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Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Parliamentary Network for a Healthy Environment

Minutes

of the joint meeting held in Strasbourg on 1 October 2026, from 2.00 pm to 3.30 pm

1. Agenda

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Draft minutes

The minutes of the meeting held by the Parliamentary Network for a Healthy Environment in Strasbourg on 25 June 2026 were approved and declassified.

3. Public hearing with the participation of Dr Michael O'Flaherty, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms Aurora Floridia, Chairperson of the Network, thanked the Commissioner for his contribution to the morning's debate. She echoed his call to listen to the planet, recalling her ski instructor who taught young people to listen to the snow and breathe with it.

Dr Michael O'Flaherty welcomed the Assembly's adoption of the resolution and recommendations aimed at accelerating climate action with young people. He explained that his presence stemmed from his desire to defend the environment and his conviction that the planet is a fundamental human rights issue. We cannot enjoy our rights or flourish without a planet that is itself thriving. Damage to the planet profoundly affects almost every aspect of human well-being, which is why he has strived, and will continue to strive, to integrate environmental issues into absolutely everything he undertakes.

With regard specifically to the environment, the Commissioner is calling for the adoption of a legally binding instrument and will return to this point later. Furthermore, in his work focusing on individual countries, he actively promotes the implementation of the *KlimaSeniorinnen* judgement. It is essential that member States understand that this judgement has established obligations that extend beyond Switzerland and has laid down fundamental legal principles applicable everywhere.

One of his environmental priorities concerns a particular country: Ukraine, where we are already witnessing the disastrous environmental destruction caused by the Russian aggression, as well as the resulting extremely

[1] The minutes were approved and declassified by written procedure on 27 October 2026.

severe damage. This damage calls for a judicial response, and he will make his voice heard on this point whenever possible. In his work on Ukraine, the Commissioner is also committed to promoting models for future reconstruction that pay very close attention to environmental issues. Here too, it is only on this condition that reconstruction will be in line with human rights and contribute to human well-being.

Another of his priorities is the regulation of artificial intelligence. Here too, the links with the environment are clear. To begin with a positive aspect, it is clear that if we succeed in harnessing the immense capabilities of artificial intelligence, it will help us save the planet. There is no doubt about that. It can be a beneficial tool provided we know how to control it, regulate it and direct it towards positive outcomes.

But the other aspect – one that is a major concern today and must be addressed – is the direct damage caused to the environment by this technology and by the physical infrastructure it requires. This, of course, refers to data centres, the extraordinary amount of water they consume, and all the associated damage. Scientists say that it is possible to remedy these problems and that priorities must be set correctly so that the necessary attention can be devoted to resolving them.

Another priority of particular importance to the Commissioner since he took office is the defence of the human rights of Roma communities, in all their diversity, across Europe. He has observed that the combined effects of marginalisation, hatred, a lack of adequate housing and all the other difficulties so common in Roma communities are considerably exacerbated by environmental destruction. This morning, in the Chamber, he cited the example of Roma communities forced to settle on landfill sites, which are sometimes extremely polluted and filled with toxic substances. This has a significant impact on their well-being, particularly that of children. This interplay of factors must absolutely be taken into account.

He also highlighted some very good practices. In Skopje, North Macedonia, he observed how cooperation with the local council had led to recognition of the important role played by the Roma community in the collection and sale of scrap metal. Thanks to an agreement with the city, this activity was no longer considered an offence, but rather a positive contribution to urban cleanliness. This was an interesting example.

Another group to which the Commissioner is paying close attention, with a view to a report next year, is that of elderly people living in care homes. He has already visited care homes in three countries and, by the end of the year, will have visited them in five countries. Everywhere, he is observing problems related to the climate. During summers such as the last one, some buildings have neither air conditioning nor even fans. On the upper floors of these buildings, which are often poorly constructed, people have to try to survive in temperatures of forty degrees. Many, of course, do not survive. There are other aspects to this problem, but these alone are already extremely serious. It is imperative that we invest in the wellbeing of older people.

As regards human rights defenders, their protection constitutes a very important part of his work. From the outset, in close cooperation with Michel Forst, the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention, he has regarded environmental defenders as human rights defenders and given them his full attention. It is in this context that he regularly calls on States to respect the right to peaceful protest. This demand has been the driving force behind several of his interventions, both with governments and parliaments.

