

The background of the entire page is an underwater photograph of several divers. In the foreground, a diver with yellow goggles is looking down at a document on a table. Other divers are visible in the background, some looking towards the camera. The water is a clear, deep blue.

# NEW MODES OF MULTI- LATERALISM

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# Building Back a Better EU Foreign Policy: Climate and Security after COVID-19

Wolfgang Ischinger

**I**n February 2017, Bill Gates alerted world leaders at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) that “we ignore the link between health security and international security at our peril.”<sup>1</sup>

It did not take long for this warning to become a terrible reality—as of this writing (August 2020), 750,000 people have perished from COVID-19, and that number continues to rise. That is roughly ten times the number of people that died in armed conflicts in 2019.<sup>2</sup>

The European Union (EU) was among the regions hit hardest in the early stages of the pandemic. More than 90,000 people have died in Italy, France, and Spain alone.<sup>3</sup> For decades we were under the illusion that our island of relative bliss could isolate itself from global turmoil. We chose to ignore dangers in plain view, instead of taking precautions that could have saved lives. We are advised to not repeat this mistake with regard to another global security threat: climate change. The EU needs a true climate foreign policy, and Germany should help to lead this effort.

## After Us, the Floods

Last year’s apocalyptic wildfires in Australia and this January’s devastating floods in Jakarta gave us a glimpse of what is to come if we don’t act now. In fact, for many, the changing climate already poses a massive security threat. In 2019, 24.9 million people were internally displaced as a result of weather-related disasters.<sup>4</sup> Absent drastic measures, such events will become even more frequent and destructive in the future. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, as a result of climate change, more than 140 million people could become internally displaced in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America alone.<sup>5</sup>

These climate impacts can also undermine peace, particularly in fragile states.<sup>6</sup> While the effect of climate change on armed conflict within states has only been modest so far, it is expected to rise with global temperatures.<sup>7</sup> The same holds true for interstate conflicts, as climate change may exacerbate resource scarcity or create new and contested abundance, like in the Arctic.<sup>8</sup> If

we continue on the current path, climate change will become one of the most serious—if not the dominant threat—to individual and global security.

The COVID-19 crisis underscores that a 21st century understanding of security needs to include non-traditional threats like climate change and points to the importance of reflecting and integrating this broader concept of security in our domestic and foreign policies. Adapting our definition of national and international security is so important because it decisively influences the way we allocate our resources. Our collective lack of pandemic preparedness—despite ample warnings—has highlighted this fact in the most painful manner.

It is good that the strategic community increasingly embraces the link between security and climate change. Eight years ago, when we started to debate the issue in Munich on a regular basis, many were skeptical as to whether climate

change was a relevant agenda item for a conference on security. That is certainly no longer the case, but political action has failed to match the rhetoric. This is particularly evident with regard to the weak implementation of the agreements reached at the UN Climate Change Conferences: rather than limiting global warming to 1.5°C, as governments agreed to in Paris in 2015, the world is currently heading for 3.2°C global warming by 2100.<sup>9</sup> Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is the single most effective action we can take to limit climate-related security risks. Yet it is only due to the massive economic shock of a pandemic that 2020 may be the first year in which annual global emissions actually fall by the amount necessary to meet the Paris objectives.<sup>10</sup>

Today, most people understand that no state can address global challenges like pandemics or climate change on its own. However, international efforts are being undermined as multilateral





fora and instruments lose support and nationalism gains ground. The United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement—and now possibly the World Health Organization—is a stark illustration of this trend. With governments understandably focused on addressing the public health emergency and economic downturn, the COVID-19 crisis has further contributed to the inward turn of many countries and diverted attention from more long-term policy objectives.

In order to offset these developments it is paramount to both strengthen the capacities of international and regional organizations and establish coalitions-of-the-willing that are able and willing to lead the way through the multilateral deadlock. Given their economic and political weight in the world, it is the European Union (EU) and its member states that have a particularly important role to play in this regard.

## The EU and Multilateral Climate Action

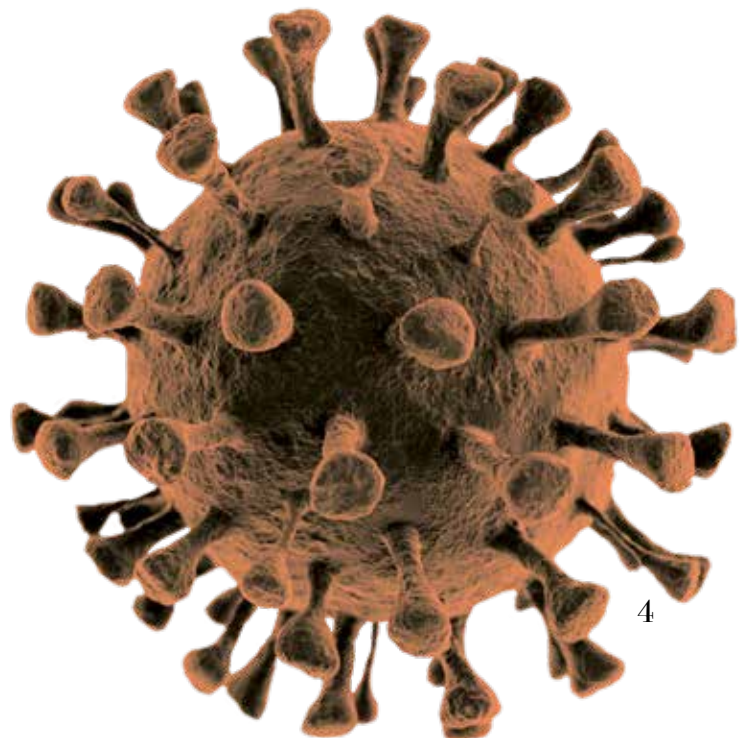
To its credit, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has made significant strides to boost climate action. Underlining that “for climate change, [...] there is no vaccine,”<sup>11</sup> President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has placed the European Green Deal at the heart of the EU recovery plan. Unfortunately, both in the Commission's initial proposals, in the subsequent deal agreed by EU leaders, and in the current budget discussions in the European Parliament, the foreign policy dimension of EU action on COVID-19 and climate change has been largely absent.

