

Canada – Europe
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada – Europe

Report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

**Fourth Part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**

Strasbourg, France, and Mission to Berlin, Germany

From October 7 to 19, 2023

Report

From 7 to 19 October 2023, a six-member delegation from the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association (CAEU) travelled to Strasbourg, France, to participate in the fourth part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The delegation then travelled to Germany as part of a parliamentary mission.

The members of the delegation were: Francesco Sorbara, Member of Parliament and Chair of the CAEU; the Honourable David Wells, Senator and Vice-Chair of the CAEU; the Honourable Percy Downe, Senator; the Honourable Lucie Moncion, Senator; Stéphane Bergeron, Member of Parliament; and Lianne Rood, Member of Parliament (for the PACE mission, 9 to 12 October). The delegation was accompanied by Jessica Kulka, Secretary of the CAEU, and Maxime Olivier Thibodeau, Advisor for the CAEU.

OVERVIEW OF THE AGENDA OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

From 9 to 13 October, the delegation participated in the fourth part of the PACE Session. Nicholas Brousseau, Permanent Observer of Canada to the Council of Europe, was unable to join the delegation as planned. Juan David Roldan, Second Secretary (Political Section) of the Mission of Canada to the European Union (EU), replaced him on short notice and accompanied the delegation from 9 to 11 October.

A. Many topics were debated by the Assembly and its committees, including:

- Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee
- Observation of the early parliamentary elections in Montenegro (11 June 2023);
- Current affairs debate: The situation in the North of Kosovo following the recent attack and the need for de-escalation;
- The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe;
- The honouring of membership obligations to the Council of Europe by France;
- Current affairs debate: Escalation of violence in the Middle East following the recent Hamas attack on Israel
- Pegasus and similar spyware and secret state surveillance;
- Preventing and combating violence against women with disabilities;
- Joint urgent procedure debate: The role of the Council of Europe in preventing conflicts, restoring credibility of international institutions and promoting global peace; and Ensuring a just peace in Ukraine and lasting security in Europe;
- Urgent procedure debate: Humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Urgent procedure debate: Call for the immediate release of Osman Kavala;
- Examining the legitimacy and legality of the ad hominem term-limit waiver for the incumbent President of the Russian Federation;
- Joint debate: Preventing addictive behaviours in children; and Mental health and well-being of children and young adults; and

- The humanitarian crisis emerging for Afghanistan and Afghan refugees.

The Assembly also heard from the following speakers:

- Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe;
- Krišjānis Kariņš, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia and President of the Committee of Ministers; and
- Didier Reynders, European Commissioner for Justice.

Finally, the Assembly awarded the 11th Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, which recognizes outstanding civil society action in defence of human rights, to Osman Kavala, a Turkish human rights defender, philanthropist and civil society activist, who is currently serving a life sentence in Türkiye in spite of a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights in 2019 requiring his immediate release.

B. Canadian activities during the session

1. Overview

Members of the Canadian delegation actively participated in the work of PACE in addition to holding bilateral meetings with members of 12 other delegations.

C. Bilateral meetings

Monday 9 October 2023

1. Meeting with France's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with French delegates. Among other things, the delegates discussed Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, recent Hamas attacks in Israel, and elections in Slovakia that were recently won by a pro-Russian party that promised to end Slovakian aid to Ukraine. They also discussed the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, where about 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled to Armenia in just a few days, following a military operation by Azerbaijan to gain control of the region. The French delegates explained France's position, which consists of supplying arms to Armenia to help it defend its territorial integrity.

2. Meeting with Armenia's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with delegates from Armenia. Talks focused on Azerbaijan's military operation last month to take control of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian delegates pointed out that they had warned the world about Azerbaijan's intentions and the risk of ethnic cleansing.

Asked about the way forward, the Armenian delegates expressed hope that pressure will be exerted on Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to bring him to the negotiating table with Armenian President Nikol Pashinyan, mediated by European Council President Charles Michel, later in October 2023 in Brussels. They also raised the possibility of asking the Council of Europe to expel Azerbaijan on the grounds of ethnic violence.

