

Canada – Europe
Parliamentary Association



Association parlementaire
Canada – Europe

Report of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Second Part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

Strasbourg, France

From April 15 to 19, 2024

Report

From 15–19 April 2024, the Canada–Europe Parliamentary Association (CAEU) sent a delegation of six parliamentarians to Strasbourg, France to participate in the second part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

The delegates were Francesco Sorbara, M.P., President of CAEU; Hon. David Wells, Senator, Vice-President; Hon. Gwen Boniface, Senator; Hon. Brian Francis, Senator; Hon. Scott Tannas, Senator; and Stéphane Bergeron, M.P.

The delegation was accompanied by the association secretary, Jessica Kulka, and an association adviser, BJ Siekierski.

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

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

- Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee
- Joint debate: Relationship between the parliamentary majority and the opposition in a democracy/Promoting the revised Code of Good Practice on Referendums
- Support for the Reconstruction of Ukraine
- Application by Kosovo for membership of the Council of Europe
- Joint debate: Alexei Navalny's death and the need to counter Vladimir Putin's totalitarian regime and its war on democracy/The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus/Sanctions against persons on the 'Kara-Murza list'
- Freedom of expression and assembly of LGBTI people in Europe
- The honouring of obligations and commitments by Albania
- Joint debate: Mainstreaming the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment with the Reykjavik process/Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis
- Draft Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law
- Responding to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and preventing further escalations in the Middle East following the recent Iranian attack against Israel
- The protection of children against online violence

The Assembly also heard from the following speakers:

- Mihail Popșoi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova
- Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Ruslan Stefanchuk, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine
- Dominique Hasler, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Education, and Sport of Liechtenstein and President of the Committee of Ministers

- H.S.H. Hereditary Prince Alois von und zu Liechtenstein

Finally, the Assembly awarded the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize to the imprisoned Russian opposition leader, Vladimir Kara-Murza. His wife, Evgenia Kara-Murza, accepted the award on his behalf.

B. Canadian Interventions in Assembly Debates

All delegates participated in the Assembly's debates. They made nine interventions during debates and tabled six speeches in writing. The texts of the delegates' speeches are available on the PACE website.¹

1. Monday, 15 April 2024

Mr. Bergeron and Senator Wells submitted their speeches in writing for the Joint Debate on the Relationship between the parliamentary majority and the opposition in a democracy/Promoting the revised Code of Good Practice on Referendums.

2. Tuesday, 16 April 2024

Mr. Bergeron spoke in the debate on Support for the Reconstruction of Ukraine and Mr. Sorbara submitted his speech in writing. Mr. Sorbara also submitted his speech in writing for the debate on the Application by Kosovo for membership of the Council of Europe.

3. Wednesday, 17 April 2024

Mr. Bergeron spoke in the Joint Debate on Alexei Navalny's death and the need to counter Vladimir Putin's totalitarian regime and its war on democracy/The arbitrary detention of Vladimir Kara-Murza and the systematic persecution of anti-war protesters in the Russian Federation and Belarus/Sanctions against persons on the 'Kara-Murza list.' Senator Wells submitted his speech in writing.

Mr. Sorbara also spoke in the debate on The honouring of obligations and commitments by Albania.

4. Thursday, 18 April 2024

Senator Francis spoke in the Joint Debate on Mainstreaming the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment with the Reykjavik process/Towards Council of Europe strategies for healthy seas and oceans to counter the climate crisis. Mr. Bergeron submitted his speech in writing.

Mr. Sorbara spoke in the debate on the Draft Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

Mr. Sorbara and Mr. Bergeron also spoke in the Current Affairs Debate: Responding to the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and preventing further escalations in the Middle East following the recent Iranian attack against Israel.

5. Friday, 19 April 2024

Senator Francis and Senator Boniface spoke in the Debate on the Protection of Children Against Online Violence.

¹ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "[Spring Session 2024](#)," Verbatim Records.