The imperative of “building back better” should not be limited to our continent. For one, the EU should seek additional ways to support

international climate institutions and mechanisms to offset waning support from others during the COVID-19 crisis. The world has very little time left to limit climate change before its effects become irreversible. We simply cannot afford further delays.

But a true climate foreign policy must be about more than reducing emissions. Climate security has to be embedded strategically and operationally in EU foreign policies, such as development aid, global health security, conflict prevention, climate diplomacy, as well as global economic and trade policies.

Many countries in Europe's southern neighborhood and the Sahel are both highly fragile and particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.<sup>12</sup> In the COVID-19 crisis, these same countries face not only the immediate public health implications of the virus, but also potentially deadlier secondary and tertiary effects, such as rapid economic deterioration and food insecurity. Supporting our neighbors during these difficult times is a humanitarian imperative, but it is also a strategic imperative, as further destabilization of these regions will have direct effects on Europe's security.



Wherever feasible, policies designed to address the manifold threats posed by the pandemic in these regions should also seek to mitigate the threat of climate change, following a green do no harm principle much like EU-internal policies. For example, EU-led investment programs should prioritize climate-friendly industries. Particular attention should also be paid to democracy promotion and governance support as both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change threaten to increase social tensions in these regions.

## Endnotes

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## More Than an Afterthought

Although climate change has been part of the EU’s security agenda since 2008, including in the 2016 EU Global Strategy, in practice it is still all too often only a foreign policy afterthought. The COVID-19 pandemic is both a reminder and an opportunity to change that. To that end, Germany should use its forthcoming EU Council Presidency to move the climate-security nexus up on the EU agenda und build a better and more comprehensive EU foreign policy.

### WOLFGANG

**ISCHINGER** is Chair of the Munich Security Conference, a post he has held since 2008. He previously served as Germany’s Ambassador to the United States from 2001 to 2006 and to Great Britain between 2006 and 2008.





# To Build Back Better, We Must Cooperate on Climate Change

Helga Maria Schmid



The havoc caused by COVID-19 is yet another wake-up call that demonstrates nature's ultimate power over our lives and societies, and the urgent need for us to better respect and protect the environment upon which we depend. As we seek to recover from the crisis, we must learn from our past mistakes and not become entrenched in them. Building back better means mending our economies and our planet at the same time. It also calls for a stronger integration of the most profound underlying environmental challenge we face—climate change—in the process of building back. This is a tall order, but, as our increasingly vocal youth remind us, we cannot afford to fail.

International cooperation is critical to the success of overcoming this pandemic and addressing climate change. Just as the virus ignores all borders and unleashes its devastation without regard for the responsibility or resilience of nations, so do the emissions from industry or melting permafrost. To win, we must demonstrate

cooperation and solidarity, as individual nations, as partners, and as a single global community.

The negotiation and signature of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by 196 states demonstrated that such an approach—and a more sustainable and resilient future—is possible. Together with another landmark global agreement—the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—it charts a clear path to deliver the economic and societal transformation needed to preserve our planet and shared future.

The EU has always been at the forefront of this multilateral climate diplomacy and is strongly committed to implementing the Paris Agreement and to sustaining and nurturing the global momentum behind its goals. COP-26, due now to take place in November 2021, will be a moment of reckoning. At the meeting in Glasgow, the international community will have to set new, ambitious, emissions-reduction targets for 2030, and map the way towards climate neutrality by mid-century.

## The Urgency of Now

But even this may not be enough. Science tells us that the climate crisis is accelerating. We must adapt faster. In December of last year, the EU set a target of being climate neutral by 2050 and adopted an ambitious new growth strategy to this end. The European Green Deal, together with our budget for the next seven years and the EU Recovery Plan, are designed to transform Europe into a greener, resource-efficient and competitive economy, and to help our partners to do likewise. We are determined to succeed in this ambition, and to inspire others to follow suit.

