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# **The role of national parliaments in protecting the right to a healthy environment**

## **Parliamentary Conference**

### **Concept note and draft programme**

**14 February 2025**

***Abbaye de Neumünster, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg***

## CONCEPT NOTE

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### 1. GENERAL CONTEXT

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Climate change is the most pressing emergency of our time, arising from a structural lack of sustainable and responsible actions. The Council of Europe acknowledged this during its 4th Summit in Reykjavik (16 May 2023) and highlighted the need for further efforts. Similarly, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) underscored this in its judgment of 9 April 2024, *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland*, stating that there is a political, judicial, and scientific consensus on the impact of climate change on human rights and the urgency of combating its harmful effects. The urgency is clear: it is time to act. The fight for environmental protection is being waged on multiple fronts.

The Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe supports a Council of Europe approach based on respect for human rights in environmental issues. Concurrently, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) is committed to supporting the Council of Europe and national parliaments in building a legal system that protects the right to a healthy environment. In April 2024, PACE adopted Resolution 2545(2024) «*Mainstreaming the Human Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment through the Reykjavik Process*» (Rapporteur: Mr Simon Moutquin, Belgium, SOC). In 2022, the Assembly also established a Network of Parliamentarians for a Healthy Environment, advocating for new governance approaches to environmental issues, engaging with academic and scientific experts, civil society representatives, and other Council of Europe bodies, conducting field visits, and sharing information and best practices.

PACE parliamentarians play a key role in the effective implementation of PACE resolutions promoting the right to a healthy environment, which are primarily directed at member States and their authorities, including national parliaments. By adopting national legislation, ensuring government actions align with international standards, and allocating adequate resources, national parliaments are pivotal in advancing PACE's agenda and improving the protection of human and social rights across the Council of Europe's member States. With their privileged access to national populations, parliamentarians are ideally positioned to promote Council of Europe standards at the national level and can help increase public acceptance of both international and national measures taken in the public interest to protect the environment.

Additionally, PACE has encouraged parliamentarians from all member States to engage in the implementation of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights as well as the findings and decisions of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR). By drawing lessons from other countries' experiences with violations of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the (Revised) European Social Charter (ESC), parliamentarians can address similar challenges in their own countries, particularly regarding environmental issues covered by the ECHR and the ESC.

This is not a one-way process. Since PACE comprises representatives from the national parliaments of the 46 member States, its achievements are ultimately those of the national parliamentarians. Dialogue with national parliaments enables PACE to tailor the implementation of its resolutions to national realities, considering specific needs and capacities. Contributions from national parliamentarians to this event are essential, as they bear significant responsibility: amplifying the impact of PACE decisions by raising awareness of its work within their home countries and contributing to the effective implementation of Council of Europe standards at the national level.

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## 2. OBJECTIVES AND FORMAT

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The overarching goal of this conference is to enhance the capacity of Luxembourgish and Belgian parliamentarians, as well as members of PACE's Network for a Healthy Environment, to monitor and advance the measures outlined in Resolution 2545(2024) «*Mainstreaming the Human Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment through the Reykjavik Process*». It also aims to review best practices addressing challenges faced by Luxembourg and Belgium in integrating the right to a healthy environment.

Specific objectives of the conference are:

- Presenting the Council of Europe's ongoing work on **protecting the right to a safe, clean, and sustainable environment**, focusing on relevant PACE texts and assessing current challenges, actions taken, and possible solutions proposed by national authorities in Luxembourg and Belgium. This theme aims to determine to what extent this right is protected in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and in Belgium, what measures are being taken to improve this protection and what obstacles are being encountered;
- Encouraging reflection on the **impact of climate and environmental litigation**. This topic explores how ECtHR, ECSR, and CJEU rulings influence Luxembourgish and Belgian environmental strategies;
- Highlighting the intersection of human rights, environmental protection, and **social corporate responsibility** by analysing international legal frameworks and national initiatives for sustainable corporate governance;
- Examine the extent of **civil society involvement, especially among youth**, in environmental decision-making processes and showcasing concrete initiatives supported by Luxembourg and Belgium.

This event is organised at the initiative of the Chamber of Deputies of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. Participants include parliamentarians, staff members from the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies and Belgian Federal Parliament, and members of PACE's Network for a Healthy Environment. National and international experts and civil society representatives will actively contribute. The working languages of the conference will be English and French.

