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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Minutes

of the hearing on “Social mobilisation, social unrest, and police reaction in Council of Europe member States: need for a new social contract?” held in Paris on 7 March 2025

The committee held a hearing as part of the drafting of the report on “Social mobilisation, social unrest, and police reaction in Council of Europe member States: need for a new social contract?” by **Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC)**. The Chairperson gave the floor to the rapporteur to present the context and the speakers.

Mr Fridez reminded that the context of the motion for a resolution could be found in the social mobilisations of 2023, particularly during the pension reform protests. He had made a fact-finding visit to Paris and met *inter alia* with the Defender of Rights, the *Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme*, and the *Ligue des droits humains* on one hand, and with representatives of the strategic and inspection departments of the police and the gendarmerie at the Ministry of the Interior on the other. Through these hearings of young activists, he aimed to give a voice to young people who had been confronted with the police and could testify to the feelings of people exposed to brutal reactions from the police. He introduced the speakers :

- David Dufresne, a journalist, writer, and documentarian specializing in police violence and social movements. He is the author of the documentary *Un pays qui se tient sage* (2020), which questioned the legitimacy of the use of force by the State. He carried out work to take stock of police violence through the *Allô Place Beauvau* project. He has extensive expertise on the rise of tensions between law enforcement and demonstrators, particularly in the context of the Gilets jaunes.
- An activist from the *Action Justice climat* association (Paris), who has been injured by an LBD shot during mobilisations in La Rochelle in 2023 with Extinction Rebellion, which denounced projects deemed harmful to the environment (such as water grabbing or the construction of mega-reservoirs).
- Activists from the *Gett'Up* association, which is committed to issues of equality, citizenship, and social justice, and works for the empowerment of young people from working-class neighbourhoods and their involvement in society.
- Representatives from the *Droits dans les yeux* (Rights in the Eyes) association, run by young people and aimed at young people. Its objective is to enable young people to know and understand their rights by making the law more accessible and understandable.

Mr Dufresne explained that the defence ball launcher (LBD) had been manufactured in Switzerland for a long time. After the numerous injuries and mutilations caused by its use during the Gilets jaunes demonstrations, the Ministry of the Interior had attempted to explain these injuries by incriminating the manufacture of the projectiles rather than the use of the weapon itself. The speaker had identified 25 cases of eye injuries, but the figures for mutilations were much higher if information from hospital services was taken into account. This reaction from the ministry illustrated a recurring trend: when the state was called to account by institutions such as the Council of Europe or the UN, on the rare occasions when it admitted to a mistake, it reduced it to a technical issue, thus avoiding any deeper questioning.

This stance was part of a shift in the doctrine of law enforcement in France. Formerly focused on protection and prevention, this doctrine had been transformed into a rapid and forceful intervention approach. The situation was all the more worrying as France continued to consider itself, and be seen, as the homeland of human rights. Thus, when international organisations denounced police violence in France, other countries took note and might have felt

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at its meeting on 7 April 2025.

justified in adopting similar methods against their opponents. This problem, therefore, went far beyond the national context and raised the issue of crowd management on an international scale.

It was essential to remember that the primary aim of policing was to protect the established order, whatever the political regime: empire, democracy, or dictatorship. In a democracy, it should be possible to debate this doctrine freely, but this debate was non-existent at the time. There was an absolute refusal on the part of the forces of law and order to discuss it. In the 1990s, observers from associations had still been welcomed to discuss these practices with the police. Those days were over: France had regressed in terms of dialogue and transparency on these issues. Furthermore, the police unions had engaged in outright blackmail, as had been the case during the Gilets jaunes protests, threatening to no longer intervene, declaring: "Without us, you are nothing."

The very structure of the police in France had accentuated this problem. Unlike in Switzerland, where it was cantonal, or in Germany, where it was managed by the Länder, the French police was national and directly representative of the State. As a result, during demonstrations, clashes between demonstrators and the police took the form of a direct confrontation with the State itself.

Furthermore, there had been a decline in sociological knowledge in the management of demonstrations. At the time, the main police unions had shifted to the right, even to the far right, and imposed a radical security vision of public space. Even within a centrist left, the street was no longer perceived as a legitimate place of protest, which contributed to the brutalisation of the police force. One of the arguments put forward to justify this brutality was the alleged rise in violence among demonstrators. However, history showed that this assertion was wrong: whether thinking of the Paris Commune, May 68, or the winegrowers' demonstrations in the 1960s, protests had always been intense. At the time, demonstrations were certainly more mobile and more frequent, but they were not more violent.

