In December 2021, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopted a ministerial decision on strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change. The decision ‘encourages the participating States to identify, raise awareness of, mitigate and adapt to climate-related challenges and to intensify their dialogue and co-operation in this regard with a view to minimizing the economic, social and environmental impacts of climate change’.¹ Ann Linde, who at the time was Sweden’s foreign minister and OSCE chairperson-in-office, referred to the decision as ‘truly ground-breaking’ in that it shows that ‘the world’s largest regional security organization … has an important part to play in finding, preventing and mitigating measures that can make a difference for the security of the people in the OSCE region’.² Interestingly, the ministerial decision was unanimously agreed during the height of Russia’s military build-up ahead of its brutal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022,³ almost at the same time as Russia blocked a UN Security Council draft resolution on climate change as a threat to peace.⁴

This article analyses the role of diplomacy in the OSCE to advance regional cooperation to address climate security at a time when not only are the adverse effects of climate change being increasingly felt among European societies, but Russia’s invasion of Ukraine places serious geopolitical constraints on cooperative efforts. Several European states, together with the United States, are providing

* This article partly builds on research commissioned by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and conducted within the climate change and risk programme at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) as well as Mistra Geopolitics, funded by Mistra (the Swedish Foundation for Environmental Strategic Research). Emanuel Adler, Alexander Katsaitis, Joakim Kreutz, Paul Levin, Anna Michalski, Naghmeh Nasiritousi, Nicholas Olczak, Mark Rhinard and participants in the research seminar at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and the global and regional governance workshop at the Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, as well as two anonymous reviewers, have provided valuable feedback on earlier drafts. The author would like to thank Anniek Barnhoorn for her research assistance.

¹ OSCE, ‘Strengthening co-operation to address the challenges caused by climate change’, MC/Decision no. 3/21, 3 Dec. 2021, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/f/507050.pdf. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 21 March 2023.)

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economic and military support to Ukraine, while seeking to reduce their energy dependency on Russia and lower their carbon dioxide emissions. The EU has imposed a series of sanctions against Russia, and two previously militarily non-aligned European states, Finland and Sweden, have applied for membership of NATO. These developments suggest that European security is rapidly changing, and they highlight the complex geopolitical nexus between climate change and international security.

Focusing on the diplomatic work of the Swedish OSCE chair in 2021, the article seeks to answer why and how it was possible for the OSCE participating states to adopt the ministerial decision despite rising geopolitical tensions between Russia and the US. The article specifically analyses how Swedish diplomats managed to draw on established OSCE diplomatic conventions to advance regional cooperation on climate security. In so doing, the article does not only shed light on important, yet often unrecognized, political dynamics in the study of European security; it also seeks to contribute to the literature on climate security and informal governance in International Relations (IR), adding new insights to previous research that has suggested that states might find ways to work together to cope with the adverse effects of climate change, even in times of rising geopolitical tensions, and that diplomats and officials in international organizations might learn to develop ways of coping with states’ contestation in different policy fields. The article makes a theoretical contribution of broader relevance to this literature by way of applying insights from research on communities of practice in IR, and it presents an analytical framework that focuses on how groups of diplomats and officials bound together by common practice and background knowledge shape outcomes in international organizations.

To answer the research questions, the article draws on a unique set of qualitative data collected from interviews with representatives at OSCE delegations as well as the OSCE Secretariat. The interviews were conducted mainly during the Swedish OSCE chairpersonship in 2021, although interviews with key practitioners were also conducted after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The article proceeds as follows. The next section discusses recent research on international organizations and climate security to contextualize the OSCE in this field. The subsequent section presents the analytical framework, research design and data collection. The following section analyses the diplomatic work that led to the 2021 ministerial decision based on interviews and official documents. The analysis suggests that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine does not necessarily mean that the initiatives advanced by groups of like-minded participating states in the OSCE, in collaboration with the secretariat, need to be paralysed, and that this reveals important

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features of how the OSCE's approach to security works in practice. The article ends by drawing a set of conclusions and indicating areas suitable for future research.

