



Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of
Parliaments of the European Union

Historical development: 1989 - 2024¹

¹ Updated January 2025. This document is compiled by the COSAC Secretariat, based on information provided by each Presidency. More information about COSAC can be found on IPEX, [here](#).

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I. Creation of COSAC

I COSAC in Paris (France)

In 1989, Mr Laurent FABIUS, Speaker of the French *Assemblée nationale*, proposed establishing an inter-parliamentary body composed of members of national parliaments specialised in European affairs.² One important reason behind his initiative was the feeling in many national parliaments that they were losing contact with Community policies following the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979. Up to that time, delegations to the European Parliament were appointed by national parliaments, and parliamentarians could at the same time be members of a national parliament and the European Parliament.

Mr FABIUS tabled his proposal to increase the role of national parliaments in the European decision-making process at the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in Madrid in May 1989. The Speakers adopted a number of initiatives to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the EC. One of them was to create what was called the **Inter-parliamentary Conference of bodies specialised in European Affairs** (the Conference was renamed COSAC³ during its IV COSAC meeting). The Speakers proposed that this Conference should meet on a regular basis in order to debate topics of common interest, which would be decided in advance.⁴ The Conference should in principle be organised biannually by the national parliament of the Member State holding the Presidency of the EC.

The **first meeting** of this inter-parliamentary conference, was convened by the French National Assembly on **16 and 17 November 1989**. Parliamentarians from ten of the twelve Member States participated, even though at that time not all national parliaments had specialised European Affairs Committees.⁵ (Parliamentarians did not attend from the other two Member States because of recent elections.) The meeting was co-chaired by the Chairmen of the European delegations of the French National Assembly and Senate, Mr Charles Josselin and Mr Jacques Genton.

The agenda focused on an issue which is still valid today: how to increase parliamentary control of EU affairs. The main focus was on how to reinforce the involvement of national parliaments in EU affairs. The parliaments discussed different options: strengthening parliamentary control at the national level, enhancing inter-parliamentary co-operation between parliaments, or strengthening the role of the European Parliament. The proposal of Mr Poher,

² See the report from Mr Laurent Fabius: “*Les Parlements Européens dans la perspective de l’Europe de 1993. Le traitement des affaires communautaires et la collaboration entre les chambres*”, presented at the meeting of the Speakers of the Parliaments of the EC-12 in Madrid on 20 May 1989.

³ The acronym COSAC comes from the French name for the Conference: *Conférence des organes spécialisés dans les affaires communautaires*. The English name became Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees, but the French acronym was used across all Community languages.

⁴ Conclusions of the Speakers Conference of the parliaments member of the European Economic Community in Madrid, 20 May 1989: <http://www.cosac.eu/fr/meetings/previous/1/doc4/>

⁵ This was the case for the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies, the Belgian Senate, the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Hellenic parliament, although they all created European Affairs Committees not long afterwards. The Belgian Senate and the Italian Chamber were therefore represented at the first COSAC by their foreign affairs committees, while Luxembourg was represented by the President of the Chamber.

Speaker of the French Senate, to create “European Senate” composed of representatives of national parliaments provoked a particularly lively debate.

In the conclusions from the 1st conference, however, the parliaments limited themselves to agreeing to improve their “reciprocal information through systematic exchange of texts concerning European affairs adopted by the Parliaments”.

In addition, a discussion took place on how to develop relations between the European Parliament and national parliaments. The parliaments also discussed a proposal from the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments about organising a simultaneous annual debate in all parliaments on a subject of common interest.⁶ Finally, the Conference approved a message addressed to the meeting of the Heads of States and Governments (taking place in Paris the following day) on the process of democratisation in Eastern Europe and the need to cooperate with those countries.⁷

II. Establishment phase

II COSAC in Cork (Ireland)

The **II Conference in Cork on 10-11 May 1990** focused on the question of how to remedy the democratic deficit. This question stayed on the agenda of future COSAC meetings and was influenced by the debate on the future of the EC that had been launched with the decision of the European Council in June 1985 in Milan to convene an IGC to discuss how the EC could develop into a political and Economic and Monetary Union.

Another subject raised at the Conference was the principle of subsidiarity, which had been launched in the so-called Spinelli report adopted by the European Parliament on 14 February 1984 to provide a blueprint for a Treaty Establishing a European Union.