Such ambitious and integrated approaches are important for all, but particularly for the world's largest economies. G20 countries account for almost 80 percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The G7 and G20 are thus important multilateral fora to drive and coordinate our climate efforts, particularly as both will play critical roles in the multilateral coordination of the post-COVID economic recovery. Global solidarity and multilateralism will be crucial to avoid any lapse into a fossil fuel and resource-intensive recovery. As we rebuild our economies, we must accelerate the transition to a low-carbon future. Our investments now must secure our future, not lock us into an unsustainable past.

The EU devotes considerable energy and resources to its climate diplomacy efforts, with a tailor-made approach promoting constructive engagement with our partners around the world; large-scale and visible activities such as “Climate Diplomacy Weeks;” dedicated programmes for partnership actions with, for example, G20 partners; and new initiatives to engage least developed countries and small island developing states. The EU also leads international cooperation on sustainable finance and works with the international financial institutions to increase green financing.

Mobilizing partnerships at all levels—bilateral and multilateral—to deliver on our climate goals is a core tenet of EU foreign policy. Another is to work to prevent and mitigate the negative consequences of climate change, including related security risks. Climate change is a serious threat multiplier, acting as a catalyst to destabilization and conflict, in particular in the most fragile states. The UN estimates that 40 percent of conflicts are exacerbated by environmental factors. Climate degradation worsens already fragile situations. The most vulnerable pay the heaviest price from natural disasters, increased pressure on natural resources, loss of livelihood, forced displacement or rising social and political unrest. Global warming is not a ‘soft threat’ if you live near Lake Chad and have seen your livelihood disappear along with the





# The European Green Deal,

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water you need. The current pandemic will further amplify climate-related security challenges as more people find their livelihoods destabilized.

## The EU's Impact

In 2008, I was involved in the drafting of a ground-breaking paper on "Climate Change and International Security." Since then, the EU has led the way, designing its support for the most vulnerable countries to combine adaptation to global warming with conflict prevention. Additionally, Germany has done important work to push the issue up the agenda of the United Nations Security Council.

We work in North Darfur to improve the management of scarce fresh water, so that communities can share what they need to grow food. We work in Vanuatu, to help the country adapt to better handle more frequent extreme weather events. Our satellites track the impacts of climate change, feeding into our conflict early warning system and long-term planning, and helping with disaster relief. Our security Missions and Operations engage to promote security in fragile regions, such as in the Sahel and Horn of Africa where tensions are increasing as the climate deteriorates. And we will do more. Already the world's biggest climate donor, the EU will continue to increase its financial footprint, with at least 22 billion Euros dedicated to EU international cooperation on climate over the next 7 years.

As a result of our efforts and those of many like-minded partners, multi-level and multilateral governance is stepping up to the challenge of climate change, in all its complexity. Governments certainly bear the lion's share of the burden in setting ambitious targets, developing the right regulatory frameworks, and ensuring all actors deliver on their responsibilities. They are

increasingly engaged and cooperating at all levels, including for example with the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. But societies and economies are not shaped by governments alone. One of the major innovations in multilateral diplomacy of the Paris Agreement was the engagement of non-state actors, and the recognition of their role in the fight against climate change. Its implementation will need even more active public-private partnerships and even wider and deeper community engagement.

Climate diplomacy, like so many aspects of our lives, will be forever marked by the impact of COVID-19. It is up to us to ensure this crisis does not hamper but rather accelerates the pace of multilateralism and climate action. Just like the virus, addressing global warming requires a massive global effort. The EU will stick firmly to its commitments and seize this opportunity for further reform, but we need all our partners to do the same. Together, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to "build back better."

### HELGA MARIA

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General for Political Affairs (EEAS) and Director of the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit of the High Representative for the CFSP (General Secretariat of the Council of the EU). Before joining the EU Institutions Ms. Schmid was the Head of the Political Staff of the German Federal Foreign Office and Head of the Office of the German Minister for Foreign Affairs.





## THE ROLE OF MULTILATERALISM AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE:

# An Interview with OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger\*

*\* This interview was conducted in early July 2020, when Ambassador Greminger still held the post of OSCE Secretary-General.*







## *We are here with OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger. Thanks for joining us, Mr. Secretary General...*

**Q: The OSCE takes what it calls a “comprehensive approach to security.” What does that entail? What role does climate change play in the organization’s work?**

Thank you, I am delighted for this opportunity to discuss climate change and security with you, a topic close to my heart.

The OSCE’s concept of security is multi-dimensional. We are interested in politico-military matters, the economic and environmental aspects of security, as well as human rights issues and their relationship with security at the individual, national, and regional levels. All of these different dimensions are viewed as complementary, interconnected, and of equal importance. We also work on the premise that insecurity in one OSCE participating State is a concern for everyone else. Dialogue and cooperation between our 57 participating States serve to address challenges to our common security.

The 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the founding document of the OSCE, was innovative not only for pioneering our organization’s comprehensive and co-operative concept of security; it was also among the first internationally agreed documents that recognized climate phenomena as a common challenge. The Helsinki Final Act called on OSCE participating States to cooperate for research on “adaptation to climatic extremes,” even before the first World Climate Conference in 1979 framed climate change as a global political issue.