The OSCE and international cooperation on climate-related security risks

Russia’s war against Ukraine highlights how efforts to address climate change and advance international security are increasingly intertwined. Research in IR and related fields has acknowledged for some time now that climate change might affect different dimensions of human and state security. The most prolific strands of research thus far have focused on the linkages between climate change and violent conflict,9 and the securitization of climate change in political discourse.10 In recent years, scholars have increasingly focused on how climate-related security risks are perceived by political actors and what organizational responses are advanced to meet these challenges.11 This analytical focus is informed by the notion that not only are states and local communities facing climate-related security risks because of inadequate mitigation and adaption efforts, but these risks often have a regional dimension. For instance, extreme weather events, droughts and floods tend to affect several countries in the same region at the same time. The transnational character of climate-related security risks is not only linked to environmental and geophysical connectedness through, for example, shared water basins, rivers and coastlines, but also to cross-border movements of people, goods, capital and energy supplies that might in turn be affected in various disruptive ways by changing climate conditions.12

It might therefore seem self-evident that states and local communities have strong incentives to seek regional and transnational cooperation to mitigate and adapt to climate risks, since it might reduce the likelihood that the adverse effects of climate change ‘spill over’ from one country to another. Yet, the perceived need for increased cooperation on climate-related security risks does not necessarily translate into effective regional responses to manage and reduce such risks. Organizational inertia, diverging political priorities, and denial of the adverse effects of climate change are all factors that could potentially hamper coopera-


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War and interstate conflicts such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine might also hamper international attempts to manage climate-related security risks.

There is nonetheless evidence to suggest that international organizations, both at global and regional levels, are getting more involved in efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate-related security risks. These efforts include policy development on prevention and preparedness, early warning systems and information-sharing, as well as enhancing crisis management and relief capabilities. For example, the UN has established a climate security mechanism as a joint initiative by the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) to strengthen the capacity of the UN system to analyse and systematically address the adverse impacts of climate change on peace and security. Other international and regional organizations have also started to address climate-related security risks. For example, the African Union (AU) has established ‘climate clusters’ centred around its interdepartmental taskforce on conflict prevention and the EU has integrated climate risk assessment in its conflict prevention and early-warning system. NATO recently decided to launch a centre of excellence on climate change and security in Montréal, Canada, to bring together military and civilian actors to develop and share knowledge on climate security. Knowledge creation and exchange between local, national and international actors has been identified as key to developing adequate global and regional responses to climate-related security risks.

The OSCE is a highly interesting organization in the context of the emergent field of climate security. Its origins date back to the final stages of the Cold War, and it played an important role in shaping post-Cold War European security. With


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57 participating states in the Caucasus, central Asia, Europe and north America, the OSCE is currently the world’s largest security organization stretching ‘from Vancouver to Vladivostok’ and it is the only one, except for the UN, in which both Russia and the US are members. Building on experiences derived from confidence and security-building measures from the late 1970s onwards, the OSCE has developed a ‘common and comprehensive approach to security’ which is based on the understanding that a threat to one country’s national security is a threat to regional stability and to each and every other state. The OSCE’s ‘innovative approach’ to security, focusing on conflict prevention and confidence-building, has also been adopted by other organizations such as the EU. On the other hand, the OSCE has been described as being an increasingly marginalized actor in European security, even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Still, David Galbreath contends that ‘no major participating state has a desire to do away with OSCE’. Indeed, after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the OSCE’s political and diplomatic relevance was revived as it was seen as offering ‘the best available framework’ to avoid further escalation.

Despite its unique role in shaping post-Cold War European security, the potential for and limits of the OSCE in terms of promoting cooperation to mitigate and adapt to climate-related security risks has not received much scholarly attention. The OSCE nonetheless has a mandate to address security risks emerging from environmental and climate factors. In 1975 its predecessor, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, was already recognizing the transnational implications of environmental degradation, and the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) was created as early as 1997 with the aim ‘to assess potential security risks stemming, wholly or in part, from economic, social and environmental factors’. Moreover, in 2007, the OSCE adopted the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security although, at that time, the participating states recognized climate change primarily as a long-term challenge.

