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Parliamentary Association



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**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
respecting its participation at the Third Part of the 2012  
Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the  
Council of Europe**

**Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association**

**Strasbourg, France June 25 to 29, 2012**

# Report

A delegation of Canadian parliamentarians comprised of Mr. Corneliu Chisu, M.P. and Mr. Don Davies, M.P., travelled to Strasbourg to participate in the third part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE or Assembly), in which Canada enjoys observer status, along with Israel and Mexico. They were accompanied by Mr. Philippe Méla, Association secretary. They were joined in Strasbourg by His Excellency Louis de Lorimier, Canada's ambassador to Belgium and to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe and his deputy, Mrs. Sirine Hijal.

## A. Overview

The Third part-session featured a full order of business with a wide range of topics being debated in committees, political groups, and in the Assembly. The Assembly held regular debates on the following topics:

### **Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights**

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe expressed concern about the consequences of austerity measures on democracy and social rights standards. The Assembly said that “budgetary cuts in social expenditure risk further deepening the crisis and undermining social rights.” It also pointed out that the implementation of austerity measures is often linked to bodies “whose character raises questions of democratic legitimisation”, such as the troika of the IMF, the European Commission and the ECB.

Endorsing the proposals of the rapporteur (Andrej Hunko, Germany, UEL), the Assembly called for a profound re-orientation of current austerity programmes to end “their quasi-exclusive focus on expenditure cuts in social areas such as pensions, health services or family benefits.”

It called on European governments to adopt measures to increase public revenues by taxing higher income categories and property wealth more strongly, by shoring up the tax base and by enhancing tax collection, the efficiency of the tax administration and the fight against tax fraud and tax evasion. They should also look into the possibilities for introducing new taxes on certain types of financial transactions across Europe.

Lastly, PACE asked States to consider measures aimed at modernising democratic structures and processes by using new forms of citizen participation and consultation, such as referendums, wherever the constitution or legislation provide for such possibilities.

### **The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis**

Concerned about the situation of young people, affected by unprecedented unemployment, underemployment and poverty, PACE called on member states to pursue youth policies that will help young people integrate into society through active

citizenship, social dialogue and sustainable employment opportunities. The resolution adopted calls for young people to be given full access to their rights and sets out a series of measures, including promoting the creation of sustainable jobs and investment in lifelong learning, implementing national “youth guarantee” schemes to ensure that no young person is out of employment or education for more than four months, and encouraging entrepreneurship.

Endorsing the conclusions of the rapporteur, Luca Volontè (Italy, EPP/CD), the Assembly also called for improved social protection for young people in precarious employment or first-time jobseekers, and for family-friendly policies in support of young parents. It also called for strengthening consultation and institutional representation mechanisms – such as youth organisations and youth parliaments – and dialogue mechanisms with the social partners, so that young people can put their views forward and have greater involvement in the taking of decisions which concern them directly.

“If no tangible improvements are made, Europe risks not only producing a ‘lost generation’ of disillusioned young people, but also undermining its political stability and social cohesion as well as its long-term competitiveness,” the Assembly indicated.

### **The impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities in Europe**

PACE expressed its concern at the social damage that may be caused by cuts to local and regional authorities as a result of the economic crisis, be it poorer public services or cuts in welfare. In a resolution based on a report by Sir Alan Meale (United Kingdom, SOC), the Assembly said local authorities themselves can take steps to lessen the negative effects of cuts by reallocating budgets so that basic social rights continue to be protected.

### **Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities**

Many Muslim women want to be involved in creating change or empowerment, and the Assembly should encourage them in their quest for equal opportunities, according to PACE. Approving a report by Athina Kyriakidou (Cyprus, SOC), the Assembly said that as well as robust anti-discrimination laws, including laws which specifically cover “multiple discrimination”, governments should encourage Muslim women’s groups and networks, ensure that all girls have access to all levels of education, and encourage diversity in the media and in public life.

### **The crisis of democracy and the role of the State in today’s Europe**

While a sound State is not usually possible without a lively and strong democracy, a strong democracy also needs a sound State in order to be able to meet the expectations of the citizens, especially by providing social justice, said PACE in a resolution it adopted, during its biennial debate on the state of democracy in Europe.

Drawing on the conclusions of the rapporteur Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC), the adopted text provides pointers for developing democracy at the transnational level, for making States more accountable and for restoring the primary role of political institutions. Such institutions were not able to anticipate, prevent and adequately react to the crisis without causing hardship to the people whom they were meant to protect,

noted the parliamentarians. Intervention by national governments to prevent the disintegration of the financial markets has increased sovereign debts, placing an additional tax burden on citizens and further eroding their trust.

