

Canada - Europe  
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire  
Canada - Europe

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation**

**on the**

**I. Parliamentary Mission to Sweden, the Country that Will  
Next Hold the Presidency of the Council of the European  
Union**

**II. Second Part of the 2009 Ordinary Session of the  
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

**Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association**

**Stockholm, Sweden, and Strasbourg, France**  
**April 23 - 30, 2009**

# Report

## INTRODUCTION

A delegation of three parliamentarians from the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association travelled to Stockholm, Sweden, for meetings on the upcoming Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and to Strasbourg, France, for the Second Part of the 2009 Ordinary Session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. The delegation was led by Association President David Tilson, M.P., and included from the Senate the Hon. Percy Downe and from the House of Commons Mr. Scott Simms, M.P. The delegation was accompanied by association secretary Philippe Méla and advisor Marcus Pistor, Library of Parliament.

In preparation for the meetings, delegates were briefed in Ottawa by officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and in Stockholm by Her Excellency Alexandra Volkoff, Ambassador of Canada to Sweden. François LaRochelle, Canada's Deputy Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe, joined the delegation in Strasbourg and briefed delegates on recent developments at the Council and on Canada's involvement.

# **I. PARLIAMENTARY MISSION TO SWEDEN, THE COUNTRY THAT WILL NEXT HOLD THE PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **A. Background**

Since 2002, the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association has sent delegations to most of the countries holding the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union (henceforth EU Presidency).<sup>1</sup> Since 2005, these visits have taken place in the months leading up to a country's EU Presidency, when the program for the six-month Presidency is still being developed. For example, in June 2008, a delegation travelled to France, the EU Presidency country from July to December 2008, and in September 2008, another delegation visited the Czech Republic which assumed this role in January for the first half of 2009. Sweden will hold the EU Presidency from July to December of this year. It will be followed by Spain (January-June 2010). Visit programs include high-level meetings with parliamentarians, government officials, and experts. The primary focus is on the upcoming EU Presidency and on Canada-EU relations. With the significant role of Presidency countries in defining the agenda for the EU's external relations and with the increasing involvement of national parliaments in the EU policy-making system, these meetings provide an important opportunity for Canadian parliamentarians to raise awareness in host countries of Canadian positions on key issues, as well as to learn about policy debates and developments in the EU. In addition, the program usually includes meetings on bilateral relations between Canada and the host country, as well as items on policy issues of particular importance to each Presidency country.

## **B. Program and Summary of Discussions**

### **Meeting with Göran Lindblad, Head of the Swedish Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and Delegation Members**

The meeting with Mr. Lindblad, Anna Lilliehöök and Kent Olsson of the Swedish Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) provided an opportunity to discuss Swedish EU policy, various international issues – including the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program to international peace and security – as well as

---

<sup>1</sup> "The Council of the European Union ... is the Union's main decision-making body. Its meetings are attended by Member State ministers, and it is thus the institution which represents the Member States. ... The Council meets in different configurations (nine in all), bringing together the competent Member State ministers: General Affairs and External Relations; Economic and Financial Affairs; Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; Competitiveness; Cooperation in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA); Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; Agriculture and Fisheries; Environment; Education, Youth and Culture.

Each country of the European Union presides over the Council for six months, by rotation. ... Decisions are prepared by the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Member States (Coreper), assisted by working groups of national government officials.

The Council, together with the European Parliament, acts in a legislative and budgetary capacity. It is also the lead institution for decision-making on the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), and on the coordination of economic policies (intergovernmental approach), as well as being the holder of executive power, which it generally delegates to the Commission. In most cases, the Council's decisions, based on proposals from the Commission, are taken jointly with the European Parliament under the codecision procedure. Depending on the subject, the Council takes decisions by simple majority, qualified majority or unanimity, although the qualified majority is more widely used (agriculture, single market, environment, transport, employment, health, etc.),"

[http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/index_en.htm).

ongoing work at the PACE. Ms. Lilliehöök is currently the rapporteur for the PACE Committee on Economic Affairs and Development on the “OECD and the World Economy.” She asked about Canada’s economic situation and policy responses to the current global economic crisis and suggested that the Canadian observer delegation to PACE make greater use of the opportunity to provide input to her report. Canadian delegates expressed an interest in Sweden’s efforts to promote renewable energies – including wind power – and develop sustainable waste management, as well as that country’s recent decision to reinvest in nuclear energy as a key element of its response to climate change. The Swedish participants asked their counterparts to talk about the current domestic political situation in Canada, relations with the United States under the Obama administration, and preparations for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. Finally, Canadian delegates raised the issue of the expected EU decision to ban the trade of seal products and expressed concern about the likely elimination of derogations for products from humane harvests, which had been included in the original proposal by the European Commission.