A number of OSCE documents have since made reference to climate change and global warming. In 2007, the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security defined a “complementary role” for the OSCE in the field of climate change. Subsequently, a number of OSCE Ministerial Decisions have addressed climate change through the lens of issues like migration, energy, and disaster risk reduction.

**Q: Do you and the OSCE consider climate protection part of security?**

Climate change is a defining challenge of our time that affects our lives in profound ways. Scientists from more than 150 countries recently declared a climate emergency. They warn us that we will face more frequent and more powerful floods, droughts, storms, and heatwaves as well as accelerated rising sea levels. This again brings along increased scarcity and competition for vital resources like water.

Climate change and its impacts are no longer an imagined future scenario—its effects are already upon us, affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. Not one of our 57 OSCE participating States is immune to these adverse impacts, which affect our security and stability both within and across borders. That is why I believe climate change warrants more attention in the OSCE.

The climate-security nexus is not yet a mainstream feature of the OSCE's security agenda. OSCE participating States so far lack a common approach, but I believe this could change in the years to come.

Early warning and prevention are among the cornerstones of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. In my mind, the OSCE could play a stronger role in supporting OSCE participating States to assess climate-related security risks. We have already started doing this in some subregions. Our network of field operations could be a strong asset in fostering regional and trans-boundary cooperation.

We also need to develop climate-sensitive conflict prevention approaches and ensure that climate action is conflict-sensitive. Even without

establishing a direct causal link between climate change and conflict, it makes sense to factor in all elements that might help participating States deal with possible repercussions of climate change on their security.

**Q: How will climate change influence how we govern? And what steps can the foreign policy community take to improve our response to climate change? Are there lessons from the OSCE's work that you think apply to how multilateralism and multi-governance can help mitigate climate change?**

Today we are facing an unprecedented confluence of transnational threats and global challenges. Most of these complex and interconnected challenges—including climate change—are not confined within borders, and no single country or organization can tackle them alone.

At the same time, multilateral mechanisms have come under greater pressure over recent years, making genuine multilateral dialogue more difficult. The adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and its ratification shortly after, is one of the greatest successes of multilateralism. Unfortunately, implementation is lagging behind and the slow pace of action is at odds with the urgency of the problem.

Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change is a systemic risk that calls for extensive cooperation across multiple sectors, borders, and regions. Partnerships and cooperation among foreign policy stakeholders, including the humanitarian, development, and security communities are essential to enhancing synergies and revitalizing multilateral approaches to climate action and the handling of climate-related security risks.



The climate security dialogue that takes place on OSCE platforms contributes to climate diplomacy by raising political awareness and allowing for discussion of diverging views in the search of a common approach. That said, we still have a ways to go to demonstrate the benefits of co-operation and to reveal the costs of not cooperating.

Consensus-based decision-making is challenging, especially on issues where OSCE participating States have diverse priorities. But consensus is a powerful tool because it ensures that decisions reached are truly co-owned. We try to pursue a unifying approach rather than a divisive one, focusing on finding areas of common interest or concern.

Given the growing recognition of the role of climate change in exacerbating risks to security and stability globally, and in the OSCE region, we must continue to search for viable opportunities to revitalize multilateral approaches to tackle these challenges. The current COVID-19 crisis has highlighted how interconnected and inter-dependent our economies and social systems are, and how such complex crises can magnify existing vulnerabilities and create new ones across multiple sectors, levels, and timelines.

Learning from this experience, we should invest more in speeding up the transition to green, low-carbon, and climate-resilient growth. We should enable climate-informed policy and decision-making by generating accurate data and evidence on climate change impacts. And we should retain enough flexibility in our approach so that we are able to tackle the uncertainties surrounding the climate risk landscape and its cascading consequences.

