

Canada – Europe  
Parliamentary Association



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

**Third Part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary  
Assembly of the Council of Europe**

**Strasbourg, France**

**19 to 23 June 2023**

## Report

From 19 to 23 June 2023, the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association (CAEU) sent a delegation of four parliamentarians to Strasbourg, France, to participate in the third part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), for which Canada has observer status.

The delegates were Hon. Percy Downe, Senator, head of the delegation; Hon. Brian Francis, Senator; Stéphane Bergeron, M.P.; and Don Davies, M.P. The delegation was accompanied by the association secretary, Jessica Kulka, and an association advisor, Maxime-Olivier Thibodeau.

### Overview of the Agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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

- Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee
- Observation of the parliamentary and presidential elections in Türkiye (14 and 28 May 2023)
- Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile
- Current affairs debate: Recent political developments in Poland
- Public health emergency: the need for a holistic approach to multilateralism and health care
- Joint debate: Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the period 2024-2027; and Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the biennium 2024-2025
- Joint debate: Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved; Social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport; and Health and social protection of undocumented workers or those in an irregular situation
- UK reform of its human rights legislation: consequences for domestic and European Human Rights protection
- Joint debate under urgent procedure: Political consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine; and War of aggression against Ukraine – Participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics?
- Debate under urgent procedure: Ensuring free and safe access through the Lachin Corridor
- Transnational repression as a growing threat to the rule of law and human rights
- Closing the digital divide: promoting equal access to digital technologies

The Assembly also heard from the following speakers:

- Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Péter SZIJJÁRTÓ, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary
- Edgars RINKĒVIČS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia and Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers
- Nataša PIRC MUSAR, President of Slovenia

## **Canadian Activities during the Session**

### **Overview**

The members of the delegation actively participated in PACE proceedings, including plenary proceedings. In addition, delegates held bilateral meetings with other delegations.

### **Bilateral Meetings**

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

On 19 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the German delegation. Delegates discussed Germany's recent ratification of the *Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union* (CETA). They also discussed the political situation in Germany and Canada and the implications of having in place a coalition government and an agreement between two minority parties, respectively. Discussions also focussed on support for Ukraine's response to Russia's war of aggression, as well as repercussions of the war on Germany's energy security and its objective to be carbon neutral by 2045.

#### **Meeting with Latvia's delegation to PACE**

On 19 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the Latvian delegation. Delegates discussed the collaboration between Canada and Latvia within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Latvian delegates expressed their gratitude for Canada's leadership of the NATO battlegroups stationed in Latvia. Latvian delegates explained that, while NATO member countries committed in 2006 to spending a minimum of 2% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defence, Latvia intends to increase this spending from 2.4% currently to 2.7% by 2030.

Everyone agreed on the importance of increasing military training and spending, which has been emphasized by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. On the Canadian side, the need to improve retention to keep our young military enrolled, and improve procurement for military equipment were mentioned, among other challenges. Latvia has its own challenges, including the need to increase the production capacity of military equipment and to better train military personnel. Latvian delegates explained that Latvia will impose conscription as a solution, resulting in a mix of a professional military and others who will go through training. They highlighted that the measure was widely accepted by the population and by most political parties in Latvia. Latvian delegates expressed the hope that Sweden would soon join NATO to improve security in the Baltics.

The situation of the Russian speaking minority in Latvia was also addressed. The Latvian delegates made a distinction between the Russian minority present in Latvia and the Russian speaking minority, comprised of people who were forced to learn and use Russian under the Soviet regime, but which does not necessarily support Russia and the war in Ukraine.

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

On 20 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the Turkish delegation. The discussion revealed how Türkiye's support for Sweden's accession to NATO is unofficially – but directly – related to Türkiye's accession to the European Union (EU). Turkish delegates emphasized that there is some frustration in Türkiye because the country has already met the criteria required to become a member of the EU but has been excluded while other countries pass ahead. Delegates also discussed the role played by Türkiye in the region – in relation to Syria and Russia, in particular – and as a member of NATO. Certain trade-related issues were also addressed, such as the export to Türkiye of equipment used to build drones.