### **Meeting with Tomas Tobé, Chair of the Sweden-Canada Parliamentary Association, and Association Members**

The meeting with Tomas Tobé, Michael Hagberg, Camilla Lindberg, and Per Bolund of the Sweden-Canada Parliamentary Association included a detailed discussion of Canada’s and the EU’s positions on the seal hunt, with Canadian parliamentarians noting the extensive regulations and management practices governing the hunt and its cultural and economic importance. They also pointed out that a likely EU ban would violate the Union’s obligations under international trade agreements. Participants also discussed the range of challenges facing Canada and Sweden as countries with significant Northern regions, specifically with respect to climate change, the environmental impact of industrial pollution, emergency preparedness, as well as – in Canada’s case – Arctic sovereignty. Swedish participants were also interested in the Canadian government’s Americas policy, and both sides expressed their support for an enhanced economic partnership between Canada and the EU, negotiations for which were launched at the Canada-EU summit two weeks after the delegation’s meetings in Stockholm. Finally, with respect to Sweden’s EU Presidency, discussion focused on preparations for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in late 2009 as the government’s number one priority, as well as the impact of the global financial crisis on competitiveness and employment.

### **Meeting with the Parliamentary Committee on European Union Affairs**

The meeting with Anna Kinberg Batra, Chairperson of the powerful Committee on European Union Affairs, and committee members Christina Axelsson, Agneta Lundberg, and Margareta Cederfeldt focused almost exclusively on the Swedish EU Presidency priorities and the context for the presidency. With regard to the latter, Swedish participants noted that the current situation in the EU is shaped very much by political uncertainty: First, the domestic political situation in the Czech Republic, where the government had been defeated and a caretaker government appointed until elections in October, would likely result in delays in implementing the priorities of the Trio Presidencies of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden. Second, in early June, EU citizens will elect a new European Parliament. Third, later this year, a new Commission

will be chosen, although it will not be clear how big the Commission will be and by what method it will be selected. This is because the EU Reform Treaty may be ratified later this year, if Irish voters will support it in a referendum (likely this fall) after rejecting it in 2008. So it is unclear when the new European Commission will be in place and how it will be selected. This will make it more difficult for the Swedish government to follow through on its priorities. Added to this difficult political context is the global economic crisis which is resulting in changing political priorities across the EU, as well as in some notable divisions between EU member states with regard to the policy response and the priorities for the EU, not only regarding economic policy, but also for issues such as climate change.

Nevertheless, Sweden is pushing ahead with the development of its Presidency program which is being developed in the context of a so-called 'trio program' of the three successive presidencies of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden. Among the Swedish priorities discussed by Committee members, which appear to be supported across much of the political spectrum, are:

- Climate change and the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen;
- Jobs and growth (including the Lisbon economic reform agenda and the EU budget review);
- Tackling international crime and related issues (including through the renewal of the Hague Programme, a five-year plan that details proposals for "EU action on terrorism, migration management, visa policies, asylum, privacy and security, the fight against organised crime and criminal justice"<sup>2</sup>);
- EU enlargement (including membership negotiations with Turkey which appear to have stalled during the French and Czech presidencies, as well as negotiations with Croatia);
- Strengthening the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy capacity; and
- The development of an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

Participants also discussed the prospects for an enhanced economic partnership between Canada and the EU, the impact of an evolving EU security and defence policy and capacity on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program to international peace and security. Finally, Canadian delegates expressed their concern about the expected EU ban of the trade in seal products and the impact this would have on coastal communities in Canada. Swedish participants pointed out that the final decision had not been taken and explained that Sweden's position was shaped by three factors: very strong public opinion on animal cruelty, especially in urban areas; very strong public opinion in rural areas against any imposition of EU regulations affecting hunting; and a commitment to free trade.