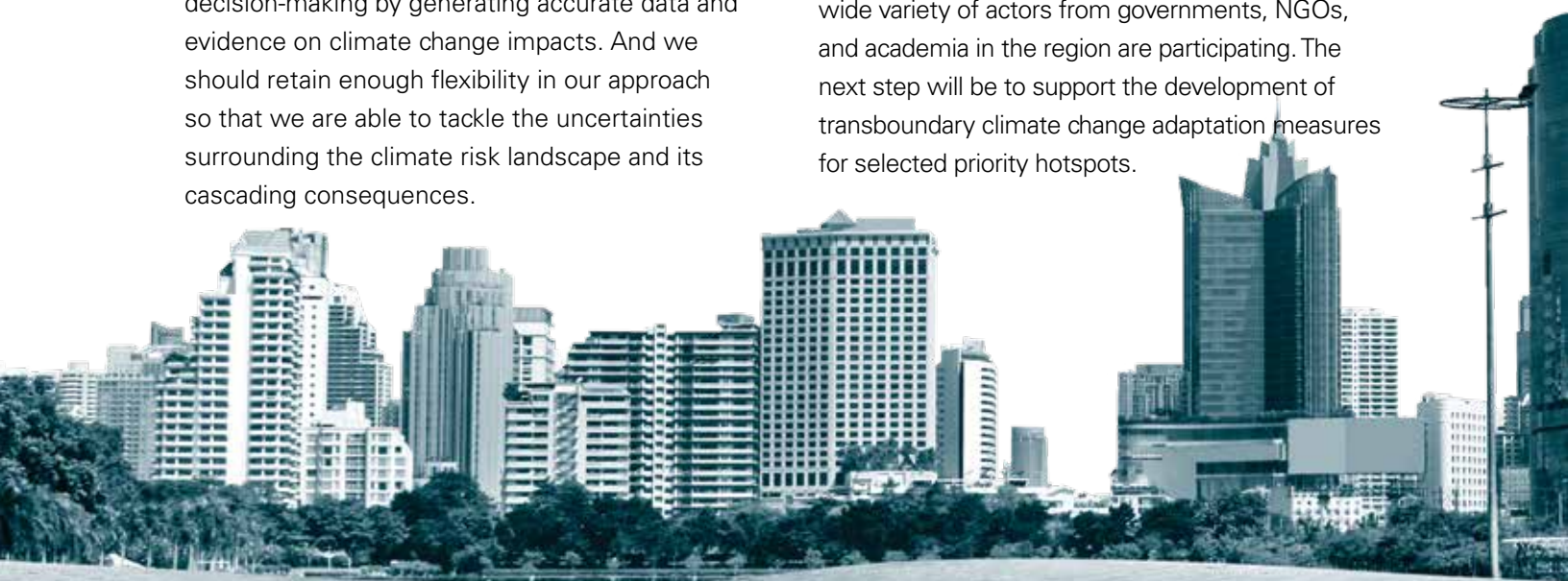
**Q: For the last three years you have been serving as the Secretary General and in 2014 during Switzerland's OSCE Chairmanship, you served as the Chair of the OSCE Permanent Council. Is there a particular OSCE climate-related project that is close to your heart?**

The OSCE has been implementing projects related to climate change for more than a decade, in close partnership with other regional and international partners, including the European Union, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, and others.

Allow me to highlight one project that we recently launched together with adelphi: "Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia."

With this project, we are bringing a regional approach to climate action that bridges national and global-level initiatives. The project aims to raise political awareness on security implications of climate change in the four regions where it is implemented. The project further aims to support a regional-level dialogue on climate-related security risks and to identify joint measures that would allow neighboring countries to manage such risks together.

We started with South-Eastern Europe, where we are currently conducting a consultation process to identify and map climate security hotspots. A wide variety of actors from governments, NGOs, and academia in the region are participating. The next step will be to support the development of transboundary climate change adaptation measures for selected priority hotspots.



I highlight this project because it will not only support OSCE participating States in implementing their commitments for climate action but will also foster regional cooperation, contributing to broader efforts for conflict prevention and confidence-building.

Together with the Union for the Mediterranean, we are also currently developing a similar program, primarily for the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners.

All these initiatives have one common goal: to transform climate risks into opportunities for cooperation that would enhance security and stability in the OSCE region and beyond.

In conclusion, let me underline that five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, it is the responsibility of the entire international community, including the OSCE, to revitalize the spirit of solidarity, trust, confidence, and collective action at all levels for a better and climate secure future.



## AMBASSADOR THOMAS GREMINGER

served as Secretary General of the OSCE from July 2017 to July 2020. Ambassador



Greminger joined the diplomatic service of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in 1990 and has held numerous senior management positions during his career. Prior to his appointment as OSCE Secretary General, he was Deputy Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, overseeing an annual budget of USD 730 million and 900 staff in Bern and abroad. From 2010 to 2015, Greminger was the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE, serving as Chair of the Permanent Council during Switzerland's 2014 OSCE Chairmanship. Prior to his assignment at the Permanent Delegation of Switzerland to the OSCE, Greminger was Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' Human Security Division, Switzerland's competence centre for peace, human rights, and humanitarian and migration policy. Greminger holds a PhD in history from the University of Zurich and the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (General Staff) in the Swiss Armed Forces. He has authored a number of publications on military history, conflict management, peacekeeping, development and human rights. His mother tongue is German; he speaks fluent English and French, and has a working knowledge of Portuguese. In 2012, he was awarded the OSCE white ribbon for his long-standing support for gender equality.





## **“Multilateralism,” the Climate Challenge, and the (Greater Metropolitan) Paris Agreement**

**Susan Biniaz**

Before turning to the Paris Agreement in particular, let me start with an admission. As a lawyer for the U.S. State Department for over thirty years (and the lead climate lawyer for over twenty-five), I was involved in negotiating many of the most significant multilateral environment agreements of the past few decades. But I have never been wild about the term “multilateralism.”

For one thing, I have found a lack of clarity when it comes to its meaning:

- » To a lawyer, it’s confusing. When people talk about a “multilateral” approach, they might mean it in its literal sense (i.e., involving three or more parties), in its fullest sense (i.e., a global regime), or in a sense that is more political than legal (i.e., in contrast to “unilateralism” or “nationalism”).
- » It is often not possible to motivate States to agree on a “multilateral” approach unless one State (or a small group of States)

catalyzes such a solution by first acting unilaterally. When an international body reaches agreement, but was only able to do so because of a unilateral action, is that an example of multilateralism?

