



Ständige Vertretung
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bei der OSZE
Wien

Statement of Federal Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock
at the Side Event „Climate Change and Security in Mountain Regions“
at the 29th Ministerial Council of the OSCE

Łódź, 1st December 2022

Dear Helga, dear colleagues, dear friends,

Thank you for setting up this important meeting. We do not have so many mountains in Germany, especially not where I am from - in Potsdam, next to Berlin. But one of our highest mountains is the Zugspitze and next to it is the “Südliche Schneeferner”, which is one of five glaciers in the German Alps – or rather, it was. Because slowly at first and then rapidly, rising temperatures and lack of snowfall have caused it to shrink and its ice to melt. On 26 September this year, the Bavarian Academy of Sciences finally concluded that Germany only had four glaciers because the “Südliche Schneeferner” could no longer be considered a glacier.

This is just one devastating example of the effects of the climate crisis as it hits every country – and no country, no matter how rich or how strong, can ignore this. Even if we keep global warming well below 2 or 1.5 degrees, the IPCC projects that about two thirds of today’s glacial ice volume in the Alps will be lost by the year 2100. We know that many other mountain ranges across the OSCE region will share a similar fate. As the Secretary General has already mentioned, this will have devastating consequences for ecosystems, water supply and energy production in the mountain regions, and even for food supply.

All of this makes the climate crisis the biggest security challenge of our century. Today, globally, three times more people are displaced by climate disasters than by war. Erosion, droughts, landslides, dying forests and other natural disasters harm, kill and displace children, women and men. The climate crisis destroys livelihoods, destabilises communities and fuels conflicts.

That is why it is so crucial that we address climate-related security risks within the OSCE. And as I said in the plenary, that is why I truly believe – and even more in light of this brutal war – that it is more important than ever not to leave these topics aside but to address climate-related security risks right now. These are the world’s greatest regional security risks and we, the OSCE, are the world’s largest regional security organisation. It is really up to us to move this topic to the top of the agenda.

When you and I first spoke, Helga, we agreed that the OSCE should play a bigger role in the future in addressing the climate crisis and its security implications. This was just after the last Ministerial Council. The decision we adopted a year ago in Stockholm was clearly a big step forward.

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine continues to cause death and suffering. But you are also taking on the challenge of fighting the climate crisis. We have to stand firm on this matter, also with regard to our further work. This is why we have donated extra money to this project. We know that if we address climate-related security risks early, we can prevent conflicts in the future.

Besides North Africa, Central Asia is one of the regions in the world most affected by water stress. In Uzbekistan, which I visited last month, agriculture consumes about ninety percent of the water supply. Eighty percent of Uzbek water resources come from rivers that cross international borders. We see there is a risk of further conflict, but with the irrigation canal in Bad Bad, supported by the OSCE and also by Germany, we have shown how to prevent climate-related conflicts before they emerge.

It is this kind of projects that we would like to continue. What is so important about this project – and this is why I am mentioning it here at this conference – is that we are not only addressing the risks, but also using the opportunities and the technologies of today and the future to tackle these challenges. When I visited the project, I was impressed by almost 1000 controlling points that are run on solar power. This is more advanced than the situation on German motorways, where we are still struggling to put up solar panels.

Another important point I would like to make is the importance of disaster prevention work. We already know that we can predict roughly 20 percent of climate-induced crises. But overall anticipatory aid spending is only at around one to two percent. By increasing our anticipatory spending, we can not only save money but we can also save lives.

To prevent disasters we also need to involve diverse stakeholders and include communities with their own perceptions of risks – like we are doing in Uzbekistan. The OSCE project “Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change” is doing just that: identifying individual hotspots for climate risks and also locally informed answers.

We should aim to further empower civil society and local actors to play an active role. This is crucial for our organisation. It could mean, for example, teaching farmers to prevent erosion of fields, planning for diverted water supplies and also including women who are working in these regions.

We should work together with the Secretariat, the OSCE field offices and the Aarhus Centres to share best practices and information for these kinds of initiatives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change is the biggest security challenge of our time. As the largest regional organisation for security, it is our responsibility to tackle this challenge. What we need now is cooperation and commitment.

Together we can fight this crisis!