C. Additional Canadian Activities During the Session

Members of the delegation also attended meetings of PACE political groups throughout the week and a meeting – on 18 April 2024 – of the PACE Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

In addition, the delegation held bilateral meetings with other member delegations and met with a Russian opposition activist.

D. Bilateral meetings

1. Meeting with Armenia's delegation to PACE

On 15 April 2024, the Canadian delegation met with two members of Armenia's delegation to PACE – Arusyak Julhakyán, M.P., and Sona Ghazaryan, M.P.

Mr. Sorbara began the discussion by noting that Canada's embassy to Armenia opened in Yerevan in the fall of 2023 and that Canada's first Ambassador to Armenia, Andrew Turner, presented his credentials to Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ararat Mirzoyan, in October 2023. He then mentioned that Canada was announcing, later in the day, the name of the expert it was contributing to the European Union (EU) Mission in Armenia, which observes and reports on the situation on the ground in conflict-affected areas. In response, Ms. Julhakyán noted that Russia has criticized Canadian involvement in the Mission and that Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov had even stated that Canada's participation had turned the EU Mission into a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission.

Senator Wells asked the Armenian parliamentarians about how ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh are integrating into Armenia; the PACE vote, in January 2024, not to recognize Azerbaijan's credentials; and Armenia's energy independence. Mr. Bergeron asked about the activities of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, the status of Armenia and Azerbaijan's peace and normalization negotiations, and Turkey's role in that process. Finally, Mr. Sorbara asked about Armenia's aspirations for EU membership.

Ms. Julhakyán and Ms. Ghazaryan said that the principal current challenge facing ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia was a lack of housing, but that none want to return to Nagorno-Karabakh amidst what they described as a cultural genocide. They said that the PACE vote on Azerbaijan's credentials was completely justified, since Azerbaijan respects none of the fundamental requirements of Council of Europe membership, and that Armenia continues to be heavily reliant on Russian natural gas imports.

Ms. Julhakyán and Ms. Ghazaryan explained that Russian peacekeepers remained in Nagorno-Karabakh despite Azerbaijan wanting them to leave, but that it was not clear when that might happen. They noted that the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace and normalization agreement was at the eighth stage of revision, but that Azerbaijan was refusing to accept the 1991 Almaty Declaration as the basis for the delimitation and demarcation of borders. They also suggested that an agreement could be reached quickly with Azerbaijan if Türkiye were to exert pressure on their Turkic ally.

Finally, the Armenian parliamentarians said that polls show Armenians are increasingly supportive of EU accession and that the entry into force, in 2021, of the European Union-

Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was a significant development. At the same time, they noted that all of Armenia's neighbours, except for Georgia, are opposed to their EU membership.

2. Meeting with Jarrett Reckseidler, Senior Political Affairs Officer, Canada's mission to the European Union

On 16 April 2024, Jarrett Reckseidler, Senior Political Affairs Officer at Canada's Mission to the European Union, provided the Canadian delegation with a briefing on recent developments in the EU and in bilateral relations.

Mr. Reckseidler began by noting the success of the 19th Canada-EU Leaders' Summit, which took place in St. John's, Newfoundland in November 2023. He said the Joint Statement that emerged from the Summit, as well as the establishment of the Canada-EU Green Alliance and Digital Partnership, advanced the bilateral relationship significantly. He also highlighted continued coordination on the imposition and enforcement of sanctions on Russia and mentioned a bilateral meeting on the topic that was scheduled to take place later in the week.

Mr. Reckseidler then informed the delegation that the European Council was meeting the next day for the last time before the European Parliament elections in June, and that he expected there would be extensive discussions on military support for Ukraine and the use of frozen Russian assets to fund Ukraine's reconstruction. With Charles Michel unable to serve a third term as President of the European Council, Mr. Reckseidler added that there was speculation that former Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa could be Michel's successor.