In addition to having regressed on these issues, France had also isolated itself at the European level. A striking example was its absence from Project Godiac, a cooperation initiative between European police forces that brought together all the police forces on the continent, except France. This isolation illustrated the growing difficulty of engaging in collective reflection on crowd management and policing.

Testimony of the Climate Justice activist:

"I was in La Rochelle during the 2023 mobilisations. As part of the measures put in place that day, we were exposed to tear gas grenades and stun grenades that were fired into the crowd. Our skin burned, and we were coughing. The police paid no attention to the doctors or the press. The measures were excessive: a procession of police officers followed us to control our movements. We were ordered to disperse, but it was impossible, because every alley was blocked by the police armed with lances. That day, as I was at the back of the procession, I was charged and received a head injury. Despite our cries of non-violence, the police continued to fire indiscriminately. We didn't understand what they expected from us, since we couldn't disperse. There was total panic: I saw people climbing over walls or taking refuge under cars. We thought we were going to die."

Testimony of a Gett'Up activist:

"I have been an anti-racist activist for six years, and this is the first time I am heard. I am very honoured to be in the presence of Mr. Dufresne, the author of a documentary that have resonated particularly with my own experience. I come from Mantes-la-Jolie, where in 2018, 156 high school students have been made to kneel, hands on their heads, in the rain in front of their school. This event has left a mark on my life and my commitment. I have been deeply affected by these confrontations, during which the BAC and other forces have committed extraordinary abuses. There is an urgent need to reform the police when we know that, as the Cluster 17 survey of 2022 have attested, 70% of the police force voted for the far-right."

Testimony of a Gett'Up activist:

"My first experience with the police was when I was 15 years old. I was the victim of a gratuitous attack: we were beaten and slapped for no reason. I didn't file a complaint, I didn't know anything about my rights. We were considered pests, enemies. We didn't even know how to report a police officer or how to communicate with them to clarify their expectations in case of misunderstanding."

Testimony of a Gett'Up activist:

"My first experience with the police was in fifth grade. I had an accident that resulted in a fractured skull, caused by a private citizen. However, at the police station, they didn't believe me. This showed that a police officer's word carried much more weight than that of the victim, even with my own family, who thought that I was lying."

Testimony of an activist from the *Droits dans les yeux* association:

"I was in high school in 2018 when the university admissions system, which had become even more discriminatory, came into force. I come from Cergy, and I saw a demonstration in front of my high school that was repressed with the use of LBDs. But the most striking image remains that of the high school students on their knees in Mantes-la-Jolie. This episode shaped us." " In 2023, after Nahel's death, my association was created, because many minors have been arrested without being informed of their rights, even though they risked imprisonment. We organise

workshops and publish articles on social networks to explain the law to young people in the neighbourhoods. While in detention, I provided legal advice to minors."

Ms Chikirou said she was very pleased with this meeting, which allowed activists to testify about the freedom to demonstrate in France and the freedom to be oneself. There had clearly been a drift in police practices. She was part of a party that denounced these abuses. The repression of social demonstrations, which had been multiplying, could be explained by the absence of structural reforms. For example, this evening, 7 March 2025, a feminist demonstration in Paris had been banned by a simple administrative decision of the police prefect, on the pretext of the risk of public order disturbances. Even demonstrations for women's rights had been targeted. The whole system needed to be rethought: it was not right that, on 1st May, a trade union demonstration should be supervised by armed police. The militarisation of the police in a democracy was unacceptable. When France adopted such practices, it had been no surprise that authoritarian regimes, such as those of Erdogan or Putin, had found echoes in their repressive methods.

Mr Fridez wanted the speakers to respond to several other points that concerned him. The right to demonstrate in France had been problematic: if the prefect anticipated violence, preventive arrests had been made. The training of police personnel had been clearly insufficient. In the past, the CRS had been well trained, but at the time, it was often BAC agents or basic police officers who intervened, with excessive recourse to LBDs. De-escalation seemed non-existent, even if the Ministry of the Interior had claimed to practise it. How could they explain that, according to certain protocols, LBDs should only have been fired at an isolated person, when in reality they had been raining down on the crowd?

