

Canada – Europe  
Parliamentary Association



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## **Report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association**

### **Third Part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**

**Strasbourg, France**

**From June 24 to 28 2024**

## Report

From 24–28 June 2024, the Canada–Europe Parliamentary Association (CAEU) sent a delegation of 10 parliamentarians to Strasbourg, France to participate in the third part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The delegates were Francesco Sorbara, M.P., President of CAEU; Hon. David Wells, Senator, Vice-President; Lianne Rood, M.P., Vice-President; Hon. Gwen Boniface, Senator; Hon. Brian Francis, Senator; Stéphane Bergeron, M.P.; Larry Brock, M.P.; Don Davies, M.P.; Jennifer O’Connell, M.P.; and Jamie Schmale, M.P.

The delegation was accompanied by association secretaries, Marc-André Bourgon and Jessica Kulka, and association advisers, Valérie Chevrier-Marineau and BJ Siekierski.

### **A. Overview of the Agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

During the session, a wide range of topics were debated in the Assembly and its committees. The Assembly held the following debates:

- “Challenges to democracy in Georgia”
- “Can the Council of Europe step up its efforts to counter threats to the freedom of expression?”
- “Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee”
- “War in Gaza: ensuring the release of the hostages, the implementation of an immediate ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian aid”
- “Observation of the presidential and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia (24 April and 8 May 2024)”
- “Modification of various provisions of the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure”
- Joint Debate: “Strengthening democracy through participatory and deliberative processes/Strengthening a youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly”
- “Protecting women human rights defenders in Europe”
- Joint Debate: “Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine/ The role of sanctions in countering the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine/ Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace”
- “Ensuring human rights-compliant asylum procedures”
- “Reparation and reconciliation processes to overcome past conflicts and build a common peaceful future – the question of just and equal redress”
- “The honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia”
- “An urgent call to Europe and its partners: envisioning immediate and long-term policy solutions in support of the displaced people of Ukraine”
- “Call for Varosha’s return to its lawful inhabitants”
- “Post-conflict time: defusing ticking time bombs for a safe return of displaced populations”
- “Safeguarding human rights for future generations”

The Assembly also heard from the following speakers:

- Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

- Gabrielius Landsbergis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and President of the Committee of Ministers
- Volker Türk, United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Marharyta Vorykhava, Vice-Chair of the Council of Europe's Advisory Council on Youth
- Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

Finally, the Assembly elected Alain Berset as the next Secretary General of the Council of Europe and awarded the inaugural Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment to the Irida Women's Center in Greece.

## **B. Canadian Interventions in Assembly Debates**

All delegates participated in the Assembly's debates. They made 19 interventions during debates and tabled 10 speeches in writing. The texts of the delegates' speeches are available on the PACE website.<sup>1</sup>

### **1. 25 June 2024**

Mr. Davies spoke in the Joint Debate: "Strengthening democracy through participatory and deliberative processes/Strengthening a youth perspective in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly." Senator Francis, Ms. O'Connell, and Ms. Rood submitted their speeches in writing.

Ms. O'Connell and Ms. Rood spoke in the debate on "Protecting women human rights defenders in Europe." Senator Boniface submitted her speech in writing.

Mr. Brock and Senator Wells spoke in the debate on "Ensuring human rights-compliant asylum procedures."

### **2. 26 June 2024**

Senator Boniface, Senator Wells, and Mr. Brock spoke in the Joint Debate: "Legal and human rights aspects of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine/ The role of sanctions in countering the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine/ Countering the erasure of cultural identity in war and peace."

Senator Francis and Senator Wells spoke in the debate on "Reparation and reconciliation processes to overcome past conflicts and build a common peaceful future – the question of just and equal redress." Senator Boniface and Mr. Davies submitted their speeches in writing.

Mr. Bergeron submitted a speech in writing for the debate on "The honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia."

### **3. 27 June 2024**

Mr. Bergeron spoke in the debate on "Challenges to democracy in Georgia."

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "[Summer Session 2024](#)," Verbatim Records.

Senator Boniface spoke in the debate on “An urgent call to Europe and its partners: envisioning immediate and long-term policy solutions in support of the displaced people of Ukraine.” Mr. Sorbara submitted his speech in writing.

Mr. Sorbara spoke in the debate on the “Call for Varosha’s return to its lawful inhabitants.”

Mr. Sorbara spoke in the debate on “Post-conflict time: defusing ticking time bombs for a safe return of displaced populations.” Mr. Bergeron submitted his speech in writing.

Mr. Davies spoke in the debate on the “War in Gaza: ensuring the release of the hostages, the implementation of an immediate ceasefire and the provision of humanitarian aid.” Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Sorbara submitted their speeches in writing.

Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Sorbara spoke in the debate entitled “Can the Council of Europe step up its efforts to counter threats to the freedom of expression?”

#### **4. 28 June 2024**

Mr. Davies and Ms. O’Connell spoke in the debate on “Safeguarding human rights for future generations.”

### **C. Additional Canadian Activities During the Session**

Members of the delegation attended meetings of PACE political groups throughout the week.

In addition, on 26 June 2024, Mr. Sorbara and Jarrett Reckseidler, Senior Political Affairs Officer at Canada’s Mission to the European Union, were interviewed by Pawel Tverskoi, a researcher at the University of Freiburg’s Department of Political Science, about the role Canada plays at the Council of Europe as an observer state.

On 27 June 2024, Senator Francis and Mr. Bergeron attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Network on the situation of the Children of Ukraine, and Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Sorbara attended a joint hearing of the PACE Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States and the PACE Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights on “Regulating foreign influence: best practices and European standards.”

Finally, the delegation held bilateral meetings with other member delegations and was briefed by Mr. Reckseidler from Canada’s Mission to the European Union.

### **D. Bilateral meetings**

#### **1. 24 June 2024**

##### **A. Meeting with Bernard Sabella, Member of the Palestinian delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface, Mr. Davies, Ms. O’Connell, and Mr. Sorbara met with Bernard Sabella, a member of the Palestinian delegation to PACE.

Mr. Sabella provided an overview of the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. He condemned Hamas’ 7 October 2023 terrorist attack while also noting that Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, had recently reported that more than 120,000 civilians had died in Gaza in the previous nine months.

Mr. Sorbara asked Mr. Sabella about the so-called “day after” – that is, plans for when the fighting stops – and voiced his opposition to Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Mr. Sabella said that the Palestinian people had lost faith in democracy and human rights and that there was no long-term planning taking place in Israel. Even Hamas’ opponents and enemies, he added, acknowledged that the group could not be eliminated and would have to play a political role in the future. Credible polls, he said, showed Hamas’ support among Palestinians was rising and that large majorities supported the 7 October attack. In the West Bank more specifically, Mr. Sabella said that the situation was being driven to a boiling point – funding to the Palestinian Authority was being blocked and Israeli settlers had killed hundreds of Palestinians. He also raised allegations that Palestinians had been tortured in Israeli prisons.

Mr. Davies then mentioned a motion related to the situation in Gaza – sponsored by a member of his party – which passed in the House of Commons in March 2024<sup>2</sup>. He said he was frustrated that the final version of the motion did not call on the Government of Canada to recognize a Palestinian state. Nonetheless, he emphasized that it was important that the motion called on the Government of Canada to cease the further authorization and transfer of arms exports to Israel.

## **B. Meeting with Hungary’s delegation to PACE**

Senator Francis and Mr. Davies with four members of the Hungarian delegation to PACE: Zsolt Németh, Chair of the delegation; Mónika Dunai; Hajnalka Juhász; and Katalin Csöbör.

Mr. Németh began the meeting by discussing Hungary’s goals for their presidency of the Council of the European Union, which was beginning in July. Mr. Németh said that the Hungarian presidency would have seven priorities, one of which was stemming illegal migration. In response, Mr. Davies said that Canada does not face the same challenges as Hungary regarding irregular immigration. At the same time, he highlighted housing challenges in Canada that have arisen, in part, because of high regular migration to Canada in recent years – that is, increased numbers of immigrants, international students, and temporary foreign workers. Senator Francis echoed that point and noted that a spike in immigration to Prince Edward Island, the province he represents in the Senate, has contributed to a housing crisis. Mr. Németh said there is a similar housing shortage in Hungary.

Mr. Davies also asked the Hungarian delegation about the state of the Hungarian economy and their position on the war in Ukraine. Mr. Németh said that the Hungarian economy is doing well and that twenty years of European Union (EU) membership has benefited Hungary in that respect. Nonetheless, he accused the EU of blackmailing Hungary by tying EU funding to Hungary’s implementation of progressive social policies, particularly those related to LGBTQ rights. Moreover, he noted that despite the European Commission’s rhetoric, Hungary continues to view China as an important trade and investment partner.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Mr. Németh said that there needs to be a ceasefire as soon as possible so that peace negotiations can begin. While he added that Ukraine’s territorial

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<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, [Journals](#), 18 March 2024.

integrity must be respected and that it must be free to join any international organization it wishes, he also expressed concerns about the growing intolerance in Ukraine of the Russian language and Russian Orthodox church.

### **C. Meeting with Georgia's delegation to PACE (Government)**

Senator Wells, Ms. Rood, and Mr. Schmale met with three members of Georgia's delegation to PACE: Givi Mikanadze, Chair of the delegation, Giorgi Chakvetadze, and Eka Sepashvili. All three members of the Georgian delegation were part of the governing coalition (Georgian opposition parties preferred to meet separately.)