Regarding the likely outcome of the European Parliament elections, Mr. Reckseidler said that he expected the centre-right European People's Party would remain the biggest group in the Parliament, but that far-right parties were likely to make significant gains. The consequence of those gains, he said, could be reflected in changes to EU migration and asylum policy and less ambitious environmental and climate change policy.

Mr. Reckseidler concluded by discussing the French Senate's vote, in March, against the ratification of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement (CETA). He explained that the National Assembly, which approved the agreement in 2019, would now have to vote on it again, but that that was not expected until late 2024 at the earliest. If France were to ultimately notify the European Council that it will not ratify the agreement, he said, there could be significant issues with respect to CETA's ongoing provisional application. He added, however, that such a notification was very unlikely.

3. Meeting with Bulgaria's delegation to PACE

Later in the morning of 16 April 2024, the Canadian delegation met with two members of the Bulgarian delegation to PACE: the Chairperson of the delegation, George Georgiev, M.P., and Vice-Chairperson, Nadejda Iordanova, M.P.

Mr. Georgiev, formerly Bulgaria's deputy foreign affairs minister, told the delegation that Bulgaria has been going through a particularly volatile political period, with the country heading towards a sixth general election since April 2021. He said the main reason for

this was a difficulty in forming coalitions, much like in Israel, but that this largely had to do with domestic political issues.

Mr. Sorbara asked Mr. Georgiev and Ms. Iordanova about the Bulgarian people's views on NATO, the EU, and support for Ukraine. The Bulgarian parliamentarians said that there is significant majority support for Bulgaria's ongoing transatlantic integration, including its membership in the EU and NATO. They also highlighted Bulgaria's military aid packages to Ukraine.

Senator Wells then asked Mr. Georgiev and Ms. Iordanova about Bulgaria's energy security. In response, they highlighted Gazprom's decision to cut off Russian gas exports to Bulgaria, in April 2022, and Bulgaria's quick move to secure alternative supply sources from the (United States) U.S. and Azerbaijan. They also noted Bulgaria's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian nuclear fuel imports and an agreement signed with Westinghouse, an American company, to provide nuclear fuel for the country's Kozloduy nuclear power plant, which provides one-third of the country's electricity generation.

Mr. Sorbara then asked about the details of Bulgaria's Schengen area membership. Mr. Georgiev explained that Bulgaria had just joined the Schengen area in March, but that only air and sea border controls had been lifted for the time being. He said it was unfair that Croatia had their land border controls lifted before Bulgaria, and that Austria and the Netherlands have been the primary obstacles to full Bulgarian participation in the Schengen area.

The meeting concluded with a discussion about Canada-Bulgaria relations. Mr. Georgiev noted that he was the first Bulgarian minister to visit Canada after Canada lifted visa requirements for Bulgarian citizens in 2017. He said that many Bulgarians come to Canada to study – mainly in Toronto and Vancouver – and he asked that the delegation send his regards to Senator Yonah Martin, Chair of the Canada-Bulgaria Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group.

4. Meeting with Chairperson of the Polish delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation then met with Agnieszka Pomaska, M.P. Ms. Pomaska began the meeting by explaining that she is a member of the governing Civic Coalition. She then mentioned that she had travelled to Vancouver the previous July for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly. Mr. Sorbara observed that Canada-Poland relations have never been stronger and noted Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to Warsaw in February – where he met with Prime Minister Donald Tusk – and Polish President Andrzej Duda's upcoming visit to Canada later in the week.

Senator Wells asked about the impact of the 2023 Polish parliamentary elections, which resulted in Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) losing power after eight years. Ms. Pomaska replied that it is taking time to reverse PiS changes – such as those made to Poland's judiciary – that resulted in EU funds being withheld from Poland. However, she noted that the previous day the European Commission had unblocked €6.3 billion in funds in recognition of two milestones the new Polish government had reached. She then said Poland's May 2025 presidential election would be very important for the new government's legislative agenda because President Duda was using his veto to block their legislation.