3. Meeting with Romania's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with Romanian delegates. Among other topics, delegates discussed the importance of nuclear cooperation in general, and in particular the announcement by the Ministers of Energy of Canada and Romania of a Canadian investment of \$3 billion in export financing available to Nuclearelectrica S.A. (SNN), the national operator of the Cernavoda nuclear power plant in Romania. According to the Romanian delegates, the addition of two nuclear reactors would help Romania become an energy hub in the region and strengthen energy security in the area. They highlighted the diversity of the energy sources used in Romania and their desire to develop green energy sources, such as wind and solar, in addition to nuclear.

The Romanian delegates also highlighted Romania's significant efforts to prioritize Ukrainian grain—efforts that they say are not being properly recognized—and the resulting difficult situation for Romanian farmers.

D. Tuesday 10 October 2023

1. Meeting with a representative of the democratic opposition of Belarus

The Canadian delegation met with Alexander Shlyk, Electoral Advisor to Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of the Belarusian democratic opposition in exile. Discussions focused on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe's decision to hold regular discussions with Ms. Tsikhanouskaya and other representatives of the Belarusian democratic opposition in September 2022 and to establish a "contact group" within the Council of Europe, in conjunction with representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society. Mr. Shlyk explained the nature and unique context of his work for the Belarusian democratic opposition in exile.

He explained that he was working to prepare for elections to be held, entirely online, in February 2024 to elect a parallel parliament of Belarus. He noted that this project stems in part from the fact that the Supreme Court of Belarus has stripped all political parties of their existence in law, except those that openly support Alexander Lukashenko, the current President.

2. Meeting with Azerbaijan's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with delegates from Azerbaijan. Talks focused on Azerbaijan's military operation last month to take control of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the Azerbaijani delegates, neither ethnic cleansing nor genocide is taking place in Azerbaijan. They said that the ethnic Armenians who fled Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia could have stayed and would have retained all the rights of residents of Azerbaijan if they had done so. According to them, the ethnic Armenians fled Nagorno-Karabakh because Armenia's separatist leaders had convinced them that they would be killed if they stayed. Azerbaijan's delegates pointed out that trilateral negotiations in Brussels, mediated by the President of the European Council, were scheduled for the end of October 2023.

3. Meeting with Sweden's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with Mihail Popsoi, a delegate from the Republic of Moldova. In the context of the Moldovan local elections scheduled for November 2023, discussions focused mainly on the issue of Russian interference. Mr. Popsoi explained how money couriers are smuggling Russian cash into the Republic of Moldova via Türkiye and Armenia with the aim of bribing voters. He also explained the context of surrounding

the Shor party—described as the “official pro-Russian opposition party in Moldova” by Russian authorities—being banned from the Moldovan parliament.

The situation in Transnistria was also discussed. According to Mr. Popsoi, the region’s relative independence is coming to an end. Transmission lines—the construction of which is financed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—to obtain energy from Romania are expected to be completed within two years. From that moment on, Moldova intends to start collecting taxes in Transnistria. According to Mr. Popsoi, this should be done without intervention from Russia, which has a military presence in the region. He also noted that negotiations on Moldova’s accession to the EU are expected to start in 2024.

5. Meeting with the head of the Kosovo Assembly’s delegation to PACE

The head of the Canadian delegation, Mr. Sorbara, met with the head of the delegation of the Kosovo Assembly, Saranda Bogujevci. Ms. Bogujevci emphasized the importance of [Mr. Sorbara’s speech](#) during the current affairs debate on “The situation in the North of Kosovo following the recent attack and the need for de-escalation,” as well as Canada’s peacekeeping role. Discussions also focused on the importance of the presence of NATO’s Kosovo Force—better known as KFOR—in the North of Kosovo and the need to counter destabilizing efforts in the region.