On the question of how he links gender issues with the defence of human rights in the context of environmental degradation, the Commissioner explained that he seeks to integrate the gender dimension into all his work. Firstly, in a very positive sense: his experience shows that, in a large part of his activities, it is women who are the driving force behind change. In this context, it must simply be recognised that mobilising women probably puts us in a better starting position than mobilising men. This is particularly true within Roma communities.

Turning to the representatives of *KlimaSeniorinnen*, the Commissioner paid tribute to these remarkable Swiss women who have achieved what men had failed to do for decades. There is no doubt that, in many cases, the consequences of environmental degradation affect women far more severely than men. A few figures illustrate this: according to UN Women, every 1% rise in temperature is accompanied by a 4.7% increase in violence against women by their intimate partners. In other words, a 1% rise in temperature corresponds to an increase of nearly 5 per cent in violence against women. It is also widely established that heat-related mortality is significantly higher among women than among men, and is estimated to be 56% higher. This is due to biological

factors, but also to the fact that many women live in unacceptable housing conditions, where it is impossible to regulate the temperature.

The Commissioner went on to comment on a possible future treaty. He began by pointing out that, although no decision has yet been taken in this regard, it is important to know, from the outset, what requirements should be set out.

Any treaty or convention must be legally binding. We cannot be content with mere recommendations or a non-binding instrument.

This instrument must be capable of responding to future developments. It cannot be based solely on the definitions or knowledge available to us today. It must, in one way or another, be able to take into account as yet unknown futures and remain as relevant to them as it is to the present.

In line with the rest of his remarks, the Commissioner is of the view that any future treaty must recognise that the consequences differ from person to person, incorporate a gender perspective and explicitly provide for the systematic consideration of women's experiences. It must also take age into account in order to grasp the lived reality of the consequences for children and older people, for example. It must include an obligation to involve civil society in efforts to resolve problems. He suggests that an age-related dimension should also be incorporated, to ensure that young activists are not excluded.

In his view, the instrument should explicitly provide for the protection of human rights defenders working on environmental issues, as well as an express reaffirmation of the right to peaceful protest.

Compensation for harm must be considered in all circumstances. Compensation is not limited to financial compensation; it may also take the form of symbolic recognition, collective apologies and many other measures. Numerous lessons from the field of transitional justice can be applied to the climate crisis.

Furthermore, any treaty of this nature must include an obligation to raise public awareness and provide education on the issues surrounding the climate crisis. Disrupting a healthy debate through lies is shameful, and we see this happening frequently in the public sphere.

The Commissioner emphasised that one of the areas in which the Council of Europe excels is: the designing of robust and effective monitoring mechanisms for the treaties it drafts. This is an advantage over UN mechanisms. It will therefore be essential for any future treaty to have such a mechanism in place to ensure rigorous monitoring, as provided for in the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

We should also learn some lessons from recent experiences, notably the negotiation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, and consider whether it is useful to allow a large group of states to act as a bloc, at the risk of depriving the negotiations of a wide range of viewpoints and making ratification more difficult and time-consuming.

Finally, the Commissioner emphasised that drafting a treaty is a massive undertaking, and that this is only the beginning of the work. The next steps involve securing signatures and ratifications, bringing the treaty into force, and monitoring its implementation with the utmost vigilance. The drafting of the Statute of the International Criminal Court offers, once again, a useful lesson. Civil society realised that its work had only really begun on the day the Court was established. The functioning of this institution involved so many obstacles and risks of failure – and it still does – that these had to be identified and prevented.

Ms Saskia Kluit said she is still surprised to find that this is the greatest challenge we face in the field of human rights, but because it is so pervasive, it is very difficult to tackle it in practical terms. However, in recent years, the Commissioner has taken very clear stances on the direction to be taken, as well as on the silencing or obstruction imposed on both environmental human rights defenders and those who take to the streets to demonstrate peacefully, in ways that can sometimes be disruptive.

She asked the Commissioner whether, when he discussed the right to a clean and healthy environment and the importance of making progress with countries, he also raised this issue directly with the ambassadors or ministers he met. In her country, which was previously very reluctant to move towards a treaty, the situation may have changed and new opportunities may be opening up. It would therefore be helpful if more voices were to express this need.