26 Stefan Lehne, Revisiting the OSCE: European security and the Ukraine crisis (Brussels: Carnegie Europe, 2015).
30 In the same year, the United Kingdom initiated the first debate on climate change at the UN Security Council: see Scott, ‘Implications of climate change for the UN Security Council’, p. 1329.
The OSCE has since taken several actions to address climate security. In 2020, it launched a project, funded by Andorra, Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Norway, to map climate risks, develop risk-reduction measures and raise awareness in the Caucasus, central Asia, eastern and south-eastern Europe. The initiative built on lessons learned from previous projects conducted by the OSCE and partners in the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC). In 2021, the OSCE organized a high-level conference, bringing together around 150 experts and representatives from participating states and partners, to address the economic and security implications of climate change. However, actions like these are limited in scope, and as a large consensus-based organization, the OSCE advances on the least common denominator, making it at times painstakingly hard for the participating states to reach common positions. This was true also before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and therefore the 2021 ministerial decision is important since it expresses the current consensus on climate security of the OSCE’s central decision-making and governing body which brings together the ministers of foreign affairs from all 57 participating states.

Communities of diplomatic practice in the OSCE

The analysis in this article of the diplomatic work to advance the OSCE’s role in cooperation on climate-related security risks starts from the notion that scholars should focus less on its formal organizational features and more on the emergent political dynamics centred around contestation and learning that are shaped by informal groups of diplomats and practitioners brought together by the ‘convening power’ of the OSCE. This focus differs from rationalist theories in IR that emphasize bargaining dynamics and institutional design as mainly determining political outcomes, as well as realist theories that put a heavy emphasis on states’ power and interests. To be sure, an analytical focus on bargaining, institutions,
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power and interests might capture important aspects of the diplomatic negotiations that take place in a consensus-based organization like the OSCE, but the methodological problem is that it is difficult to determine the importance of such formal and structural factors to explain specific outcomes, such as the 2021 ministerial decision. Furthermore, most rationalist accounts of informal cooperation within and among representatives of international organizations and states are unable to explain the social processes that make informal modes of cooperation possible in the first place. Alternatively, close attention should be paid to the context-specific ‘social knowledge’ that develops in an organization such as the OSCE, since it is changes in this knowledge that make certain actions seem more appropriate or likely to the actors involved over time.

Recent research on communities of practice (CoP) in international politics has contributed to explanations on social ordering processes by way of looking at why and how some configurations of meaningful performances—rather than others—informally organize international cooperation. Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger originally coined the CoP concept to capture the multifaceted social dynamics of situated learning. Learning occurs in social settings where individuals acquire the practical knowledge relevant to performing tasks, and members of CoP negotiate knowledge through ‘routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence’. CoP are defined here as domains of knowledge that constitute communities of engaging practitioners bound by a shared interest in learning and performing shared practices. Sustained by a repertoire of communal resources, these practices embody a community’s knowledge and confer on practitioners the dispositions and expectations necessary to cultivate governance, legitimize authority, and thus engage in mutually negotiated evolving joint enterprises.

Focusing analytically on CoP allows IR scholars to systematically study how groups of practitioners contextually bound together by shared practices and background knowledge shape political outcomes. By pointing at meaning-making and identity formation, the CoP concept offers ways to think about how

situated and practically derived learning shapes emergent social dynamics in international politics. Think, for example, of the shared practices of groups of like-minded diplomats from various states working to advance UN climate change negotiations, military officials from different countries carrying out multinational missions or humanitarian aid workers coordinating international disaster relief to aid local communities. The American and German academics, diplomats and officials that formed a community of ‘Atlantic realists’ in the early stages of the Cold War, bound together by a shared understanding of geopolitics and a sense of joint enterprise to provide advice to policy-makers in Washington and Bonn, are another example. 45 Importantly, members of CoP do not necessarily correspond to reified structures of organizational affiliations and boundaries (such as the AU, EU, NATO and UN), and such groups of practitioners do not always have to agree on how to achieve a particular outcome. It is rather the processual and partly conflictual character of knowledge creation and exchange that, in practice, holds a community together and shapes political outcomes. 46 This is an important distinction, because it highlights crucial aspects of shared practices that are not captured by the concept of epistemic community, typically defined as professional networks with recognized expertise. 47 Research in IR on epistemic communities tends to underplay the assertion that the political effects of learning do not rely on scientific knowledge in itself, but instead on the establishment of ways of saying and doing things that make certain scientific findings and arguments appear self-evident to practitioners in certain political settings. 48