Senator Wells then asked about the reasons for the recent Polish farmer protests. Ms. Pomaska said that the farmers were protesting both EU environmental regulations and cheap Ukrainian imports. Finally, Senator Boniface asked how Ukrainian children have adapted to living in Poland. Ms. Pomaska said that most have adapted quickly because of the cultural and linguistic similarities and that, overall, there are still approximately one million Ukrainians in Poland.

5. Virtual meeting with Bernard Sabella, Member of the Palestinian delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation had intended to meet with both the Palestinian and Israeli delegations to PACE while in Strasbourg. In the wake of Iran's 13 April drone and missile attack on Israel, however, many airlines suspended flights from Tel Aviv. As a result, neither delegation was able to send members to the April PACE session.

While the Israeli delegation was unable to meet virtually with the Canadian delegation during the session, the Canadian delegation conducted a video call with Bernard Sabella, a member of the Palestinian delegation to PACE. Senator Wells began the meeting by asking Mr. Sabella for an assessment of the situation on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank.

Mr. Sabella said that he was very pessimistic, and that the Israeli government had no vision for after the war. He highlighted a World Bank's Gaza Strip Interim Damage Assessment, which estimated that 62% of all homes in Gaza had been damaged or destroyed and said that people do not understand the direness of the humanitarian situation. He told the Canadian delegation that there is currently no light at the end of the tunnel and that a two-state solution is the only path forward. He added that the Government of Canada could play a role in advancing that goal by, for instance, recognizing the State of Palestine.

With respect to Hamas' 7 October 2023 terrorist attack on Israel, Mr. Sabella said that the Palestinian Authority has consistently called for the release of Israeli hostages and for a permanent ceasefire. When the war ends, he said, the Palestinian Authority should be empowered to govern the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Sorbara noted that he has five mosques in his riding and that there is a tremendous amount of sympathy among his constituents for the Palestinians and distress about the impact on children of the Israel-Hamas war. He also condemned the settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank and expressed his support for the Canadian government's decision to renew its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Mr. Bergeron then asked if Mr. Sabella has become more pessimistic in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks, and Senator Tannas asked him whether he envisioned Hamas existing in a two-state solution.

Mr. Sabella replied that the displacement of nearly two million Palestinians in Gaza has evoked the "Nakba" – the massive displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War – and that Palestinians have been treated as non-humans. Hamas, he said, will not be eliminated, and he argued that the most optimistic future scenario would be one in which Hamas renounces violence like the Palestinian Liberation Organization did in the Oslo Accords.

6. Meeting with the French delegation to PACE

Following the meeting with Mr. Sabella, three members of the Canadian delegation – Mr. Sorbara, Mr. Bergeron, and Senator Boniface – met with five members of the French delegation to PACE: Bertrand Bouyx, M.P., the Chairperson of the French delegation to PACE; Senator Alain Milon, First Vice-Chairperson; Senator Claude Kern, Vice-Chairperson; Senator Didier Marie; and Senator Christophe Chaillou.

The only subject of discussion in the meeting was the vote in the French Senate, in March 2024, to reject CETA. Except for Mr. Bouyx, a Member of the French National Assembly, who supports the Agreement, and Senator Kern, who was unable to participate in the vote, Senators Marie, Milon, and Chaillou were all opposed to CETA and voted against it.

Senator Marie took the lead in explaining their opposition. He said that the vote was not against Canada, but against an economic model that no longer respects French values – particularly with respect to climate change and fossil fuels. As one concrete example, he suggested that CETA's provisions for tariff-free automobile trade do not take into account the rapid global shift towards electric vehicles, and most importantly the EU's contested plan to ban the sale of internal combustion engine cars by 2035.