---

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, "The Hague Programme - Ten priorities for the next five years," [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/news/information\\_dossiers/the\\_hague\\_priorities/](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/information_dossiers/the_hague_priorities/).

## Meeting with the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs

The meeting with Göran Lenmarker, Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and committee members Kenneth G. Forslund, Kerstin Lundgren, and Birgitta Ohlsson began with a discussion of the changing political and economic context in which countries plan for and assume the EU Presidency, with Committee members noting that the presidency country has to adjust to changing circumstances and also focus on building a consensus among EU members. As a result, it often has to abandon its own position in favour of an EU consensus. The discussion then moved to the areas of EU policy of particular interest to the Foreign Affairs Committee – as opposed to the EU Affairs Committee. The Committee's involvement has focused on the following areas:

- **EU Enlargement:** With the end of the Cold War, the European integration project has become a process not only for the western part of the continent, but a project for all of Europe. While EU membership is not a likely prospect for all European countries, the EU's evolving European Neighbourhood Policy is seen as a key vehicle for engaging countries like Belarus and Ukraine.
- **Free Trade:** There is a strong commitment to free trade across party lines in the Swedish parliament. This is seen as a key starting point for global engagement, including transatlantic relations.
- **The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP):** Sweden is committed to pushing the transition from national foreign policies of EU member states to a *common* foreign and security policy. This is vital to the development of a stronger global role for the EU. One area where a common policies is of particular importance in the relations with Russia.
- **Climate change:** A strong commitment to fighting climate change is of particular importance during an economic downturn. As one Committee member put it, "we need to make sure that we take our commitments seriously and that we mean what we said."
- **Other issues** include the foreign policy aspects of EU cooperation in justice and home affairs, the development of an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, and various political developments since the end of the Cold War.

The discussion then turned to Afghanistan, with Canadian delegates explaining Canada's policy and contributions and raising concerns about the situation of women in that country, following the adoption of a new Shi'a personal status law and the assassination of a prominent women's rights activist. They also explained Canadian concerns about the apparent unwillingness of some European countries to make significant contributions to the military efforts in the more dangerous south of Afghanistan. Committee members explained the debate in Sweden, specifically whether Sweden should be part of a mission widely seen as led by NATO rather than the United Nations (Sweden is not a member of NATO). They also argued that there is often too much focus on the south and not enough recognition of what can be accomplished in the north by the international community. Other topics discussed were Iran's nuclear program and the options available to the international community trying to

prevent Iran from producing nuclear weapons, and Canada-EU cooperation in the Arctic.

### **Meeting with Liselott Hagberg, Third Deputy Speaker of the Riksdag**

Ms. Hagberg, Third Deputy Speaker of the Riksdag, gave the Canadian delegation an overview of how the international work of the Swedish parliament is organized. There are 32 bilateral friendship groups which allow parliamentarians to network, exchange ideas and develop positions on issues of common concern with their counterparts in other countries. With regard to EU related issues, the Riksdag changed the involvement of parliamentary committees, which had been handled primarily by a special committee until 2006. Since then, all committees deal with EU matters in the areas within their respective mandates. Preparations for the EU Presidency also involve all committees, especially the committee chairpersons and vice-chairs. The discussion then turned to the various mechanisms by which parliamentarians in Canada and Sweden can address questions to the government, including question period and written questions. Finally, the meeting provided an opportunity for the delegation to discuss a possible visit by Ms. Hagberg and a parliamentary delegation to Canada in 2010.

### **Meeting with Annika Söderberg, Deputy Director and Head of Section, EU Coordination Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office**

The meeting with Annika Söderberg began with an overview of the challenges facing Sweden as it prepares for its EU Presidency, in particular the global economic crisis, and the political uncertainties due to the elections to the European Parliament and the selection of a new European Commission. She went on to explain the domestic and EU processes for developing a presidency program and highlighted Sweden's key priorities. Participants then discussed the relationship between the European Central Bank's monetary policy and fiscal policies adopted by the EU and its member states in response to the global economic crisis; the prospects for Turkish EU membership supported by Sweden but opposed by other key members; and the challenges of making progress on fighting climate change and mitigating its impact in the context of an economic downturn. Finally, Canadian delegates explained Canada's position on the seal hunt and the expected EU ban on the trade in seal products, the details of which were being negotiated in April by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council. Noting that seals are not an endangered species, that the hunt is well managed and regulated, and that it is of great economic and cultural importance to many remote communities in Canada, they argued that an EU ban based on animal welfare concerns would set a dangerous precedent and would violate the EU's obligations under international trade agreements. In response, Ms. Söderberg explained that Sweden had not yet decided on how it will vote in the Council.