Thus, to understand how common positions on a relatively new topic such as climate-related security risks are forged among diplomats representing the OSCE participating states, it is necessary get a sense of these practitioners’ notions of what can and cannot be done at a specific time to advance the OSCE’s capacity to address such risks. This practical knowledge is formed by groups of increasingly like-minded diplomats clustered around ‘diplomatic sites’ in the OSCE. 49 The process by which practically-derived lessons are drawn from diplomatic contestations is of key importance here, since the diplomatic practices of negotiation and decision-making by consensus in the OSCE mean that diplomats learn how they need to work to shift the least common denominator on a topic, and that this might entail expanding the group of like-minded diplomats and collaborating with officials at the OSCE secretariat, as well as carving out compromises with

those representatives that are still not convinced, in order to move a certain policy agenda forward and keep it alive over time.

To illustrate, an informal OSCE Group of Friends of the Environment was launched in 2019 on the initiative of France, Switzerland and the UK. The group recognizes ‘the close connection between the environment and security [and] aims to strengthen cooperation on environmental issues as part of a broader effort to prevent conflicts, build mutual confidence and promote good neighbourly relations’.\(^{50}\) At its launch the group also included Albania, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Slovakia and the US, and it has kept expanding since then. Moreover, representatives from OSCE participating states that support international cooperation on climate security in other international organizations (such as Germany and Sweden, as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council) tend to promote it within the OSCE as well. The group of diplomats in the OSCE that seeks to advance the climate security agenda tends to represent western and northern European countries, but in recent years diplomats representing countries in the Balkans, Caucasus, central Asia and eastern Europe have also been engaging in discussions on climate-related security risks. However, diplomats from two participating states, Russia and Turkey, have been particularly reluctant to engage in such discussions within the OSCE, and this heavily influenced the diplomatic negotiations during Sweden’s chairpersonship.

The analysis presented below draws on the CoP framework to study how Swedish diplomats managed to draw on established OSCE diplomatic conventions to advance regional cooperation on climate security, within as well as beyond the group of like-minded diplomats. With the aim of seeking to explain why and how it was possible for the 2021 ministerial decision to be unanimously adopted despite rising geopolitical tensions, the author has conducted an analysis of the domain of knowledge on climate security in the OSCE, placing emphasis on the work of Swedish diplomats during the chairpersonship. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with 15 representatives and officials from ten OSCE participating states and the OSCE Secretariat. The author was able to follow the diplomatic negotiations on the decision as part of the work to write a report commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.\(^{51}\) The author was invited to present the report at two diplomatic events in Vienna in September 2021, one hosted by the informal OSCE Group of Friends of the Environment and one by the Permanent Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE. This provided opportunities for participant observations, as well as informal conversations with key actors in the negotiations.

Overall, the data collection strategy was informed by the ambition to not rely only on accounts from Swedish diplomats but to obtain accounts from a diverse set of participating states, and interviews were conducted with diplomats


Learning, contestation and diplomatic practices on climate security in the OSCE

Sweden had not held the OSCE chair since 1993, and one of the main goals for its 2021 chairpersonship was to get the Ministerial Council to agree to adopt a new decision on climate change. This was based on the fact that several international organizations had recently advanced their positions on how to address climate-related security risks, and that the OSCE had not adopted any significant political statement on the issue since the Madrid Declaration in 2007. Adopting a ministerial decision would send the strong political signal that the OSCE is committed to combatting the security challenges caused by climate change. The lessons learned from the successful campaign to establish the UN climate security mechanism during the period when Sweden was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (in 2017–18) provided a benchmark for Swedish diplomats. Swedish diplomats also knew that the US Mission to the OSCE would be much keener on moving this policy agenda forward during the presidency of Joe Biden, compared to the way in which it had acted under the presidency of Donald J. Trump. Representatives from France, Germany and other members of the informal Group of Friends of the Environment were supportive of the ambition to get the OSCE to adopt a new decision, while the UK was also hosting the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow, which was scheduled to be held about a month before the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in early December 2021.
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The Swedish strategy and emerging political dynamics on climate security in the OSCE