The Commissioner confirmed that he regularly raised environmental human rights issues with governments. Indeed, these have been the main focus of several of his visits and would continue to be so where relevant. During his visits, he held discussions with governments at ministerial level and also raised these issues with ambassadors in Strasbourg. In principle, these exchanges take place three times a year within the formal framework of the meetings of the Ministers' Delegates. Environmental issues would feature increasingly prominently in his contributions to this body.

The Commissioner will therefore continue to seek opportunities for dialogue with governments in order to encourage them to make progress on all these issues: not only the possible drafting of a legal instrument, but also the implementation of the Court's judgments and all the other aspects mentioned in his address.

The Chairperson thanked the Commissioner for his ambitious and practical advice and emphasised the importance of working together and moving forward together, each in their own role. Having practical guidance is a huge help, as is the sense that the Commissioner supported the approach advocated by the Assembly and now endorsed by many member States, whilst encouraging reflection amongst those who are more hesitant or reserved at this stage. It is high time to act. She agreed with the Commissioner when he insisted that particular attention be paid to vulnerable groups, notably older people and human rights defenders.

4. Public hearing with representatives from *KlimaSeniorinnen* and Greenpeace International

The Chairperson continued the meeting by hearing from representatives of *KlimaSeniorinnen* and Greenpeace. She pointed out that the ruling they had secured constituted a historic decision for the climate and human rights in Europe. It also raised a practical question: what happens once the Court has handed down its ruling? What can parliamentarians and governments do? As the Commissioner pointed out, this ruling does not concern Switzerland alone, but all Member States.

To explore what this might mean in practice, she welcomes Ms Elisabeth Stern, co-chair of the *KlimaSeniorinnen* association; Ms Pia Hollenstein, a member of the association; Ms Louise Fournier, from Greenpeace International; and Mr Simon Moutquin, from Greenpeace Switzerland.

Ms Pia Hollenstein explained that this meeting is important to them and that this is the first time they have taken part in such an exercise. As a former member of a national parliament, she feels this is a form of recognition.

She began by providing some details on the case brought before the Court. She pointed out that their appeal had been rejected at every level of jurisdiction to which they had appealed in Switzerland. However, on 9 April 2024, they finally won their case before the European Court of Human Rights. This was a significant victory. The question now was what the consequences would be for them – in their personal lives, in their work and on a global scale.

She looked back on their own journey, which began with the Urgenda climate case in the Netherlands, in which the applicants won their case against the Dutch government, which was forced to take action. Following this case, Greenpeace Switzerland and Greenpeace International considered what the implications might be for Switzerland and what action could be taken there.

On a personal level, Ms Hollenstein explained that she had often felt frustrated in her parliamentary work because the proposals she championed simply failed to secure a majority. In Switzerland, it can be difficult to make progress on these issues. When she was asked to join the founding committee of their association, she saw it as an opportunity to tackle some of these problems. She had now been a member for ten years.

In 2016, the association's members began to expand their activities, building on the Greenpeace initiative. Without this organisation, they would not have succeeded: Greenpeace provided them with considerable linguistic and financial support, in particular.

Outside the parliamentary framework, they see themselves as part of the climate movement. They are not a political party, but maintain links, within a network, with a whole range of non-governmental organisations.

The collective is made up of women who have all reached retirement age. As women over the age of 64 statistically have a higher mortality rate than men, they wanted, from the outset, to focus their campaign on women.

They began by researching how to win a case of this nature. Determined to secure a victory, they formed an all-female collective. Whilst their campaign was also intended to benefit all other affected groups, their initial intention was to act as a group of older women.

Their aim is simple: to secure more ambitious climate targets, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and step up the fight against climate change. They are calling for a reduction of at least 50 per cent in these emissions by 2030.

One of the key questions they wanted the court to rule on was whether climate protection constitutes a human right. In this case, the Court answered in the affirmative. Ms Hollenstein leaves it to legal experts to provide further clarification, but emphasises that this outcome is very important to them. The case has clarified that climate protection falls within the scope of human rights.

To support their argument, they drew on provisions of the Swiss Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Paris Agreement – a whole set of legal foundations that Switzerland had failed to uphold. They were thus able to argue that climate protection constitutes a human right, an argument with which the Court agreed. They hope that this decision will have an impact elsewhere in Europe.

This ruling implies that climate targets must be set, that Switzerland must establish a CO_2 budget based on scientific criteria, and that Switzerland is obliged to pursue a climate policy in line with these requirements. Right-wing forces, both within and outside the government, are far from happy at the prospect of implementing the ruling.