Senator Marie also reiterated longstanding concerns in France, and Europe more broadly, about the use of hormonal growth promoters by Canadian beef and pork farmers and agriculture imports from large-scale Canadian industrial farms. Mr. Bouyx, for his part, noted that he had voted for CETA in the National Assembly in 2019. He said the Communist group in the Senate only forced a CETA vote when they did because they knew it would fail at that particular moment.

Mr. Bergeron described the vote in the French Senate as painful and incomprehensible for Quebecers and Canadians. Contrary to Senator Marie's assertion that the vote was not against Canada, he said Canadians saw it as a rebuff. He also suggested that Senator Marie misunderstood Canadian agriculture and invited him to visit some farms in Quebec. Senator Kern echoed that point and said that in his time in Canada he had never seen anything resembling the industrial farms Senator Marie described. Mr. Bergeron concluded by asking whether France could support a free trade agreement with any country if it could not support one with Canada.

7. Meeting with Norwegian delegation to PACE

Following the meeting with the French delegation, the entire Canadian delegation met with five members of the Norwegian delegation to PACE: Ingjerd Schie Schou, M.P., the Chairperson of the delegation; Lise Christoffersen, Vice-Chairperson. M.P.; Andreas Sjalg Unneland, M.P.; Morten Wold, M.P.; and Lise Selnes, M.P.

The meeting began with a discussion on the PACE vote that was to be held on Kosovo's Council of Europe membership. Ms. Schou began by explaining that their whole delegation intended to vote in favour. While Norway recognized Kosovo as an independent state in 2008, she said they viewed the vote on Council of Europe membership as distinct from the recognition question.

The conversation then turned to the similar challenge Norway and Canada face in transitioning to renewable energy despite being large oil and gas producers. Senator

Wells noted that there has been rising opposition in Canada to the federal government's carbon tax and that Canada only accounts for 1.5% of global emissions. He then asked the Norwegian delegation about Norwegians' support for their country's carbon tax. Mr. Sorbara, for his part, added that there has been very effective opposition in Canada to the Canadian government's price on carbon and that, as a result, few Canadians realize that 80% of Canadian families make more from the rebates they receive (the Canada Carbon Rebate) than they pay.

Ms. Schou said that there is a consensus in Norway with respect to the country's carbon tax and green shift. Mr. Wold agreed that that is largely the case but emphasized that his political party – the Progress Party – does not agree with all elements of the country's green shift. He said that the person who turns off the last oil platform has not been born yet.

Ms. Schou then raised the criticism that has been levelled at Norway's oil and gas industry for profiteering from the war in Ukraine. She said that this criticism was unjustified and pointed out that Norway's Sovereign Wealth Fund has been providing substantial financial assistance to Ukraine.

Finally, Senator Boniface noted that she had traveled to Norway the previous fall with the Standing Senate Foreign Affairs and International Trade committee, and Mr. Sorbara added that CAEU is considering a bilateral visit to Norway in the fall of 2024.

8. Meeting with the Finnish delegation to PACE

Three members of the Canadian delegation – Senator Wells, Senator Boniface, and Senator Tannas – then met with five members of the Finnish delegation to PACE. They were: Chairperson Kimmo Kiljunen, M.P.; Tuula Haatainen, M.P.; Anna-Kristiina Mikkonen, M.P.; Jarno Limnell, M.P.; and Minna Reijonen, M.P.

Senator Wells began by congratulating the Finnish delegation on Finland's accession to NATO the previous April. Mr. Kiljunen replied by thanking Canada for being the first country to ratify Finland's NATO Accession Protocols, and the conversation quickly turned to the threat Russia currently poses to Finland. Mr. Limnell – a former officer in the Finnish Defence Forces and a professor of cybersecurity – said there is no imminent direct threat from Russia. However, he said that Russia is already engaged in hybrid activities and specifically mentioned Russian efforts to instrumentalize migrants and push them towards the Finnish border. He added that Finland's decision, earlier in the month, to completely close its land border crossings with Russia would have been unthinkable years ago. For his part, Mr. Kiljunen said that Finland wants, as it always has, pragmatic relations with Russia, but that Russia – through its actions – has made that more difficult. The meeting concluded with a short discussion about the U.S. presidential election.