The Swedish diplomatic strategy established by its OSCE task force, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Stockholm and the delegation of Sweden to the OSCE in Vienna, was partly based on the argument that adopting a new decision would be well in line with the already established mandate of the OSCE—going as far back as the 1975 Final Act of Helsinki—as well as showing that the OSCE was already engaging in a range of climate security activities, such as developing risk assessment capacities in central Asia, eastern Europe and the southern Caucasus. However, the strategy was also based on the argument that a new decision would not only provide political clout to ongoing OSCE activities; it would also serve to strengthen the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security. It would do this by explicitly acknowledging that the adverse effects of climate change are not only related to the potentially increased risk of armed conflict, since climate change affects human and state security in different, yet interrelated, ways. The strategy was also meant to highlight the fact that many OSCE projects related to climate-related security risks have been financed by groups of participating states with extra-budgetary means. Some participating states have viewed such activities as not being part of the OSCE’s core mandate, and this has meant that the lessons learned from the projects had not meaningfully informed the political discussions on how to develop the role of the OSCE in the field of climate security, at least not to the extent that several participating states, including Sweden, would have liked. Therefore, the strategy was to argue that adopting a ministerial decision would further realize the potential of the OSCE in the field of climate security, as well as increasing its relevance to its participant states as well as partner organizations.

Several diplomats described a sense of growing political momentum around climate security in the OSCE, also before the Swedish chairpersonship started in January 2021. The creation and subsequent expansion of the informal Group of Friends of the Environment was seen as a strong indication of the strong support throughout the organization for integrating environmental and security issues. Having a strongly motivated OSCE secretary-general in Helga Schmid was also mentioned. At the start of the Swedish chairpersonship, as she delivered her inaugural remarks at the OSCE Permanent Council, Schmid explicitly referred to environmental and climate-related challenges in relation to the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security. A few months later, Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller, the acting deputy head of the US Mission to the OSCE, made a statement at the Permanent Council urging the participating states to consider steps ‘to address the broader impacts of climate change on regional security’. For Sweden, the statement was important due to the political weight of the US, but also because of the

52 OSCE, ‘Climate change and security in eastern Europe, central Asia and south Caucasus’.
53 Interviews, 15 March 2021; interviews, 16 March 2021; interview, 19 March 2021.
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detailed proposals it contained—notably, the suggestions that the OSCE should assist participating states by developing a guide to best practice for assessing the security impacts of climate change, and that the OSCE should integrate climate considerations into existing conflict prevention measures, for example in the form of early-warning systems to monitor rising tensions over key resources.

Diplomats also pointed to constructive discussions on climate-related security risks held at the EEC meeting in March 2021, albeit at this meeting the Russian representative voiced concerns that too much focus on climate change and security might risk diverting attention away from other serious challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Several diplomats suggested that a recurrent problem in the negotiations was that the evidence of a link between climate change and security needed to be better understood; this point was also raised during the EEC meeting. In particular, Russia and Turkey were said by several interviewees to be critical of the idea of further developing the role of the OSCE in relation to climate security. In early 2021, when the first round of interviews for this analysis was conducted, the dynamics at the highest political level of the OSCE were described as being marked by high levels of mistrust due to what were perceived by many diplomats as ongoing Russian efforts to destabilize Ukraine. However, several interviewees also suggested that the Russian government was possibly not as principally opposed to the idea of enhancing the role of the OSCE in climate security as it had been in the past, whereas the Turkish government’s negative stance was perceived as being more steadfast, mainly due to its views on cross-border water security issues and their implications for Turkey’s national security. Thus, the security challenges and geopolitical implications of climate change were most likely assessed quite differently by Russian and Turkish diplomats during the negotiations, compared to diplomats representing northern and western European countries as well as Canada and the US.