However, the II COSAC was dominated by a discussion on the organisation of the so-called “Assizes” that were to be held later that year on 27-30 November in Rome to discuss the future development of the European Communities. The 2nd Conference welcomed the principle of holding such an inter-parliamentary conference to discuss possible treaty changes and decided that a “restricted” meeting of the members of national parliaments and European Parliament should be held in June with a view to preparing the Assizes”.⁸

All delegations agreed that there was a need to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the EC. However, delegations did not agree how this problem could be solved. Some thought it necessary to strengthen the role of the European Parliament, while others recommended a stronger role for national parliaments in scrutinising European affairs at national level. Again, the idea of a European Senate was raised by some delegations, but no attempts were made to formulate concrete proposals concerning its composition or powers. The 2nd Conference

⁶ *Compte-rendu de la 1re Conférence interparlementaire des commissions spécialisées dans les Affaires européennes à Paris*: <http://www.cosac.eu/en/meetings/previous/1/doc3/>

⁷ Message to the Heads of State and Government: <http://www.cosac.eu/en/meetings/previous/1/doc2/>

⁸ The chairmen of the European Affairs Committees and a delegation from the European Parliament met on 26 June 1990 in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in Brussels to discuss the preparations of the Assizes.

suggested that the “principle of subsidiarity” should be defined more specifically in the Treaties in order to remedy the democratic deficit of the EC.

The II COSAC also decided on some points concerning its organisation, for example, that the Conference should meet at least once during each Presidency and that a meeting of the Chairpersons should prepare and coordinate the work of the conference.

The Assizes

The Assizes meeting that was held on the eve of the Maastricht IGC on 27-30 November 1990 in Rome in the Italian Chamber of Deputies comprised 173 members of national parliaments and 85 Members of the European Parliament.

The idea of organising the Assizes had been proposed by the French President, Mr François Mitterrand, in a speech on 25 October 1989 before the European Parliament and was later supported by two resolutions of the European Parliament, who saw this as an opportunity to gain support for its proposals in the Spinelli report, providing a blueprint for a Treaty Establishing a European Union.⁹ COSAC welcomed the principle of organising the Assizes to discuss possible Treaty changes at its meeting in Cork in May 1990, but wanted to influence its organisation. Hence delegations considered it necessary that a restricted meeting of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees and the European Parliament be held with a view to preparing the Assizes. A number of organisational issues were addressed at that meeting, which took place in the Belgian Parliament on 26 June. However, the formal decision to convene the Assizes and settle the organisation of the event was taken by the Speakers of the Parliaments at a meeting on 20 September 1990. Apart from settling issues such as the composition, working method and presidency of the Assizes, they also ensured a link to COSAC by establishing a drafting committee composed of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees plus five MEPs charged with the task of drafting the final declaration of the Assizes.¹⁰

At its Conference on 1 and 2 October in Rome (just 8 weeks before the Assizes) COSAC attempted to influence the agenda of the Assizes by recommending that the debate be divided into four general topics: 1) the new goals of the Community; 2) strengthening democratic legitimacy; 3) allocation of competences; and 4) relations with other countries and institutions of Europe. It was agreed that the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees plus five MEPs (identical with the “drafting committee” established by the Speakers) should finalise preparations of the Assizes. However, at a meeting on 12 November the “triple presidency” of the Assizes (the 2 Italian Chambers and the European Parliament) refused to accept the proposal by COSAC for the agenda, which they found would effectively alter the decision reached by the Speakers in Rome on 20 September.

At the end of the Assizes, a final declaration was adopted that endorsed a number of proposals for treaty reform.

⁹ The report of Mr Spinelli was adopted on 14 February 1984.

¹⁰ The drafting committee of the Assizes was chaired by the speaker of the Belgian parliament, Mr Charles-Ferdinand Nothom, who at the same time chaired the meetings of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees and the delegation of the European Parliament under COSAC. He was also the chairman of the Belgian Parliament’s European Affairs Committee.

III COSAC in Rome (Italy)

The main business of the **III COSAC in Rome** on **1-2 October 1990** was to prepare the Assizes on the future of the EC. The conference recommended that the debate was organised into four general topics (see box above).

It was agreed that the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees and five Members of the European Parliament should meet for a final preparatory meeting of the Assizes on 12 November 1990.

IV COSAC in Luxembourg

The **IV COSAC** took place in **Luxembourg** on **6-7 May 1991**. For the first time, a President-in-office of the Council participated in COSAC. Mr Jacques POOS, Minister for Foreign Affairs and President of the Council, presented a synthesis report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union (CFSP), which has been discussed in the Intergovernmental Conference on the political Union. After a general exchange of views on the CFSP most of the delegations expressed their concern on the absence of parliamentary control of the CFSP either by the national parliaments or by the European Parliament.

The Conference agreed (in principle) on the first Rules of Procedure of COSAC. The Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees had met on 22 March 1991 in advance of the Conference to prepare a draft. The Rules of Procedure were adopted after difficult discussions. The Conference decided that all decisions should be taken by consensus. In order to enhance the role of the European Parliament in the preparations of future COSAC meetings, it was laid down that the European Parliament would be invited to participate in meetings of the Presidential Troika (composed of the national parliaments of the current, former and future Presidencies).