## DRAFT PROGRAMME

9h00 – 9h30	<b>Reception of participants</b>
9h30 – 10h00	<p><i>Opening Remarks</i>  <b>Claude WISELER</b>, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Luxembourg  <b>Saskia KLUIT</b>, Chair of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health, and Sustainable Development, PACE</p>
<b>Keynote Speaker</b>	
10h00 – 10h30	<b>Adélaïde CHARLIER</b> , Climate Justice and Social Activist
<b>Session I: Towards Ensuring a Safe, Clean, and Sustainable Environment</b>	
10h30 - 11h30	<p>Facilitator: <b>Lisa BURKE</b></p> <p><i>Recognition of the right to a safe, clean, and sustainable environment (Moutquin Report)</i>  <b>Aurora FLORIDIA</b>, Chair of the PACE Network for a Healthy Environment</p> <p><i>The Council of Europe's role: overview of ongoing work within the Reykjavik process</i>  <b>Ragnhildur ARNLJÓTSDÓTTIR</b>, Ambassador, Permanent Representation of Iceland to the Council of Europe  <b>Charlotte BLONDEL</b>, Vice-President of the Ad hoc Multidisciplinary Group on Environment (GME), Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe</p> <p><i>National legislation and policy review</i>  <b>Paul GALLES</b>, Chair of the Environment Committee, Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies, member of the Luxembourg delegation to the PACE  <b>XX</b>, Representative of the Belgian parliament or the ministry responsible for the environment in Belgium</p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
11h30 – 11h45	<i>Coffee Break</i>
<b>Session II: Impact of climate and environmental case-law</b>	
11h45 – 13h00	<p>Facilitator: <b>Lisa BURKE</b></p> <p><i>Climate jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)</i>  <b>Françoise TULKENS</b>, Former Judge of the European Court of Human Rights elected in respect of Belgium</p> <p><i>Climate jurisprudence of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR)</i>  <b>Olivier DE SCHUTTER</b>, Member of the European Committee of Social Rights, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights</p> <p><i>Towards a legally binding recognition of a human right to a healthy environment</i>  <b>Sumeyra ARSLAN</b>, Representative of the European coalition for the right to a healthy environment</p> <p><i>Impact of European climate and environmental jurisprudence on national law and policies</i>  <b>Hicham RASSAFI-GUIBAL</b>, Lawyer, Doctor of Public Law</p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>

13h00 – 14h00	Lunch Break
<b>Session III: Towards responsible and sustainable businesses</b>	
14h00 – 15h30	<p>Facilitator: <b>Lisa BURKE</b></p> <p><i>International standards and guidelines on human rights and business: the need for harmonisation?</i>  <b>Kathia MARTIN-CHENUT</b>, research director at the CNRS assigned to the Institute of Legal and Philosophical Sciences of the Sorbonne</p> <p><i>Responsible business conduct: from the international to the national level</i>  <b>Başak BAĞLAYAN</b>, Expert on Responsible Business Conduct, Secretary General of the Luxembourg National Contact Point of the OECD International</p> <p><i>Integrating sustainability into business practices in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg</i>  <b>Romain POULLES</b>, Chief Executive Officer of PROgroup (local company)</p> <p><i>Questions and Answers</i></p>
15h30 – 15h45	Coffee Break
<b>Session IV: Engaging youth and civil society</b>	
15h45 – 17h00	<p>Facilitator: <b>Lisa BURKE</b></p> <p><i>Holding States accountable for climate change challenges</i>  <b>Anne MAHRER</b>, Co-President of KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz (on-line)</p> <p><i>Citizen consultation and results in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg</i>  <b>Joëlle WELFRING</b>, Member of the Parliament of Luxembourg, Former Minister for the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development  <b>Marion LORENTZ-GOTTARDI</b>, Representative of Klima-Biergerrot</p> <p><i>Reflections on their participation in COP29</i>  <b>Natasha LEPAGE and Frida THORSTEINSDOTTIR</b>, Luxembourg Climate Youth Delegates</p> <p><i>School initiatives for climate action</i>  <b>Julien LEMMER VELOSO</b>, President of Actionteam4future, Lycée Robert Schuman Luxembourg</p> <p><i>Questions and Answers</i></p>
<b>Closing remarks</b>	
17h00 – 17h30	<p><b>Anne-Sophie ROUX</b>, environmental activist</p> <p><b>Alexandra SCHOOS</b>, member of the Luxembourg delegation to the PACE</p>

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