Ms Hollenstein pointed out that Switzerland must now submit a report to the Committee of Ministers every six months, an obligation that also applies to the other parties to the mechanism. In response, the Committee thanked Switzerland for the information provided, whilst emphasising that much more was needed, as many aspects had not been implemented.

The association is organising a European tour. Many people in Europe are unaware of the application they have lodged with the Court. It is therefore very important that everyone has access to this information.

In conclusion, Ms Hollenstein believes she can say that they have succeeded in securing recognition of the need to do more. They have also secured the right for non-governmental organisations to lodge applications. Although this was not their initial objective, it is an additional positive outcome.

The fact that they are a collective of older women has had a considerable impact. She states that they are all determined to see their campaign through to the end. Their objective has not yet been achieved. Every country needs collectives like theirs, and she believes they are on the right track.

Ms Elisabeth Stern emphasised that, whilst listening to Dr O'Flaherty discuss such important topics as human rights defenders and gender issues, she wondered how to frame her own contribution, which focused on a 'small' Swiss collective that had nevertheless had a considerable impact far beyond Switzerland. This impact was based on at least three areas of action.

The first was to inform the public about all these issues, and not just their own case. Whilst this served as a starting point, the main aim was to convey the importance of climate protection. When they met people in different towns and villages, they were struck both by the breadth of knowledge some possessed and by the lack of information among others. These two situations always coexisted.

They had written a book whose title, “When Switzerland Started to Sweat”, had a double meaning: the parliamentarians broke out in a sweat upon learning of the decision, whilst the heat was actually making the population sweat. The association subsequently helped produce a documentary film, “Too Hot”. The film and the book were their two main tools for mobilising people.

The second was the European tour they had embarked upon. They planned to visit several countries; at that stage, around twelve, which represented a considerable challenge for elderly women. In this regard, Ms Stern particularly appreciated that Mr O’Flaherty had presented them as agents of change. They did indeed see themselves in this light, and not merely as vulnerable people who would be better off sitting in a rocking chair.

The third area involved ensuring that no one forgot the ruling. This ruling affirms, on the one hand, that climate protection is a human right and, on the other, that states have a responsibility to protect them from the effects of climate change.

These three areas of activity are guided by the Council of Europe’s three core values: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Ms Stern said that they would continue to be active for some time to come, even though they had reached an age at which, statistically speaking, they might only have four or five years left.

Finally, she wished to say a few words about hope for the younger generations and referred to the morning’s discussion with the young people, which she had found excellent and very moving.

She referred to a definition of hope: hope consists in being able to envisage oneself as capable of acting effectively in the future. For a young person, this means being able to picture themselves in this new world, at a time when they will still be alive, and to see within it a specific place where they can make a difference.

Ms Louise Fournier pointed out that the judgment handed down in April 2024 established an obligation for all member states of the Council of Europe: Article 8 guarantees protection against climate change.
She pointed out that, in paragraph 550 of the judgment, the Court set out explicit mitigation obligations that States must comply with.

The first is to set out a timetable for achieving carbon neutrality, based on a global carbon budget or another quantification method that takes into account equity, capabilities and historical responsibility in the climate crisis.

On this basis, the second step is to establish, without delay, interim pathways to achieve these carbon neutrality targets.

States must also provide evidence demonstrating that they are effectively on track to meet their climate targets or that they have already met them. The Court has specified that they must update these targets in line with the best available scientific knowledge and, more generally, act in a timely and appropriate manner.

This judgment has profoundly altered the understanding of the obligations of Council of Europe member states, as well as those of states worldwide. The International Court of Justice has also referred to this landmark decision. Courts in various countries are using this case to define the obligations not only of states, but also of major polluting companies.

The second question that arose was: what was the KlimaSeniorinnen’s view on the implementation of the judgment? Had the respondent State effectively put in place a climate governance framework that met the obligations defined by the Court? In their view, the answer was no, for three reasons.

The first concerned the carbon budget. The defendant state continued to rely on climate targets that were not based on a national carbon budget corresponding to a fair share of the effort and compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5 °C. The Court had already ruled that this approach was insufficient. However, the state had neither calculated such a budget nor revised its targets on this basis.

The second issue concerned offset mechanisms. The defendant State planned to make extensive use of foreign carbon credits to meet its 2030 targets. Yet, as of May this year, fewer than 64,000 certificates had been transferred, whereas several million were expected. An official from the defendant State acknowledged that the country was not on track to meet its 2030 target.