After brief introductions, Mr. Mikanadze defended a bill the governing coalition had introduced in the Georgian Parliament that would ban the changing of genders and prevent same-sex couples from adopting children. He said the bill is consistent with the conservative views and traditions of the Georgian people, and highlighted the crowds that took to the streets on 17 May for Family Purity Day, a relatively recent national holiday. He then defended the country's new Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence – the subject of a PACE urgent procedure debate later in the week.

Mr. Mikanadze said the bill prohibits the direct funding of political parties from abroad and indirect funding going through media and NGOs. He said the bill is about transparency – only includes fines – and explicitly states that it will not result in any organization being shut down. When asked to provide examples of why the bill was necessary, he pointed to widespread false allegations spread by NGOs that the country's last parliamentary elections, in 2020, were rigged.

He then pushed back against the transparency law being described as "Russian." He pointed out that 20% of Georgian territory is currently being occupied by Russia and that the two countries do not have diplomatic relations. For her part, Ms. Sepashvili said that Georgia is one of many countries trying to counter foreign interference and that the country's voters deserve transparency. In response to a question from Mr. Schmale about the significant protests against the transparency law, Mr. Mikanadze said that they have stopped.

Before concluding the meeting, Mr. Mikanadze noted that Canada's embassy in Türkiye covers relations with Georgia and that it would be very useful for Canada to have at least a consulate in the country.

### **D. Meeting with the Israeli delegation at PACE**

Senator Boniface and Mr. Sorbara met with two members of the Israeli delegation to PACE, Meirav Ben-Ari, head of the delegation, and Boaz Bismuth.

The discussion between the two delegations focused primarily on the conflict between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Sorbara began by outlining the situation in Canada, where the Canadian population appeared to be divided over the conflict. He referenced not only the discontent associated with the devastating situation facing civilians in the Gaza Strip, but also the rise of anti-Semitic events across the country. In addition, Mr. Sorbara mentioned that misinformation and disinformation about the conflict were causing polarization at the international level.

The Israeli delegates said that the Israeli authorities are not opposed to the Palestinian people. They said what was happening was in no way a genocide and described the conflict, instead, as a fight against terrorism and terrorist organizations in the region, including Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Ms. Ben-Ari mentioned that Israel did not have any intention of occupying the Gaza Strip, which was echoed by Mr. Bismuth, a member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's party, who added that the Israeli Prime Minister had said that this was not his government's objective.

The meeting participants also discussed the conflict in terms of what will happen in the future, on "the day after." Members of the Israeli delegation said that the war could indeed come to an end, so long as Hamas does not rule the Palestinian population in any way, shape, or form. The Canadian delegation, for its part, made it clear that a two-state solution was both a desirable and conceivable outcome. At the same time, they noted that the Canadian government was not currently ready to formally recognize the State of Palestine and that the Canadian government believed a peace agreement would have to come first.

## **1. 25 June 2024**

### **A. Briefing by Jarrett Reckseidler, Senior Political Affairs Officer at Canada's Mission to the European Union**

Jarrett Reckseidler, Senior Political Affairs Officer at Canada's Mission to the European Union, provided a briefing to the Canadian delegation.

Mr. Reckseidler began his briefing by describing the outcomes of the 27 European Parliament elections, which took place between 6 June and 9 June 2024. While headlines suggested that far-right parties had had the most success, Mr. Reckseidler said that that was only the case in France and Germany, and that the main centre-right and centre-left political groups – the European People's Party and the Socialists & Democrats – remained the two largest. The centrist Liberal-Renew Group and the Greens, he clarified, were the biggest losers. He also suggested one or more new political groups could emerge.

Concerning the biggest jobs in the EU, Mr. Reckseidler said that it appeared Ursula von der Leyen would return as President of the European Commission, António Costa would be the next President of the European Council, Kaja Kallas would be the next EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, and Mark Rutte would be the next North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Secretary General. However, it was not certain, he added, that von der Leyen would be confirmed by the European Parliament, and that she would need to seek support from either the Greens or the European Conservatives and Reformists.

Regarding the College of Commissioners – that is, the 27 members of the European Commission whom von der Leyen or her successor would lead – Mr. Reckseidler said he expected that hearings in the European Parliament for commissioners designate would begin in the fall and that the whole team would be in place by January 2025 at the latest. In the meantime, the existing commissioners, he said, would serve as caretaker commissioners.

### **B. Meeting with Kosovo's delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface, Senator Francis, Senator Wells, Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Davies, and Mr. Sorbara met with five members of Kosovo's delegation to PACE: Saranda Bogujevci, Chair of the delegation; Arben Gashi; Enis Kervan; Ariana Musliu-Shoshi; and Besnik Tahiri.