The text points out that building sound States means developing close links with civil society, encouraging a fearless press diverse in its ownership, promoting citizenship and reducing sovereign debt while at the same time preserving economic growth and social integration, and making existing representative democratic structures more representative.

The Assembly also invited Council of Europe member States to consider, in the framework of the World Forum on Democracy to be held in Strasbourg in October 2012, ways in which “democracy can be strengthened by deepening it at all levels of the nation State and also by constituting it at the transnational level”.

### **The portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns**

Although the member States of the Council of Europe already have legal remedies for countering xenophobia and racist speech, the Assembly feels that a real strategy is needed for combating xenophobia, especially during election campaigns.

Following the proposals by the rapporteur (Daphné Dumery, Belgium, NR), the parliamentarians called on political leaders to assume their responsibilities during debates on migration issues and “to combat xenophobic rhetoric and ideology”.

The electoral commissions should be able to sanction political leaders if they behave inappropriately before or during elections and local and regional authorities should work more closely with migrant communities in order to improve mutual understanding indicated the Assembly.

### **The honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro**

The PACE welcomed the substantial progress made by Montenegro in fulfilling its obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe. Drawing on the conclusions of the co-rapporteurs on this question, Jean-Charles Gardetto (Monaco, EPP/CD) and Nursuna Memecan, (Turkey, ALDE), the Assembly observed that the country had signed and ratified 83 Council of Europe conventions, thus complying with all the requirements contained in [Resolution 1724 \(2010\)](#), and had continued to fully co-operate with the Venice Commission and other Council of Europe monitoring bodies.

The PACE also noted the positive role played by Montenegro in the stabilisation of the region and its involvement in several regional and multilateral initiatives. It also highlighted the fact that the country had adopted or brought into line numerous laws in the field of the rule of law, democracy and human rights, and welcomed in particular the progress made in aligning its legislation on elections and citizenship with the Constitution.

However, the Assembly believes that some key steps still needed to be taken in a number of key areas that will remain the focus of the monitoring procedure. These include: completion of the reform of the judiciary and amendments to the Constitution; the capacity of political parties to reach the necessary compromises and ensure that the

rights of all minorities are respected; the fight against corruption and organised crime; and the legal status of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees.

Pending progress in the implementation of these recommendations, the Assembly decided to continue its monitoring procedure with respect to Montenegro.

### **The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States**

Governments should create a safe environment for human rights defenders to play their vital role, and pursue anyone who seeks to harm them or obstruct their work, PACE has said. In a resolution based on a report by Mailis Reps (Estonia, ALDE), the Assembly also called for public recognition of their work.

### **Urgent debate on the crisis of democracy in Egypt**

Whilst welcoming the election of the first civilian President in Egypt as a “historical step in the country’s transition to democracy”, the PACE expressed its deep concern about recent developments which constitute “real obstacles to a slowly emerging democracy” in Egypt.

These obstacles include the dissolution of parliament, the constitutional changes enacted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (granting legislative power to the army and stripping the President of powers in the field of the budget and foreign and defence policy) and the questionable independence and impartiality of the Constitutional Court.

The text adopted, based on the proposals of Jean-Charles Gardetto (Monaco, EPP/CD), also points out that the fundamental challenges lying ahead include the eventual design of the balance of powers, how the army will share power with the President, and the role of women and of religious minorities.

The Assembly underlined that the newly elected President should now reassure those Egyptians who are longing for security and stability but who are, at the same time, deeply polarised, and initiate the badly needed reforms to build a civil administration free from the corrupt practices of the past and boost the economy.

The Assembly stressed that the question of the new Constitution is emblematic, and that “all these crucial issues must be tackled in this text”. In this connection, the Assembly highlighted the important beneficial role which the Council of Europe could play through its Venice Commission, which has unique experience in constitutional drafting.

The adopted text concludes by saying that the Assembly is ready “to share its experience in the field of democratic transition with the Egyptian institutions, in order to facilitate the difficult political transition in what is the largest country in the Middle East”.

### **Current affairs debate on European institutions and human rights in Europe.**

The recent creation of a new EU Special Representative on Human Rights may be unnecessary duplication of work already being done by the Council of Europe, warned Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg, ALDE), during the current affairs debate on European institutions and human rights in Europe.