Finally, it was clear that there had been setbacks in national climate policy.

Ms Fournier emphasised that independent climate advisory bodies can play an important role in helping states to develop their climate policies. The Committee of Ministers has recommended this solution to Switzerland. In Council of Europe member states, such bodies can provide parliaments with the scientific and technical expertise that they often lack. Greenpeace International therefore welcomed this proposal and hoped that Switzerland would take up the idea of a national climate advisory body.

Finally, the speaker emphasised that this was not just about Switzerland, but about the climate obligations of all states represented in the Council of Europe, and suggested four questions for parliamentarians to put to their governments.

1. What is their country's remaining carbon budget, or what equivalent quantification method does it use? How was this budget calculated and on what basis, particularly with regard to intergenerational equity and historical capabilities?
2. Do the interim targets and the policies implemented genuinely demonstrate that the long-term carbon neutrality targets can be achieved?
3. Is there evidence that the country is on the right track? Is there a plan in place if the interim or long-term targets are at risk of not being met?
4. Is the country acting early enough, consistently enough and on the basis of the best available scientific evidence? Where a climate advisory body exists, how is its advice incorporated? In the absence of such a body, how do policymakers obtain scientific advice?

In conclusion, Ms Fournier pointed out that the members of KlimaSeniorinnen had explained that they had brought their case not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of future generations. The International Court of Justice has also emphasised this, as have all the States that supported the United Nations General Assembly resolution. This initiative has been welcomed, and intergenerational solidarity and equity have been highlighted. The time has now come to put these principles into practice when implementing the KlimaSeniorinnen judgment.

Mr Simon Moutquin pointed out that the film 'Too Hot', which focused on the 'battle' waged by the KlimaSeniorinnen, would be screened that very evening.

The speaker acknowledged that figures generally tend to bore people and that he was tempted to gloss over the 40 °C temperatures recorded during the summer, and the fact that these were nothing compared to the 50 °C we can expect in a few years' time. He asserted that it would not be possible to adapt to this: air conditioning would not be enough, and that temperatures of 50 °C meant that elderly people and children would die because they would be unable to adapt.

He went on to mention heatwaves four or five times more severe than anything that could have been imagined a few years ago. He also cited the 600,000 hectares of forest that burnt during the summer – 600,000 hectares that went up in smoke.

He mentioned Belgium, where half the area of what he described as the country's most beautiful nature reserve had burnt down. It was a national treasure. He also referred to Spain, France, Tunisia, Algeria and Nepal, where, according to the figures he cited, 1,400 people had died following a glacier collapse and thousands more were missing.

Beyond the figures, we must talk about reality, and it was precisely this that the work carried out with KlimaSeniorinnen focused on: the plight of vulnerable people.

Their mission, like that of parliamentarians, was to gain a genuine understanding of what vulnerable people across Europe were experiencing and enduring. He mentioned farmers who could no longer cultivate their land because it had become too arid, and young people living in homes where temperatures could reach 55 °C.

He pointed out that women were among the main victims of the climate crisis, along with older people, people with disabilities and those taking antidepressants. These people were the first to suffer from climate change. Members of KlimaSeniorinnen had lost friends and loved ones as a result of this crisis and heatwaves. This was also what drove their commitment. We must therefore look beyond the figures and focus on personal experiences. Civil society and political leaders have a responsibility to recognise this reality.

Young people and older people had taken to the streets to demand action. In 2021 and 2024, the Assembly adopted, almost unanimously, an excellent report calling for the recognition of the right to a healthy environment.

Since 2020, the Council of Europe had, in its own somewhat ironic words, been working tirelessly – or, at the very least, had managed to set up working groups, study groups and evaluation groups. However, the concrete results that were expected had not yet materialised.

The KlimaSeniorinnen case served as a wake-up call, highlighting the link between human rights and the environment within the Council of Europe. Mr Moutquin was pleased to note that, over the past few weeks and months, this issue had once again come to the fore. Voices had been raised in favour of a legally binding instrument enshrining the right to a healthy environment.

The KlimaSeniorinnen judgment, however, already represented a major step forward, particularly in terms of improving the methods for monitoring judgments. This was not simply a judgment against Switzerland: it concerned all member states of the Council of Europe and strengthened the Council's role in the defence of human rights and in environmental policy.