Only one issue could not be resolved at the Luxembourg conference: the article concerning revision of the Rules of Procedure (point 13 c), because the participating parliaments were split on this issue. The final decision was therefore postponed to the 5th Conference in The Hague. However, consensus was reached on the remaining articles of the Rules of Procedure, and the name COSAC was adopted.¹¹

V COSAC in The Hague (the Netherlands)

The **V COSAC** in **The Hague** on **11-12 November 1991** adopted the first Rules of Procedure. The new rules confirmed that meetings of COSAC should take place every six months during the second part of the Presidency of the Council, taking into consideration the schedules of the parliaments. The rules provided for the possibility of organising extraordinary meetings of COSAC if an absolute majority of the Presidents of the European Affairs Committees were in

¹¹ *Règlement des organes spécialisés dans les affaires communautaires des parlements de la Communauté européenne*, <http://www.cosac.eu/en/meetings/previous/4/cosac/>

favour of it.¹² The rules fixed the number of participants per Member State at six, leaving the composition of each delegation up to the parliaments.

It was furthermore agreed that the Presidential Troika (composed of the current, former and future Presidencies), together with a representative of the European Parliament, should be responsible for proposing topics for forthcoming meetings at the beginning of each Presidency. Decisions on the draft agenda should be taken by the Presidency after having consulted the Presidential Troika and the representative of the European Parliament. The practice of involving the full group of Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees was dropped.

According to the first Rules of Procedure, COSAC was empowered to issue *communiqués* of the meetings drawn up by the Presidential Troika and the European Parliament. The decision-making process on how to adopt such conclusions was not specified in the rules, but a practice requiring unanimity was established. However, the Presidency was left with the possibility of issuing a message under its own responsibility provided that the Conference could not agree upon a final *communiqué*. As already mentioned, agreement on the article concerning the change of the Rules of Procedure caused certain difficulties, but it was eventually agreed that consensus was needed for future revisions.

As well as agreeing the rules, the 5th COSAC deliberated on the proposals for a Political Union and an Economic and Monetary Union prepared for the Intergovernmental Conference. The proposals were analysed on the basis of the final declaration of the Assizes.

III. Entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty

VI COSAC in Lisbon (Portugal)

The VI COSAC in Lisbon on 4-5 May 1992 was the first COSAC to follow the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. The Conference therefore focused on an exchange of information on the state of the ratification procedures of the Maastricht Treaty in the Member States.

The results of the IGC were also discussed. The Maastricht Treaty was the first Treaty to mention the role of national parliaments. Declaration 13 encouraged “greater involvement of national parliaments in the activities of the European Union”.¹³ It called for an increased exchange of information between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Governments were encouraged to “ensure, inter alia, that national parliaments received Commission proposals for legislation in good time for information or possible examination”.¹⁴ Declaration 14 invited national parliaments and the European Parliament to meet under the Assizes-format to be consulted on the main features of the EU.¹⁵ It was even foreseen that the Presidents of the European Council and the Commission should report to the Assizes. The Maastricht Treaty had no immediate impact on COSAC, which was not mentioned in the text itself. But the wording of Declaration 13 reflected the conclusions of the 1st COSAC.

¹² This article remained in later versions of the Rules or Procedure, but it has only been applied once, in January 2003, when an extraordinary meeting was organised in Brussels under the Greek Presidency.

¹³ Treaty establishing a European Union: <http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/en/treaties/dat/11992M/htm/11992M.html#0100000033>

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ In fact, after the experience in Rome, the Assizes were never again convened.

A number of delegations expressed disappointment about the outcome of the IGC and proposed that COSAC should adopt a resolution calling upon the governments to convene a new IGC to address the democratic deficit in the EC. But no consensus could be reached on such an initiative.

The Lisbon COSAC also debated the “Delors II package” on a new financial perspective for the financing of the EC. A proposal that COSAC should ask for an IGC on budgetary control of Community finances did not find consensus. The Lisbon COSAC was the first Conference not to adopt a *communiqué*, but the Portuguese Presidency under its own responsibility issued a final declaration in its place, as foreseen by the Rules of Procedure.

VII COSAC in London (United Kingdom)

The agenda of the **VII COSAC in London on 10-11 November 1992** was determined by the general political situation in Europe at the time. The EC was shaken after a narrow majority of the Danish electorate had rejected the Maastricht Treaty in June, and an even narrower majority of the French electorate had voted in favour. The EC had launched a response to the ratification crisis: subsidiarity, openness and opt-outs became the basic formula that the heads of state or government would propose at the Edinburgh summit later the same year. COSAC therefore discussed the democratic deficit, especially the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament in ensuring democratic accountability in the Communities.