E. Wednesday 11 October 2023

1. Meeting with the head of Poland’s delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with the head of the Polish delegation, Arkadiusz Mularczyk. Discussions focused on the content of a debate that could be held at PACE in January 2024, which would be entitled “Reparation and reconciliation processes to overcome past conflicts and build a common peaceful future – the question of just and equal redress.” Mr. Mularczyk explained Poland’s request that Germany pay for the damage suffered during the Second World War. He also discussed Poland’s position on Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine and Ukraine’s request for consultations with Poland, which has banned the import of Ukrainian grain. This is the first step in filing a dispute with the World Trade Organization.

2. Meeting with the head of Israel’s delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation held a virtual meeting with the head of the Israeli delegation, Meirav Ben Ari, who was in Israel. Ms. Ben Ari told the delegation about the horrific scenes she had witnessed following the Hamas attacks in Israel on 7 October: children, women and civilians killed by Hamas. She argued that Hamas’s attacks are being carried out not only by the enemies of Israel, but by the enemies of all democratic countries.

3. Meeting with Türkiye’s delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with delegates from Türkiye. Discussions focused on Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine. The Turkish delegates stated that Türkiye wanted to mediate the conflict and was trying to help with the distribution of Ukrainian grain. Delegates also discussed Türkiye’s role in other topical issues, such as the situation in Israel following the Hamas attacks, the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and Sweden’s accession to NATO.

F. Thursday 12 October 2023

1. Meeting with the United Kingdom's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation held its usual meeting with delegates from the United Kingdom. Among other things, delegates discussed a possible free trade agreement between Canada and the United Kingdom, the non-indexation of benefits paid to British pensioners living in Canada and pensioners from another country living in the U.K., inflation, the cost of living, the housing shortage, migration, climate change, as well as the recent Hamas attacks in Israel.

G. Friday 13 October 2023

1. Meeting with Ukraine's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation met with delegates from Ukraine. Discussions naturally focused on Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. In particular, Ukrainian delegates expressed their views on the degree of international recognition of the Holodomor, the "Great Famine" of the 20th century in Ukraine. They provided an update on the war in Ukraine, stressing the need to improve the state of Ukrainian military equipment, in particular air defence, artillery and drones. Ukrainian delegates explained how current events, such as the Hamas attacks in Israel and the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, are diverting attention from the war in Ukraine, which works in Russia's favour. The issues of corruption in Ukraine and its judicial system were also discussed.

2. Canadian interventions in PACE debates

All of the Canadian delegates took part in the PACE debates. Six interventions were made during the debates, and 11 written speeches were added to the Session reports.¹ All of these speeches are posted on the PACE website.²

H. Monday 9 October 2023

[Mr. Sorbara](#) spoke in the current affairs debate on "The situation in the North of Kosovo following the recent attack and the need for de-escalation."

I. Tuesday 10 October 2023

[Mr. Bergeron](#) spoke in the debate on "The challenge of far-right ideology to democracy and human rights in Europe," while [Senator Wells](#) submitted a written speech.

J. Wednesday 11 October 2023

[Mr. Sorbara](#) and [Senator Wells](#) submitted written speeches as part of the current affairs debate on the "Escalation of violence in the Middle East following the recent Hamas attack on Israel."

[Mr. Bergeron](#) spoke in the debate on "Pegasus and similar spyware and secret state surveillance," while Senators [Wells](#) and [Downe](#) submitted written speeches.

¹ When members are unable to deliver their speeches for lack of time, the Rules of Procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe allow speeches to be submitted in writing and included in the Reports of the debates. See Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, [Rules of Procedure of the Assembly \(January 2023\)](#), Article 31.2.

² Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "[Autumn Session 2023](#)", Verbatim Records.

[Senator Moncion](#) spoke in the debate on “Preventing and combating violence against women with disabilities,” while [Ms. Rood](#) submitted a written speech.