Even before the adoption of any other instrument or mechanism, this judgment therefore constituted a decisive step forward. The Committee of Ministers proposed the adoption of national instruments to ensure its implementation. Civil society carried out a study to determine which national instrument would be the most appropriate or the most effective.

Some had argued that Switzerland had specific characteristics, notably the existence of the cantons and its decentralised system. Civil society, however, carried out a study showing that a national body and an effective national mechanism could function perfectly well, even in a country with a structure such as Switzerland's.

Mr Moutquin pointed out that, as a member of the Assembly, he had occasionally heard questions raised about society's lack of trust in politicians. Why did citizens vote for the far right or the far left? Why did they reject politicians when the latter were doing their job properly, or felt that they were doing it properly?
He observed that civil society devoted effort and financial resources to carrying out work that decision-makers sometimes failed to do. Consequently, how could citizens truly place their trust in the justice system and in institutions such as the Council of Europe if nothing was done to give concrete effect to this judgment?

This ruling was not directed solely at Switzerland, nor did it concern only elderly women in that country. It was essential for the respect of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, as well as for the well-being of all vulnerable people affected by climate change.

Ms Yuliia Ovchynnykova explained that she had had two dreams when she began working with Simon on the report on the recognition of the right to a clean and healthy environment and the protection of the oceans and seas. The first was to meet the Prince of Monaco, whom she described as a leading global figure in the defence of the oceans and the marine environment. The second concerned the results achieved and the

judgement handed down in the KlimaSeniorinnen case, which she saw as a tremendous example of the defence of the right to a clean and healthy environment and the right to life. She pointed out that drinking clean water and breathing clean air are fundamental rights.

After hearing about their journey and the steps they had taken, she emphasised the importance of putting together professional teams, particularly in the field of environmental protection. Bringing together professional lawyers and researchers with in-depth expertise is essential to achieving results. As a researcher who had worked extensively with Greenpeace and the WWF in Ukraine, she knew how important it was to work in synergy.

She identified several key elements: firstly, professionalism and the presence of competent individuals within teams; secondly, cooperation between environmental non-governmental organisations and the formation of national coalitions of environmental campaigners; and finally, environmental education – both formal and informal – at all levels. She also emphasised the importance of establishing top- -training programmes for environmental defenders and of constantly ensuring the protection of each and every one of them.

She asked the KlimaSeniorinnen whether, when they launched their campaign, they had imagined it might change the debate within the European Union on climate and human rights, and what had surprised them most along the way.

Ms Pia Hollenstein explained that neither she nor any of the association's 3,000 members knew, at the outset, where this initiative would lead them.

From the outset, they suspected that Switzerland would not act on their demands and that they would ultimately have to take their case to the European Court of Human Rights. When they appeared before the Court, they were quite surprised to see the extent to which it had upheld their claims.

Neither she nor the other members had much experience in this field, which highlighted the importance of Greenpeace's expertise. Their women's collective could never, on its own, have taken this case to such a high level of jurisdiction. They had plenty of free time and energy, but they lacked legal expertise.

Another decisive factor, she believed, was the very high level of expertise of their lawyers and the international experts who assisted them – without whom they would probably not have won. This expertise obviously came at a cost that they could not have afforded without Greenpeace's support.

Ms Claudia Arpa believed that the KlimaSeniorinnen's campaign was an excellent example of what could be achieved: young people working with a group of older women to protect the climate and pursue a goal that concerned all generations. She was struck by the fact that a court ruling established a legal position, but pointed out that the problem was that such a ruling was not always followed up with action in the Member States.

In Austria, for example, significant efforts had been made to adopt excellent climate legislation, acting as pioneers in this field. However, the country was now experiencing an economic crisis, and politicians constantly presented the environment and the economy as mutually exclusive. She believed it was very important to bear this difficulty in mind when it came to contributing to climate protection.

Ms Pia Hollenstein noted that the dichotomy between the environment and the economy kept cropping up, but said she personally did not understand why these two aspects were seen as opposed. If no action was taken, the costs would be enormous, which, in her view, was the best possible argument. She echoed the phrase heard during the morning's debate: inaction costs more than action.

Whenever the economic argument was put forward, she always wondered what had become of the capacity for innovation of which companies were once so proud. The economy must be innovative. She recalled that over thirty years ago, at the first major climate summit in Rio in 1992, many business leaders had set out the reasons why immediate action was needed, failing which the costs would be considerable.