Ms. Bogujevci began the meeting by discussing the latest developments regarding Kosovo's potential membership in the Council of Europe. Following the vote at the April PACE session to recommend that Kosovo become a Council of Europe member, she said that the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers (the foreign ministers of member states) had met in May but did not hold a vote on Kosovo's membership. Since the Committee of Ministers only meets once a year, she said there was concern in Kosovo about lost momentum.

Mr. Davies asked what the barriers are to Kosovo's membership. Ms. Bogujevci said one obstacle was the demand by some members of the Council of Europe, such as Germany, France, and Italy, that Kosovo create an Association of Serbian Municipalities. While she said that Kosovo had reluctantly agreed to do this, she alleged that Serbia's government had successfully lobbied against a vote before the Committee of Ministers meeting. She characterized the process as having been hijacked and hoped for an extraordinary Committee of Ministers meeting in the fall. Mr. Gashi added that only two-thirds of the Committee was required to approve Kosovo's membership. Mr. Sorbara said that Canada is following the process closely and is in Kosovo's corner. He added that their ambassador is working well in Ottawa.

### **C. Meeting with Georgia's delegation to PACE (opposition parties)**

Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Brock, Ms. Rood, and Mr. Schmale met with three members of Georgia's delegation to PACE – Ana Tsitlidze, Levan Bezhashvili, and Ketevan Turazashvili – all of whom were members of the opposition in the Georgian Parliament.

Ms. Tsitlidze began the meeting by explaining that she and Mr. Bezhashvili were members of the United National Movement, a party founded by former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, who was currently imprisoned in the country. She then criticized the 'foreign agents law' the Georgian Parliament adopted the previous month, which she described as a 'Russian law' championed by the pro-Russia oligarch, Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder of the governing Georgian Dream political party.

Mr. Bezhashvili said the Georgian government was frequently comparing their law to Canada's proposed Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act to deflect criticism. He urged Canadian parliamentarians to publicly reject that comparison.

Ms. Tsitlidze added that the Georgian law would be used to quash dissent ahead of the crucial October 2024 parliamentary elections and that the effects of the law were already being felt. She also said that Mr. Ivanishvili was becoming increasingly conspiratorial and highlighted an April 2024 speech in which he referred to a "Global War Party" – meaning the United States and the EU – which were meddling in Georgia's affairs and trying to push it towards confrontation with Russia.

Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Brock inquired about the situation on the ground for the protesters. Ms. Tsitlidze said that the oligarchical system was taking hold in Georgia and that Georgian special forces had brutally repressed the protests.



Ms. Rood then asked the Georgian delegation about changes to their electoral system, and Mr. Schmale asked why transparency regarding foreign funding sources was problematic. The Georgian delegation confirmed that the 2024 parliamentary elections would be the first under a fully proportional voting system and argued that the labeling of many Georgian non-governmental organizations as foreign agents would have an extremely negative impact on their operations.

Finally, Senator Wells asked about the status of Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Ms. Tsitlidze replied that she has a house in one of the territories that she is still unable to visit and that a number Georgians living close to the borders of the territories have been kidnapped and brought there in recent years.

## **1. 26 June 2024**

### **A. Meeting with Romania's delegation to PACE**

Senator Francis and Mr. Sorbara met with three members of the Romanian delegation to PACE: Andi-Lucian Cristea, Sorin-Titus Muncaciu and Titus Corlăţean.

The parliamentarians began by discussing the Romanian parliamentary elections scheduled for early December 2024. The members of the Romanian delegation all agreed that the main objective would be stability after the elections, no matter the circumstances. At the time of the meeting, the date of the presidential election had not yet been set. However, some members of the Romanian delegation were critical of the powers exercised by the Romanian president in practice, which they suggested were inconsistent with the powers granted to the office by the Romanian constitution, notably as regards the economy.

The discussion then focused on the recent European elections, and the delegations briefly touched on European politics. The Romanian delegates informed the Canadian delegates that, in March 2024, Romania had joined the Schengen Area to allow for open sea and air borders, although land border controls would remain in effect for the time being. Most of the Romanian delegates were optimistic about this new development within the EU since economic relations between Romania and the EU are already interconnected, given Romania's status as a member of the EU.