### **Meeting with Ireland's delegation to PACE**

The Canadian delegation met with members of the Irish delegation on 20 June. The close bilateral relations between the two countries, and their kinship, were highlighted. The Irish delegates addressed the repercussions of Brexit for Ireland as well as the accomplishments of the Good Friday Agreement. They also explained the popularity of citizens' assemblies in Ireland. [Citizens' assemblies](#) are composed of citizens who discuss and consider legal and policy issues, make recommendations and report back to the Irish parliament. As noted by the Irish delegates, a citizens' assembly on [drugs use](#) started in April 2023. The Canadian delegates touched on legislation related to the legalization of cannabis and medical assistance in dying. The delegates promised to continue sharing information on these issues that generated great interest on both sides.

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

On 21 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the Ukrainian delegation. The Canadian delegation reiterated its support for Ukraine in its response to Russia's aggression. In turn, Ukrainian delegates emphasized the importance of that support and of the collaboration between the two countries. They noted that Canada was the first country to use an asset seizure and forfeiture regime against the current Russian government when it ordered the seizure of a Russian-registered cargo aircraft currently grounded at Toronto Pearson Airport, on 10 June.

The Ukrainian delegates shared information regarding the ecocide and the reconstruction needs that followed the destruction of the Kakhovka dam. They also shared a recent report from Ukraine's Prosecutor General's Office documenting the crimes committed by Russia during the war. Ukrainian delegates explained the extent of the need for housing, employment, and psychological support, among others, resulting from internally displaced persons in Ukraine, mostly moving from the Kherson region. Discussions also focussed on Ukraine's accession to NATO; Canadian delegates assured their counterparts of their support in that regard and with respect to the reconstruction work to come after the war.

### **Meeting with Palestine's delegation to PACE**

On 21 June, Canadian delegates met with Bernard Sabella, Chairperson of the Palestinian delegation, a member of Partners for Democracy at PACE. They discussed the merits of different proposals to create two states – Israel and Palestine – or one

secular state that would include both. The role played by the United States and China in the region was also discussed, among other issues.

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

On 21 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the Armenian delegation. Armenian delegates explained how recent events have exacerbated the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is disputed with Azerbaijan and has a large ethnic Armenian population. They explained the repercussions of the latest developments in the Lachin corridor, the only land connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding region, arguing that the blockade of the Lachin corridor was in violation of international law and the peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. According to the Armenian delegates, 120,000 people are at risk of not getting humanitarian assistance as a consequence of the blockade. They also denounced that the Russian peacekeepers in charge of supervising the region's security are helping people from Azerbaijan get into Armenia.

The issue of Azerbaijan's claims on Armenia's territory – and the absence of agreement on the delineation of borders between the two countries – was also discussed. Armenian delegates argued in favor of using a map established in 1975 – the last map approved under the Soviet regime before it collapsed – that both countries recognized at the time.

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

On 21 June, the Canadian delegation hosted the United Kingdom's (U.K.) delegation for lunch in the PACE dining room. In the context of negotiations for a free trade agreement between the two countries, the issue of the non-indexation of benefits to U.K. pensioners living in Canada – and to pensioners from another country living in the U.K. – was raised. Among other issues, delegates discussed the level of support for Ukraine in the war with Russia, the impact of inflation on the cost of living, as well as energy diversification in their respective country.

### **Meeting with Azerbaijan's delegation to PACE**

Canadian delegates met with members of the delegation from Azerbaijan on 22 June. The Azerbaijani delegates discussed relations with Armenia, in general, and the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in particular. They argued that the Lachin corridor is part of Azerbaijan and that it is wrongfully used by Armenia to bring in weapons and exploit Azerbaijan's resources to bring them back in Armenia. Azerbaijani delegates denied that a humanitarian crisis was happening in Nagorno-Karabakh and argued that their government had restricted humanitarian access to the region because of the Russian peacekeepers' presence. According to Azerbaijani delegates, these Russian peacekeepers' actions are undermining the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Discussions also focussed on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia, including the delineation of borders between the two countries. Azerbaijani delegates argued that

both countries agreed on a map in 1991, when the Soviet regime collapsed and Azerbaijan joined the United Nations, and that map should be used.

### **Meeting with Moldova's Delegation to PACE**

On 22 June, the Canadian delegation met with members of the Moldovan delegation. Moldovan delegates highlighted their proximity to the war in Ukraine and their involvement in support of Ukraine. That proximity is such that the same morning, Russia was threatening to bomb bridges close to Ukraine but on Moldovan territory. Moldovan delegates also outlined the complex energy situation in Moldova as well as the need to diversify energy sources and to make them greener. They explained the work done recently – and planned – on energy infrastructure.