She wondered what had become of that approach and said she did not understand why economic actors today refused to focus on innovation when they had the necessary resources at their disposal.

Mr Simon Moutquin acknowledged that there were political forums where the links between the economy, the environment and social development were debated, and recognised the importance of these debates. He pointed out, however, that the Council of Europe is the home of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

To illustrate his point without singling out any Member State, he cited the example of Egypt. Whilst serving as a Member of Parliament, he had worked extensively on human rights violations in that country, where he referred to the presence of hundreds of thousands of political prisoners. He referred to President Sisi, whilst hesitating over his title, and then cited the argument that fifteen schools should be built each year due to rapid population growth. The authorities thus invoked the difficulties they faced to justify their position.

In his view, a similar line of reasoning emerged when a ruling required Switzerland to calculate its carbon budget, or another country to comply with a court decision, and considerations were then put forward relating, for example, to the German car industry or the economy.

He considered that it was not the role of the Council of Europe to take these economic arguments into account. Similarly, it was not for the Committee of Ministers to accept the economic arguments used by states to justify non-compliance with judgments. He compared this attitude to justifying running a red light on the grounds of being late: such a justification was unacceptable, as the rules must be respected.

He emphasised that the failure to implement a judgment on social or economic grounds remained a breach of the rule of law. The debate on the links between environmental protection and the economy remained open, but Greenpeace had amply demonstrated that inaction entailed much higher costs. Environmental protection could also create jobs and bring many other benefits**.**

The Chairperson noted that more and more people and local areas wanted to take concrete action to protect their local environment. Originally from the Lake Garda region in Italy, she explained that the area had suffered considerable environmental damage. Many people working for or living in local authorities were unaware of their rights.

The KlimaSeniorinnen were fortunate to be able to work with Greenpeace, which gave them access not only to funding but also to essential expertise, given the complexity of these issues. However, not everyone had the time and resources required to pursue lengthy legal proceedings. She also pointed out that three court cases had been necessary in Switzerland before a favourable ruling was obtained.

Deeply committed to these issues in Italy, she had been considering setting up a group of legal experts capable of supporting citizens taking action in this area. Such expertise came at a real cost. Their work on Lake Garda had led them to call upon experts from Lombardy and other regions. Even within a single country such as Italy, the rules varied from one province to another, and citizens were not necessarily aware of them. The task was therefore immense.

As Greenpeace and other NGOs could not be everywhere at once, she asked whether Greenpeace could support a training programme enabling people to act as local representatives and pass on this knowledge. These individuals could inform local residents of their rights, particularly in relation to the Aarhus Convention or the KlimaSeniorinnen ruling. She also highlighted the lack of skills and resources needed to take action on climate change. She added that consideration must also be given to the recognition of the rights of nature. She cited the example of the Mar Menor in Spain and the initiatives she had been involved in in Italy to secure legal personality for Lake Garda. She asked whether this approach could help to speed things up, given the urgency of the situation and the fact that the world was on fire. She wanted to know whether the rights of nature were among the issues on which Greenpeace was working and reflecting.

Ms Louise Fournier explained that Greenpeace organisations were involved in this sort of work, but that the KlimaSeniorinnen were also carrying out such activities themselves. As part of their tour, they had been travelling around European countries since the summer to present their case, the lessons they had learnt from it and the obligations that arose from it. They also engaged with various groups on ways to mobilise and take action to ensure their rights were respected.

As regards the rights of nature, she believed this was a very interesting approach, which was developing in parallel with other initiatives. Latin America was much more advanced in this area than Europe. She pointed out that many Latin American countries, such as Peru, had enshrined provisions relating to the rights of nature in their constitutions. In her view, this approach did indeed offer a level of protection that the right to a healthy environment did not guarantee. She added that the recent advisory opinion of the Inter-American Court on climate change, just like the ICJ's opinion on the right to a healthy environment, contained very strong language on the rights of nature as such.

However, the issue of implementation remained central. Enshrining these rights in national constitutions was a positive step, but we must examine what was actually being done to protect them in practice. The discussion therefore always came back to the same problem: that of their effective application.