The OSCE as a diplomatic site

Seen from the perspective of CoP, it is highly interesting that several diplomats explicitly referred to the ‘convening power’ of the OSCE and described it as relying on the practice of bringing together stakeholders from different policy fields and political levels around common concerns, such as at the high-level conference on the economic and security implications of climate change. Thus, a defining feature of the OSCE’s diplomatic repertoire is that it provides a site where knowledge on local vulnerabilities and information about risk-management strategies can be shared in ways that few other international organizations are able to do, which makes it unique in the field of climate security. In the interviews, the OSCE

56 Interview, 1 April 2021; interview, 9 April 2021.
57 Interview, 19 March 2021; interview, 22 March 2021.
58 Interviews, 15 March 2021; interviews, 16 March 2021; interview, 19 March 2021; interview, 1 April 2021; interview, 9 April 2021.
59 OSCE, ‘30 years after Bonn’; interviews, 15 March 2021; interview, 19 March 2021; interview, 22 March 2021; interview, 9 April 2021.
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was recurrently referred to as the only regional organization with a mandate spanning environmental and security challenges, and this was generally perceived as something that also provided an opportunity to address climate security.

But it is also important to note that even like-minded diplomats were not in agreement on the best way of moving the agenda forward, as some mainly saw added value in bridging global and national commitments, whereas others were not convinced that the OSCE would be the best venue to address the nexus between climate change, environmental challenges and security—because doing so might risk duplicating the work of other organizations, mainly the UN. A few diplomats also reflected on the possibility that participating states might be reluctant to allow new issues, such as climate-related security risks, to overshadow established ones, such as conflict prevention. The context-specific knowledge about diplomatic work in the OSCE suggested to most interviewees that political change can indeed occur quickly, but in the words of two interviewees ‘changes in an organization like [the OSCE] are easily reversible’ and ‘sometimes change is too strong’. Another diplomat suggested that climate security was not really perceived as a key priority for the OSCE by all participating states, and that the examples most often used in diplomatic negotiations to illustrate climate-related security risks were usually taken from outside the OSCE region (e.g. the Lake Chad region and Somalia). This does not mean, however, that climate-related security risks are not present in the OSCE region: only that such risks are not always recognized as such by the participating states. Some interviewees stressed that Swedish diplomats knew that they could not push too hard for a ministerial decision, given the need to achieve consensus and also given that quite a few participating states might be reluctant to advance the OSCE agenda on climate-related security risks, thus hiding comfortably behind the position of more outspoken sceptics, such as Russia and Turkey.

Expanding the domain of knowledge on climate security in the OSCE

Interview data, combined with observations made on site in Vienna, suggest that Sweden and like-minded partners in the OSCE did not finally achieve the ministerial decision they ideally had aimed for. For example, Canada issued a statement saying that although they supported the decision that was adopted by the Ministerial Council, they were ‘disappointed […] by the weak language concerning the disproportionate impact of climate change on women. This impact is undeniable and has been reaffirmed both through United Nations bodies and most recently at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change’. The decision is nonetheless an unanimously agreed docu-

60 Interview, 23 March 2021; interviews, 8 April 2021.
61 Interview, 22 March 2021.
62 Interviews, 8 April 2021.
63 Interviews, 16 March 2021.
64 Interview, 1 April 2021.

