



Declassified¹
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24 January 2024
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Informal group Women@PACE Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a healthy environment

Minutes of the meeting held in Strasbourg, Tuesday, 10 October 2023

1. **Agenda** [AS/Soc/NCP/FEM (2023) OJ01]

The Chairperson of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a healthy environment, Ms Edite Estrela, opened the joint meeting of the Network and Women@PACE by highlighting two main issues. The first one concerned the triple crisis of pollution, global warming and the collapsing of biodiversity that exhausts nature. The Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a healthy environment sought to ensure that the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment was legally recognised and that the rights of both current and future generations were adequately protected from the consequences of the triple crisis. The second scourge mentioned was breast cancer, the most frequent type of cancer for women. The Chairperson welcomed Professor Carole Mathelin who would talk about the relationship between breast cancer and environmental risks.

The Representative of the Women@PACE group, Ms Petra Bayr, reiterated that both the Women@PACE group and the Network of Contact Parliamentarians had decided to support the breast cancer campaign. This meeting would discuss a specific aspect of this collective effort, namely how environmental factors contributed to the development of breast cancer and what could be done to reduce this risk. Finally, she drew members' attention to the brochure published by the group on 210 questions on breast cancer in Europe.

The draft agenda for the meeting was **adopted**.

2. **Breast cancer and the right to a healthy environment**

Prof. Carole Mathelin, Head of the Surgery Department at ICANS (Cancer Institute of Strasbourg Europe), made her presentation (which is attached).

Ms Grigoryan thanked Prof. Mathelin for her presentation. The risk factors influencing the development of breast cancer included pesticides, poor diets, and lifestyle choices. She then asked about stress as a significant risk factor, especially in conflict areas where citizens were under a constant stress. Studies on the matter seemed inconclusive and asked for more information.

Prof. Mathelin explained that there was no overarching consensus on the matter. Yet, one study that had shown that, following extreme periods with stress such as ones after earthquakes, significant increase in breast cancer cases had been observed. The influence of more subtle forms of stress was harder to determine.

Mr Moutquin referred to inequality in access to organic food for people with lower income which put them at a higher risk of developing illnesses. Moreover, night-time work and high levels of pollution in the poorest areas of cities further escalated health risks. Clearly, the environment, health, and social issues were closely linked together. It would be useful for politicians to have information on whether Prof. Mathelin had had any contacts with the judicial world to provide scientific evidence which could be used in the context of advocating for an additional protocol to the ECHR on the right to a healthy environment which should be recognised as a fully-fledged right by the Council of Europe.

¹ The minutes were approved and declassified by the Network at its meeting on 24 January 2024.

Prof. Mathelin expressed her strong support for the right to a healthy environment. It was quite complicated to defend this right but specialised studies in the medical realm could be brought before courts to address social inequalities and ensure stronger protective standards as a solution. Just a few weeks ago in Alsace, a case was brought before the court that showed enough evidence to reach the conclusion that cancer was related to a woman's night work.

Ms Fabricius asked if consuming meat and dairy products could have a significant impact, and if access to green areas could reduce stress levels for citizens in cities.

Prof. Mathelin gave other experts the opportunity to answer some questions and invited the Head of the Brazilian Breast Cancer Association to speak.

The Head of the Brazilian Breast Cancer Association expressed his concern regarding the problem of pesticides, especially in the context of agriculture, and underlined the need to reduce their use. This problem was particularly acute in Brazil, where agriculture massively used pesticides. There should be more awareness raising on the health risks stress levels for female night-workers.

Ms Garvey asked about breast feeding and its potential to reduce the risk of breast cancer. Ireland had poor levels of breast feeding and needed evidence that could support the promotion of breast feeding. She also asked if there were any completed studies that proved the link between chemicals in food and breast cancer development.

Prof. Mathelin emphasised that breast feeding reduced the risk of breast cancer occurrence, however, only at a rate of around 4% for every year of breast feeding. One study that assessed the impact of pesticides had shown a 20% higher risk of breast cancer in women working in farms using these substances or living close to such farms. Another study concerning women working in farms proved that not all pesticides were correlated to a higher risk (ranging from increasing the risk by 40-50% to 0%). Therefore, the risk varied drastically depending on the type of pesticide used.