Mr. Sorbara then moved on to the issue of the war in Ukraine – more specifically the Romanian government's support for the Ukrainian people. Mr. Corlăţean told the Canadian delegates that, at the national level, Romania had already provided considerable financial contributions to Ukraine and that it would continue to support and stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people while remaining mindful of the need to prioritize its own military security. He also pointed out that later in the year Romania is hosting the 31st annual session of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly, where the war in Ukraine and members' support for Ukraine would certainly be discussed. Mr. Muncaciu, a member of the Romanian opposition, openly disagreed with support and assistance for Ukraine. In his opinion, financial and military support for Ukraine is a bad idea, because Romania should not take the risk of getting involved in a foreign war. Mr. Sorbara explained that, in Canada, there is genuine consensus on support for Ukraine across all party lines. He added that, in his

opinion, the results of the Canadian federal election, expected in 2025, will not affect Canada's support and assistance for Ukraine.

Finally, in light of the migration-related challenges in Europe, Mr. Sorbara inquired about the situation in Romania. The Romanian delegates all agreed that Romania was not facing such challenges at this time.

### **B. Meeting with Italy's delegation to PACE**

Mr. Brock and Mr. Sorbara met with multiple members of Italy's delegation to PACE, including Elisabetta Gardini, Chair of the delegation, Deborah Bergamini, a vice-chair, Senator Aurora Florida and Piero Fassino.

Mr. Sorbara started the discussion by highlighting Canada's extensive Italian diaspora and the strong interpersonal relationships between the two countries. He then spoke about the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU. The Italian delegation provided a brief update on CETA. Ms. Gardini said that the Italian Parliament had yet to ratify the agreement, but that she was personally in favour of ratification because the agreement already provides significant trade-related benefits for Italy. She added, however, that agriculture should still be looked at more closely and described the need for "strategic patience" concerning CETA ratification.

The Canadian delegation also broached the topic of artificial intelligence with the Italian delegates, in part owing to the recent Italy-Canada Roadmap for Enhanced Cooperation between the two countries. Ms. Gardini praised Canada's artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities and space technology. She also remarked that, since 2019, Canada and Italy have also made joint progress and created job opportunities in AI through the Canada-Italy Business Forum on Artificial Intelligence.

### **C. Meeting with Norway's delegation to PACE**

Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Brock, Mr. Davies, and Mr. Sorbara met with three members of Norway's delegation to PACE: Ingjerd Schie Schou, Chair of the delegation, Lise Selnes and Lisa Marie Ness Klungland.

As Norway, like Canada, is an oil and gas producer, the first topic discussed by the delegations was the significant increase in demand for Norwegian oil and gas caused by the war in Ukraine, as several European countries have tried to reduce their energy dependence on Russia.

The Norwegian delegation then shared information on an initiative known as the Oil Fund, which was described as a pension fund that was created using revenues from the Norwegian oil and gas industry and managed by Norges Bank Investment Management. They told the Canadian delegation that this fund holds US\$1.7 trillion in assets and that the Norwegian government is allowed to use 3% of it annually for research and education, among other things. They also informed the Canadian delegates that this initiative has been supported unanimously by all parties in the Norwegian Parliament.

The discussion then turned to NATO, both countries being founding members of the organization. The Norwegian delegation said this would be the first year that Norway reaches the threshold of devoting 2% of GDP to defence spending. They added that an

all-party consensus had been reached to increase defence spending for the next 12 years.

The Norwegian delegates said that Norway, like Canada, had welcomed many Ukrainian refugees, especially women and children, and that two out of three adult refugees in Norway were now employed in the country. They told the Canadian delegation that this addition to the labour force had been very well received in Norway because demographic issues remain the greatest challenge there. However, they noted that some Norwegians were unhappy about losing childcare spaces.

Mr. Davies asked the Norwegian parliamentarians whether most of the Ukrainian refugees wanted to stay in Norway or leave and return to Ukraine. They replied that fewer and fewer refugees want to ultimately return to Ukraine given their successful integration into Norwegian society.

Mr. Davies then addressed the climate crisis by asking questions about Norway's experience with the extreme weather events that have occurred around the world, especially wildfires. He asked the Norwegian parliamentarians how they thought oil and gas production could be balanced with an energy transition and, specifically, whether Norwegians were receptive to this transition. The members of the Norwegian delegation explained that this transition was already well underway in Norway: revenues from the oil industry are being used to fund science and create "green" or "clean" energy. However, they also said that it would be difficult for the Norwegian public to accept eliminating the oil industry entirely, considering the number of jobs it creates in the country.

Lastly, Mr. Brock addressed the situation in Gaza, as Norway joined Spain and Ireland in formally recognizing Palestinian statehood in May. The Norwegian parliamentarians told the Canadian members that the vast majority of Norwegians were extremely concerned about the fate of civilians in Gaza. However, they also reported that anti-Semitic incidents have taken place in Norway, including bullying of young Jewish students, which they strongly condemned. All in all, they remained convinced that the only possible outcome was a two-state solution.