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ment in which ‘nothing essential is missing’, in the words of one Swedish diplo-
mat. This interviewee also stressed other important factors, that are particularly
relevant seen from the perspective of CoP. First, the COP26 meeting in Glasgow,
hosted by the UK—a key partner for Sweden in the field of climate security—was
concluded during the intense final stages of the negotiations on the ministerial
decision, and this provided additional political momentum for Swedish diplomats
to put pressure on reluctant delegations. But such momentum could not have been
used by Sweden had it not been for the fact that an increasing number of participating
states had adopted the practice of involving national experts on environmental
and climate issues. Such expertise is usually not held by staff at the ministries of
foreign affairs, or by the OSCE delegations, but it is essential when diplomats
foresee that negotiations on a ministerial decision will actually take place. Mixing
diplomats with environmental and climate experts tends to shift the focus in the
negotiations to practical, rather than political, aspects of climate change. Second,
both Russia and Turkey had expressed scepticism right from the start of the nego-
tiations, but both were nonetheless willing to engage in discussions on the role of
the OSCE in climate security during early 2021. In the view of one Swedish diplo-
mat, this reflected the OSCE’s unique properties as a regional security organization,
in the sense that communication channels were open to both Russia and Turkey,
which allowed Swedish diplomats to gradually learn what the Turkish and Russian
governments might be able to agree to. To stress this unique feature of the OSCE,
the interviewee said that ‘at some point we were talking with Washington on one
phone and Moscow on another […] you don’t get to that point at the end of the
negotiations, right before a decision is prepared, where there is a sense that a lot is
still possible and achievable, unless you’ve been able to strategically engage with
your counterparts throughout the whole year’.

Thus, the domain of knowledge that informed the Swedish diplomats’ expecta-
tions on what might be achievable is constituted by consensus-seeking diplomatic
practices developed over time in the OSCE, but when it comes to the field of climate
security this knowledge also drew on lessons learned from previous diplomatic
negotiations in other venues such as the UN Security Council and UNFCCC. The
community of engaged practitioners in the field of climate security is not
confined to specific organizations, since diplomats and officials interact and learn
from each other across organizational boundaries, which is illustrated by the way
in which the outcomes from the COP26 meeting could be used in the negotia-
tions at the OSCE. However, to achieve outcomes diplomats need to know the
expected ways of doing things at specific diplomatic sites to move negotiations
forward. The practice of engaging experts on environmental and climate issues
was important in broadening the diplomatic discussions—from a narrow focus on
whether there is solid scientific evidence that climate change increases the risk for
interstate conflict, to also acknowledging that climate change might have adverse
consequences for human and societal security in a broader sense.

66 Interview, 24 January 2022.
67 Interview, 24 January 2022.

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But Sweden and like-minded partners probably never expected that they would be able to achieve everything they had ideally wanted to, especially considering the contestation from Russian and Turkish delegations. The ministerial decision is also conspicuously broad in that it covers various aspects, including calls on participating states to develop national strategies to mitigate and build resilience against the impacts of climate change; the promotion of technological innovation and the use of renewable energy; and a call to adopt an approach to COVID-19 recovery that takes climate change into account. However, several interviewees suggested that the main benefit of the decision lies in the fact that it provides the OSCE Secretariat with the means to further develop activities to support regional and transnational cooperation on climate-related security risks in the OSCE region. Importantly, through the decision, the OCEEA and OSCE field operations are now explicitly tasked to assist participating states—once requested to do so by the latter—in implementing the provisions of the decision and to seek cooperation with other relevant regional and international organizations. Thus, the lowest common denominator in the OSCE has moved in the direction of both acknowledging—at the highest political level—the need to address challenges caused by climate change, and specifying the range of activities that the OSCE can undertake to support participating states and partners to address climate-related security risks.

Conclusions

The analysis presented in this article suggests that the OSCE is in a better position today to assist participating states to cope with the adverse effects of climate change because of the 2021 ministerial decision; the fact that these states have agreed on further specifying the role of the OSCE represents a step forward for international cooperation on climate security. Any commitment that the participating states can agree on at the level of the Ministerial Council sends a strong signal to national and local actors, as well as to partner countries and other organizations, that climate-related security risks can be addressed through coordinated political action. This is of course noteworthy at times of increased geopolitical contestation. However, the analysis also suggests that the level of ambition still differs greatly among OSCE participating states, and there are most likely quite divergent views among them regarding what are perceived to be the best ways forward. The current crisis caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has paralysed much of the work that was foreseen to take place at the highest political level, such as a planned high-level event with ministers and climate envoys in the spring of 2022, but the work done by groups of like-minded participating states in collaboration with the OSCE Secretariat has not been completely disrupted.

