the past. In May of this year, the United States laid out its revised National Security Strategy, which considers security not only in terms of strengthening alliances and countering terrorism but also in promoting human dignity and protecting the environment.

As the Strategy states, we have an interest in a just and sustainable international order that can foster collective action to confront common challenges. This international order will support our efforts to advance security, prosperity, and universal values. Without such an international order and effective mechanisms to forge international cooperation, challenges that

recognize no borders – such as climate change and pandemic disease – will persist and potentially spread.

In this vein, we have worked closely with international partners such as the UN Environment Programme, which has undertaken remarkable efforts to assist some of the poorest, most disadvantaged, and most vulnerable people in the world in the face of conflicts and disasters. In Afghanistan and other affected regions, the U.S. government works with UNEP by providing on-the-ground expertise in environmental services, promoting human security and encouraging policies that will foster sustainable development.

Perhaps one of the more complex issues in the area of security aspects of the environment is the question of integrating natural resource management and environmental cooperation into peace operations. The concept of environmental security recognizes that disasters – both manmade and natural – in one country can impact the region and indeed the world. Already countries work bilaterally and through other multilateral organizations when disasters occur. For example, the U.S. Government is very grateful for the support it received from 17 countries following the devastating oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Specifically, I would like to thank our fellow OSCE participating States, which I'll give in alphabetical order, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom that provided essential equipment and support. I would like to add to that list Partners for Cooperation Korea and Japan.

In addition, four international organizations came to our assistance, including the European Union, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the UN Environment Programme, and the International Maritime Organization. Specifically, we would like to highlight that the EC Monitoring and Information Center coordinated offers of assistance.

More recently, when the Russia Federation experienced wildfires near Moscow, the U.S. delivered firefighting equipment and humanitarian support worth 4.5 million dollars. And many other European countries and institutions assisted as well. The OSCE does not need to duplicate these bilateral efforts. But it can fulfill its traditional role as the repository of best practices and a platform for dialogue. These goodwill gestures are the ultimate confidence building measures.

Finally, one issue that will have an even greater importance in the years to come, as many of our distinguished speakers have already mentioned, is water. Such factors as climate change and increasing demand will likely lead to tensions and perhaps even conflict over trans-boundary waters. These are complex issues that require years of dedicated work to build trust and strengthen the institutional arrangements required to sustain meaningful cooperation. This not only involves work with the riparian countries but careful management of donors to ensure diplomatic and development efforts are effective and well coordinated. For this reason, we have earmarked \$1 million, which likely would be channeled through the UN, to help support sensitive negotiations on trans-boundary water cooperation in targeted areas around the world.

All these are areas where the OSCE has in the past and/or could in the future play a role. As we have already heard in this RevCon, the OSCE has certain unique strengths that place it in a prime position to lead on environmental security issues. Its concept of security being

comprehensive and indivisible is holistic, where other entities may be too compartmentalized to see the big picture. Its regional scope gives the OSCE a level of local knowledge and an orientation on how the various aspects of security play out in Eurasia that is lacking in other regional fora. And its greatest strength, its field presence, gives the OSCE an on-the-ground perspective in many places where other multilateral institutions have none. As we consider how best to fulfill our earlier commitments on environment and security, we should not lose sight of the strengths this organization brings to the discussion.

Citizens are demanding even more from our governments in terms of protecting the environment. Our governments need to listen to public concerns and respond effectively.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.