K. Thursday 12 October 2023

[Senator Wells](#) spoke in the joint urgent procedure debate on “The role of the Council of Europe in preventing conflicts, restoring credibility of international institutions and promoting global peace” and “Ensuring a just peace in Ukraine and lasting security in Europe.”

[Mr. Bergeron](#) and [Mr. Sorbara](#) submitted written speeches as part of the urgent procedure debate on the “Humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

L. Friday 13 October 2023

[Mr. Bergeron](#) spoke in the debate on “Examining the legitimacy and legality of the ad hominem term-limit waiver for the incumbent President of the Russian Federation,” while [Senator Downe](#) submitted a written speech.

In his remarks at the end of the debate, [Damien Cottier](#), the Chairperson of PACE’s Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, referred to Mr. Bergeron’s speech.

[Senator Moncion](#) submitted a written speech as part of the joint debate on “Preventing addictive behaviours in children” and “Mental health and well-being of children and young adults.”

[Mr. Sorbara](#) submitted a written speech as part of the debate on “The humanitarian crisis emerging for Afghanistan and Afghan refugees.”

1. Parliamentary mission to Germany

Following its participation in PACE, the delegation (Francesco Sorbara, Member of Parliament and Chair of the CAEU; the Honourable David Wells, Senator and Vice-Chair of the CAEU; the Honourable Percy Downe, Senator; the Honourable Lucie Moncion, Senator; and Stéphane Bergeron, Member of Parliament) went on a parliamentary mission to Berlin, Germany, from 14 to 18 October. Mr. Sorbara had to return to Canada before the end of the mission; therefore, Senator Wells led the delegation on 17 and 18 October. The delegation was in Germany to gain a better understanding of the country’s role in the European Union and its actions in response to Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine. With this goal in mind, delegates met with members of the European Parliament, representatives of political foundations and experts on Germany’s energy and security policy.

Several members of the Embassy of Canada to Germany participated in these meetings or accompanied the delegation to these meetings: Isabelle Poupart, Chargée d’affaires; Evelyne Coulombe, Deputy Head of Mission; Gregory Lemermeyer, Counsellor (Political Affairs) and Head of the General Relations Division; Farrah Musani, Counsellor (Foreign Policy); Erin Koenig, Counsellor (Economics); Florian Zschalich, Political Affairs Officer; Heike Echterhoelter, Political Affairs Officer; and Martin Menden, Analyst (Economic Policy and Climate).

Monday 16 October 2023

1. Representatives of political foundations

The Canadian delegation met with experts on North America and German politics from the following political foundations: the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Jonathan Nowak and Fabian Blumberg), the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Matthias Jobelius), the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (Martin Biesel and Sascha Tamm) and the Heinrich Boell Foundation (Bastian Hermisson). Discussions focused on Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, energy security, reducing carbon emissions, Germany's new approach to international relations, the rise of the far right in the EU and Germany, disinformation and foreign interference. Germany's recent ratification of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was also discussed.

2. Members of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German Bundestag

The Canadian delegation met with two members of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German Bundestag: Markus Töns of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), who is the Deputy Chairman of the Committee, and Tobias Bacherle of the Green Party. Among other topics, delegates discussed Germany's ruling coalition government, its recent ratification of CETA, migration in the EU and Germany, EU expansion, and the consequences of Brexit for the EU and Germany. They also discussed disinformation and foreign interference, the rise of extremism, the war in Ukraine and the results of the elections that had just taken place in Poland.

3. Experts on Germany's energy policy

The Canadian delegation participated in a roundtable discussion with experts on Germany's energy policy. The participants were: Lisa Badum, Member of Parliament for Alliance 90/The Greens; Felix Christian Matthes of the Öko-Institut e.V.; and Carsten Rolle of the Federation of German Industries. Discussions focused on energy security, Germany's move away from Russian energy sources, diversification of energy sources, Germany's and Canada's carbon emissions reduction commitments, and both countries' investments in green technologies.