Ms Pia Hollenstein explained that the organisation received numerous requests but lacked the necessary resources to respond to them all. She noted with regret that people sometimes had to seek support elsewhere due to a lack of available resources. Addressing young people, she emphasised that they must become aware of their rights to be consulted and that it was essential for them to get involved themselves and work with political parties. In her view, the inclusion of young people in parliaments and the National Assembly was essential to foster genuine hope for action.

Young people must understand that they can exercise power and be ready to seize the opportunity. Everyone can take action locally to raise awareness of the need to protect the environment. She invited those present to support these initiatives and believed that discussing these issues came naturally to many of them.

The Chairperson thanked the participants for this important discussion, as well as for the whole day, which she considered to have been very instructive. She reminded everyone that the next meeting would take place in Paris on 4 December, from 1.30 pm to 5.00 pm, and that a visit to the interactive, multilingual climate exhibition at the Cité des Sciences was planned

5. **Date and venue of the next meeting**

4 December 2026 (1.30 pm–5.00 pm), Paris

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable

(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)

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Yuliia Ovchynnykova (Ukraine)	
Sophia Chikirou (France)	

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Mr Cerni Escalé	Andorra / *Andorre*	Mme Bernadeta Coma
Zzz…	Armenia / *Arménie*	Ms Hripsime Grigoryan
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Mr Andreas Minnich	Austria / *Autriche*	Ms Andrea Eder-Gitschthaler
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Mr Tihomir Krastev	Bulgaria / *Bulgarie*	Mr Rumen Muntyanov
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Ms Christiana Erotokritou	Cyprus / *Chypre*	Mr Constantinos Efstathiou
Ms Ivana Mádlová	Czechia / *Tchéquie*	Mr Ondřej Šimetka

ZZ…	Czechia / *Tchéquie*	ZZ...
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Ms Minna Reijonen	Finland / *Finlande*	Mr Pekka Aittakumpu
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M. Alexandre Dufosset	France	Mme Liliana Tanguy
M. Alain Milon	France	M. Alain Cadec
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Mr Vinzenz Glaser	Germany / *Allemagne*	Ms Christin Willnat
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Ms Gabriella Mária Virágh	Hungary / *Hongrie*	**Mr István Gyöngyösi**
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Mr Joseph O'Reilly	Ireland / *Irlande*	Mr Rónán Mullen
Ms Elena Bonetti	Italy / *Italie*	Mr Roberto Rosso
Ms Aurora Floridia	Italy / *Italie*	Mr Giuseppe De Cristofaro
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Zz…	Montenegro / *Monténégro*	Ms Edina Dešić
Ms Saskia Kluit	Netherlands / *Pays-Bas*	Mr Theo Bovens
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Mr Jan Filip Libicki	Poland / *Pologne*	*ZZ...*
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Ms Katja Kokot	Slovenia / *Slovénie*	Zz…
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Mr José Latorre	Spain / *Espagne*	Ms Nerea Ahedo
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Mr / *M.* Sabih Gazi Öztürk, Türkiye

Experts / Expert·es

Dr Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe / Commissaire aux droits de l'homme du Conseil de l'Europe

Ms / Mme Elisabeth Stern, Co-chair of the KlimaSeniorinnen / Coprésidente des KlimaSeniorinnen

Ms / Mme Pia Hollenstein, Representative of the KlimaSeniorinnen / Représentante des KlimaSeniorinnen

Ms / Mme Louise Fournier, Greenpeace International / Greenpeace International

Mr / M. Simon Moutquin, Greenpeace Switzerland / Greenpeace Suisse

Other persons present / *Autres personnes présentes*

Ms / Mme Chiara Macariello, ASSEDEL

Ms / Mme Carlotta Caromani, Italy / Italie

Ms / Mme Vanessa Kabanova, Slovakia / Slovaquie

Ms / Mme Ingela Gustafsson, Sweden / Suède

Mr / M. Patrick Bonin, Québec, Canada

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

Parliamentary Network for a healthy environment

Réseau Parlementaire pour un environnement sain

(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)

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Equality and Non-discrimination / *Egalité et non-discrimination*	Ms/*Mme*	Edite Estrela
	Mr/*M.*	Vik Solveig

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Congress of Local and Regional Authorities /

Congrès des Pouvoirs Locaux et Régionaux

Thematic Spokesperson on Environment and Climate Change/ *Porte-Parole thematique sur l'environnement et le changement climatique*	Ms/*Mme*	Meropi-Spyridoula Ydraiou

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