Climate Change and Security links in Turkey explored by German-Turkish Expert Roundtable at Bilkent University

Bilkent University Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Istanbul Policy Center – Sabancı University – Stiftung Mercator Initiative and International Organization for Migration Turkey office co-organized the Turkish-German Expert Roundtable on “Climate Change and Security in Turkey: Opportunities and Threats” held in Bilkent University, Ankara with participation of representatives from academia, public institutions, NGOs and international organizations on May 28 and 29, 2015.

During the two-day event, supported by the Klimafonds of the German Federal Foreign Office, representatives from Turkish and German academia, public institutions and international organizations discussed the security and migration implications of global climate change in Turkey.

The first day was dedicated to introducing the topic by two acclaimed experts in the field, Professor Jurgen Scheffran of Hamburg University and Professor Aysegul Kibaroglu of MEF University, Istanbul. Professor Scheffran shared his expertise on the climate related conflict and security risks in the Eastern Mediterranean. He emphasized the importance of human security dimension of climate change in the wider region, especially in relation to food security, migration, water and energy security. Professor Kibaroglu discussed the domestic and transnational impacts of climate change on water resources in and around Turkey. She emphasized that new challenges require new ways of thinking and cooperative policy responses. The discussion revealed multiple complex understandings of the links between conflict, migration, security and global environmental change. The participants discussed new reports, such as the New Climate for Peace prepared for the German G7 presidency and drew attention to such debates in the context of the coinciding Turkish presidency of the G 20 in the run up to the Paris COP 21 climate summit to be held in December.

Delving deeper into the implications for Turkey, experts from the two countries focused on the implications for food, migration, water and energy security during the second day. Zeynep Kadirbeyoglu of Bogazici University pointed out the double insecurity caused by global food market fluctuations and increasing climate instability for Turkey’s food sovereignty. The second topic discussed was migration with a focus on both cross-border and domestic flows, including the recent influx of Syrian refugees into Turkish territory. The debate benefited from the expertise of the visiting specialist on environmental migration from the IOM, Daria Mokhnacheva, who presented the global policy-relevant research of IOM on the interlinkages between migration, environment and climate change. The subsequent session shed light on global energy markets and potential maladaptations that may further increase the human insecurity of communities in Turkey. Water security was the final topic handled by expert roundtable participants who unanimously agreed that water security should be understood in a cross-scala and cross-temporal context by addressing the key challenges such as availability, access and distribution.
This initial Turkish-German expert roundtable in Ankara will be followed up by a second expert roundtable to be held in Berlin in October 2015. "This was a first step in building a long lasting cooperation between German and Turkish institutions on much debated interactions between climate change and security" said co-organizers Assistant Professor Dr. Clemens Hoffmann (Bilkent University) and Dr. Ethemcan Turhan (Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University). Hoffmann and Turhan reiterated their willingness to carry out this policy-relevant dialogue through preparation of policy briefs, a joint online resources website and a potential academic volume that may emerge as a output of this ongoing dialogue between academics and policy makers in Turkey and Germany.