4. Isabelle Poupart, Chargée d'affaires at the Embassy of Canada in Berlin

The Canadian delegation met with Isabelle Poupart, Chargée d'affaires at the Embassy of Canada in Berlin. Ms. Poupart gave an overview of current issues in Germany that are of particular concern to Canada: Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the paradigm shift announced by Chancellor Scholz (Zeitenwende), Germany's energy dependence on Russia, diversification of energy sources, particularly hydrogen, as well as the issue of migration.

5. Geneviève Rolland, Quebec's Delegate General in Munich

Mr. Bergeron met with Geneviève Rolland, Quebec's Delegate General in Munich, at the offices of Quebec's General Delegation in Berlin. Ms. Rolland attended the meeting virtually, from Munich, while her colleagues, Nicole Koufou and Manuel Feifel, attended in person. Ms. Rolland explained the collaboration between Quebec and Bavaria and the work she does to promote and support Quebec in its political, institutional, cultural, educational, scientific, technological and economic relations with Germany, Austria and Switzerland. She also explained how the General Delegation's diplomatic actions take three forms: economic, scientific and identity-based.

Tuesday 17 October 2023

1. Representative of the Ukrainian Refugee Reception Centre

The Canadian delegation went on a guided tour of the Ukrainian Refugee Reception Centre (Ukraine Ankunftszentrum) located at the former Berlin Tegel Airport. Sascha Langenbach, spokesperson for the State Office for Refugee Affairs Berlin (LAF), took the delegation on a tour of the premises and explained the various services provided to the 5,000—soon to be 7,000—refugees living there, as well as the context in which the Centre performs its work.

2. Representative of the German Bundesrat

The Canadian delegation met with Claus Dieter Koggel, Head of the Parliamentary Directorate-General in the German Bundesrat. Mr. Koggel explained the composition and operation of the Upper House of the German Parliament. He also explained the legislative process and answered questions from delegates. The delegation then went on a guided tour of the Bundesrat.

3. Experts on Germany's Ukraine policy

The Canadian delegation participated in a roundtable discussion with experts on Germany's Ukraine policy. The participants were Laura Christoph of the Institute for European Policy and Rafael Loss of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Discussions focused on Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, the duration of the conflict and its repercussions, the problem of corruption in Ukraine, Ukraine's energy infrastructure, EU expansion, as well as the dispute between Ukraine and Poland over Ukrainian grain.

O. Wednesday 18 October 2023

1. Representatives of the European Council on Foreign Relations

The Canadian delegation met with representatives of ECFR, an international think tank that conducts independent research on European foreign and security policy. The participants were Theodore Murphy, Director, Africa Programme, and Manisha Reuter, Deputy Director, Asia Programme. Discussion topics included Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, interference by India and China, and the new geopolitical reality facing the EU, Germany and Canada.

2. Christoph Heusgen, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference

Lastly, the Canadian delegation met with Christoph Heusgen, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference. Discussions focused on the results of the elections that had just been held in Poland and their significance for the EU and Germany, the rise of the far right in the EU and Germany, the issue of migration, and Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Discussions also addressed the upcoming presidential elections in the United States, the conflict between Hamas and Israel, how the many ongoing conflicts benefit Russia, as well as interference from India and China.

Respectfully submitted,

Francesco Sorbara, Member of Parliament

President, Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Fourth Part of the 2023 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and Parliamentary Mission to Germany
DESTINATION	Strasbourg, France and Berlin, Germany
DATES	From October 9 to 18, 2023
DELEGATION	
	Hon. Lucie Moncion
SENATE	Hon. David Wells Hon. Percy Downe
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Stéphane Bergeron Francesco Sorbara Lianne Rood
STAFF	Jessica Kulka Maxime-Olivier Thibodeau
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 54,470.61
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 22,818.17
HOSPITALITY	\$ 2,703.85
PER DIEMS	\$ 16,146.90
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 413.92
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 96,553.45