The official announcement of the new post made no reference to the Council of Europe, she pointed out, in apparent contradiction with a 2007 memo agreed with the EU which said the Council of Europe should remain “the reference” for human rights standards. “At a time of severe budgetary restraint, is such a new post really justified?” she asked.

### **Political transition in Tunisia**

Despite facing challenges, Tunisia is “well advanced in its process of reform”, the Assembly declared at the end of a debate attended by the President of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia Mustapha Ben Jaafar.

Adopting a resolution based on a report by Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg, ALDE), PACE encouraged the country’s political forces and civil actors to “continue making a positive contribution to democratic transition while seeking to maintain political stability”.

The parliamentarians congratulated Tunisia on the free and well-organised elections for the National Constituent Assembly, a democratic first among the Arab Spring nations, and said they hoped the future Constitution would meet Tunisians’ expectations and enshrine the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Assembly offered its continued practical assistance to Tunisians, encouraged the National Constituent Assembly to request Partner for Democracy status, and decided to follow closely developments in the country.

### **Roma migrants in Europe**

Concerned about the critical situation of Roma migrants in Europe, the Assembly called on the Committee of Ministers to encourage member States to put an end to the collective expulsion of Roma, to reconsider their forced return policies of Roma to Kosovo, and to take the necessary steps to naturalise stateless Roma. PACE also called on the relevant Council of Europe bodies to consider ways and means of addressing the problem of negative stereotyping and stigmatisation of Roma in the media and in political speech.

The recommendation adopted is based on the conclusions of the report by Annette Groth (Germany, UEL), who describes the prejudices encountered by Roma migrants and the discrimination they have to cope with, particularly in access to education, healthcare, employment and housing.

The Assembly also decided to support the Council of Europe Dosta! Campaign (“Go beyond prejudice, meet the Roma”) by providing its members with information so as to enhance awareness in national parliaments.

### **The inadmissibility of restrictions on freedom of movement as punishment for political positions**

While underlining the link between free movement of persons and freedom of expression, the Assembly said that some Council of Europe member States have misused their legal right to determine entry into their territory in order to deny entry “to some persons merely as punishment for a political or ideological position they peacefully hold”.

Following the proposals by the rapporteur Haluk Koc (Turkey, SOC), the Assembly condemned such practices and recalled that States which are also members of the EU are bound by strict rules within the framework of the European legal order and in particular the Schengen Agreements.

### **The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (June 2011-May 2012)**

In a resolution unanimously adopted, on the basis of the report by Andres Herkel (Estonia, EPP/CD), the PACE summarises progress and concerns in ten countries under the monitoring procedure, and in four countries engaged in post-monitoring dialogue.

The Assembly also notes the Monitoring Committee's intention to change the arrangements for presenting reports on the 33 countries which are not subject to these procedures, and to abandon the three-year cycle of assessment in order to better reflect the findings of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, which operate on cycles of varying duration. It also intends to pursue a more general reflection on ways to enhance the impact of its monitoring procedures.

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

### **1. Overview**

The members of the delegation participated actively in the plenary session of the PACE, and in meetings of committees – in particular, the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments of Member States of the Council of Europe, and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. The delegates also attended meetings of the various political groups in the Assembly.

The delegation was briefed by Ambassador Louis de Lorimier, Canada's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe.

### **2. Meetings**

The two delegates met, either together or separately, with members of the delegations of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Germany and Italy. Their exchanges of views were aiming at understanding the position of these countries on a number of topics, including the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the European Union and Canada being presently negotiated, the issue of visas imposed by Canada on Bulgaria, Romania and the Czech Republic, the Economic crisis in Europe and NATO.

### **3. Visit to Struthof Concentration Camp**

The Canadian delegation was greatly moved by a visit to the Struthof Concentration Camp situated about 50 km south-west of Strasbourg, the only WWII Concentration camp situated in French territory. The visit served as a reminder of the important need

to remain vigilant about the protection of human rights and of the critical role played by the Council of Europe in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

#### **4. Canadian Intervention in Assembly Debates**

Canadian delegates actively participated in Assembly debates, delivering a total of 6 speeches. All speeches delivered by delegates, whether delegates of member or observer delegations become part of the verbatim record of the proceedings of the Assembly and made available to the public.

The following speeches were delivered by delegates:

***On the joint debate on (a) Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights (b) The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis and (c) The impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities in Europe***

**Mr. Davies** said:

“Solving the economic situation in Europe required proactive measures, but austerity measures are ineffective and aggravating, and serve in fact to dehumanise the crisis.

