



INTERPARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUPS AND CLIMATE CONFERENCE: PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Summary report of interparliamentary groups' activities relating to the Climate Conference

November 2015

On the initiative of the President of the Senate Mr Gérard Larcher, interparliamentary friendship groups have been actively engaged throughout 2015 to **ensure the success of Paris climate conference (COP21)**.

After being briefed on the themes of the conference by the President of the Bureau Delegation for International Affairs, Mr Jean-Claude Gaudin, and the committee on regional planning and sustainable development President, Mr Hervé Maurey, the presidents of the 80 friendship groups established within the Senate as well as their members, have worked hard over the past few months to ensure that **the climate issue is addressed as widely as possible in their diverse activities**. Particular mention must be made of the groups responsible for maintaining relations with countries deemed strategic for the climate conference's objectives, which have played a large part in this active engagement.

1. Active engagement

In total, **almost a third of friendship groups** have integrated the issue of climate change and the environment in their programmes for 2015, **in various different ways**.

- The Senate organised several **colloquia** focusing on the issues at stake during COP21, attracting a wide audience.

A colloquium on "*Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean: perspectives on the climate challenge, from the local to the global*", sponsored by the regional friendship groups concerned, was held on 4 June 2015. It placed emphasis on the importance of **interdisciplinarity** in climate-related issues and the need to include social sciences in discussions.

It was also an opportunity to address **global issues that impact on local regional policies**. In her closing remarks, the Ambassador responsible for negotiations on climate change and Special Representative for the 2015 Paris Climate Conference Mrs Laurence Tubiana described the long process for achieving a **legally-binding agreement**.

The colloquium on "*Climate change: Implications for the Pacific islands*", held on June, 9th 2015 under the **France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands Friendship Group** and chaired by Mrs Catherine Procaccia, was an opportunity to highlight the **future of the oceans** and the situation of small island States. These countries are the **first to suffer from the effects of global warming** and yet only contribute to a tiny fraction of global carbon emissions.



France-Vanuatu-Pacific Islands Group: senators participating in the colloquium on June 9th 2015, with Mr Nicolas Hulot.

This event addressed the **multitude of issues** surrounding climate change, including **environmental effects** (direct threat to biodiversity), the **economic consequences** (rising sea levels resulting in the loss of fertile land and infrastructures, and the effects this has on agriculture and the tourism industry) and **social impact** (the arrival of the first "climate refugees").

During the second **French-Moroccan Parliamentary Forum** on 16th and 17th of April 2015, the France-Morocco group – and its president Mr Christian Cambon in particular – were able to showcase **a number of exemplary countries, such as Morocco**, which has developed a remarkable renewable energy programme which could have a knock-on effect on a number of African countries, which were still hesitant to make commitments. COP22 in 2016 will in fact take place in Morocco.

During "*The challenges of climate change facing Africa*", which was held on November 5th 2015 as part of a series of talks organised by the **France-West Africa friendship group**, the President of the Senate Mr Gérard Larcher and the group's President Mr Jacques Legendre particularly commended African countries' efforts to seize the development opportunities offered by low-carbon growth models.

- During **special visits and interviews**, senators were able to gather information on the countries' positions and share points of view and experiences.

These talks illustrated the universal nature of climate-related concerns. The discussions used everyday realities at "local" level as a basis for providing insight into challenges faced at "global" level.

France welcomed the President of the Parliament of Ghana Mr Edward Doe Adjaho for the occasion, and the President of the **France-West Africa group** Mr Jacques Legendre took this opportunity to praise this country's efforts in preparing for the climate conference, along with the **rest of the African continent**. The group also welcomed several delegations, including one from the Ivory Coast, which has been badly affected by deforestation and is still, today, suffering its heavy consequences (erosion, flooding, soil degradation etc.). The Ivory Coast recently implemented a new forestry code as well as an environmental plan, and is making substantial efforts to educate the population better to improve forest management.

Exchanges organised by the **France-South Africa group** to welcome the Namibian delegation clearly demonstrated the developing African countries' desire to promote an "econological" approach; that is, one that strikes a balance between economy and ecology.



France-West Africa friendship group: a Ghanaian delegation on the Tribune of Honour in the semi-circle, during the salute

As for Europe, a Bundesrat delegation invited by the **France-Germany group** was given the unique opportunity to highlight the **leading role and dynamism of local authorities** as well as their **many significant and concrete achievements in regions**, such as the actions taken in Bordeaux to renovate buildings for greater energy efficiency, and even the extensive development of public transport.

Another significant example is the **France-The Netherlands group**, which is taking an active interest in Dutch expertise in preventing the effects of rising water levels over the long term in areas at risk of sea flooding. The Group is particularly focusing on *wateringues* (drainage structures in flood-risk areas on marine plains that are below the highest tide level in the Netherlands).