Mr Amraoui mentioned that many studies showed that a large amount of breast cancer cases could be avoided by the health care system and asked what they could do to decrease or limit the progression of the disease. As the use of pesticides became increasingly widespread and the price of organic food made it inaccessible for many, this had to be part of a comprehensive health policy. It was necessary to take decisive steps to tackle the environmental factors that had a direct impact on breast cancer. He mentioned examples from the tobacco industry and the agro-chemical industry. Finally, he asked what could be done to step up the efforts to reduce those risk factors.

Prof. Mathelin supported the assertion that the use of pesticides affected both women and men; the latter faced the increased risk of testicular cancer.

The President of the French Surgery Association confirmed the link between testicular cancer and hormonal health, as well as the evident increase in incidents of prostate cancer making it as widespread as breast cancer. He stressed the importance of joining forces against these cancer types, which was in the interest of both women and men.

Mr Papandreou asked whether there was any research on holistic practices in countries, islands, or ethnic groups, that could work as a blueprint for policies. Furthermore, he asked if there was research on the status of women in societies and how that may affect the risk of developing breast cancer.

The Deputy to the Mayor of Strasbourg highlighted the preventive measures taken in Strasbourg concerning this issue, such as offering all pregnant women in the Alsace region to contact their GP for specific prescriptions (green prescriptions) to access two information sessions on environmental risk factors. A basket with organic food was also offered to the needy pregnant women in the region along with nutrition advice, which had led to certain changes in behaviour. A French MP had initiated a draft law to make this a general practice in France, which could inspire other countries in Europe. The message to politicians was the importance of avoiding contamination with pesticides during a child's growth and ensuring better general awareness and accessibility of organic food. The city also worked on assessing the levels of pesticides in the environment and did a follow-up survey of pregnant women and their children. It was found that girls exposed to pesticides in their mother's womb had higher incidence of breast cancer. During pregnancy, both women and the babies in the uterus were highly sensitive to pesticides. One must try to avoid contamination throughout a child's growth. Industrial accidents had more significant impact on children that were growing and on menopausal women because fat tissues absorbed more pesticides. Therefore, there were mainly three periods in life where one must be very cautious: foetus in utero, teens, and women during menopause. Regarding the question about specific

geographical areas to look at, the Himalayas and Bhutan could be interesting case studies because public policies there focused on the quality of life, the environment contained fewer pesticides and breast cancer rates were low. Many factors, such as women having children early, breast feeding, and not being exposed to many pesticides, could explain the phenomenon.

Ms Musliu-Shoshi raised the issue of breast implants which were becoming more common in all of Europe and asked if there had been any study done on the impact of the plastic breast surgery in women in their 30s-40s.

Prof. Mathelin confirmed that there was no direct evidence of breast cancers induced by breast implants; yet there were some accidents with microtextured implants that caused problems, including lymphomas.

Ms Bilalli Zendeli asked if regular medical controls for women in less developed countries could help reduce the incidence of breast cancer, bearing in mind that environmental problems were worse in those countries.

Prof. Mathelin explained that mammography was not particularly relevant for young women and that most breast cancer cases occurred in women aged 60 or more. She advised women, starting at the age of 25, see a gynaecologist once a year for a clinical assessment of their breasts to become aware of potential changes that could be signs of cancer.

Ms Faxe followed up on a previous question, regarding the diet question in terms of meat and milk. She asked what actions should be taken in this respect, based on the existing knowledge. Moreover, the EU was planning to prolong the use of glyphosate for another 10 years despite the evidence that it was severely damaging people's health, which meant another decade of exposure to this chemical.

Prof. Mathelin promoted the Mediterranean diet as the best diet to prevent breast cancer based on existing studies and research. This type of diet implied eating lots of organic fruits, vegetables, olive oil, some starch, limited alcohol, and moderate consumption of meat.

3. Other businesses

Ms Bayr and **Ms Estrela** thanked Prof. Mathelin and all the other speakers for the valuable insights and a new basis of knowledge to implement progressive policies in European countries. They invited all those present to join the group picture.