9. Meeting with the Assembly of Kosovo's delegation to PACE

While the other three members of the Canadian delegation were meeting with the Finnish delegation to PACE, Mr. Sorbara, Mr. Bergeron, and Senator Francis met with three members of the Assembly of Kosovo's delegation to PACE – Chairperson Saranda Bogujevci, M.P.; Arben Gashi, M.P.; and Enis Kervan, M.P. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the vote, later in the day in the Parliamentary Assembly, on whether to recommend Kosovo become a member of the Council of Europe.

The members of the Assembly of Kosovo's delegation to PACE explained that that they were confident that they had enough votes in the Parliamentary Assembly. However, they were less confident about the next stage of the process: the final membership decision that must be taken by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers – that is, the organization's executive body, which consists of member states' foreign ministers.

10 . Meeting with Gennady Gudkov, Member of the Russian Anti-War Committee

On the morning of 18 April, the Canadian delegation met with Gennady Gudkov, a member of the Russian Anti-War Committee, The Anti-War Committee was formed in the wake of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, and includes Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Garry Kasparov, and other prominent members of the Russian opposition movement.

Mr. Gudkov began the meeting by explaining that he was a member of the Russian State Duma from 2001 to 2011 and served as deputy chair of the Duma committee on security. Prior to his political career, he was an officer in the KGB – the Soviet Union's foreign and domestic intelligence agency.

Mr. Gudkov told the delegation that he was one of the main organizers of opposition rallies in Moscow in 2015 and that after he and his son were arrested in 2019, both were subsequently released and given 10 days to leave the country. In February 2024, he said, he was designated a terrorist by the Russian government, and it is now a crime for Russians to communicate with him.

Mr. Gudkov thanked Canada for its tough and principled position on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. He said Vladimir Putin's hold on power is now dependent on the war and that Ukraine's victory, for that reason, is essential to bring about a leadership change in Russia. With Russia spending \$120 billion annually on the war, however – an amount that Ukraine cannot come close to matching, even with assistance from the U.S. and other countries – he argued that a complete Ukrainian victory is unrealistic. He suggested the most realistic positive outcome would be a return to the borders before Russian's February 2022 full-scale invasion.

Mr. Gudkov then spoke about the unintended consequences of Western sanctions against Russian elites and the decision by some countries to deny visas to Russian citizens. Certain sanctioned members of the Russian elite who are opposed to Putin, Mr. Gudkov said, now have no option but to fall in line. He said he understood why the Ukrainians and the Ukrainian diaspora advocated for the most punishing sanctions possible, but that sanctions can sometimes be counterproductive. At the same time, he added, hundreds of thousands of ordinary Russians who left the country after the war have returned – because of some countries' visa restrictions – and many are now being conscripted. He urged governments, such as Canada's, to consult the Russian Anti-War Committee and to facilitate the Committee's communication with the Ukrainians.

In response to questions from the Canadian delegation about Russians' views on Putin and the war, Mr. Gudkov said that the Putin regime's propaganda machine is extremely effective, but that Putin's support is likely in the 25% range. He estimated that 35% of Russians are opposed to him, but that the rest – a plurality – are neutral. He also said

that younger Russians are more likely to oppose Putin than older Russians and that opinions on the war have split up families and even led to politically motivated divorces.

He concluded by emphasising that Putin – not all Russians – should be seen as the enemy.

11. Meeting with the Italian delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation then met with the seven members of the Italian delegation to PACE – Chairperson Elisabetta Gardini, M.P.; Senator Ettore Antonio Licheri; Maria Cristina Caretta, M.P.; Catia Polidori, M.P.; Graziano Pizzimenti, M.P.; Lucrezia Mantovani, M.P.; and Valentina Grippo, M.P.