Apart from the democratic deficit, the 7th COSAC also discussed how the declarations on national parliaments attached to the Maastricht Treaty could be implemented. There was no agreement on the proposal to create a Conference of the Parliaments (Assizes) as proposed by Declaration 14. Another proposal that was rejected was to open COSAC meetings to the press. COSAC concluded that the experience of correspondence (exchange of information) between national parliaments (COEU-P) initiated by the Belgian Chamber of Representatives had not been successful. It was stopped after only 9 of the 21 Assemblies had responded positively to the initiative.

Like at the previous COSAC, it proved impossible for delegations to agree on a *communiqué*. Instead, the UK Presidency drew up a final report, in the name of the COSAC Chairmen, which drew attention to a number of points that had been raised during discussions to combat the democratic deficit. The report followed the declaration adopted by the European Council in Birmingham on 16 October confirming the need for more democracy, subsidiarity and openness, in particular in the proceedings of the Council.

VIII COSAC in Copenhagen (Denmark)

The **VIII COSAC** took place in **Copenhagen** on **3-4 May 1993**, just two weeks before the second Danish referendum on the Maastricht Treaty.

For the first time, the “democratic deficit of the EU” was not the central issue at COSAC. There was a discussion instead on the role and working methods of COSAC, but proposals to extend COSAC meetings to two days, as well to open the meetings to the press, were rejected. The delegations had a debate on parliamentary scrutiny of the two new policy areas in the

Maastricht Treaty: the Common Foreign and Security Policy and co-operation on Justice and Home Affairs.

The previous month (April 1993) the ECOFIN Council had adopted a series of measures aimed at promoting economic recovery in Europe. Consequently, the 8th COSAC focused on economic growth, competitiveness and employment. The situation in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the enlargement negotiations, were also debated. According to the statement from the conference issued in the name of the Danish Presidency, a large majority of the delegations welcomed the opportunity to have a dialogue with the Danish Prime Minister, Mr Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, and the Foreign Minister of the Presidency on key policy issues.

An evaluation of the role of COSAC took place on the basis of a paper prepared by the Dutch Parliament. This meeting was the first time that the question of increasing the co-operation between special committees of parliaments was discussed in COSAC.

IX COSAC in Brussels (Belgium)

The **IX COSAC** took place in **Brussels** on **22-23 November 1993**. Building on the agenda of the 8th COSAC, the main themes of the conference were growth, competitiveness and employment, as well as immigration and implementation of the Schengen agreement. This meeting was the first time that a European Commissioner participated in COSAC. Mr João de DEUS PINHEIRO took part in an exchange of views on the Commission's White Paper on Economic growth, competitiveness and employment.

The question of the democratic deficit was not entirely absent from the conference. An informal exchange of views took place over lunch on the second day on the two declarations on the role of national parliaments attached to the Maastricht Treaty, which had come into force three weeks before the meeting.¹⁶ Finally, the Parliaments of Poland and Hungary addressed COSAC with a request to be invited to participate as observers in future COSAC meetings.

X COSAC in Athens (Greece)

The **X COSAC** in **Athens** on **9-10 May 1994** was dominated by discussions on enlargement of the EU, economic growth, competitiveness and employment, the question of the democratic deficit and transparency in the EU decision-making process.

In relation to enlargement, COSAC invited representatives of the national parliaments of applicant countries to participate as observers in COSAC meetings. The Rules of Procedure of the COSAC were modified to allow applicant countries to participate with a maximum of three observers, on the condition that accession negotiations had started. The conditions under which observers could participate in the meetings were not defined by the rule change.

The Speaker of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, Mr Charles F. NOTHOMB, had drafted a report on the question of democratic deficit and the lack of transparency in the EU,

¹⁶ To facilitate the informal debate on the role of national parliaments, the Belgian Presidency had drawn up a comprehensive report on "parliamentary control" of EU affairs.

which he presented at the conference. In the report he addressed questions such as the impact of the new powers of the European Parliament under the Maastricht Treaty, transparency and whether the Maastricht Treaty had taken sufficient account of the proposals of the declaration of the Rome Assizes to reduce the democratic deficit.

XI COSAC in Bonn (Germany)

The **XI COSAC in Bonn on 24-25 October 1994** focused on three main topics: internal security of the EU, environmental protection and the application of the principle of subsidiarity. Internal security and police cooperation had become topical with the Maastricht Treaty, which provided for intergovernmental co-operation in this field. The German Presidency focused discussion on the newly-created Europol, examining its powers and how national parliaments could scrutinise its activities, although the debate also touched upon the problem of asylum, its definition, procedure for managing asylum claims and the application of the Dublin Convention.