This is not just a European problem; it also affects North America. Expenditure cuts have focused almost exclusively on social areas such as pensions, health, social services and family benefits. They have therefore targeted the most vulnerable segments of the population. There have been substantial reductions in services as well as cuts in the quality of social services in general. Women and children will be affected disproportionately by austerity measures, largely because a large majority of single parents are women. Since the implementation of austerity measures, women have seen their quality of life undermined by tax and benefit changes and by other cuts in social services, such as those relating to child benefits and childcare, which have a tremendous effect on single mothers and women on low incomes.”

“Austerity measures have inhibited the creation of jobs, led to significant cuts in public unemployment and, for those in work, reduced minimum salaries. The climate has also resulted in the end of fundamental rights, such as the right to take collective action in the European Union.”

“From a purely economic standpoint, in recessionary contractions, cuts in government expenditure, social safety nets or wages contravene sound economic principles. They undermine an individual’s purchasing power and their capacity for economic independence, and they inhibit growth. It has become clear that austerity measures, as they have been applied so far, pose a serious threat to social cohesion and the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups. We must reflect on the fact that the degradation of social and economic rights could be avoided if governments were to evaluate the real causes and consequences of implementing austerity measures.”

“As the rapporteur has so cogently pointed out, the causes of the crises were unbridled market liberalism and its associated political expressions. It is likely that more of the same would deepen the problem, not correct it. Pursuing a social market economy based on the creation of quality employment opportunities and support for educational



and social programmes is far more likely to create growth and recovery. The rapporteur has commendably set out a series of recommendations that propose a democratic and socially responsible alternative to the austerity measures taken thus far. They are socially just and economically wise, and I fully support the plan.”

***On the Joint debate – Democracy at risk: the role of citizens and of the State today: (i) The crisis of democracy and the role of the state in today’s Europe; (ii) The portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns***

**Mr. Chisu** said:

“I am pleased to have the opportunity to address the Assembly in this debate on the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy’s report, “The crisis of democracy and the role of the State in today’s Europe”. I am also grateful for the opportunity to present an observer’s point of view on a matter that is fundamental not only to the Council of Europe, but to the world – how the recent economic crisis has affected democracy across Europe.”

“I applaud the work of the rapporteurs in highlighting the deteriorating conditions for the rule of law and democracy in Europe due to the recent economic conditions. I emphasise at the outset that although this might appear to be a European crisis, its consequences are by no means limited to this continent. Europe is Canada’s second most important investment partner, and the effects are closely felt back home. Any economic hardships in Europe are often felt by many Canadians.”

“As noted in the draft resolution, democracy has been one of the main victims of the global financial crisis that began in 2008. Several European governments have implemented harsh austerity policies, including lowering wages and social benefits, while also increasing taxes. These measures have generated quite a severe crisis of democracy, as manifested by a sudden meltdown in citizens’ political trust.”

“I agree with the rapporteurs that strong transnational institutions – especially sound financial institutions – supported by clear policies are needed to intervene in the markets to defend the general interest and the public good. The Council of Europe could play an important role in minimising the effect that economic recessions have on democracy throughout Europe. The individual nation state may have limited capacity to cope with such vast and serious problems. For this reason, I hope that the Assembly will commit to continue building democratic values in the parts of this continent that need it the most.”

“A further solution lies with us. Parliamentarians have an invaluable role to play in crisis mitigation. As parliamentarians, we are oriented towards political dialogue, negotiation, confidence building and problem solving. We are entrusted to carry out these activities on behalf of our citizens for the betterment of public policy in our countries. No doubt we have our critics, but no one can question our commitment and dedication to finding solutions to society’s problems. Ultimately, if we fail to correct the situation, we fail our own citizens. As noted in the draft resolution, strong states are based on strong democracy.”

“I urge the political leaders of the Council of Europe to work together to achieve the needed reforms to ensure the democratic integrity of all member states. The

recommendations proposed by the co-rapporteurs are reasonable and can have a great effect.”

**Mr. Davies** said:

“We should all be grateful for the committee’s report on the portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns. It serves as a stark reminder that we need to address the root causes of the poor treatment of migrants, and that we have much work to do. We know the root causes: xenophobia, irrational fear, prejudice and sometimes outright racism practised against those who are different from the mainstream of society. It is unacceptable that politicians succumb to the temptation to tap into those hurtful, negative attitudes towards immigrants and use them as a source of political support. They reinforce and give legitimacy to the widespread perceptions of immigrants as a burden on the economy and social programmes, as a security risk or as a threat to social customs and stability.”

