

Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)

Fighting over resources in Africa and the Middle East: with climate change leading to increased competition over water and land, how can the EU help prevent new political and military conflicts?

Climate change is seen as one of the most challenging issues for human mankind, not only threatening the environment as a space to live but also as a trigger for conflicts and insecurity worldwide. The director of the UN Environment program cited once a scenario that predicts temperatures to rise over 4 degree celsius by 2060.¹

Looking at causes of armed conflicts in the 20th century shows that the majority of conflicts was among others about resources such as water or land. Therefore, helping to prevent conflicts would also mean solving existent conflicts.

People depend on resources. In regions where resources affected by climate change are scarce, there is going to be fighting over those resources.

Speaking of “fighting over resources”, we should divide between three types of conflict. There are conflicts about the direct consumption of local resource, which are not seen as triggering armed conflicts but as a destabilising factor as they affect only small, often non-organised parties. The second kind of conflict is about indirectly used resources when their exploitation is very profitable. Because the exploitation is controlled by well-organised groups, those conflicts often lead to brutal armed conflicts. The third kind of resource conflict is the combination of the two mentioned.

It is obvious that every intervention needs to be customised for the very region targeted.

Scarcity of goods can be reduced on a short term by either increasing the supplied amount, which for instance would mean to improve infrastructure, or by decreasing the demand, which can be done by using the good more efficiently and in a sustainable manner.

Conflicts in general are solved without warfare when the aims as well as the rights of both partners are respected, which is likely to happen in a democratic cultures. A high level of democracy often goes along with an increased economic activity:

Studies show that there is a direct link between trust within people and the economic and political activity². No matter where, trust is essential for economic activity as every deal depends on trust.³

The long-term goal of the EU should therefore be to strengthen democratic trends in countries likely to host conflicts caused by competition over resources by enabling people to trust each other in order to adapt together to climate change.

Long- and short-term strategies work hand in hand so that they are likely guarantee a sustainable development and prevention of conflicts.

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1 <http://www.france24.com/en/20110720-un-says-climate-change-threatens-world-security>

2 http://www.forbes.com/2006/09/22/trust-economy-markets-tech_cx_th_06trust_0925harford.html

3 Zeppelin University professor Marcel Tyrell and Harvard Student Marcus Jacob showed that in regions with strong surveillance in the former GDR the economic productivity was lower than average.
http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic718237.files/JacobTyrell_Surveillance%20Social%20Capital%20Economic%20Performance.pdf