### **Roundtable Discussion with Anna Michalski, Acting Director, and Göran von Sydow, Senior Researcher, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS)**

Following their meetings with parliamentarians and senior officials, the roundtable discussion with Anna Michalski, an expert in transatlantic relations and the EU as a global actor, and Göran von Sydow, whose research currently focuses on the Swedish EU Presidency, gave Canadian delegates an opportunity to discuss and assess

Swedish priorities and policies in a broader analytical context. Several policy areas were discussed, including:

- Climate change, the number one priority for Sweden's EU Presidency: The global economic crisis already appears to have had a considerable impact on EU commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, with the deadline for meeting more ambitious target being moved back to 2050. In addition, existing differences concerning targets and timelines have been amplified by the recession and there is growing pressure to bring India and China fully into a post-Kyoto process.
- European security architecture: The development by the EU of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) and capacity raises questions about the future role of NATO in Europe as well as the future of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Closely related to this is the role of the United States in the European security architecture. This also has repercussions for the EU's role in addressing global and regional security issues, including in the Middle East and with respect to Iran.
- Emerging powers: While Europeans are concerned about the possibility of stronger bilateral ties between the United States, on the one hand, and China and India, on the other, the United States similarly views the growing importance of the EU to China with some concern. Both the EU and the US fear being left out of bilateral relationships.
- The EU as a global actor: The EU has developed 'soft power' tools to gain influence internationally, including trade and economic cooperation agreements. This appears to have been at least in part an effort to build structures in neighbouring and other regions that are similar to the EU itself (for example the African Union), but this approach is now seen as having failed.

### **Meeting with Teppo Tauriainen, Deputy Director General, Department for International Trade Policy, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Officials**

Discussions with Teppo Tauriainen, Deputy Director General, Department for International Trade Policy and Paula Wennerblom, Special Advisor, Americas Department, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, focused on the prospects for an enhanced economic partnership between Canada and the European Union. The meeting began with an overview of the process of trade policy-making in the European Union. Officials explained that trade policy initiatives normally come from the Commission and that the presidency countries' role is to move the trade agenda forward. Most of the initiatives are already in place when a country assumes the EU Presidency, but there is some room for new initiatives coming from the rotating Council leadership. Sweden's approach to trade policy continues to be driven by the goals of promoting free trade, resisting protectionist tendencies during the global economic crisis, and reducing EU trade barriers to facilitate European integration into global production chains. This approach is supported across political party lines and reflects Sweden's long history as a trading nation and home of major multinational corporations.



With regard to specific trade policy initiatives, Sweden views bilateral trade talks as complimentary to multilateral negotiations. It wants to make progress in bilateral talks that are stalled – including South Korea and India – but recognizes the economic and political obstacles to concluding trade talks. In addition to free trade negotiations, the EU also uses or intends to use economic cooperation frameworks such as formal Economic Partnership Agreements with countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific and, in its immediate neighbourhood, the European Neighbourhood Policy (for example, Ukraine, the Mediterranean and possibly Moldova and Georgia). With such a range of policy tools and a large number of countries already involved in trade and economic cooperation discussions with the EU, there has been some opposition in the Union to commencing additional talks, especially with advanced industrial countries such as Canada. However, the potential benefits of a closer economic partnership with Canada, in the context of stalled multilateral talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO), appear to have persuaded member countries and the Commission to agree to launch negotiations with Canada in May.

For Sweden, in order for bilateral free trade negotiations to be complimentary to, and not compete with, the WTO process, they have to be broad and include areas not traditionally included in bilateral FTAs. In the case of negotiations with Canada, the inclusion of provincial government procurement and inter-provincial trade barriers in Canada is seen as a key issue that must be addressed. Countries not fully supportive of these negotiations could use indications that not all Canadian provinces are on board as a reason for blocking progress on reaching a deal. The limited resources available to the Commission, which is responsible for conducting the negotiations, are another possible obstacle to a timely conclusion of negotiations.