Discussions also focussed on Moldova's accession to the EU and to NATO and the obstacles along the way. Regarding Moldova's accession to NATO, Moldovan delegates argued that Russian propaganda is so powerful that there would not be sufficient public support at present in Moldova; accession would be more feasible in the middle term future, following Ukraine.

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

On 22 June, Canadian delegates met with members of the French delegation. They discussed the reasons why ratification of CETA is not on the French Senate's agenda. The political party, Groupe Les Républicains, which holds a majority in the French Senate, has positioned itself against CETA and since the number of votes would not be sufficient to adopt the agreement, CETA will be put on the Senate's agenda only after the upcoming senatorial elections, scheduled on 24 September 2023. Delegates also discussed the political situation in France; the fact that only President Macron and his group are at the center of the political spectrum and that the extreme right is gaining ground in Europe, including in France. They all highlighted the importance they attach to the relationship between France and Canada and Quebec, which is cultural and political before commercial.

### **Canadian Interventions in Assembly Debates**

All delegates participated in the Assembly's debates. They made five interventions during debates and submitted nine speeches in writing<sup>1</sup>. The texts of delegates speeches are available on the PACE website<sup>2</sup>.

### **Monday, 19 June 2023**

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<sup>1</sup> Where members are unable to deliver their speech due to a lack of time, PACE procedures allow for speeches to be submitted in writing and included in the record. See Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [Rules of Procedure of the Assembly \(January 2023\)](#), rule 31.2.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "[2023 – third part of the session](#)," Verbatim listing by session.

[Mr. Bergeron](#) and [Senator Downe](#) submitted their speeches in writing for the debate entitled “Observation of the parliamentary and presidential elections in Türkiye (14 and 28 May 2023).”

### **Tuesday, 20 June 2023**

[Senator Downe](#) and [Mr. Bergeron](#) gave a speech for the debate on “Addressing the specific challenges faced by the Belarusians in exile.” [Mr. Davies](#) gave a speech, and [Senator Francis](#) submitted a speech in writing, for the debate entitled “Public health emergency: the need for a holistic approach to multilateralism and health care.”

### **Wednesday, 21 June 2023**

[Mr. Davies](#) gave a speech, and [Senator Francis](#) and [Mr. Bergeron](#) submitted their speeches in writing, for the joint debate on “Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved”; “Social inclusion of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons through sport”; and “Health and social protection of undocumented workers or those in an irregular situation.”

In his closing remarks, the Rapporteur who wrote the report entitled “Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved,” [Domagoj Hajduković](#), acknowledged Mr. Davies’ contribution to the debate:

I was hoping that this debate would not take the road it took, because this was supposed to be a debate about integration, without questioning the reasons why we have migrants in our countries or refugees.

Indeed, migration or rather immigration for most of the European countries is a reality that will remain. Anybody who thinks that we can create fortress Europe is wrong. I'm sorry to dispel this dream you have.

In my view at least, it would be really opportunistic and useful to look into how to create a possibility out of this reality, how to create an advantage. What Mr Don DAVIES from Canada said: diversity is strength. I think we can look up to Canada in many respects when it comes to integration of migrants.

Unfortunately, Canada is not a member state of the Council of Europe, so I couldn't include you in the best practices. I have, however, a few countries. As I know there are many good examples in many countries, I focused on three: Norway, Sweden, and Finland. There are others, and it would take a lot, maybe a few reports to list them all.

### **Thursday, 22 June 2023**

[Mr. Davies](#), [Senator Downe](#) and [Mr. Bergeron](#) submitted their speeches in writing for the joint debate under urgent procedure on “Political consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine”; and “War of aggression against Ukraine – Participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics?”

[Mr. Bergeron](#) submitted a speech in writing for the debate under urgent procedure on “Ensuring free and safe access through the Lachin Corridor.”

**Friday, 23 June 2023**

[Senator Francis](#) gave a speech for the debate entitled “Closing the digital divide: promoting equal access to digital technologies.”

Respectfully submitted,

Francesco Sorbara, M.P  
President, Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

### **Travel Costs**

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Third Part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Strasbourg, France
<b>DATES</b>	From June 16 to 19, 2023
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
<b>SENATE</b>	Hon. Percy Downe Hon. Brian Francis
<b>HOUSE OF COMMONS</b>	Stéphane Bergeron Don Davies
<b>STAFF</b>	Jessica Kulka Maxime-Olivier Thibodeau
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	\$ 23,187.06
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	\$ 10,129.68
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	\$ 860.81
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	\$ 7,701.34



<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	<b>\$ 216.00</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 42,094.89</b>