#### **D. Meeting with the Republic of Moldova's delegation to PACE**

Senator Wells, Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Davies, and Mr. Sorbara met with members of Moldova's delegation to PACE, including Andrian Cheptonar.

Senator Wells started the discussion by speaking about Russia's attempts to influence Moldovan institutions. He asked Mr. Cheptonar whether he believed that Russia was trying to take control of institutions in the Republic of Moldova. Mr. Cheptonar said that, even if that were true, he doubted that Russia's efforts would work since Moldovan authorities had full control of the Moldovan Parliament.

In the same vein, regarding the Moldovan presidential election, scheduled for October 2024, Mr. Bergeron asked whether disinformation and misinformation about this election, orchestrated by Russian authorities, was influencing the people of Moldova. Mr. Cheptonar explained that he did not believe it was, even though he thought Russia was pouring unlimited amounts of money into Moldova in an attempt to buy the election.

He added that, Maia Sandu, the current president, is genuinely trusted by Moldovans and that this trust would be difficult to undermine. He also said that, despite strong pro-

European sentiment among Moldovans, parliamentarians would need to continue efforts to educate and inform citizens about the European cause, as Moldovans tend to view Russia favourably because of the traditional ties between them and the Russians. However, Mr. Cheptonar said he was aware that certain pro-European politicians sometimes resort to using Russian rhetoric to get into power, precisely because the public still holds to these traditional ties. He also mentioned that pro-Russian entities will undoubtedly organize challenges to the election results after the fact to try to destabilize the country.

Still, he confirmed that Moldova generally continues to make progress in shaking off Russian influence, especially considering the recent start of negotiations for the Republic of Moldova to join the EU.

Lastly, Senator Wells talked about the situation in Transnistria, where Mr. Cheptonar had said that the Russian army was still very much present. He also explained that the main problem remained the region's dependence on Russian electricity, but that Moldovan authorities were currently building transmission lines to connect with other countries, including Romania, and developing solar energy in order to increase the country's energy independence.

#### **E. Meeting with Armenia's delegation to PACE**

Senator Francis, Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Davies, and Mr. Sorbara met with two members of Armenia's delegation to PACE: Arusyak Julhakyán and Sona Ghazaryan.

The discussions between the two delegations mainly concerned the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Mr. Bergeron started by asking a question about the discrepancy between claims by the Armenian diaspora that territories in the region have been ceded to Azerbaijan in exchange for peace and claims by the Armenian government that none of its territory has been ceded. Ms. Julhakyán replied that no territory has been ceded to date, but that discussions to delineate the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan had started in April 2024 and that these discussions should ultimately lead to a peace agreement between the two countries. She added that Armenia wants the boundaries to remain consistent with the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration made at the end of the Soviet regime, because it is the most recent map with legal foundations.

Mr. Davies asked the Armenian parliamentarians whether recent developments were a net positive or whether, on the contrary, Armenia had reached an impasse in discussions with Azerbaijan. Armenian delegates were optimistic in the sense that the discussions initiated in April 2024 had so far helped to prevent an escalation of the conflict.

However, they said that, in their opinion, the sticking point continues to be Azerbaijan's refusal to recognize the boundaries set by the Alma-Ata Declaration. Indeed, Ms. Julhakyán noted that, although both sides have embraced the general approach of wanting to sign a peace agreement soon, she believes Azerbaijan continues to find excuses in order to avoid signing the agreement. As an example, she said that Azerbaijan is maintaining that the preamble to the Armenian Constitution includes land claims to Azerbaijani territory and that Azerbaijani authorities are therefore demanding that Armenia amend its Constitution before any peace deal can be signed. The two Armenian parliamentarians denied these claims, arguing that the preamble to the Armenian

Constitution does not include any land claims; rather, it offers historical context for Armenia's independence. In any case, they asserted that the peace agreement between the two countries would include a provision that makes borders binding, regardless of domestic laws in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

They also explained that Azerbaijan wants to wait for the outcome of the American elections and for COP29 to be held in Baku before signing any treaty. They also pointed out that Armenia was initially supposed to host COP29 but that it had traded that right to Azerbaijan in exchange for the return of Armenian prisoners of war.

In light of these challenges to the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Mr. Sorbara asked whether Canada could do anything. The parliamentarians answered in part that Armenia needs support from the entire international community to put pressure on Azerbaijan so that the peace agreement can be concluded before COP29.

Lastly, the Armenian parliamentarians said that Canada's support for Armenia's economic resilience was welcome. They mentioned that Armenian authorities recently met with Antony Blinken and Ursula von der Leyen in a continued effort to diversify Armenia's energy sector, with the goal of reducing the country's energy dependence on Russia and increasing its solar energy potential.