4. Date and place of next meetings

The Group Women@PACE:

- Tuesday, 23 January 2024, Strasbourg

The Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a healthy environment:

- Thursday, 12 October 2023, from 9.30 to 10.30 am, Strasbourg
- First part-session 2024 of the Assembly, 22-26 January 2024, Strasbourg

List of presence / *Liste de présence*

Network of Contact Parliamentarians for a healthy environment / *Réseau de parlementaires de référence 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*)

This list is not exhaustive / *Cette liste n'est pas exhaustive*

Member States / *États Membres*

Albania / <i>Albanie</i>			
Andorra / <i>Andorre</i>			
Armenia / <i>Arménie</i>	Mr/M.	Armen Gevorgyan	EC/DA
Austria / <i>Autriche</i>	Mr/M.	Stefan Schennach	SOC
	Ms/Mme	Agnès Sirkka Prammer	SOC
Azerbaijan / <i>Azerbaïdjan</i>	Ms/Mme	Sevinj Fataliyeva	EC/DA
Belgium / <i>Belgique</i>	Mr/M.	Rik Daems	ALDE
Bosnia and Herzegovina / <i>Bosnie-Herzégovine</i>	Ms/Mme	Marina Pendeš	EPP/CD
	Mr/M.	Saša Magazinović	SOC
Bulgaria / <i>Bulgarie</i>			
Croatia / <i>Croatie</i>	Ms/Mme	Zdravka Bušić	EPP/CD
Cyprus / <i>Chypre</i>			
Czech Republic / <i>République tchèque</i>			
Denmark / <i>Danemark</i>			
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Finland / <i>Finlande</i>	Ms/Mme	Minna Reijonen	EC/DA
France	Ms/Mme	Liliana Tanguy	ALDE

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Germany / Allemagne	Ms/Mme	Franziska Kersten	SOC
Greece / Grèce	Mr/M.	George Papandreou	SOC
Hungary / Hongrie			
Iceland / Islande	Mr/M.	Bjarni Jónsson	UEL
Ireland / Irlande	Mr/M.	Thomas Pringle	UEL
	Ms/Mme	Róisín Garvey	SOC
Italy / Italie	Mr/M.	Stefano Maullu	EC/DA
	Ms/Mme	Aurora Floridia	SOC
Latvia / Lettonie			
Liechtenstein	Mr/M.	Peter Frick	ALDE
Lithuania / Lituanie	Mr/M.	Arminas Lydeka	ALDE
Luxembourg	Mr/M.	Paul Galles	EPP/CD
Malta / Malte			
Republic of Moldova / République de Moldova			
Monaco	Mr/M.	José Badia	EPP/CD
Montenegro / Monténégro	Mr/M.	Miloš Konatar	SOC
Netherlands / Pays-Bas	Ms/Mme	Margreet De Boer	SOC
	Ms/Mme	Agnes Mulder	EPP/CD
North Macedonia / Macédoine du Nord			
Norway / Norvège	Ms/Mme	Linda Hofstad Helleland	EPP/CD
Poland / Pologne	Ms/Mme	Marta Kubiak	EC/DA
	Ms/Mme	Danuta Jazłowiecka	EPP/CD
Portugal	Mr/M.	Pedro Cegonho	SOC
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	Ms/Mme	Alina Stefania Gorghiu	EPP/CD
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Slovak Republic / <i>République slovaque</i>			
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Spain / <i>Espagne</i>			
Sweden / <i>Suède</i>			
Switzerland / <i>Suisse</i>	Mr/M.	Jean-Pierre Grin	ALDE
	Mr/M.	Olivier Français	ALDE
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Ukraine	Ms/Mme	Yuliia Ovchynnykova	ALDE
United Kingdom / <i>Royaume-Uni</i>	Baroness	Doreen E. Massey	SOC

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Morocco / <i>Maroc</i>	Mr/M.	Allal Amraoui
Palestine		

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Ex-Officio Member / Membre d'office	Mr/M.	Tiny Kox	UEL
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	Mr/M.	Aleksander Pociąg	EPP/CD
	Mr/M.	Ian Liddell-Grainger	EC/DA
	Mr/M.	Iulian Bulai	ALDE
	Mr/M.	George Katrougalos	UEL

PACE committees concerned / Commissions de l'APCE concernées

Political Affairs / <i>Questions politiques</i>	Mr/M.	Simon Moutquin	SOC
Legal Affairs / <i>Questions juridiques</i>	Mr/M.	Ziya Altunyaldiz	NR
Migration / <i>Migrations</i>	Mr/M.	Pierre-Alain Fridez	SOC
Equality / <i>Égalité</i>	Ms/Mme	Edite Estrela	SOC
Culture	Ms/Mme	Inka Hopsu	SOC