The Climate Justice activist stated, regarding the use of LBDs shots, that it was inconceivable that in an environmental demonstration, gathering a large crowd of people, someone isolated could be targeted. Even if there had been a strategy to target groups causing disorder, that was not what happened in practice. The processions were very well structured (front, rear, lateral actions), and yet, the police fired into the crowd, sending their projectiles randomly and indiscriminately. In addition to preventive arrests, the police confiscated protective gear (swimming goggles, saline solution) that demonstrators needed during tear gas attacks, as had happened during pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Being found in possession of such materials was interpreted as an intention to attack.

Mr Dufresne clarified that the new crowd control strategy stated that a police officer should fire at an isolated person. But in practice, this never happened. The LBDs, which were supposed to be precision weapons, were in reality weapons of war. According to international weapon catalogs, in Europe, only France (along with Poland) used LBDs as part of crowd control, whether during demonstrations or in the neighborhoods. These weapons, due to their imprecision during movement, were not used properly. In 2023, at Sainte Soline, the use of gendarmes on quads completely contradicted the official rhetoric from the Ministry of the Interior. Putin had even told Macron that in Russia, no one suffered mutilations – because people were prevented from protesting there. Here, preventive arrests were akin to the "Putin method." That evening, even before a feminist demonstration began, demonstrators were arrested. This reminded people of what had happened during the Gilets jaunes protests: crowds crammed into buses, later partially released, under the watch of a judicial system struggling to respect the ideals of the republican police.

It was essential that the Council of Europe listen to the voices of young people from the neighbourhoods – they were not heard in France – because what had been observed since 2017 was being forcefully confirmed. Until then, there had been specialized units (mobile police, riot police), even though the conviction of Rémi Fraisse by the European Court of Human Rights had illustrated their limitations. But now, the required level and training of officers had completely deteriorated. In Paris, for example, a super-prefecture had commanded motorcyclists armed with LBDs, known as *Bravem*, who operated without any control. Among the solutions proposed was adopting the British model of police oversight – an independent body, unlike the current situation in France, where the Ministry of the Interior controlled the apparatus; and strengthening police training: in France, after only three months of training, a police officer could carry a weapon, whereas in Scandinavian countries, training lasted up to three years.

Mr Gevorgyan insisted on avoiding any double standards. The brutality of the Armenian police was not criticized because they are opposed to Putin. The issue was resolutely geopolitical.

Mr Schennach congratulated the young people for their courage, while reminding them of the importance of never acting alone.

The Chairperson added that in her country, the Netherlands, there had been no shootings, even though migrants also suffered a certain brutality there.

A Gett'Up activist concluded that the use of force by the police needed to be better regulated, and its control strengthened. Several associations had proposed integrating citizens into the IGP to reduce bias. Before carrying a weapon, police officers needed to be well-trained. Three months was not enough, and recruitment

criteria had been relaxed every year (now, 6 or 7 out of 20 was enough). Psychological aptitude tests should have been introduced, and the political opinions and worldviews of candidates should have been assessed, to weed out those who were unsuitable. Young people in the neighbourhoods had lived in fear of racial profiling, and there had been an urgent need to create spaces for dialogue between them and the police. Bravem, a symbol of pure violence, had embodied this drift.

The Climate Justice activist emphasized the role of the security ethics body. Although it was an external body, it had only had advisory powers. In her opinion, it should have become the sole police oversight body. Parliamentary oversight had had its limits, as more and more parliamentarians had been on the right, even the far-right. She mentioned having participated in a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Rotterdam – while such demonstrations had been banned in France – where the police, present on foot or by bicycle, had not been visibly armed. A distinction needed to be made between environmental activists, who willingly took their chances, and anti-racist activists. Racism had been above all a societal issue and could not be reduced to police practices alone. The porosity between private and public interests, particularly regarding the protection of the AGMs of companies like Total or the Bolloré group, showed that an entire system had been at stake and needed to be reformed.

In conclusion, **the rapporteur** thanked the speakers for their pertinent remarks and reiterated that the police were supposed to protect people, property, and freedom of expression. He condemned the desire to silence people who protested and emphasized that the resources of the Defender of Rights had been insufficient, and that the system had continued to evolve with virtual impunity, leaving the police with unacceptable means of exerting pressure.