### **Other Program Elements**

The Canadian delegation hosted a working lunch with Lennart Killander Larsson, Deputy Director and Canada Desk Officer, and Paula Wennerblom, Special Advisor, both from the Americas Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Jan-Joel Andersson, Program Director, Swedish Institute for International Affairs. Participants discussed a range of topics, including the state of transatlantic relations, the relationship between the EU's security and defence policy and NATO, the international mission in Afghanistan, and the integration of defence industries in Europe.

Finally, delegates conducted a study visit to Hammarby Sjöstad, a new district of Stockholm designed and built according to “tough environmental requirements on buildings, technical installations and the traffic environment.”<sup>3</sup> The goal of the project, which will provide about 11,000 residential units for over 25,000 residents when completed, is to reduce “the impact placed on the environment by emissions from Hammarby Sjöstad” to a level 50 % below that of “the corresponding level for newly constructed housing areas dating from the early 1990s in Stockholm.”<sup>4</sup>

The Canadian delegation is most grateful for the excellent work done by the Canadian embassy in Stockholm in preparing and implementing the program.

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hammarbysjostad.se/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## II. SECOND PART OF THE 2009 ORDINARY SESSION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

### A. Background: The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation which aims:

- to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
- to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity;
- to find common solutions to the challenges facing European society: such as discrimination against minorities, xenophobia, intolerance, bioethics and cloning, terrorism, trafficking in human beings, organised crime and corruption, cybercrime, violence against children; and
- to consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform.<sup>5</sup>

Founded 60 years ago in 1949, the Council of Europe has now reached a membership of 47 countries from the Azores to Azerbaijan, and from Iceland to Cyprus, with Montenegro joining as its newest member in May 2007. The Council's main objective is to promote and defend democratic development and human rights, and to hold member governments accountable for their performance in these areas. However, it is also very active in fostering international cooperation and policy coordination in a number of other areas, including legal cooperation, education, culture, heritage, environmental protection, health care, and social cohesion. The Council of Europe is responsible for the development of more than 200 European treaties or conventions, many of which are open to non-member states, in policy areas such as human rights, the fight against organised crime, the prevention of torture, data protection, and cultural co-operation.<sup>6</sup> The Council's main institutions are the Committee of Ministers (the CoE's decision-making body, composed of member states' foreign ministers or their deputies), the Parliamentary Assembly, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

The Parliamentary Assembly consists of 636 members (318 representatives and 318 substitutes), who are elected or appointed by the national parliaments of the 47 Council of Europe member states from among their members. The parliaments of Canada, Israel and Mexico currently hold observer status with PACE. The special guest status of Belarus, which had applied for membership in the Council of Europe in 1993, was suspended in January 1997 in the wake of the adoption of a new constitution in Belarus, which was widely seen as undemocratic.

The Assembly elects the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the judges of the European Court of Human Rights and the Council's Commissioner for Human Rights. It is consulted on all new international treaties drafted by the Council, holds the Council

---

<sup>5</sup> Council of Europe website: [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About\\_COE/](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Com/About_COE/). For a detailed discussion of the Council's history and role, see The Council of Europe, 800 million Europeans, available on that website.

<sup>6</sup> For a complete list of the Council of Europe's treaties, see the organization's website: [www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int).

and member governments accountable, engages in studies of a range of issues of common interest to Europeans, and provides a forum for debate for national parliamentarians. The Assembly has played an important role in the process of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe and actively monitors developments in member countries, including national elections. It meets four times a year in Strasbourg, with committee meetings taking place more frequently. Council and Assembly decisions and debates are often reported widely in the European media.

The Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly bring together policy – and decision-makers from a range of politically, culturally, and geographically diverse countries. Together, the Council and Assembly provide the primary forum for the formation of a trans-European political community committed to democracy and human rights. The Parliamentary Assembly also provides parliamentary oversight functions for several key international organizations, including the OECD, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This wide-ranging role in international policy-making and in the promotion and protection of democracy and human rights makes the Council and Assembly an important venue for pursuing and advancing Canada's multilateral and bilateral engagement in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

Canada is an observer to both the Committee of Ministers, where it has participated actively in a number of policy areas (the other observers are the Holy See, Japan, Mexico, and the United States), and the Parliamentary Assembly (where the other observers are Israel and Mexico).<sup>8</sup> Since gaining observer status, delegations from the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association have participated in all four annual part sessions of PACE.