“We also know that the rise of such sentiments tends to coincide with periods of economic instability. Unscrupulous politicians exploit people’s personal insecurity and unfairly direct their fears against groups of people who are easy, vulnerable targets for blame. It is important to note that such exploitation occurs not only during election campaigns; it can also become part of the ongoing political culture. We must note firmly and without compromise that the justifications for characterising immigrants in that way are completely specious and wrong, and have no place in civilised political discourse. They must be rejected immediately and thoroughly and condemned by all parties across the political spectrum.”

“I would like to share my personal experience as a member of parliament representing an ethnically diverse electoral district in the major Canadian city of Vancouver, which has a large immigrant population. Immigrants and refugees defy the stereotypes. They do not improperly displace established citizens from jobs; nor do they fail to accept cultural norms. They are no more likely to engage in criminal activity than the nationals of any given country. Instead, they enrich our society in every way imaginable.”

“Immigrants are more likely to be self-sustaining, industrious and entrepreneurial. They want to integrate in their new countries. They want their children to be educated and to advance in their professions. In short, they want what we all want: the right to live their lives in a productive and harmonious fashion. However, political parties everywhere pander to the irrational, extremist voices that demean and dehumanise immigrants, and governments respond too readily to those voices by enacting legislation that is detrimental to immigrants, rather than showing leadership and courage by developing supportive policies.”

“By all means, colleagues, let us disagree on policy and have a vigorous, democratic debate on all the issues, but let us learn from history and honour the most cherished precepts of this institution. Let us categorically reject the use of slander, stereotype and prejudice against people as a political tool. That is the best way for us to advance human rights – by treating people as the individuals they are and deserve to be.”

### ***On the Debate on honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro***

**Mr Chisu** said:

“It is encouraging to read the rapporteurs’ thorough study of the substantial progress made by Montenegro in reforming its democratic processes, strengthening the rule of law and protecting human rights. I would like to say a few words of praise for Montenegro.”

“First, I want to commend Montenegro for its reforms to increase the transparency of its parliament’s work to bring Montenegro’s election legislation in line with its constitutional requirements, for its reforms to the laws on criminal procedure and for its improvements in the situation of ethnic minorities.”

“These reforms represent a further step in the commitment by Montenegro to become an active member of the community of democratic nations. Montenegro’s progress is encouraging for the cause of Euro-Atlantic integration and EU enlargement, objectives that Montenegro considers priorities. The reforms documented by the rapporteurs can only help Montenegro in its efforts to join the EU. The invitation to EU succession negotiations that has been received is a great milestone.”

“It is also important to draw attention to the role that Montenegro has played in bringing stability in the Balkan region. Among other efforts at promoting political stability, it has played a key role in collaboration with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia, in solving protracted and complex problems with refugees and internally-displaced persons. It is participating in a joint project to fund long-term solutions to facilitate the return of those persons and to improve their living conditions. In addition, there have been significant developments in trade, tourism, defence co-operation, transport and energy. That contribution to stability in the region is commendable.”

“From the perspective of my government, Montenegro’s integration into the EU and the Euro-Atlantic area is welcomed, as is integration for all countries of the western Balkans. Canada also supports NATO’s open-door policy and supports all countries in the western Balkans joining NATO once they meet the criteria for membership. We believe that EU membership and integration into other regional and continental alliances are the best way for countries to ensure economic prosperity, security and political and social stability. Montenegro should be encouraged to continue on the path of reform.”

“While much has been achieved, there continue to be areas that are causes for concern. Reforms affecting the judiciary, including the Supreme Court, need to be completed. Other incomplete reforms include those affecting the rights of some ethnic minorities, such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. With the support of the Council of Europe, the EU and the international community, there is no reason why Montenegro cannot achieve those reforms.”

### ***On the situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states***

**Mr. Chisu** said:

“Human rights defenders play an essential role in ensuring healthy, vibrant democracies and the rule of law. They are critical to our societies in exposing corruption and criminality at the political level, protecting those wrongly accused of crimes by political

opponents, and generally ensuring that our political and governmental institutions function properly. Their work enables the rest of us to exercise our human rights, especially our freedom of speech, and our political freedoms – our freedom to participate freely in the political life of our respective countries, and to pursue ideas and policies that we believe in without fear that we will be vilified, marginalised or even harmed because of the views that we hold. They do that work typically for little economic gain, motivated purely by a belief in what is just and right. They expose themselves and their families to considerable physical risk, including the risk of death, and to the risk of being marginalised or ostracised. Instead of being rewarded and recognised for their work, they are often labelled as extremists, traitors and agents of foreign powers.”