The German federal minister for the environment, Mr Klaus TÖPFER, addressed the meeting on environmental issues. The Minister recalled the importance of the Conference in Rio de Janeiro that had sought to agree ways to reduce green house gases. The German Chancellor Mr Helmut KOHL, made a speech on European integration that underlined the importance of national parliaments in the integration process and pleaded for the participation of parliaments in the preparatory works to the IGC in 1996.

The final debate was on the application of the subsidiarity principle, which had been enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty in Article 3B and fleshed out in declarations from the European Council in Birmingham and Edinburgh in autumn 1992.

IV. Preparing the next IGC

XII COSAC in Paris (France)

The **XII COSAC** took place in **Paris on 27-28 February 1995**. The prospects of a new debate on the future of the EU clearly influenced the agenda. The Maastricht Treaty had mandated a new IGC to be convened in 1996 to address a number of unsettled issues.¹⁷ The agenda for the IGC was partly known, because the Maastricht Treaty had identified a number of points, which, among other things, included the whole functioning of the EU in respect of enlargement and the extension of the “co-decision procedure” that put the European Parliament on an equal footing with the Council in the legislative procedures for certain policy fields. Member States’ governments decided at the Corfu European Council in June 1995 to establish a so-called “Reflection Group” under the chairmanship of the Spanish state secretary of foreign affairs, Mr Carlos WESTENDORP, to prepare the IGC. The European Parliament was invited to send two participants to the group to join the representatives of the 15 governments.¹⁸

¹⁷ Article N of TEU.

¹⁸ The two representatives of the European Parliament in the reflection group were Mr Elmar Brok (PPE) and Ms Elisabeth Guigou (PSE).

The COSAC conference addressed the problem that national parliaments were not represented in the reflection group for the preparation of the next IGC, and called for a closer association of the national parliaments to this group. To compensate for this shortcoming, the Speaker of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, Mr Charles-Ferdinand NOTHOMB, proposed establishing a “parliamentary reflection group”. This idea was then later taken up by the Conference of Speakers, which created the reflection group on 19 April 1995.

Two agenda points concerned the role of national parliaments in the EU. The first dealt with the application of Declaration 13 of the Maastricht Treaty; the other attempted to raise a debate on the future role of national parliaments in the EU with a view to the preparations for the 1996 IGC. Another topic raised at the meeting was the campaign against fraud in the EU.

The French National Assembly and Senate once again launched the idea of adding a European Second Chamber composed of national parliamentarians to the institutional framework of the EU.¹⁹ Their proposal was that this Second Chamber should be competent in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). The French Senate, which was the originator of the proposal, argued that the national parliaments should be more closely associated to the decision-making process of the EU. But the French proposal of creating a Second Chamber did not receive much support from other national parliaments, with a clear majority of delegations against the idea.

There was a proposal to create a COSAC Secretariat, in order to allow an intensification of the cooperation between national parliaments, but no agreement could be reached.

The conference also included an exchange of views on the different scrutiny procedures in place in national parliaments. Delegations agreed that there was a need for an improvement of the transmission of EU proposals and other documents to the competent committees of national parliaments, in particular those concerning CFSP and JHA.

XIII COSAC in Madrid (Spain)

The future of the EU and the role of national parliaments in it preoccupied the **XIII COSAC in Madrid on 8-9 November 1995**. The conference was influenced by the deliberations of the Westendorp Reflection Group, which was preparing the next IGC. The Reflection Group had published a progress report on 1 September 1995, which had suggested two areas for reflection regarding the future role of national parliaments in the EU:

- Explore associating national parliaments with the Community institutions. Study the possibility of inserting Declarations 13 and 14 to the Treaty. Examine in greater detail ways of simplifying tasks of each national parliament to supervise the Union decisions.
- Study the proposal to create a High Consultative Council on subsidiarity composed of delegations from national parliaments.

The debate at COSAC was also inspired by the work of a parliamentary reflection group²⁰, which had been created at an informal meeting of the Conference of Speakers²¹ on the

¹⁹ The two chambers of the French Parliament did not agree on the details. Whereas the Senate proposed creating a second chamber, the National Assembly suggested establishing an inter-parliamentary Council to deal with the application of the subsidiarity principle.

²⁰ See also the XXII COSAC.