---

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the work of the Assembly, see the organization's website: <http://assembly.coe.int>.

<sup>8</sup> Canadian officials from several federal government departments and agencies and from one provincial government participate in more than 20 meetings annually of committees, expert groups, and steering committees of the Council of Europe. Canadian parliamentarians attend all four parts of the annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as parliamentary committee meetings at the EBRD in London and the OECD in Paris.

## **B. Overview of the Second Part of the 2009 Ordinary Session**

The spring session featured a full order of business<sup>9</sup> with a wide range of topics being debated in committees,<sup>10</sup> political groups,<sup>11</sup> and in the Assembly.<sup>12</sup> Once again, the conflict between Georgia and Russia was a central topic of debate. A second important topic for discussions in political groups, committees and the Assembly, was the process of selecting candidates for the position of Secretary General of the Council of Europe, and the respective roles of the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly. The Assembly will elect the next Secretary General during the Third Part Session in June. Political groups had an opportunity to interview some of the candidates during the April session.

In addition to the urgent debate on “The election process for the Secretary General of the Council of Europe,” the Assembly held debates under urgent procedure on “The functioning of democratic institutions in Moldova” and “Draft Protocol No. 14 bis to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.” The Assembly held regular debates on the following topics:

- Progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee , including:
  - Observation of the presidential election in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (22 March 2009 and 5 April 2009),
  - Observation of the parliamentary elections in Montenegro (29 March 2009),
  - Observation of the parliamentary elections in Moldova (5 April 2009), and
  - Constitutional Referendum in Azerbaijan (18 March 2009);
- The protection of human rights in emergency situations;
- The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states;
- Honouring of obligations and commitments by Serbia;

---

<sup>9</sup> The Agenda is available at:  
<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc09/EDOC11845.htm> .

<sup>10</sup> There are 10 regular committees: the Political Affairs Committee; the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights; the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development; the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee; the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography; the Committee on Culture, Science and Education; the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs; the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men; the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities; and the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe.

<sup>11</sup> A political group is the equivalent of a parliamentary party or caucus. There are five political groups in PACE: the Socialist Group (SOC), the Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD), the European Democratic Group (EDG), the Liberal, Democratic and Reformers Group (ALDE), and the Group of the Unified European Left (UEL).

<sup>12</sup> Regular Assembly debates focus on a draft resolution (a decision or statement by the Assembly) and/or recommendation (a proposal addressed to the Committee of Ministers), as well as an explanatory memorandum, which are prepared by a rapporteur for the relevant standing committee. The committee adopts – and usually amends – the resolution prior to the Assembly debate. Assembly debates open with a statement from the rapporteur(s), followed by statements from representatives of the five political groups, after which the debate is opened to other speakers. Speakers have to register in advance. Speakers unable to participate in the debate due to time constraints can submit their intervention in writing, so it becomes part of the official record.

- Action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls;
- Women in prison;
- Follow-up given by Georgia and Russia to Resolution 1647 (2009);
- The humanitarian consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia: Follow-up given to Resolution 1648 (2009); and
- Growing food and fuel.

The Assembly heard from several European political leaders and other guest speakers:

- Mrs. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland;
- Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Prime Minister of Spain;
- Mr. Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, who presented his Annual activity report 2008; and
- Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation of Spain, representing the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

Detailed information about the session, the transcripts and summaries of all debates, the reports discussed, and the resolutions and recommendations adopted are available on the Parliamentary Assembly's website: <http://assembly.coe.int/>.

### **C. Canadian Activities during the Session**

Canadian delegates participated actively in meetings of political groups – the European Democratic Group (EDG) and the Liberal, Democratic and Reformers Group (ALDE) – and committees – including the Political Affairs Committee, the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, and the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography. The delegation was honoured with a lunch hosted by Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, at which participants discussed the political situation in Canada, Canada's participation in the work of the Council, including with respect to international conventions, and the evolving relationship between the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe. Canadian delegates also met informally with parliamentarians from other countries and Council of Europe staff to discuss a range of issues of common interest. Finally, David Tilson made a written submission to the debate on "Action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls."

