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## Mobile base stations on Tuesday's parliamentary agenda

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The sensitive issue of mobile base stations has made it to the parliamentary agenda, with Parliament's Social Affairs Committee due to discuss the issue at length on Tuesday. The discussion will revolve around the potential threat posed to children.

In addition to interested parties from the public, the meeting will hear from representatives from the Ministries of Health, Education, Infrastructure and Communications, the Malta Communications Authority, Mepa, environmental NGOs, and the countries three mobile telephony providers.

A concurrent online petition, which calls for mobile base stations situated on rooftops across the country to be removed from within at least 10 metres from children's bedrooms, drawn up by Prof. Peter Xuereb, describes the current practice as a "human experiment". Referring to Tuesday's Social Affairs Committee, the petition's organisers say, "We intend to speak there and question the mobile phone operators, who deny that there is any evidence of risk such as to bring into play the 'precautionary principle'.

"This," the petition states, "would require them to find alternative sites and remove the many hundreds already sited within 10 metres of the bedrooms of children, elderly people, and sick and other vulnerable people all over Malta.

"For three years they have ignored the growing evidence, including European Parliament resolutions that call on the authorities and operators not to site these on schools and so on. How can it then be right to site them in densely populated residential areas, without consultation or consideration of viable (if less profitable and effective – commercially) alternatives; and this on their own admission?"

The petition – which can be viewed and signed at

[www.avaaz.org/en/petition/STOP\\_MOBILE\\_PHONE\\_ANTENNAE\\_BEING\\_SITED\\_WITHIN\\_15\\_METRES\\_OF\\_KIDS\\_BEDROOMS\\_IN\\_MALTA](http://www.avaaz.org/en/petition/STOP_MOBILE_PHONE_ANTENNAE_BEING_SITED_WITHIN_15_METRES_OF_KIDS_BEDROOMS_IN_MALTA) – adds, "Please help us break through this cynical barrier – you could be saving health and even lives down the line. Stop this human experiment now, in Malta and in other countries".

A group of concerned citizens who brought the matter to the Committee aim to challenge a letter published in 2008 by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, which had said that Mepa had been "given the green light by the director of public health, confirming these antennae did not generate any adverse effects" and that the Malta Communications Authority continuously monitored radiation in line with World Health Organisation guidelines.

A Council of Europe (CoE) resolution last year called on all member states, Malta included, to "take all reasonable measures to reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields, especially to radio frequencies from mobile phones, and particularly the exposure to children and young people who seem to be most at risk from head tumours" and to "reconsider the scientific basis for the present electromagnetic fields exposure standards set by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection, which have serious limitations and apply 'as low as reasonably achievable' principles, covering both thermal effects and the athermic or biological effects of electromagnetic emissions or radiation".

The CoE also called for the setting in place of information and awareness-raising campaigns on the risks of potentially harmful long-term biological effects on the environment and on human health, especially targeting children, teenagers and young people of reproductive

age, and to pay particular attention to “‘electrosensitive’ people suffering from a syndrome of intolerance to electromagnetic fields and introduce special measures to protect them, including the creation of wave-free areas not covered by the wireless network”.

So as to reduce costs, save energy, and protect the environment and human health, the CoE recommended that research is stepped up on new types of antennas and mobile phones, and encouraged research to develop telecommunication based on other technologies which are just as efficient but which have less negative effects on the environment and health.

In its resolution, the CoE added, “While electrical and electromagnetic fields in certain frequency bands have wholly beneficial effects which are applied in medicine, other non-ionising frequencies, be they sourced from extremely low frequencies, power lines or certain high frequency waves used in the fields of radar, telecommunications and mobile telephony, appear to have more or less potentially harmful, non-thermal, biological effects on plants, insects and animals as well as the human body even when exposed to levels that are below the official threshold values.

“Moreover, the precautionary principle should be applicable when scientific evaluation does not allow the risk to be determined with sufficient certainty, especially given the context of growing exposure of the population, including particularly vulnerable groups such as young people and children, which could lead to extremely high human and economic costs of inaction if early warnings are neglected.

The CoE’s Parliamentary Assembly said in the resolution it “regrets that, despite calls for the respect of the precautionary principle and despite all the recommendations, declarations and a number of statutory and legislative advances, there is still a lack of reaction to known or emerging environmental and health risks and virtually systematic delays in adopting and implementing effective preventive measures.

“Waiting for high levels of scientific and clinical proof before taking action to prevent well-known risks can lead to very high health and economic costs, as was the case with asbestos, leaded petrol and tobacco.”