Mr. Sorbara began the meeting by asking the Italian delegation why Italy has yet to ratify CETA. He highlighted the significant increase in Italian exports to Canada since the Agreement's provisional application and Italy's large trade surplus with Canada.

Ms. Gardini noted that hearings had been taking place on CETA in the foreign affairs committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and that there seemed to be support for the Agreement. At the same time, she highlighted the opposition of Italian farmers – in particular to imports of Canadian wheat treated with the herbicide glyphosate – as one significant obstacle.

Mr. Sorbara then asked the Italian delegation about Italy's natural gas imports from Russia. Ms. Gardini noted that Italy has significantly reduced its imports of Russian natural gas since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine while making large investments in renewable energy. Though the Italian government is also looking at nuclear power options, Ms. Gardini said Italians have historically been opposed to it and voted against nuclear power in two poorly timed referendums – in 1987 and 2011 – following the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters.

Senator Wells then asked the Italian delegation about the latest developments in Italy's response to migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Ms. Gardini said that Prime Minister Georgia Meloni's government has tried to address the root causes of irregular migration and has been negotiating directly with African governments. She said the centrepiece of the Meloni government's response has been the Mattei Plan: a multi-year, multibillion-euro Africa initiative that focuses on education and training, agriculture, health, energy, and water in certain African countries. She added that the Meloni government supports the efforts of Europol (the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation) and Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) to tackle smuggling and irregular migration, but that certain EU member states, such as Italy, continue to bear too much of the burden. She described the Italian coastguard's numerous rescue operations in the Mediterranean as heroic. In response, Mr. Sorbara noted that Canada has had its own challenges with irregular migration and mentioned the Government of Canada's recent decision to reimpose visa requirements for Mexican nationals to reduce asylum claims.

Members of the Italian delegation also inquired about the types of support, including tax credits, that the Government of Canada provides to the Canadian film industry, and how the Government of Canada has addressed Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) – a subject debated at the January PACE session, which the Canadian

delegation did not attend. Mr. Sorbara explained that anti-SLAPP legislation in Canada is in force at the provincial level and then briefly explained the role Telefilm Canada plays in supporting the Canadian film industry.

The meeting concluded with a short conversation about the Italian public's views on the war in Ukraine. Ms. Gardini said that there are high levels of support for Ukraine in Italy and that many Ukrainians remain in Italy. However, she added that there has been a shift in public opinion and that increasingly the Italian public wants the war to end as soon as possible.

12. Meeting with the Ukrainian delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation then met with members of the Ukrainian delegation to PACE – including Chairperson Maria Mezentseva, M.P. and M.P.s Larysa Bilozir, Yuriy Kamelchuk, Oleksiy Goncharenko, and Yevheniya Kravchuk.

Ms. Mezentseva began the meeting by discussing the Russian missile attack on the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv, the day before, which had killed over a dozen people. She said the attack was only the latest example of why Ukraine needed additional air defence systems, as soon possible. Collectively, the Ukrainian delegation expressed optimism that the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate would approve a significant military assistance package for Ukraine later in the week. Mr. Goncharenko expressed concern, however, that the actual amount going to Ukraine would be much lower than the topline number, since significant amounts would be used to replenish U.S. weapons and ammunition stocks.

From there, the conversation turned to Canada's military assistance to Ukraine, and Mr. Bergeron highlighted recent Canadian media reports about delays in the delivery of that assistance.

Ms. Mezentseva then spoke of the significance of the PACE resolution, unanimously adopted the previous day, on seizing Russian assets for the reconstruction of Ukraine. Mr. Bergeron noted that Canada had been at the forefront in passing legislation to that effect, and had seized Russian assets in Canada, but has yet to take the next step of using those assets to support Ukraine. Mr. Sorbara then asked the Ukrainian delegation about how the Council of Europe's Register for Damage for Ukraine was working. Ms. Mezentseva said that the Register was up and running, easy to use, and that the Ukrainian government expected billions of dollars in claims. She added, however, that many Ukrainians making claims were already asking when they would receive compensation.