In Asia, the France-China group is very active. On June 16th, the delegation of Chinese representatives and the friendship group stated the two countries' respective positions on climate change and the efforts being made to reach a general agreement at the Paris conference in December 2015. The announcement was made at the opening of the new session of the Grand Committee of the National People's Congress of China and the French Senate. The active involvement of other countries in the region should also be noted, particularly the **France-Vietnam group**. This country is one of the worst affected by global warming and has expertise in critical areas, including rising sea levels and even the international management of the Mekong River levels, which has a major impact on Vietnam's rice production and food security for people in Southeast Asia.

The **France-India group** gained an understanding of the complex balance between development and ecology thanks to high-level diplomatic talks, during which India's climate strategy and commitments in this area were presented.

As for the Americas, it should be noted that the **France-United States group** received H.E Ambassador Mrs Jane Hartley, who confirmed that reaching a climate agreement was a key priority for President Obama. She also reiterated her country's commitment in this area to reduce its carbon emissions in 2005 by between 26% and 28% by 2025. The United States has already tripled its wind power capacity and has 20 times more solar energy equipment. Mrs Hartley also pointed out that the Paris agreement would meet the financial needs of the poorest countries, in Africa and small island States for example.

- Climate change was **at the heart of the groups' visits in 2015.**

Out of around 15 missions abroad, two thirds of the delegations addressed this issue as a primary or secondary theme.

Here are a few examples, among others:

The **France-New Zealand friendship group** was able to gauge the difficulties of setting agreed objectives in certain countries during a visit to Wellington in April. This country has a population of just 4.5 million, and yet it has one of the highest rates of greenhouse gas emissions per capita in the world. The emissions mainly come from agriculture and transport, even though these sectors use 75% renewable energy from hydroelectricity and geothermal sources.

The senatorial delegation nevertheless observed awareness among parliamentarians and locally elected officials of climate change – a recurring theme during all bilateral exchanges – and New Zealand's desire to reach an ambitious agreement in December 2015. The President of the House of Representatives Mr David Carter also approved the participation of a delegation of New Zealand representatives in the parliamentary activities of the Paris Climate Conference 2015. Likewise, environmental issues dominated talks between the delegation and the mayors of large cities.

The **France-Albania group** encountered a very different reality during their visit. As a developing country, Albania is one of the poorest in Europe with a GDP of less than 3,500 euros per capita and has very low greenhouse gas emissions. It submitted its national contribution (INDC) in September in accordance with the European Union's position under the agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while also taking account of the state of the country's economy. The challenge is to put in place a development model that respects natural and climatic balances, which could be a real asset for enhancing Albania's image and appeal.

As proof of this mobilisation, the Minister for the Environment Mr Lefter Koka reminded the delegation that his ministry has a National Coordinator for Climate Change and announced that a permanent structure responsible for climate change has also been created. Among the numerous issues raised, he highlighted forest management (a freeze in deforestation activities for 10 years to replenish the timber stock) and the creation of a special status for the protection of mountain and coastal areas, based on the French model, which will be put before Parliament soon.



France-Southeast Asia group: talk with the Thai Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment

Developed countries' financial commitments to tackling climate change were identified as a key element for reaching an agreement by the three countries visited by the **France-Southeast Asia group** (Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore). The question of expertise and support, in terms of training for example, was also considered as a success factor.

The senatorial delegation was able to argue in favour of promoting a policy for environmental protection that creates wealth and jobs. The President of the delegation, Mr Gérard Miquel, placed constant emphasis on the advantage of developing alternative energy sources, such as biomass, a particularly promising technique that already exists in numerous countries.

The **France-Canada group's** visit highlighted the importance of civil society and non-State actors given a key role to play through the "Agenda of Solutions", which promotes public and private initiatives and projects. The role of civil society in the fight against climate change and the implementation of best practice were mentioned in particular during a parliamentary working session, prompting the idea of developing incentives such as tax credits for solar energy.

This country must take into account a number of factors in its policy on the fight against climate change: its vast area, extreme temperatures, growing population and extensive natural resources (hydrocarbons minerals and agricultural products). In fact, Canada holds the world's third largest oil reserve and is its sixth largest producer. The country aims to promote the oil industry and effective action to protect the environment at the same time. With this in mind, the country has made a relatively ambitious contribution to COP21 by aiming to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 30% in 2030 compared to 2005.

Another example is the **France-Madagascar and Indian Ocean countries group's** visit to Kenya, during which it was noted that Kenya serves as **a model for Africa** thanks to the measures already in place and those it has undertaken to carry out.

The senators discovered that Kenya and international donors have made significant investments in order to develop renewable energy production. The Kenyan government hopes to generate more than half of the country's electricity from renewable sources by 2030, including 25% from geothermal power plants.

II. A common objective: making the Paris conference a success.

Amid burgeoning initiatives in response to the deadline of December 2015, the friendship groups have tried to discern the major trends in their counterpart's concerns and provide parliamentary diplomatic support for the conclusion of an ambitious and balanced agreement at the Paris conference.

- **An unquestionable dynamic towards reaching a broad legally-binding agreement**

A real dynamic has been observed throughout 2015. Two examples especially show evidence of this.