» An agreement might be “multilateral” in one respect but not necessarily in another. For example, a multilateral agreement might set an environmental standard but be silent on enforcement; if a State opts to enforce the standard through a trade measure, such as an import restriction, is that trade measure “multilateral” or “unilateral?” If a multilateral environmental agreement requires Parties to restrict trade with non-Parties, is the trade measure “multilateral” vis-à-vis the State that did not join?

» Even within the context of a global regime, there can be gradations of “multilateralism.” The international climate change regime is arguably at the extreme end of the spectrum; not only is there near-universal participation, but decisions are taken by consensus. However, a global agreement could operate in a different way. The Montreal Protocol, for example, is global in terms of its membership but can take decisions by less-than-global super-majority voting, in some cases binding all Parties.

Not only do I find the concept of “multilateralism” to lack clarity,

but my experience leads me to believe that there is nothing magical or superior about a multilateral approach *per se*. Such an approach might have its advantages, serving the purposes of, for example:

- » promoting environmental effectiveness, where action in many countries is necessary to address the environmental problem in question;
- » reducing competitiveness concerns, which might have otherwise impeded action;
- » addressing the interests of States affected by the environmental problem; and/or,
- » enhancing the legitimacy of the regime.

However, those benefits might come at a cost. A multilateral approach might impede action—by slowing things down, by making it more difficult (or even impossible) to reach agreement, or by empowering reluctant participants. In some situations, unilateral, bilateral, or “mini-lateral” approaches might be more effective. In the case of addressing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from international aviation, for example, it took a unilateral act on the part of the European Union to prompt the development of an international approach. It is therefore hard to say, in a vacuum, whether “multilateralism” is the appropriate path and, even if so, exactly which form it should take.

For these reasons, I think it is useful to sidestep labels and focus instead on pragmatic





problem-solving, i.e., identifying specific problems to be addressed and potential solutions to be considered. Below I consider problems and potential approaches to addressing them in the context of the international climate regime.

## The Paris Agreement – A Good Foundation

I start from the premise that the 2015 Paris Agreement is a good foundation for international action and cooperation on climate change.

In part, I rest that premise on the history of the international climate change regime. It can be debated whether the international community's initial choice, back in 1990, to take a UN-based global approach to climate change was a wise one or not. Securing agreement among nearly all countries in the world is always difficult; in the case of climate change, the challenges are compounded by the complexity of the issue, countries' wildly different interests, and North-South politics. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was dogged by all of these challenges; moreover, the Parties were never able to agree to move away from consensus decision-making, essentially giving any one country the ability to block a decision.

It is no wonder that it took years of trial and error to elaborate the regime. The Parties needed to strike the right balance between stringency and participation, among other factors. Kyoto veered in the direction of stringency but sacrificed participation; it included emissions cuts that were legally binding and internationally negotiated but they did not apply to developing countries (even those with rapidly growing emissions), and the United States never joined. On the other hand, the Copenhagen Accord (as filled out by the Cancun agreements) achieved widespread participation, including both the United States and China, but was thoroughly non-binding and lacked rigor in terms of rules and guidelines. Against all odds, the Paris Agreement secured stringency in terms of both form and content, as well as global participation.

However, the Paris Agreement was not just a surprisingly good outcome in light of the climate regime's difficult history; it is also a positive agreement on the merits, with the potential to deliver necessary ambition. Among other things:

- » The Paris Agreement clearly sets forth the key climate objectives—limiting global temperature increase, enhancing resilience/adaptation to climate impacts, and making financial flows consistent with the other two objectives.



- » Its architecture, which is both long-term and reliant on nationally determined contributions, allows Parties to focus their energies on implementation and increasing ambition, rather than continually having to negotiate new agreements/amendments/targets/etc.
- » It creates an ambition cycle, with regular global assessments and updates of national action.
- » It provides for robust reporting and review of both emissions and implementation.
- » It finds the sweet spot between national discretion and international rules, accommodating a wide array of different national circumstances within the context of various global goals and requirements.
- » The goals of the Paris Agreement are floors, not ceilings. Nothing in the Agreement prevents the Parties, or groups of Parties, from aiming higher (such as for a temperature goal of 1.5°C, rather than “well below 2,” or for net zero emissions by 2050, as opposed to the second half of the century). That is already happening.
- » Finally, it breaks new ground in recognizing and encouraging the contributions of non-State actors.

As the ad for Prego spaghetti sauce used to say, “it’s in there.”

## Criticisms of the Paris Agreement

Some of the criticisms of Paris are based on misimpressions. For example, it is sometimes said that the Agreement is a failure because the NDCs put the world on track to warm by three or more degrees Celsius. That would be a

valid criticism if the Agreement stopped with one set of NDCs. But the initial NDCs were never designed to fully achieve the Agreement’s temperature goal. Rather, they were intended to guide the early years and then be replaced by more ambitious NDCs in subsequent years. The Agreement has an indefinite time-frame, with regular global assessments and NDC updates along the way.

Other critiques, for example, that countries have not been doing enough under the Agreement to tackle climate change, say more about the nature of the climate beast—and the insufficient political will to address it—than about the Agreement itself. Moreover, two unanticipated events since Paris have further affected enthusiasm for climate action: the U.S. withdrawal from Paris has likely eroded political will, at least in some countries, and the arrival of a pandemic in 2020 has, at a minimum, diverted political attention.