13

### **D. Canadian interventions in assembly debates**

#### **a. David Tilson, M.P., written submission to the debate on "Action to combat gender-based human rights violations, including abduction of women and girls"**

---

<sup>13</sup> Assembly members and observers signed up to speak in a debate which is cut short can submit their intervention in writing to the Table Office, so that it becomes part of the official record.

I want to join previous speakers in congratulating Ms Papadopoulos on a good report on an issue that is of great importance to Canadians.

Let me begin by pointing to one of the most troubling aspects of current debates on human rights: when it comes to women's rights, far too many people have to be reminded again and again that women's rights are human rights. When it comes to violence against women, whatever form it takes and however it is justified, we are speaking of violations of the most fundamental of human rights – the right to life, liberty and security of the person.

While there have been some notable improvements, women and girls in Canada and around the world continue to suffer from violence and discrimination because of their gender. Between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2004, nearly 60 000 women sought refuge in one of 473 shelters across Canada. This alone indicates how pervasive gender-based violence continues to be. Much is being done to raise awareness and address this challenge across our country, by governments, parliamentarians, NGOs and individuals. In 1991, parliament established 6 December as the national day of remembrance and action on violence against women in Canada. This day marks the anniversary of the murders in 1989 of 14 young women at l'Ecole Polytechnique de Montreal.

While gender-based violence affects all parts of our society, women and girls in immigrant communities often face particular problems. At times, their experiences are justified or explained in terms of the cultural or religious practices and beliefs prevalent in their communities. But, as the rapporteur has clearly argued in her report, cultural relativism cannot justify violence against women or other violations of women's human rights.

Canada has alone been an immigrant society and we have worked hard over the past decades to develop integration programmes for immigrants, which seek to balance the need for social cohesion and a common understanding of our fundamental democratic values with respect for the different traditions and religions represented across our country. Striking this balance has been difficult at times, and it remains a hotly contested topic among citizens, politicians, community leaders and experts alike. The federal government has played an important role in these debates and has worked to promote an approach aimed at building bridges between cultural communities and fostering a deeper understanding of our fundamental democratic values among immigrants.

With regard to addressing the issue of gender-based violence, the government has funded a range of community-based programming, including programmes aimed at teaching girls leadership skills, knowledge of their rights on gender and racial equality, and others more specifically aimed at preventing violence. As my colleague, Helena Guergis, who serves as our Minister of State for the Status of Women, has noted, "By supporting these ... projects, we are investing in the future of immigrant and refugee women, so they can live without being at risk of violence and can contribute fully to the life in our country".

But such programmes not only address the issue of violence against women and girls directly, by educating and empowering them; they also send a clear message to all

Canadians and to people wanting to come to Canada that multiculturalism and respect for religious diversity go hand in hand with a commitment to fundamental human rights, to women's rights and their full participation in society, and to the elimination of violence against women and girls.

This commitment does not, of course, stop at our borders. In our foreign policies, we support international efforts aimed at eliminating violence against women and at promoting women's rights. This is a key priority for Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. We are therefore deeply troubled by recent developments in that country, in particular the adoption by the Afghan parliament of a new Shi'a personal status law that would effectively legalise marital rape, and the assassination of a prominent women's rights activist.

We are also committed to mainstreaming a gender perspective, so that these debates do not happen on the margins of international politics. On this last point, allow me to suggest that the Assembly would be well served if the linkages between discrimination and violence against women and a range of other issues were to be examined routinely by all PACE committees.<sup>14</sup>

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. David Tilson, M.P.  
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

---

<sup>14</sup> Report, 2009 Ordinary Session (Second part), Thirteenth sitting, Tuesday 28 April 2009 at 3 p.m., Addendum 2, <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/Records/2009/E/0904281500ADD2E.htm>.

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	I. Parliamentary Mission to Sweden, the Country that will next hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union II. Second Part of the 2009 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Stockholm, Sweden, and Strasbourg, France
<b>DATES</b>	April 23-30, 2009
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Percy Downe, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. David Tilson, M.P. Mr. Scott Simms, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Philippe Méla, Secretary Mr. Marcus Pistor, Advisor
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$23, 938. 03</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$10, 731. 62</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 647. 88</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 4, 627. 92</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 420. 79</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 294. 41</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$40, 660. 65</b>