#### **F. Meeting with Germany's delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface and Mr. Bergeron met with members of Germany's delegation to PACE, including Armin Laschet.

The delegations first discussed the results of the European elections held from June 6 to 9, 2024. Mr. Laschet explained that the results do not necessarily reflect a rise in extremism, as some suggest, at least in Germany's case, but that he nevertheless believes that democracy, both in Europe and elsewhere in the world, is under pressure now more than ever. He said that, in Germany, pro-democracy and pro-Europe parties still hold a majority of seats in the German Parliament.

The German parliamentarians then asked the Canadian delegates about the situation in Canada, specifically whether the Conservative Party of Canada espouses certain right-wing principles associated with the Republican Party in the United States. Canada's delegates replied that that was not the case.

Both delegations acknowledged that, on both sides of the Atlantic, COVID 19 undoubtedly boosted populism or, at the very least, right-wing ideas in societies, including an anti-immigration movement. The Canadian delegates explained that the immigration situation in Canada is very different from that in Europe, but that rhetoric like that used by the extreme right in Europe and the United States is nevertheless becoming more prominent in certain segments of Canadian society.

#### **G. Meeting with France's delegation to PACE**

Senator Wells, Mr. Bergeron, and Mr. Brock met with Senator Claude Kern from France's delegation to PACE. The members of the National Assembly who were part of France's delegation were absent because the country's legislative elections coincided with the third part of the 2024 PACE session.

The French legislative elections, which were ongoing at the time, therefore took up most of the discussions with Senator Kern. According to him, the results would be highly unpredictable. He said that, at that point, he would be very surprised to see one party obtain a majority in any scenario. He also explained that France's legislative elections remain very different from European elections because, in France, people are more inclined to vote for their constituency candidate than for the party itself.

The parliamentarians also discussed CETA, as it was rejected by the French Senate in March 2024, sending it back to the National Assembly. Senator Kern was one of the senators who voted in favour of ratifying the free trade agreement between Canada and the EU. He said that, at that time, he could not tell what the fate of this agreement would be in France, even if the country's agricultural crisis were to fade.

#### **H. Meeting with Slovenia's delegation to PACE**

Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Sorbara met with Tamara Vonta, the Chair of Slovenia's delegation to PACE. Mr. Bergeron asked Ms. Vonta about Slovenia's decision to recognize a Palestinian state and recent referenda in the country on adopting a proportional representation voting system and legalizing marijuana.

Ms. Vonta explained that there had long been a consensus in Slovenia that it would recognize a Palestinian state once a significant group of European states did so. For that reason, she said, Ireland, Spain, and Norway's official recognition the previous month had compelled Slovenia to follow suit.

Regarding the consultative referenda, she explained that in addition to the referendum on adopting a proportional representation voting system, there had been two on legalizing marijuana – one for medical purposes and the other for recreational purposes – and a fourth on legalizing medical assistance in dying. All four passed, she said, with significant ranges in support. Proportional representation had the highest support (over 70%) and the legalization of marijuana for recreational use had the lowest (just over 51%).

#### **I. Meeting with Türkiye's delegation to PACE**

Mr. Brock and Mr. Sorbara met with five members of the Turkish delegation to PACE: Yıldırım Tuğrul Türkeş, Chair of the delegation; Kamil Aydın; Meryem Göka; Pelin Yılık; and Abdurrahman Babacan.

Mr. Sorbara began by noting that he has a significant Turkish population in his riding and that he was pleased by the Canadian government's decision, in January 2024, to end its presumptive denial policy for applications to export certain Canadian controlled goods to Türkiye, a NATO ally. Mr. Türkeş downplayed the impact of the Canadian government's policy and suggested that it spurred Türkiye to start making the goods themselves.

Mr. Sorbara then inquired about how Türkiye is managing the significant number of displaced individuals in its country. Mr. Türkeş said that Türkiye is hosting between four to five million refugees and that it is extremely expensive to do so. He said many countries struggle to understand the scale of the challenge Türkiye faces in that respect.

Mr. Sorbara also asked Mr. Türkeş about his perspective on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Mr. Türkeş replied that 30 years ago, Azerbaijan was incapable of defending itself and Armenia seized its territory. Now, he argued, Azerbaijan was merely taking its

territory back. He also rejected assertions that ethnic cleansing had taken place in Nagorno-Karabakh and stated that it was only natural for ethnic Armenians to prefer to live in Armenia than in Azerbaijan.

## **1. 27 June 2024**

### **A. Meeting with Ukraine's delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface, Senator Francis, Senator Wells, Mr. Bergeron, Ms. O'Connell, and Mr. Sorbara met with several members of the Ukrainian delegation to PACE, including Pavlo Bakunets, Yuriy Kamelchuk, Larysa Bilozir, and Olena Khomenko.