“The rapporteur has done an admirable job of exposing how widespread the ill treatment of human rights defenders is in some member states. It is disappointing that many of the documented cases of maltreatment of human rights defenders are in member countries of the Council of Europe. That cannot be tolerated. The Council of Europe is looked to for inspiration as a model of promoting and defending human rights. Canada is a strong defender of human rights, and of human rights defenders. The rapporteur is correct to say that the primary responsibility for protecting human rights defenders lies with the member countries, and rightly calls on each member country of the Council of Europe to take immediate steps to put an end to the harassment of human rights defenders and the dangers they face. At the same time, however, we cannot be complacent about the dire situation that they face in many countries. It is imperative that a concerted and sustained effort be made by all countries, even those with admirable human rights records, to apply pressure on those countries to remedy the intolerable conditions faced by those courageous individuals who do so much to safeguard my rights and yours.”

“I am encouraged that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the rapporteur in particular, has taken this important step of bringing to light the deplorable situations still faced by many human rights defenders in some countries. I am confident that with the Council of Europe’s continued attention to this issue, combined with the efforts of member countries, we can change the culture of impunity in the treatment of human rights advocates.”

### ***On the Debate on Roma migrants in Europe***

**Mr. Chisu** said:

“I welcome this opportunity to comment on the draft recommendation of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, on the situation of Roma migrants in Europe. I also thank the rapporteurs for their excellent work. Canada shares many of the same concerns as the Council of Europe and the European Union with regard to the situation of Europe’s Roma population and its impact on movements within Europe and to Canada.”

“Our government will soon pass legislation to speed up our refugee determination process, so that those in genuine need of protection can more quickly be settled in Canada, while those not in need of protection will be more quickly removed. I just want

to mention that a quarter of refugee claimants in Canada last year came from European countries. Canada received 5 800 refugee claims from European countries, 95% of which were either abandoned or rejected. We believe strongly that the legislation represents a positive step forward, not only for refugees and Canada's refugee determination system but for the interests that we have in common with European countries."

"The draft recommendation acknowledges that the Roma are among the most disadvantaged, discriminated against, persecuted and victimized groups in Europe. That disadvantage makes the Roma vulnerable to human trafficking, as has been observed by international experts, so it is important that the recommendation calls on the relevant bodies to "establish whether the Roma community is affected by and/or involved in trafficking in human beings."

"Our government recently announced a national action plan to combat human trafficking, which is a comprehensive blueprint to guide the Canadian Government's fight against this serious crime. The draft recommendation seeks to debunk myths about the Roma in Europe, in relation to their sedentary habits, historical roots in Europe and use of legitimate immigration channels."

"One way of addressing this issue is by celebrating the contributions that Roma people have made to our communities. Canada is firmly committed to defending human rights. We greatly appreciate the Canadians who are committed to serving their communities, including the staff and volunteers of the Toronto-based Roma Community Centre for their dedicated service to Canada's Roma community. In addition, the draft recommendation instructs the Council of Europe's committees and bodies to conduct an analysis of the possible contributing factors to the Roma's difficulties."

"Canada has a longstanding interest in national and pan-European efforts to address the situation of the Roma, such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion, running from 2005 to 2015. We look forward to hearing about actions – such as those proposed by the recommendation – that would complement initiatives that are already under way to improve the situation of the Roma, all of which have Canada's full support."

### **C. 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, terrorism, trafficking in human beings, organised crime and corruption, cybercrime, violence against children, economic challenges; and
- to consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform.

Founded 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 organized crime, the prevention of torture, data protection and cultural co-operation.<sup>[8]</sup> Canada is a signatory to a number of these treaties, including the Convention on Cybercrime.

The Council's main institutions are the Committee of Ministers (its 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 and member governments accountable, engages in studies of a range of issues of common interest to Europeans and provides a common 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 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 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.

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).

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Corneliu Chisu, M.P.  
Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

## Travel Costs

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Third Part of the 2012 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Strasbourg, France
<b>DATES</b>	June 25 to 29, 2012
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Corneliu Chisu, M.P. Mr. Don Davies, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Philippe Méla, Association Secretary
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$ 6, 627. 61</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 4, 027. 84</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 61. 60</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 2, 072. 93</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 0. 00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES</b>	<b>\$ 0. 00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$12, 789. 98</b>