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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

Round Table on “Representative democracy against climate crisis” held via videoconference, on Monday, 18 January 2021

In the framework of the 9th Forum for Democracy, the PACE Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development and the Current Affairs Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities organised a joint round table on the role of deliberative democracy in combating the climate crisis. The event gathered local, regional, and national elected representatives from all over Europe and different political groups. Opening remarks were presented by:

- ✓ Ms Jennifer De Temmerman, Chairperson of the PACE Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development Public Health and Sustainable Development (France)
- ✓ Ms Gunn Marit Helgesen, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Norway)
- ✓ Mr Andreas Nick, Vice-Chairperson of PACE (Germany)

Ms De Temmerman gave an overview of the themes to be discussed. With the climate crisis, society faced unprecedented socio-economic, health and environmental challenges. Failure to ensure environmental justice would lead to conflicts and social upheavals. To ensure the right to a healthy environment and leave no one behind, attitudes and behaviours must change. The situation was critical, and inaction would have disastrous consequences for all. Elected officials at all levels and from across the political spectrum were ready to rise to this challenge and to act consistently in order to tackle the climate crisis. They needed to ensure that public institutions and the private sector functioned properly to address environmental issues effectively and in accordance with the principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Ms Helgesen stressed that measures decided at national and international level to combat climate change could only succeed if local and regional elected representatives made a decisive contribution. It was important to ensure subsidiarity and proportionality of all measures undertaken. Moreover, elected representatives should provide local communities with the information and dialogue.

Mr Nick underlined that, in order to beat the climate crisis, elected representatives must deliver action based on a holistic approach. He called for the creation of a solid legal foundation for the protection of the right to a healthy, clean, safe and sustainable environment for all through an Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. The governments and parliaments of member States should further develop “green” policies and legislation and strengthen liability for actions that harm the environment. A response to the climate crisis should be provided at all governance levels: international, European, national, regional and local.

Session I: Elected to save the planet: the role and responsibility of elected representatives in combating climate change

Moderator: Ms Edite Estrela, PACE Rapporteur on “The climate crisis and the rule of law” (Portugal)

- ✓ Ms Jennifer De Temmerman, Chairperson of the PACE Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development and Rapporteur on “Inaction on climate change – a violation of children’s rights” (France)

¹The minutes were approved and declassified by the Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 9 February 2021, held via videoconference.

- ✓ Ms Gunn Marit Helgesen, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Vice-President of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CRPM), Co-President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), First Vice-President of the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (Norway)
- ✓ Mr George Papandreou, PACE Rapporteur on “More participatory democracy to tackle climate change” (Greece)
- ✓ Mr Magnus Berntsson, President of the Assembly of European Regions, Vice-president of the Regional Council and Regional Minister for the Environment of the Västra Götaland Region (Sweden)

Ms Estrela opened the first session. The worst-case-scenario remained plausible, and the role of elected representatives in tackling the climate crisis was vital. The current decade would be decisive. The crisis should be considered as an opportunity for the Council of Europe to accompany changes in mentalities, as it had done so for more than 70 years, by questioning many forms of behaviours.

Ms De Temmerman acknowledged the responsibility of elected representatives for stopping the continued damage caused to the environment. They should take part in the governmental efforts to combat climate change and contribute to the general awareness. Young people had also become increasingly aware and involved in action against climate change. To mitigate climate change, elected representatives should consider the economic circumstances, the proportionality of proposed measures and the need for a public debate.

Ms Helgesen stated that public dialogue should be held at international and national levels so as to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), share experience on action against climate change and enhance global awareness about the climate crisis.

Mr Papandreou insisted on the fundamental importance of democratic mechanisms and institutions for the effective fight against climate change. He described different mechanisms aimed at involving the public in helping the government in France, Ireland and the United Kingdom. Better information on the climate crisis could help overcome polarisation in society. Fighting against climate change was a continuous process and governments should draw more from the collective wisdom.

Mr Berntsson underlined the role of elected representatives in the implementation of the SDGs such as by countering misinformation and ensuring adequate monitoring of action at different levels of governance.

Ms Hennessey, Head of the Division for Democratic Innovation of the Council of Europe, presented the World Forum for Democracy’s “Deliberative Democracy for Climate” Campaign.

Session II: Turning words into deeds: challenges and opportunities of linking global, regional, national, and local action

Moderator: Mr Vladimir Prebilic, Spokesperson of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities on Climate Change and Environment (Slovenia)

- ✓ Mr Simon Moutquin, PACE Rapporteur on “Anchoring the right to a healthy environment: need for enhanced action by the Council of Europe” (Belgium)
- ✓ Mr José Manuel Fernandes, member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Intergroup “Green New Deal” (Portugal)
- ✓ Ms Belinda Gottardi, member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, CEMR Spokesperson on Climate, Administrator – Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy – Europe (Italy)
- ✓ Mr Mohamed Boudra, President of Local and City Governments United (CGLU), Mayor of Al Hoceima, President of the Moroccan Association of Local Council Presidents (AMPCC), Deputy Head of the Moroccan Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Morocco)
- ✓ Ms Sibel Arslan, PACE General Rapporteur on Local and Regional Authorities (Switzerland)

Mr Prebilič introduced the second session by giving examples of concrete actions that elected representatives could take to tackle climate change. It was essential to link actions of different levels of governance and to coordinate global policies and measures with local action. The sub-national level was key to the successful implementation of global policies and must be involved in their adaptation.

