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## Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

### Minutes

#### Public hearing on “Climate crisis and the rule of law”, held via videoconference, on Monday, 6 July 2020

In the framework of the report currently in preparation on “Climate crisis and the rule of law” with Ms Edite Estrela (Portugal, SOC) as rapporteur, the Committee held a public hearing with the participation of:

- ✓ Mr Paweł Wargan, Council Member and Campaign Co-ordinator, Green New Deal for Europe
- ✓ Mr Robert Vautard, Director, Institut Pierre-Simon Laplace, Université Versailles Saint-Quentin

**Mr Leite Ramos**, the Chairperson, briefly introduced the guest speakers and gave the floor to the rapporteur.

**Ms Estrela** presented her revised introductory memorandum, highlighting the main points for discussion. She notably suggested to replace the title of the report to read “climate crisis and the rule of law”. Given the outlook on an undesirable future caused by climate change, the urgency of the situation had to be recognized without surrendering to a fatalistic attitude. In this respect, it was necessary to analyse the instruments the Council of Europe was already equipped with, while exploring new standards and best practices, such as those suggested by the Green New Deal for Europe. With the support of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, the preparation of a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) could hopefully be launched, instituting the right to a healthy environment.

**Mr Wargan** then took the floor to explain his work for the Green New Deal for Europe: a coalition of civil society organisations, think tanks and researchers around Europe that tried to articulate what a just and sustainable economic transition could look like within the legal and institutional constraints of the EU. He notably expressed concerns regarding the alleged inability of European leaders to address pre-existing fissures within Europe that had exacerbated since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was anticipated that in the next three decades, 200 million climate refugees would arrive to Europe, fleeing unbearable heat, droughts, famine, flood and climate-related conflicts. Referring to the latest models predicting a five degrees Celsius increase in global temperatures by the end of the century, Mr Wargan stressed the urgency of acting against climate change in the six upcoming months, a timeframe suggested by the Chief of the International Energy Agency, within which effects of the climate crisis could still be reverted. In light of these challenges, current programmes such as the European Commission’s Green Deal or the Energy Charter Treaty were considered insufficiently ambitious and an example of “greenwashing”, especially regarding their overly indulgent treatment of private corporations. As a response, European countries should move beyond the gestural politics of climate protests towards more disruptive industrial action, for example by organising a sustained general strike across the continent, in order to force the economy to a halt. It was necessary to move from “reform” to “invention”. Secondly, European leaders should start to build up structures of mutual aid and solidarity, for instance through inclusive assemblies based on a model of popular democracy that become sovereign, giving people meaningful agency over their future.

**Mr Vautard** described his technical experience as a physicist and Coordinating Lead Author of the Sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment report chapter on climate change information for regional impact and for risk assessment. The COP25 held in Madrid in 2019 had entrusted the IPCC with articulating the implications of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees. The IPCC report explained that the planet had already warmed by one degree Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, and that at current rates, the 1.5 degree Celsius mark would be reached by the middle of the century. Evidence of the present effects

<sup>1</sup>The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 22 September 2020, held by videoconference.

of climate change suggested a clear increase in the global sea level, the melting of glaciers and average regional temperatures in France reaching their highest point within the last century. Furthermore, all models indicated that global warming after the middle of the previous century could not be explained by natural patterns of geological and meteorological evolution, bringing certainty to the conclusion that climate change was caused by human activity. Recent improvements in the capacity to measure regional and local effects of climate change had led to predictions that Europe would become a hotspot for climate change. Southern Europe and the Mediterranean would be the most affected areas, notably by floods and lack of precipitation. Strong disparities between the North and the South of the continent would be observed, exacerbating existing fissures and urging for solidarity between Northern and Southern European countries.

**Ms Estrela** thanked the experts for sharing their views which would serve as a basis for her future work on the report.

**The Chairperson** warmly thanked the experts for their contributions and closed the hearing.

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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development  
*Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable*

List of participants/ *Liste des participants*

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