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

(The names of members who took part in the meeting are in bold /
Les noms des membres ayant pris part à la réunion sont en caractères gras)

Chairperson / *Présidente* :

Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / Pays-bas
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Vice-Chairpersons / *Vice-Président-e-s* :

Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / Pologne
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	Armenia / Arménie
Lord Don Touhig	United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

Members / Membres	Country / Pays	Alternates / Remplaçant-e-s
Ms Jorida Tabaku	Albania / Albanie	Zz...
Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / Andorre	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Mr Armen Gevorgyan	Armenia / Arménie	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
Mr Stefan Schennach	Austria / Autriche	Ms Doris Bures
Zz..	Austria / Autriche	Ms Agnes Sirkka Prammer
Mme Anne Lambelin	Belgium / Belgique	Mr Andries Gryffroy
M. Benoît Lutgen	Belgium / Belgique	Mme Véronique Durenne
Ms Darijana Filipović	Bosnia and Herzegovina /	Mr Šemsudin Dedić
Ms Atidzhe Alieva-Veli	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	Zz...
Ms Petya Tsankova	Bulgaria / Bulgarie	Zz...
Ms Zdravka Bušić	Croatia / Croatie	Ms Rada Borić
Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / Chypre	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádllová	Czechia / Tchéquie	Mr Aleš Juchelka
Ms Michaela Šebelová	Czechia / Tchéquie	Mr Ondřej Šimetka
Ms Camilla Fabricius	Denmark / Danemark	Ms Karin Liltorp
Ms Hanah Lahe	Estonia / Estonie	Zz...
Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / Finlande	Ms Miapetra Kumpula-Natri
Mme Sophia Chikirou	France	M. Nicolas Bonnet
M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
Mme Maud Petit	France	M. Jean Laussucq
Zz...	Georgia / Géorgie	Zz...
Ms Heike Engelhardt	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Franziska Kersten
Mr Andrej Hunko	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Catarina Dos Santos-Wintz
Mr Christian Petry	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Martina Stamm-Fibich
Mr Harald Weyel	Germany / Allemagne	Ms Katrin Staffler
Ms Maria Syrengela	Greece / Grèce	Mr Dimitrios Markopoulos

Mr Georgios Stamatis	Greece / Grèce	Mr Alexis Tsipras
Ms Mónika Bartos	Hungary / Hongrie	Mme Katalin Csöbör
Ms Mónika Dunai	Hungary / Hongrie	Ms Zita Gurmai
Zz...	Iceland / Islande	Zz...
Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / Irlande	Ms Róisín Garvey
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / Italie	Mr Roberto Rosso
Ms Aurora Floridia	Italy / Italie	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
Mr Alessandro Giglio Vigna	Italy / Italie	Mr Graziano Pizzimenti
Mr Stefano Maullu	Italy / Italie	Mr Francesco Zaffini
M. Andris Bērziņš	Latvia / Lettonie	Mr Edmunds Cepurītis
Mr Peter Frick	Liechtenstein	Ms Franziska Hoop
Ms Orinta Leiputė	Lithuania / Lituanie	Mr Zigmantas Balcytis
Mme Stéphanie Weydert	Luxembourg	M. Paul Galles
Mr Michael Farrugia	Malta / Malte	Mr Joseph Beppe Fenech Adami
Mr Ion Groza	Republic of Moldova /	Ms Diana Caraman
Mme Christine Pasquier-Ciulla	Monaco	Mme Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo
Mr Miloš Konatar	Montenegro / Monténégro	Mr Boris Mugoša
Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / Pays-Bas	Ms Elly Van Wijk
Ms Carla Moonen	Netherlands / Pays-Bas	Mr Theo Bovens
Mr Bekim Kjoku	North Macedonia / Macédoine	Mr Sadula Duraki
Ms Lisa Marie Ness Klungland	Norway / Norvège	Ms Linda Hofstad Helleland
Ms Danuta Jazłowiecka	Poland / Pologne	Mr Mirosław Adam Orliński
Mr Jan Filip Libicki	Poland / Pologne	Ms Magdalena Biejat
Mr Ryszard Petru	Poland / Pologne	Mr Jan Kanthak
Ms Jamila Madeira	Portugal	Mr Nuno Fazenda
Mr Carlos Silva Santiago	Portugal	Mr Telmo Faria
Ms Alina-Ştefania Gorghiu	Romania / Roumanie	Mr Cristian-Augustin Niculescu-Ţăgârlaş
Ms Diana Stoica	Romania / Roumanie	Zz...
Zz...	Romania / Roumanie	Zz...
Mr Gerardo Giovagnoli	San Marino / Saint-Marin	Ms Alice Mina
Mr Vladimir Đorđević	Serbia / Serbie	Mr Predrag Marsenić
Ms Tatjana Pašić	Serbia / Serbie	Ms Jelena Milošević
Mme Anna Záborská	Slovak Republic / République	Mr Pavol Goga
Mr Dean Premik	Slovenia / Slovénie	Ms Iva Dimic
Ms María Fernández	Spain / Espagne	Mr Alfonso Rodríguez
Mr José Latorre	Spain / Espagne	Ms Marta González Vázquez
Ms Carmen Leyte	Spain / Espagne	Ms Luz Martinez Seijo
Ms Sofia Amloh	Sweden / Suède	Mr Denis Begic
Ms Victoria Tiblom	Sweden / Suède	Ms Boriana Åberg
Mme Céline Amaudruz	Switzerland / Suisse	Mme Valérie Piller Carrard
Ms Sibel Arslan	Switzerland / Suisse	M. Pierre-Alain Fridez
Ms Gökçe Gökçen	Türkiye	Mr Namık Tan
Mr Berdan Öztürk	Türkiye	Ms Ayşegül Doğan
Mr Sevan Sivacioğlu	Türkiye	Ms Sena Nur Çelik Kanat
Mr Cemalettin Kani Torun	Türkiye	Mr Mustafa Kaya