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Bureau de la Commission des Questions Sociales
Ex-Officio Members / Membres d'office**

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First Vice-Chairperson / <i>premier vice-président</i>	Mr/M.	Alain Milon	EPP/CD
Second Vice-Chairperson / <i>deuxième vice-présidente</i>	Ms/Mme	Olena Khomenko	EC/DA
Third Vice-Chairperson / <i>troisième vice-présidente</i>	Ms/Mme	Sibel Arslan	SOC

**Congress of Local and Regional Authorities /
Congres des Pouvoirs Locaux et Regionaux**

Thematic Spokesperson on Environment and Climate Change/ <i>Porte-Parole thématique sur l'environnement et le changement climatique</i>	Mr/M.	Cemal Bas
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**Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie /
Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie**

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Inter-Parliamentary Union / Union Interparlementaire

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European Parliament / Parlement Européen

	Ms/Mme	Marie-Pierre Vedrenne (France, Renew Europe)
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Other Parliamentarians present / Autres parlementaires présent.e.s

Ms / Mme Bernadeta Coma, Andorra / *Andorre*

Ms / Mme Petra Bayr, Austria / *Autriche*, the Representative of the Women@PACE group

Mr / M. Ivan Ivanov, Bulgaria / *Bulgarie*

Ms / Mme Heike Engelhardt, Germany / *Allemagne*

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

Ms / Mme Ariana Musliu-Shoshi, Assembly of Kosovo* / *Assemblée du Kosovo**

Ms / Mme Arta Bilalli Zendeli, North Macedonia / *Macédoine du Nord*

*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 à son territoire, à ses institutions ou à sa 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.

Ms / Mme Sascha Faxe, Denmark / *Danemark*

Ms / Mme Camilla Fabricius, Denmark / *Danemark*

Mr / M. Georgios Stamatis, Greece / *Grèce*

Ms / Mme Mónika Bartos, Hungary / *Hongrie*

Ms / Mme Boglárka Illés, Hungary / *Hongrie*

Ms / Mme Róisín Garvey, Ireland / *Irlande*

Mr / M. Joseph O'Reilly, Ireland / *Irlande*

Ms / Mme Franziska Hoop, Liechtenstein

Ms / Mme Saskia Kluit, Netherlands / *Pays-Bas*

Ms / Mme Carmen Leyte, Spain / *Espagne*

Ms / Mme María Fernández, Spain / *Espagne*

Mr / M. Murat Cahid Cingi, Türkiye

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Mr / M. Helge Seland, Norway / *Norvège*

Ms / Mme Maria Abreu Mendes, Portugal

Ms / Mme Sarah Anelay, United Kingdom / *Royaume-Uni*

Experts / Expert.e.s

Prof. Carole Mathelin, Head of the Surgery Department at ICANS (Cancer Institute of Strasbourg Europe) / chef du Service de chirurgie de l'ICANS (Institut de cancérologie Strasbourg Europe)

Head of the Brazilian Breast Cancer Association / *Directeur de l'Association brésilienne de lutte contre le cancer du sein*

President of the French Surgery Association / *Président de l'Association française de chirurgie*

Deputy to the Mayor of Strasbourg / *Adjoint à la Maire de Strasbourg*

Mr / M. Volodymyr Kalenskyi

Council of Europe staff / Secrétariat du Conseil de l'Europe

Mr / M. Bjorn Berge, Députa Secretary General / *Secrétaire général adjoint*

Mr / M. Christos Giakoumopoulos, DG I – Director / *Directeur*

Mr / M. Mikhaël Poutiers, DG II – Bern Convention / *Convention de Berne*

Mr / M. Eoghan Kelly, DG II – Bern Convention / *Convention de Berne*

Ms / Mme Greta Faggiani, PACE / APCE

Ms / Mme Guri Gabriella Hagen, Trainee, PACE / APCE

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

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

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Ms / Mme Aiste Ramanauskaite Secretary to the Committee / *Secrétaire de la commission*
Ms / Mme Anita Gholami Co-Secretary / *Co-Secrétaire*
Mr / M. Guillaume Parent Co-Secretary / *Co-Secrétaire*
Ms / Mme Sylvie Elter Assistant / *Assistante*
Ms / Mme Françoise Schir Assistant / *Assistante*