²¹ The Conference took place on 19 April 1995 in Paris.

initiative of the Speakers of the French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Philippe SEGUIN, and the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb.²² Chaired by Ms Nicole CATALA, Vice-President of the French *Assemblée nationale*, the parliamentary reflection group had recommended a number of concrete proposals on how to improve the role of national parliaments in EU affairs. The group called for the role of the national parliaments and COSAC to be inserted in the Treaty, and proposed that the EU institutions should be obliged to transmit legislative proposals to the national parliaments. The group furthermore suggested that a body like COSAC should be empowered to monitor whether draft EU legislation complied with the principle of subsidiarity.²³

The majority of delegations in COSAC again rejected establishing a European second chamber. The conference also discussed the possibility of mentioning the role of COSAC in the Treaty.

XIV COSAC in Rome (Italy)

The XIV COSAC in Rome on 24-25 June 1996 warmly welcomed the conclusions of the European Council in Turin on 29 March 1996. On the opening day of the IGC, the Heads of State or Government had for the first time obliged the Council Presidency to “provide information to the national parliaments through COSAC”.²⁴

The XIV COSAC in Rome represented the first opportunity to implement this new initiative. Mr Lamberto DINI, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, presented a summary of the progress made to date of the IGC and of the work of the Italian Presidency following the European Council in Florence.

Again the role of national parliaments in the EU was a key point on the COSAC agenda. The conference also debated reform of COSAC. The Westendorp Reflection Group had issued its final report on 5 December 1995. The group had rejected the idea of a second chamber and concluded that “COSAC was a favourable formula for the improvement of relations between national parliaments and the European Parliament”, although it had also recommended that COSAC should not become a new institution.

Against this background, the conference discussed a proposal to strengthen the possibilities for national parliaments to act collectively by empowering COSAC to express itself on the principle of subsidiarity and on issues within the two inter-governmental areas of the Treaty (CFSP and JHA). A majority of delegations rejected the idea, although most delegations

²² The parliamentary reflection group met for the first time in Paris on 29 June 1995. Other meetings were held in Brussels on 23 September, Luxembourg on 26 October, and Athens on 4 December 1995.

²³ After the deliberations at the XIII COSAC on the role of national parliaments in the EU and in the light of the start of the IGC in Turin which “should equally examine how and to what extent national parliaments could, also collectively, better contribute to the Union's tasks”, the Delegation for the European Union of the French National Assembly launched an initiative to promote strengthening the role of national parliaments in European affairs. The recognition from the Heads of State and Governments of a collective role of national parliaments in the EU in the mandate of the IGC was partly a result of the different initiatives and discussions in COSAC. The French Delegation for the European Union seized this opportunity to promote its ideas and organised meetings with other European affairs committees. During these contacts, all national parliaments agreed with the assessment of the French Delegation that the gap between the citizens and Europe was growing steadily and that national parliaments were the only possible “mediator” between both levels.

²⁴ Turin European Council, 29 March 1996, Presidency Conclusions, <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/turin.html>

nonetheless accepted the need to improve the functioning of COSAC. The Finnish delegation suggested establishing a working group to work out recommendations on how to proceed with the issue. The COSAC Presidential Troika was mandated to prepare a report on a “reinforcement of declaration 13 and an improved functioning of COSAC, to be presented at the next meeting of COSAC in Dublin”.

XV COSAC in Dublin (Ireland)

The **XV COSAC** took place in **Dublin** on **15-16 October 1996**. The future role of national parliaments and COSAC in the EU were at the forefront of the agenda, as the conference was the perhaps last chance for national parliaments to reach a common position to influence the outcome of the IGC.²⁵ On 10 October 1996 the COSAC Presidential Troika had agreed a set of recommendations to reinforce Declaration 13 and the functioning of COSAC. The conclusions of the report were largely approved by delegations in the conclusions of the XV COSAC.

The fact that COSAC agreed on the two main issues concerning the role of national parliaments in the EU had some influence on the outcome of these issues in the IGC. COSAC recommended including Declaration 13 in the Treaty, making it legally binding: “to ensure that governments follow through on their commitments under the Declaration and that the National Parliaments have a period of at least four weeks for examining all proposals of relevance to the legislative process”.²⁶

As far as the functioning of COSAC was concerned, delegations could not agree on recommending that COSAC should be mentioned in the Treaty, but suggested that COSAC could address specific issues such as “subsidiarity, 2nd (CFSP) and 3rd pillar items (Police and Judicial cooperation in Criminal matters) and questions relating to fundamental rights of European citizens”.

It was also noted that the “conclusions” of COSAC should not be binding for national parliaments, although they should be forwarded to the EU institutions and the governments of Member States.

The Irish EU Presidency submitted a note inspired by the conclusions of the Dublin COSAC to the IGC. The document from the Irish Presidency went further on certain aspects than the consensus reached at COSAC, suggesting that COSAC should be empowered to express the views of national parliaments on whether EU legislative proposals complied with the subsidiarity principle.²⁷ It was furthermore proposed that COSAC should be invited to make its views known on legislative proposals within the area of Justice and Home Affairs which might have direct bearing on the freedoms of individuals.