Finally, Mr. Bergeron raised the points made the previous day by Mr. Gudkov about the need for the Ukrainians to collaborate more with the Russian opposition movement. Ms. Kravchuk and other members of the Ukrainian delegation said that they did not see value in collaborating with the Russian opposition because the Russian opposition had no influence within Russia. They emphasized that only a Ukrainian victory could produce a change in Russian leadership.

13. Meeting with Türkiye's delegation to PACE

The Canadian delegation then met with five members of Türkiye's delegation to PACE: Chairperson Yıldırım Tuğrul Türkeş, M.P., and M.P.s Meryem Göka, Mehmet Akalin, Pelin Yılık, and Sevan Sıvacıoğlu.

Mr. Tuğrul began the meeting by noting that Türkiye's ministry of foreign affairs had informed him that no Canadian leader had ever made an official visit to Türkiye and that no Turkish leader had ever made an official visit to Canada. Mr. Sorbara then highlighted the growing bilateral trade relationship and said that he was glad that Canada and Türkiye had resolved their differences over Canada's decision to suspend export permits for military goods and technology to Türkiye. He also noted that there was a bill that had been tabled in the House of Commons to establish a Turkish heritage month in Canada. Mr. Sorbara then asked Mr. Tuğrul about Türkiye's delays in approving Sweden's NATO membership and its role in facilitating a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Mr. Tuğrul explained that a large obstacle to Türkiye's ratification of Sweden's NATO membership had been the sensational burning of a copy of the Koran outside Türkiye's embassy in Stockholm. He said the act exposed cultural differences between the countries regarding the limits of free speech and deeply offended the Turkish people. With respect to Armenia and Azerbaijan, Mr. Tuğrul said that Armenia had been occupying Azerbaijan's land in Karabakh and that despite Azerbaijan having reasserted control over the region, no one was forcing ethnic Armenians to leave.

Senator Wells then asked Mr. Tuğrul about his and his colleagues' views on the situation in Gaza. Mr. Tuğrul stated that there was no doubt that Hamas was entirely responsible for starting the current war, but that it was impossible justify the deaths of over 30,000 civilians in Gaza.

Finally, the two delegations discussed Iran's drone attack on Israel the previous weekend. Mr. Tuğrul noted that Iran had given 72-hours advanced notice before its retaliatory attack and said that he could not understand why the attack's failure was being ridiculed, since that ridicule risked provoking Iran further.

14. Lunch with the United Kingdom's delegation to PACE

On 18 April 2024, three members of the United Kingdom's delegation to PACE – Lord Leslie Griffiths, Lord Richard Keen, and Andrew Percy, M.P. – hosted a lunch for the Canadian delegation in the Council of Europe's Blue Restaurant.

Lord Griffiths began the lunch by complimenting Senator Francis for his intervention in a PACE debate that morning on the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and asked him questions about some of the Indigenous terms and concepts he mentioned in his speech. In individual conversations over lunch, the delegations discussed, among other things, the upcoming United Kingdom (U.K.) general election and U.S. presidential election, minority language rights in Canada and the U.K., and the process of electing judges to the European Court of Human Rights.

Respectfully submitted,

Francesco Sorbara, MP

President, Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Second Part of the 2024 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
DESTINATION	Strasbourg, France
DATES	From April 15 to 19, 2024
DELEGATION	
	Hon. Gwen Boniface
	Hon. Brian Francis
SENATE	Hon. Scott Tannas
	Hon. David Wells
	Stéphane Bergeron
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Francesco Sorbara
	Jessica Kulka
STAFF	Billy Joe Siekierski
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 17,381.82
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 12,652.53
PER DIEMS	\$ 10,155.51
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 464.11
TOTAL	\$ 40,653.97