To change our perceptions: 
The economy, ecology and European security

*edited by Rob Zaagman*

**Introduction**

There is a need for a change in the perception and treatment of economic and environmental issues. Building on the Budapest Document of 1994, we would advocate a new look at economic and ecological issues strictly from a security angle, i.e. focusing on those issues which could in the short to medium term lead to (violent) conflict.

The main focus of activities of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is on the prevention of (violent) conflict in the OSCE area. To that end, it employs a comprehensive concept of security which presupposes that a variety of aspects be taken into account by the decision-making bodies of the organisation. However, the economic/ecological dimension of the OSCE is virtually absent from the OSCE conflict prevention agenda, that is to say, economic and ecological issues are not perceived as (near-future) security threats. The OSCE emphasis in these areas is exclusively on the transition to free-market economies and democracy, safely tucked away in the deliberations of the Senior Council when meeting as the Economic Forum where they are treated in isolation from other OSCE issues.

For three reasons, this situation should change. Firstly, it leads to the neglect of issues which could cause (violent) conflict in the short term. Moreover, since economic and ecological issues are not integrated in the supposedly comprehensive security discussions of the political OSCE bodies, important aspects may be overlooked when the OSCE is debating how to address a conflict-prone situation. Lastly, this state of affairs also leads to a neglect of core security concerns of certain OSCE states which are of an economic and ecological nature, e.g. the Central Asian states. If participating states wish to keep these (and perhaps other) states interested in the OSCE as a

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1. This report has been produced by an independent working group of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee as a contribution to the discussions concerning the security model for the 21st century. The report was written and edited by Rob Zaagman on the basis of discussions in a working group consisting of the following persons: Herman Amelink, Arie Bloed, Ige Dekker, Cees Homan, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Wilco de Jonge, Marjanne de Kwaasteneniet, Eimert van Middelkoop, Rob Siekmann, Peter Volten and Rob Zaagman.

2. Paragraph 15 of the Budapest Political Declaration requests 'the Chairman-in-Office to explore ways to integrate economic dimension issues into the tasks faced by the OSCE' (an implicit recognition that so far this had not been the case). The Chairman-in-Office is also encouraged to enhance dialogue with international economic and financial institutions 'in order to place issues of common concern into a broader security context'. (chapter Dc, paragraph 3). However, the Chairman-in-Office was asked to present a progress report only at the Summit Meeting of Lisbon (December 1996), and the security approach is not reflected in the agendas of the Economic Forum. Furthermore, ecological issues with security implications are not mentioned at all.
security organisation, it will be necessary to prove the relevance of the organisation to these states by addressing these concerns as well.

It is not our intention to address longer-term trends like global warming or the depletion of the ozone layer because we think that the OSCE’s span of attention is not suited to such a long-term perspective. Neither do we propose that the OSCE abandon its interest in transitional issues: Clearly, a successful transition to free and effective markets and economic prosperity is of relevance to security and cooperation in Europe and is closely linked to democratic processes.

**Economic and ecological issues as security threats**

Environmental and economic questions have increasingly been recognised as security-agenda issues. All over the former Soviet Union (FSU), the degradation of the environment is dramatic and can have strategic implications. Certain problems, for instance disputes related to waterway management or nuclear waste, exist in other parts of the OSCE area as well. Many of them have transboundary dimensions; they can quickly lead to international tensions. Moreover, scarcities cause some states to become dependent on other states, opening the door to political pressure through economic means because of this dependence.

The risk of conflict may drastically increase over the next decade, both quantitatively (the number of conflicts, intra-state as well as inter-state) and qualitatively (intensity) because of a combination of a growing demand for resources (population growth plus increased consumption per capita) and a likely exhaustion of the environment. While it is difficult to prove a decisive and immediate causal link between environmental issues and conflict, a number of factual observations can be made which suggest a sufficiently close relationship for such issues to be treated as genuine security issues. Even if economic and environmental issues in themselves do not cause tensions, they can make up an important element in the context of which disputes, e.g. minority issues, have to be seen because they will often exacerbate matters.

Tensions are more likely to come to a head in states where the authority of the government is shaky or the population is divided along ethnic and/or religious lines. If used by political leaders to mobilise groups through appeals to group identity, disputes over land, water and other natural resources may quickly lead to a radicalisation of the groups addressed, with disruptive effects on the political process. One should note that environmental issues played a leading role in the process of political mobilisation of average citizens in the glasnost period and, more specifically, in the growth of national consciousness in the non-Russian republics.

**Scarcity conflicts deriving from competing claims**

Food, water and energy are part and parcel of the international as well as domestic security concerns of most of the developing countries in the OSCE area. Of central interest is the use of scarce transboundary water resources,