²⁵ The IGC was to discuss the role of national parliaments in the EU at a meeting on 12 November 1996, and the next COSAC, in The Hague on 9-10 June 1997, would be only seven days before the conclusion of the IGC.

²⁶ <http://www.cosac.org/en/meetings/previous/15/doc/>

²⁷ CONF 3948/96 of 15 October 1996.

XVI COSAC in The Hague (the Netherlands)

The XVI COSAC took place in **The Hague** on **9-10 June 1997**. The XVI COSAC endorsed the proposal of the Dublin COSAC that the provisions of Declaration 13 should be reinforced by turning it into a legally binding protocol to the new Treaty. In addition, it proposed that a six-week delay should elapse before a Commission proposal could be put on the Council's agenda for final adoption. This was more than the four weeks that the Dublin COSAC had asked for.

The conference also asked for more transparency in the EU legislative process. It adopted a declaration asking for a) increased accessibility of proposed legislation and legislative acts of the Union; and b) the Council, when acting in its legislative capacity, to publish the results of votes and explanation of votes as well as statements in the minutes.

The Dutch Prime Minister, Mr Wim KOK, Foreign Minister, Mr Hans van MIERLO, and State Secretary, Mr Michel PATIJM, addressed COSAC to present the state of negotiations in the IGC just before the final bargaining was to take place at the IGC in Amsterdam

V. Implementation of the Amsterdam Protocol on the role of the national parliaments in the European Union

XVII COSAC in Luxembourg (Luxembourg)

The XVII COSAC took place in **Luxembourg** on **13-14 November 1997** and was the first of a number of meetings to discuss implementation of the new protocol attached to the Amsterdam Treaty. The new Treaty included a protocol on the role of national parliaments in the European Union, and COSAC was acknowledged for the first time in the European treaties.²⁸ It provided COSAC with the possibility to examine draft EU legislation and address to the EU institutions any contributions it deemed necessary - notably in relation to the application of the principle of subsidiarity, the area of freedom, security and justice as well as questions regarding fundamental rights. It was, however, underlined that such contributions would in no way bind national parliaments or prejudge their position. The protocol put no obligations on COSAC or national parliaments. The new powers would only be used if national parliaments wanted to use them.

The meeting addressed the question of how to revise the Rules of Procedure of COSAC in order to implement the protocol. It was suggested that it would be necessary to provide COSAC with the possibility to express itself through a majority vote. The meeting also considered the question of whether there was a need to establish a secretariat to assist the Presidency and the Troika in preparing COSAC meetings. No final decisions were taken at the meeting, as there was still time whilst the Amsterdam Treaty was being ratified by Member States. A proposal to establish a working group in order to examine the question of a revision of the rules was tabled and the COSAC Presidential Troika was asked to consider the issue. It was agreed that a report on the findings would be presented to the next COSAC in London.

²⁸ Protocol on the role of the national parliaments in the European Union attached to the Amsterdam Treaty.

A number of delegations recommended that a question concerning the “establishment of an Area of Freedom, Security and Justice” should be put on the agenda of the London COSAC for discussion, in order to start activities under the new role of COSAC.

A number of other important issues were also debated at the conference. The Luxembourg Prime Minister, Mr Jean-Claude JUNKER, presented the priorities of the Luxembourg Presidency, which included the enlargement of the EU with ten new Member States from Central and Eastern Europe and the reform of key community policies, such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the financial perspectives for the spending of the Union in the years ahead.

XVIII COSAC in London (United Kingdom)

The **XVIII COSAC** took place in **London** on **18-19 May 1998**. The Presidential Troika had not been able to agree on a revision of COSAC rules and so the issue was not on the agenda of the London COSAC. Instead, COSAC deliberated on the current state of the enlargement of the EU, the Economic and Monetary Union (with particular emphasis on the independence of the European Central Bank), and scrutiny of Justice and Home affairs.

The Irish *Oireachtas* had tabled a proposal to enable extraordinary meetings of COSAC Chairpersons to be convened to ensure a higher frequency of meetings than the two annual conferences. But the proposal did not find approval among all delegations and was consequently rejected.

COSAC also discussed a proposal to change its Rules of Procedure in order to allow a representative of COSAC to participate in external meetings on behalf of COSAC and to report back to it. The proposal was dropped, however, because unanimity (required for any rule change) could not be reached.

XIX COSAC in Vienna (Austria)

The **XIX COSAC** took place in **Vienna** on **23-24 November 1998**. On 10 November 1998 negotiations on joining the EU had formally been opened with the first six applicant states. So when the Austrian Foreign Minister, Mr Wolfgang SCHÜSSEL, addressed the conference, he concentrated his introductory statement on the enlargement negotiations. The Austrian Prime Minister, Mr Viktor KLIMA, opened a debate on employment; and the Commissioner, Mr Marcelino OREJA, gave an introduction to a debate on institutional reform, with a particular emphasis on transparency.