Criticisms that the Agreement would be stronger if the targets were negotiated, legally binding, and enforceable, do not address whether a “stronger” agreement, at least on paper, would have been more effective in real life. Even assuming for the sake of argument that such a design could have been agreed to, would it have had a positive or negative effect on participation (including that of the United States and China), the level of ambition, and actual implementation?

## But More Needs to Be Done...

That said, much more needs to be done to effectively grapple with the enormity of the climate challenge. The international community is currently not doing enough to address climate change, whether by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to impacts, or otherwise. Per the IPCC and other sources, we are not nearly on track to

keep the world at a safe temperature—one that does not involve devastating impacts and upend life as we know it; even at a “safe” temperature, there would be significant negative impacts.

If we are to avoid the worst consequences of climate change, we need to act with sufficient vigor and speed to effectuate a massive transition from fossil to non-fossil energy and the large-scale removal of carbon from the atmosphere.

## Five Steps Towards Achieving the Paris Objectives

I would suggest five things that need to happen to move us closer toward achievement of the Paris objectives—some inside Paris proper and some outside, in the “greater metropolitan” area. COVID-19 injects huge “known unknowns” into the mix, and others might equally pick five different items for their agenda, but here is my multi-forum, multi-actor list.

### 1. NDCs – It Takes a Village

The “nationally determined contribution” (NDC) is the backbone of the Paris Agreement. This design feature of the Agreement, which relies on the Parties to set and update their emissions contributions rather than specifically directing them to do X or not do Y, depends upon the Parties’ political will to deliver adequate reductions over time. There is nothing automatic about it.

For the NDCs to be successful, help will need to take many forms, from many sources:

- » High-level political attention (such as that provided by the UN Secretary General, the G7, and the G20) is needed to help keep Parties focused on the importance of NDC implementation and enhancement.
- » Financial and technical assistance (such as

through the Green Climate Fund and the NDC Partnership) is needed to help some developing countries with the implementation of their NDCs.

- » Pressure from civil society is needed to help keep climate action on the front burner, as well as push for stronger commitments.
- » Action by sub-national governments and other non-State actors is needed to contribute to NDC implementation, as well as provide confidence to Parties to raise their ambition.
- » Should the United States return to Paris in the short term, its leadership and other tools will be needed to promote global NDC implementation and improvement. Admittedly, the atmosphere doesn’t care whether emissions are reduced pursuant to an NDC or otherwise. However, NDCs are the currency of the Paris Agreement, and it is important for the viability of the regime to ensure that a significant amount of climate action is captured in this form.

### 2. Specific Initiatives – Getting to Net Zero

In the few years since 2015, when the Paris Agreement was adopted, conventional wisdom has shifted in the direction of the need for both a stronger limit on global temperature increase (1.5°C., rather than well below 2) and a nearer-term goal for net zero emissions (2050, rather than the second half of the century). As such, there needs to be greater emphasis on initiatives focusing on specific decarbonization objectives (whether related to reducing emissions, increasing removals, or both) among smaller sets of actors.



- » In terms of “who,” there could be a role for sub-sets of Parties (i.e., national governments) and/or multi-stakeholder initiatives involving sub-national governments, companies, etc.
- » In terms of “what,” efforts could involve, for example, sectoral cooperation (e.g., cement) and/or a specific objective (e.g., related to the internal combustion engine).
- » In terms of “where,” efforts could take place in a forum outside the UNFCCC/Paris Agreement, such as in a revived U.S.-led process involving the world’s major economies, or the G20. Instead or in addition, they could be rooted somehow in the UNFCCC/Paris; at a minimum, outside cooperative arrangements could potentially be fed back into the Paris regime, e.g., as part of the regular global stocktake.
- » In terms of “how,” to the extent that “agreement” is reached on any particular subject, initiatives might result in a non-binding outcome, a binding agreement, or other arrangements; in some cases, there may just be cooperation without a particular written outcome.

### 3. The Conference of the Parties (COP) – In Need of Reimagining

Even before COVID-19, it was a good time to review and rethink the “COP,” the annual UNFCCC climate change conference.

The COP has historically revolved around inter-governmental negotiations, with success measured (rightly or wrongly) by the extent to which

the Parties to the UN Framework Convention or the Paris Agreement are able to reach agreement. However, things are changing:

- » With the Paris Agreement in force, the Paris design based on non-negotiated mitigation contributions, and the “rulebook” nearly completed, future COPs will involve much less negotiation.
- » There is a growing disconnect between the demand for climate action and what the official COP has been able to deliver.
- » Non-State entities have become more significant as climate actors, not just in the United States (where they work to uphold the Paris goals in the face of withdrawal) but all over the world. They are not only taking extensive action but also discussing and debating emerging issues and approaches (such as carbon dioxide removal) in ways that the COP is not. At the recent Madrid COP, there were times when the so-called “side events” seemed like the main event, and the official proceedings seemed like the side event.