As previously mentioned in this dossier, China's attitude is evolving and the **France-China group** has supported this process at parliamentary level.



France-China group: meeting with the President of the Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, Mr Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Mr Chi Wanchun, a member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) of China, Vice-President of the Foreign Affairs Committee and President of the China-France Friendship Group and Mr Didier Guillaume, President of the France-China friendship group

The **France-Australia group's** activities can also be commended. The Australian economy is deeply marred by the heavy use of coal (61% of electricity production and 32% of energy consumption in 2013-2014). We know that Prime Minister Mr Tony Abbott, who received support from the industrial and mining sectors when he came into power in 2013, tightened Australia's climate policy significantly (the "carbon" tax brought in by the Labour government was repealed).

In light of this, and following President François Hollande's historic journey on the first ever official visit to the country by a French Head of State in 2014, the Australia-France group scheduled a visit that coincided with the arrival in office of the new Prime Minister Mr Malcolm Turnbull, who belongs to the same party but shows signs of a more progressive approach towards climate change policy in Australia. This evolution first became apparent in this government's new communications, centred around a call for "technology modernisation" and "lifestyle transformation". The government reshuffle was also geared towards this new perspective and the exchanges in Parliament in Canberra this November confirmed this new major development.

- **The need for a differentiated approach**

The issue of differentiation has strongly pervaded inter-parliamentary exchanges.

For example, Gabonese senators underlined their country's commitment to the fight against climate disruption within the framework of the **France-Central Africa group**. They also pointed out that Gabon has taken several measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of its strategic plan "Gabon emerges": the development of hydroelectricity, national parks and sustainable forest management etc. Gabon was also one of the first countries to submit its national contribution to COP21. But the Gabonese delegation also voiced the concerns of developing countries with regard to the compatibility between economic growth and environmental protection, pointing out that COP21 is not an end in itself, but a step forward in the international commitment to combating global warming.

Similarly, during the work of the **France-West Africa group**, Mrs Fabienne Keller expressed her regret that Least Developed Countries (LDCs) had not been sufficiently taken into account, considering they are the first to suffer from the effects of climate change – due to their geographical location and heavy reliance on natural resources – while also being low greenhouse gas emitters.

She also warned of the potential increase in migratory trends as result of climate change (according to the UN, 250 million people could be affected between now and 2050).

- **Adapting national policies at sub-national level**

The **France-Quebec group's** visit illustrates this approach. In September 2015, the group studied Quebec's shift towards a green economy during a visit to Montreal, following the adoption of an ambitious sub-national action plan. Quebec occupies a leading position in the fight against climate change in North America and set ambitious objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions very early on.



France-New Zealand group: with the members of the Local Government and Environment Committee of the Parliament in Wellington

In addition to Quebec's role as a driving force for the Federal Government of Canada, the provincial government aims for greater recognition of the role of sub-national actors during the Paris conference.

The **France-New Zealand group** has actively addressed climate change with the mayors of large cities: Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch. Auckland, in particular, which expects its population to grow by one million between now and 2040, presented the city's planned expansion to the senatorial delegation, placing emphasis on innovative infrastructure and urban public transport projects to prevent congestion in the city.

For its part, the **France-Korea group** held a series of talks with academics and figures in civil society to prepare for the France-Korea Year and openly debate topical issues in bilateral relations.

- **The difficult question of financial commitments**

Finally, the provision of the Green funding – intended to reach a target of 100 billion a year between now and 2020 – was a much debated issue during exchanges within the framework of the **Pacific groups** (Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand) for example. Numerous other groups (**France-Canada, France-United States**, etc.) have raised the question of contributions by developed countries for actions to reduce and adapt to the effects of climate change in developing countries.

Exchanges on this subject have highlighted the need to ensure "climate funding" policies are in line with these countries' requirements and the magnitude of the climate change issues at stake.

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The Senate's interparliamentary friendship groups – which are naturally open to everyone – **are particularly aware of the urgency of the climate issue** and have contributed towards the signature of an international agreement that would meet the challenges for the future of humanity and our planet, using **the tools of parliamentary diplomacy**.

As parliamentarians, the groups' members will continue to play an **essential role in the effective implementation of commitments** in the future. Thanks to their **legislative and monitoring powers**, they will be the key to achieving success.

Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Groups and the Paris Conference

http://www.senat.fr/international/groupe_ami_cer.html

France-South Africa: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_646.html
 France-West Africa: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_573.html
 France-Central Africa: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_572.html
 France-Albania: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_571.html
 France-Germany: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_604.html
 France-Central Asia: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_556.html
 France-South East Asia: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_609.html
 France-Australia: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_578.html
 France-Brazil: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_576.html
 France-Canada: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_583.html
 France-Caribbean: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_642.html
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 France-Sri Lanka: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_550.html
 The French Senate's China-Taiwan Information and Exchange Group: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_623.html
 International Tibet Information Group: http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_634.html