Ms Olena Khomenko	Ukraine	Ms Larysa Bilozir
Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova	Ukraine	Mr Andrii Lopushanskyi
Ms Lesia Zaburanna	Ukraine	Mr Rostyslav Tistyk
Ms Alicia Kearns	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Dan Aldridge
Ms Kate Osamor	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Perran Moon
Ms Elaine Stewart	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Mr Mike Reader
Lord Don Touhig	United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Ms Michelle Welsh

Partners for Democracy / Partenaires pour la Démocratie

Mr / M. Allal Amraoui, Morocco / Maroc

Mr / M. Hassan Arif, Morocco / Maroc

**Representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Community (*) /
Représentants de la communauté chypriote turque (*)**

Mr/ M. Armağan Candan

Mr / M. Oğuzhan Hasipoğlu

(*) In accordance with Resolution 1376 (2004) / Conformément à la Résolution 1376 (2004)

Other parliamentarians present / Autres parlementaires présents

Mr / M. Besnik Tahiri, Kosovo*

*All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo / Toute référence au Kosovo, que ce soit le territoire, les institutions ou la population, doit se comprendre en pleine conformité avec la Résolution 1244 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies et sans préjuger du statut du Kosovo

Other persons present / Autres personnes présentes

Mr / M. Antoine Renard, Honorary President of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) / Président d'honneur de la Fédération des associations familiales catholiques d'Europe (FAFCE)

Ms / Mme Irène Colonna d'Istria, Director of just transition programmes at Makesense / Directrice des programmes, Transition juste de Makesense

Secretariat of Delegation or of Political Group / Secrétariat de Délégation ou de Groupe politique

Ms / Mme Carmen Ionescu, Romania / Roumanie

Mr / M. Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

Ms / Mme Francesca Arbogast, SOC Group / Groupe SOC

Experts / Expert·e·s

Ms / Mme Raluca Verweijen-Slamnescu, Independent Consultant, Solid Change Slamnescu KG / *Consultante indépendante, Solid Change Slamnescu KG*

Mr / M. David Dufresne, writer and journalist / *écrivain et journaliste*

Ms / Mme Léa Zaïdat, an activist of the French association *Action Justice Climat Paris* / *une militante de l'association française Action Justice Climat Paris*

Mr / M. Sacha Halgand, Mr / M. Rayan Joseph, Mr / M. Zacharia Soumaré and Mr / M. Alexandre Decroix, young representatives of the French association *Ghett'up* / *jeunes représentants de l'association française Ghett'up*

Ms / Mme Salomé Zerbouhi and Ms / Mme Inès Aribi, young representatives of the French association *Droit dans les yeux* / *jeunes représentantes de l'association française Droit dans les yeux*

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly / Secrétariat de l'Assemblée parlementaire

Ms / Mme Despina Chatzivassiliou, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly / *Secrétaire générale de l'Assemblée parlementaire*

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

Ms / Mme Catherine Du BernardHead of the Secretariat / *Cheffe du Secrétariat*
Ms / Mme Aiste Ramanauskaite Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*
Ms / Mme Jannick Devaux Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*
Ms / Mme Claire Dubois-Hamdi Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*
Ms / Mme Xenia BirioukovaAssistant / *Assistante*
Ms / Mme Özgü Tan.....Assistant / *Assistante*