The COP’s role as an action-forcing event is too important to alter its annual frequency. But it is time for the COP to adapt. As just two examples:

- » A more effective COP would put greater emphasis on, and energy into, practical implementation than on agreed COP pronouncements. For example, a session on unpacking the issues involved in developing a national strategy to decarbonize the economy by the middle of the century could be more useful than chasing a consensus sentence on such strategies (which is likely

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to be least-common-denominator and without real-life impact).

» A COP should aim to reduce the gap between the official universe (the Parties) and the unofficial universe (the non-State actors). The UNFCCC regime is already far ahead of others in terms of supporting and engaging so-called “non-Party stakeholders.” More could be done, however, to combine the worlds, such as through platforms for multi-stakeholder initiatives, greater ease of access for states, cities, etc.

Of course, COPs cannot be expected to evolve effectively unless there is also an evolution in the metrics used to judge them. For example, if COP watchers treat implementation as dull and focus unduly on the presence or absence of particular words in an official outcome, reform will be more difficult. At the same time, unless COPs can change to fit the new realities (and COVID-19 has added extra challenges to staging a large conference, to be sure), they risk losing force and relevance.

#### 4. The Importance of Other Fora – It’s Your Problem Too

The Paris Agreement cannot fully advance its objectives without the help of other international agreements and institutions. As noted above, certain fora will need to lend political, technical, and/or financial support to the implementation and enhancement of NDCs. But others also need to step up, as the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer did when it adopted the 2016 Kigali Amendment to regulate the production and consumption of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

In some cases, other fora may be appropriate because an issue demands specialized expertise. For example, the Paris Agreement calls for strengthened cooperative action on technology development and transfer. However, no one would expect an agreement to reduce or eliminate tariffs on climate-friendly goods to be negotiated under Paris auspices.

In other cases, the UNFCCC regime has designated particular fora to address greenhouse gas emissions. In this regard, emissions from international bunker fuels are addressed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), respectively. ICAO has adopted a global market-based mechanism to offset international aviation emissions; more needs to be done in the IMO, which has so far adopted only an initial GHG strategy.

In addition, climate impacts are bound to have a material effect on other fields. Certain climate impacts relate to environmental fields, such as biodiversity, fisheries, and





protection of the marine environment, and should be taken up by fora addressing those issues. Other impacts, such as sea level rise, have implications for, e.g., the law of the sea and migration.

Finally, in some cases, the issue is less about *taking* climate action than about *not impeding* climate action. If the Paris Agreement works as intended, Parties will be assuming increasingly ambitious targets over time. At least some of the national measures taken to achieve them are likely to be challenged under other regimes that regulate trade and/or investment (such as the WTO). There may be ways for such fora to make an affirmative contribution to the climate effort, such as through fossil fuel subsidy reform. However, at a minimum, they should consider how best to ensure that their regimes do not stand in the way of *bona fide* climate action.

## 5. Climate = Foreign Policy

To date, climate change has been largely addressed alongside foreign policy, rather than as part of it. In the United States, even under the climate-friendly Obama Administration, and with international climate negotiations embedded in the State Department rather than another agency, climate issues were not mainstreamed into the day-to-day business of the department.

However, to the extent that efforts in the above realms are to be successful, many will depend, at least in part, on convincing officials and other actors in “traditional” foreign policy spaces of the need to integrate climate change into their worlds. There needs to be a broad national commitment to the issue. Climate change has too many sources, on the one hand, and implications, on the other, to be either ignored or treated as a niche issue with little or no bearing on other fields.

This needs to change. Steps such as these could help:

- » **Lead by example:** Those in leadership positions should make clear to policymakers that the days of giving short shrift to climate considerations are over. There needs to be institutional recognition of the many ways in which actions taken in certain fields (e.g., trade, aviation, shipping, agriculture) can help reduce climate change and how certain other fields (e.g., migration, law of the sea, food security, conflict) are potentially affected by climate impacts.
- » **Educate:** Governments should explore ways to integrate climate literacy into standard diplomatic training and continuing education.
- » **Cut the jargon:** Climate specialists, especially those involved in the international negotiations/regime, need to do a better job of speaking in a language that non-specialists can understand. Partly because the regime is complicated, and partly because particular words have taken on outsized significance in the negotiating process, climate negotiators (myself included) tend to speak in code. We need to make the climate regime more accessible.
- » **Institutionalize through structure and personnel:** Governments should organize themselves so as to better integrate climate change with traditional foreign policy issues. This could involve not only how they set up their bureaucratic structures (e.g., including international climate issues within the ministry of foreign affairs) but how they select and assign personnel.

## Conclusion

In sum, we have the right foundation—it's the Paris Agreement. Like any foundation, it needs additional layers or, to pick up the city metaphor, additional structures both within Paris proper and within its surrounding areas. These need to include ever-improving NDCs from Parties, heightened commitments from smaller coalitions, ambitious action from non-State actors,

help from other international agreements, and integration of climate issues across the foreign policy landscape. The international community may or may not succeed in avoiding the worst climate impacts; if it fails to do so, however, it will not be a function of the Paris Agreement but rather of a lack of political will that no agreement alone, whatever its design, could overcome.

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