Mr Moutquin stressed the importance of rapidly placing the environmental cause within a legal framework. To this end, his report called for more determined action. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 crisis had slowed down action to combat the climate emergency. The acceleration of global warming could further disrupt biodiversity

and unleash new dangerous viruses. Complex environmental questions called for a broad public debate to identify optimal ways of action.

Mr Fernandes described the work of the European Parliament on the adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework and the recovery plan. Local and regional authorities could and should influence EU decisions. The European Green Deal, which built on the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, provided for 30% of funds allocated to the climate emergency and ensured that no policy decision would be applied to the detriment of the environment. The climate crisis was not a matter of territory but rather a global concern. This required more public-private partnership agreements to leave no one out of the equation. A horizontal approach shared by all political parties should percolate into the programmes and activities of the EU. The parliamentary intergroup sought to build a general consensus between political parties and to develop the sense of ownership for sustainable policies.

Ms Gottardi explained how the Covenant of Mayors was helping local elected representatives manage global environmental challenges, while actively involving citizens. It provided common governance and offered its members a strong and flexible framework for development, co-operation and innovation, funding opportunities and the possibility to bridge different levels of governance including with regard to objectives linked to the Paris agreement. Due to their proximity to citizens and close collaboration with private actors, local elected representatives were on the front line of action to mitigate the local consequences of climate change.

Mr Boudra considered actions against the climate emergency as a vital component of SDGs. Climate change amplified water shortages and adversely affected food sovereignty in African territories. States should cooperate more on economic development and health issues. Morocco had pioneered the development of renewable energies on the African continent by building wind energy farms and establishing the Mediterranean Climate House in Tangier. It had also adopted legislation to prevent construction within 100 metres of the coastline and had taken measures to ensure biological sanitation for eliminating waste.

Ms Arslan referred to the functioning of the Swiss federal state in implementing the Paris Agreement at different levels of governance in Switzerland. To this end, an article in the federal constitution, mentioning the environment, and the new law on curbing CO₂ emissions were important stepping-stones. Switzerland's external assistance to developing countries sought to help better equip poorer countries and give them the means to protect the environment. Many initiatives at the cantonal level, such as the specific commission to deal with climate issues and climate protection established by the canton of Basel-Stadt, assisted action at local level. The PACE played a valuable role in supporting local authorities and women in their action against climate change.

Conclusions

In reply to the debate and questions from the audience on the social networks, **Ms De Temmerman** insisted on the responsibility of elected officials for building climate resilience; they were in the same "boat" as young people and shared the sense of urgency to take the right decisions. The ongoing pandemic should make everyone think about their personal relation with the environment. Ms De Temmerman then thanked all panellists for their participation, as well as staff and interpreters for ensuring a smooth running of the meeting.

Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development
Sous-commission de la santé publique et du développement durable

List of participants / Liste des participant.e.s
(28 seats / 28 sièges) 18.01.2021

Chairperson / *Président* : Mme Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN, FranceVice-Chairperson / *Vice-Présidente* : ZZ ...

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4.	Ms	Ivelina VASSILEVA	Bulgaria / Bulgarie		ZZ...
5.	Ms	Zdravka BUŠIĆ	Croatia / Croatie		ZZ...
6.	Ms	Alena GAJDUŠKOVÁ	Czech Republic / République Tchèque		ZZ...
7.	Ms	Minna REIJONEN	Finland/ Finlande		ZZ...
8.	Mme	Jennifer DE TEMMERMAN	France	Mme	Martine WONNER
9.	Mr	Matern VON MARSCHALL	Germany / Allemagne	Ms	Sybill BENNING
10.	Mr	Sokratis FAMELLOS	Greece / Grèce	Ms	Foteini PIPILI
11.	Mr	Joseph O'REILLY	Ireland / Irlande		ZZ...
12.	Mr	Fabio DI MICCO	Italy / Italie		ZZ...
13.	Mr	Nikola POPOSKI	North Macedonia / Macédoine du Nord		ZZ...
14.	Mr	Andrzej SZEJNA	Poland / Pologne		ZZ...
15.	Mr	Bolesław PIECHA	Poland / Pologne	Mr	Tomasz LATOS
16.	Mme	Edite ESTRELA	Portugal		ZZ...
17.	M.	Cezar Florin PREDA	Romania / Roumanie	Mr	Valeriu Andrei STERIU
18.	Mr	Sergey KALASHNIKOV	Russian Federation / Fédération de Russie		ZZ...
19.	Ms	Carmen LEYTE	Spain / Espagne		ZZ...
20.	Mr	Ola MÖLLER	Sweden / Suède	Ms	Annicka ENGBLOM
21.	Mme	Sibel ARSLAN	Switzerland / Suisse	Mme	Ada MARRA
22.	Mr	Halil ÖZŞAVLI	Turkey / Turquie	Ms	Selin SAYEK BÖKE
23.	Ms	Olena KHOMENKO	Ukraine		ZZ...
24.	Mr	Oleksandr SKICHKO	Ukraine		ZZ...
25.	Mr	Geraint DAVIES	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni		ZZ...
26.					
27.					
28.					

ex officio : Mr Luís LEITE RAMOS (Chairperson, Portugal, *Président, Portugal*)

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 Mr / M. George Papandreou..... Greece / *Grèce*
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