The meeting began with a discussion about the work of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, which Canada co-chairs with Ukraine. Ms. Bilozir said that while the true number of returned children – roughly 700 – was being unreported, at the current rate of return, it would nonetheless take 50 years to bring all Ukrainian children back.

Mr. Sorbara then asked the Ukrainian delegation about the situation on the ground. Mr. Kamelchuk replied that Ukrainians are becoming used to blackouts and that many only have two to four hours of electricity per day. He said the country – but particularly the Kharkiv region – needs better air defence. In that respect, he said an additional Patriot missile system and F-16 fighter jets would make a significant difference.

Mr. Sorbara also asked the Ukrainian delegation how the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine was working to date. Ms. Khomenko replied that it was working well, but she expressed frustration about the slow progress towards establishing a special tribunal to try the crime of aggression. She acknowledged that there was still a debate among the Core Group – the 40 countries, including Canada, that have been considering how best to develop the tribunal – on whether Vladimir Putin and high-level Russian officials benefit from personal immunity. For that reason, she welcomed the PACE resolution unanimously adopted the previous day, which stated that personal immunities of key suspects shall not apply before the special tribunal and should instead be left to the interpretation of the future tribunal's judges.

Finally, several members of the Canadian delegation inquired about the impact of Ukraine's mobilization law, which came into force the previous month. Mr. Kamelchuk noted that an application had been developed to allow Ukrainian men living abroad to register for military service and that many already had. Ms. Khomenko added, however, that it was no secret Ukraine needed to mobilize more soldiers.

### **B. Meeting with the United Kingdom's delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface, Senator Francis, Senator Wells, Mr. Bergeron, Mr. Davies, Ms. O'Connell, and Mr. Sorbara had a lunch meeting with members of the United Kingdom's (U.K.) delegation to PACE. They included Lord David Blencathra, Lord George Foulkes, Lord Leslie Griffiths, Andrew Percy, M.P, and Pauline Latham, M.P.

The main topics of conversation were the upcoming U.K. general election, taking place in July, and the impact to date, on the U.K., of Brexit. There was agreement among the U.K. delegation that their upcoming election would likely result in a majority for the Labour

Party. The only unknown, they added, was the size of that majority. Regardless of the outcome, they all stressed that bilateral cooperation with Canada would continue to be a priority for the new government.

On the subject of Brexit's impact, however, there was disagreement. Some members of the U.K. delegation, such as Lord Foulkes, viewed Brexit as disastrous for the U.K. economy. Mr. Percy, in contrast, argued that Brexit had improved the U.K.'s growth prospects and had already resulted in increased foreign direct investment.

## **1. 28 June 2024**

### **A. Meeting with Sweden's delegation to PACE**

Senator Boniface, Senator Wells, and Mr. Bergeron met with two members of the Swedish delegation to PACE: Chair Markus Wiechel and Boriana Åberg.

Mr. Wiechel began the meeting by explaining that their delegation to PACE was smaller than usual because it was Almedalen or "political" week in Sweden – an annual gathering, on the island of Gotland, of Swedish politicians, journalists, and lobbyists that has been taking place since the late 1960s.

Senator Wells and Mr. Bergeron asked Mr. Wiechel and Ms. Åberg about Sweden's NATO integration, imports of Russian energy, and the perception that there is rising anti-immigrant sentiment in the country.

Mr. Wiechel expressed the opinion that Sweden's asylum and immigration policies had been too generous in recent years. He argued that this has resulted in backsliding with respect to women's rights; closed, poorly integrated communities in the suburbs of major Swedish cities, such as Malmö; and rising antisemitism.

Regarding Sweden's energy consumption, Ms. Åberg said that over three-quarters of the country's energy supply comes from renewable sources and nuclear power. She said that Sweden continues to import small amounts of Russian natural gas and is continuing to do so to avoid a scenario in which Russia sells the same gas twice. Finally, she said that the Swedish people are very excited about – and supportive of – the country's NATO membership. She added that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine convinced even the most skeptical Swedes that NATO membership was necessary.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Francesco Sorbara, MP

President, Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association



## **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Third part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Strasbourg, France
<b>DATES</b>	From June 24 to 28, 2024
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
	Hon. Gwen Boniface
SENATE	Hon. Brian Francis
	Hon. David Mark Wells
	Stéphane Bergeron
	Larry Brock
	Don Davies
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Jennifer O'Connell
	Lianne Rood
	Jamie Schmale
	Francesco Sorbara
	Jessica Kulka
STAFF	Valérie Chevrier-Marineau
	BJ Siekierski
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$ 30,991.91
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$ 19,504.39
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$ 1,741.16
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$ 15,142.01
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	\$ 562.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 67,941.97</b>