

Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change

Jahreskonferenz

Keynote: „*Climate Change, the Global Commons and Security: a new paradigm for the 21st century?*“

(10 Minuten)

- 1. The Climate crisis *the* security threat of our time.** It is a threat to human security and it challenges regional and international peace and stability. This summer with scorching heat, dried-up rivers, burning forests gives us an idea what to expect in the years ahead. The planet is heating up faster than even pessimistic scenarios projected. Natural resources around the world are more and more strained. **Right now we are heading straight into a 2.7°C world – if we don't manage to bend the curve.**

As the effects of climate change intersect with a complex array of environmental, economic, social and gender issues, they become catalysts for conflict and tensions. In many regions, climate impacts also question the geopolitical status quo.

We witness such impact chains particularly in vulnerable regions, such as the Sahel, and in countries with weak governance, where crises within and between states are aggravated. Where jihadists and organized crime use the fragility and vulnerability to climate impacts as a gateway to assert their power interests and thus endanger security on the ground but also here in Europe.

The same holds true for Afghanistan, the biggest producer of opium in the world: Poppy as a drought-resilient, water efficient and profitable crop is sometimes the only alternative for farmers to generate income while the climate crisis progresses. Illegal cultivation and trade generate revenue for armed groups as well as for the Taliban. This exacerbates food insecurity and poverty, surging as the ongoing drought persists.

Because of the complex nature of the risks evolving from the climate crisis, climate change does not fit into conventional security paradigms. And so the traditional toolkit we have at hand in addressing security threats will need to be augmented by a more inclusive approach, taking into account the different layers of this meta-security threat. Our foreign, security and stabilization policies must reflect this reality.

This is one reason why we have incorporated climate policy as a core issue of our foreign policy. Together with other relevant ministries and players we focus on improving resilience and adaptation next to strengthening mitigation. Resilience is key. Not only to withstand climate change but also for peace and security.

- 2. We are living in a world of shifting tectonic plates. There are the manifold geopolitical implications of the climate crisis itself:** resource conflicts over water, land, food, energy, triggering humanitarian crises, migration, diseases, inequality, violence, social and

political instability. **And there are already geopolitical implications of the energy transition away from fossil fuels to renewables.** Power constellations are shifting. New alliances, trade and investment patterns will ensue. Instead of natural resources - technology, innovation and access to critical materials will determine international influence. **This implies new conflicts, it creates new opportunities and a new geopolitical and geo-economic playing field.**

3. The Russian war of aggression, and all the suffering and damage it has caused has put energy security on top of the agenda compelling us to re-think our fatal dependency on autocratic fossil fuel exporting countries and indeed all fossil fuels. In a terrible way it put a spotlight on the vulnerability of the world economy in the face of aggression and power politics. Combine that with the already present energy crisis, fragile food crisis, with its link to climate change and the reverberations from the impacts of Covid contributing to a debt crisis - and you can see the existential threat to millions around the world, but particularly in developing countries.

4. One can also, obviously see, the system rivalry between democracies and autocracies (CHN, RUS) that is unfolding on various levels across the global south. While this rivalry goes far beyond the climate agenda, it has severe impacts on our fight for a 1.5°C world. On one side there are those who believe in a rules-based international order. On the other there are regimes repressing their own population and trying to dominate others by imperialist means. They use loans and investments to create dependencies they can then politically exploit. And they spread narratives creating mistrust against “the West”. This set-up is a challenge for our climate and energy policy, too.

The run for resources won't stop once we've transitioned away from fossil fuels. In fact, if we want to assume leadership for the transformative task ahead of us, we need to keep access to critical raw materials. But, as you know: The lithium (78%) we need for our batteries is mainly coming from Chile – and is then processed in China, before being imported into the EU. China's global share in the production of key materials for solar panels (Polysilizium, Wafer) will soon amount to 95 percent. **The transformative energy policy underway is an opportunity – one that we cannot afford to miss – to learn from the mistakes of the past. We need reliable value chains. We need to diversify as much as possible.** And we have to choose our partners wisely Because we know that prosperity and security are most stable where they go hand in hand with human rights. In the end, we will only be able to convince partners in the global South to choose cooperation with us over others if we are credible leaders in the global energy transition and if we put sufficient economic weight – and financial resources – on the scale. Both we can only achieve if we act together with our European partners.

5. We are in a massive disruptive moment from a shift in geopolitics but also the pace and scale of the climate impacts. The climate crisis is not only threat to human security and a conflict multiplier.

It is shaking the very ground on which our economic prosperity, our supply chains and our development pathway are built.

There is a very simple truth. We are running out of resources. **We are running out of global commons. If we want to maintain our prosperity and enable others to live a life in peace and dignity, the zero carbon pathway is the only chance we've got.** And we have to be honest with ourselves, as UBA President Dirk Messner recently wrote, the current international system has not been conducive to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals or the Paris Agreement. We must, with allies, quickly focus in on this new reality, reach out to the most progressive and the most influential to develop creative out-of-the-box ideas. The global financial architecture is one of the crucial levers we have to work to move things forward.

Incremental contributions to address the climate crisis are necessary building blocks, but they are not sufficient. **The world is in a period of transition. If we want to shape this transition according to our values and our interests then what we need is a truly transformative approach.**

6. In the middle of these multiple crises it is essential that we keep in sight our goals:

Prosperity for ourselves and for others, fight against inequality, poverty, starvation, promotion of development, a life in dignity and freedom without leaving anyone behind. **In a dynamic situation of system rivalry paired with geopolitical changes we need a new mapping of our partners, our allies, our rivals. And with that in mind we need to stand in for our goals – driven by both, our fundamental values and our economic and security interests.**

So do we need a new paradigm? You bet we do. One that places the wellbeing of people and the planet in its center and changes our international institutions, for example our international financial institutions, so that they deliver quickly for both. We have to recognize the multipolarity of the current world, and forge new alliances that are ready to support such a new paradigm - call it an **ecological, social market-based economy**. And we, as a wealthy country, must look South and be ready to work on eye level with developing country partners to help them achieve their goals. **For their achievement of an ecological socially just economy is essential for our own national security and wellbeing. We are connected.**