In the context of the OSCE, the political significance of an emerging constellation such as the informal Group of Friends of the Environment lies in the
members’ ability to identify, and fund, extra-budgetary projects to assess climate-related security risks in the OSCE region, and this ability in turn ultimately rests on shared practices that embody the community’s knowledge on the broadening repertoire of security challenges caused by a changing climate. The members’ work to bring together environmental and climate experts with national governments and local stakeholders, to facilitate knowledge creation on climate risks and adaptation strategies, is also a practice that is well suited to the OSCE as a diplomatic site. Moreover, the OSCE Secretariat has been involved in the organization of several similar projects and, given its long history of cooperation with UN agencies, could contribute to the UN climate security mechanism by providing knowledge on specific climate-related security risks in the OSCE region. In fact, the ministerial decision tasks the OSCE to expand the cooperation with other relevant regional and international organizations, and here the OSCE Mediterranean partnership with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia is particularly interesting, given the increasingly adverse effects of climate change in the partner countries.\(^7^1\) Igli Hasani, the current coordinator of OSCE economic and environmental activities, referred to the ‘spirit’ of the decision to express the OSCE’s willingness to support the Mediterranean partners to ‘identify and map potential security risks stemming from climate change and take joint measures to reduce such risks’.\(^7^2\) In this way, diplomats and officials in the OSCE continue to expand the domain of knowledge on climate-related security risks to other organizations and countries which in turn might spur processes of learning, as well as contestation, in new political settings.

An important finding that carries broader theoretical relevance for the study of climate security as well as informal governance in IR is that, even though it might be difficult for OSCE participating states to reach consensus on new, emerging issues, this analysis suggests that constellations of like-minded diplomats can successfully shape political outcomes if they find ways to frame specific issues as being in line with the organization’s mandate. Importantly, the political struggle to shift the least common denominator on an issue, such as the security challenges caused by a changing climate, involves creative ways to apply context-specific diplomatic practices to expand what is perceived to be the relevant domain of knowledge. Expanding the community of diplomatic practitioners in the OSCE that shares an understanding of the close connection between environmental, climate and security issues is not only important because it raises the stakes for sceptical representatives to block negotiated outcomes; expanding this community also means (perhaps more importantly) that more practitioners are involved in a joint enterprise that is shaping their dispositions and expectations on what can and should be achieved in an organization like the OSCE when it comes to addressing climate-related security risks. Thus, further attention should be paid to

\(^7^1\) Andrea Dessì and Flavia Fusco, eds, *Climate change and security in the Mediterranean: exploring the nexus, unpacking international policy responses* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2022).

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how communities of diplomatic practitioners shape political outcomes in different international organizations by way of connecting practically derived lessons from various diplomatic sites in the UN Security Council, UNFCCC, OSCE and other organizations such as the AU, EU and NATO, since it might determine how these organizations decide to frame climate-related security risks and what resources and capacities are devoted to manage those risks.

Finally, the analysis presented in this article suggests that focusing on emergent political dynamics within international organizations provides important analytical insights on how actions to address climate-related security risks are shaped in different institutional contexts. The work to bridge scientific research on climate-related security risks and multilateral diplomacy has gained momentum in recent years, but the likely disruptive effects in various countries, related to attempts to promote sustainable development and reduce dependency on fossil energy sources in order to lower emissions, will most probably lead to new kinds of geopolitical tensions that need to be understood better. In this sense, Russia’s war against Ukraine—and the responses to it on the part of European states and the US—constitute only one piece of the puzzle of the changing geopolitics of climate security in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world.

Table 1: List of interviews

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<th>Interview</th>
<th>OSCE participating state/OSCE Secretariat</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>OSCE Secretariat</td>
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<td>Delegation of the UK to the OSCE</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Permanent Mission of the Republic of North Macedonia to the International Organizations in Vienna</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the OSCE, the UN and other International Organizations in Vienna</td>
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<td>Permanent Mission of Montenegro to the UN, OSCE and other International Organizations in Vienna</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>US Mission to the OSCE</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Republic of Austria, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN, OSCE and other International Organizations in Vienna</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Permanent Mission of Armenia to the OSCE</td>
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