The XIX COSAC also returned to the question of how to implement the Amsterdam Protocol and reform of the working methods of COSAC. The Austrian COSAC Presidency asked delegations to consider the discussion as a sort of “first reading”, focusing on identifying the questions to be addressed. The debate focused on a wide range of issues, including the voting arrangements of COSAC, the possibility of organising extraordinary meetings, the language regime, and establishing a secretariat. A proposal was made to establish a working group composed of the Presidential Troika and the European Parliament in order to examine these

questions in detail. However, it was decided to leave the final decision on this matter to the following COSAC in Berlin.

The XIX COSAC ended with a novelty, a declaration of solidarity to Italy, which had refused to extradite the Kurdish leader imprisoned in Italy: “The XIX COSAC [...] expresses its solidarity with Italy, which has faced the Öcalan affair in full compliance with the principles of Italian and European legislation.”

XX COSAC in Berlin (Germany)

The **XX COSAC in Berlin on 30 May - 1 June 1999** addressed some of the same agenda points as the previous COSAC in Vienna, including a particular focus on institutional reform.²⁹ German MEP, Mr Elmar BROK, who had been one of the two observers from the European Parliament in the negotiations leading to the Amsterdam Treaty, opened the debate. Mr BROK suggested that a special Convention, involving national parliaments and the European Parliament, should be convened to draft a European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Further discussion on revising the Rules of Procedure of COSAC also took place. No attempts were made to finalise these discussion in Berlin, but the conference agreed to establish a working group to examine the issue. This idea had been proposed during the previous COSAC in Vienna, but in Berlin it was agreed to increase the composition of the group to one representative per parliament that wanted to participate. The German COSAC Presidency proposed a plan that foresaw an interim report to be presented at the XXI COSAC in Helsinki in October 1999, with a view to adopting the new rules in spring 2000 in Lisbon. The incoming Finnish Presidency, however, proposed a plan that anticipated agreeing the rules in the working group at a meeting in early October, before the full COSAC meeting in Helsinki. Should agreement not be possible in the working group, the full COSAC could deal with any outstanding problems. This plan was endorsed by consensus.

XXI COSAC in Helsinki (Finland)

The **XXI COSAC in Helsinki on 10-12 October 1999** succeeded in concluding the debate on the reform of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC.

The working group that had been established in Berlin managed to agree a compromise that was endorsed by all delegations at the meeting. During the discussion, proposals were made to add German as a working language, and to ensure that the European Parliament did not participate in votes on Contributions addressed to the EU institutions; however, neither proposal was adopted. The European Parliament was willing to issue a unilateral declaration stating that the European Parliament would abstain from voting on any contribution addressed to it. Proposals to set up a secretariat and introduce majority decisions were rejected as clearly lacking sufficient support among delegations.

²⁹ The institutional reform of the EU had not been finalised with the Amsterdam Treaty. In particular, the question of the number of Commissioners and the voting weights in the Council had not been resolved. A special protocol to the Treaty foresaw that a new IGC should be convened to address these issues before the next enlargement. The protocol also proposed that a further IGC should be convened to carry through a general institutional revision at the latest one year before the number of Member States exceeded 20.

Consequently, the Helsinki COSAC adopted the new Rules of Procedure as proposed by the working group, including the unilateral declaration offered by the European Parliament. It was agreed, however, that the position of the European Parliament within COSAC should be studied further during the following Portuguese Presidency in order to make changes to the Rules of Procedure on this question if necessary.

VI. On the route towards the future of Europe

XXII COSAC in Lisbon (Portugal)

The **XXII COSAC in Lisbon on 29-30 May 2000** was dominated by the questions debated at the IGC leading to the Nice Treaty. But the work of the Convention on the Charter of Fundamental rights, which had started on 17 December 1999, and the European Council's decision to make the EU the most competitive Economy of the world by 2010 also preoccupied the conference in Lisbon.

Debates took place on three main issues: the extension of qualified majority in the Council, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the relations between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Delegations could not reach agreement on the first two issues, but on the third question COSAC stated that "MEPs and national deputies were not competitors, but rather partners, acting only at different levels of representation". Therefore the Lisbon COSAC did not further pursue the question of the position of the European Parliament within COSAC.

XXIII COSAC in Paris (France)

The **XXIII COSAC** took place in **Paris on 16-17 October 2000**. The IGC was in its closing phase, with only two months to go before the heads of state or governments should conclude the Nice Treaty. The French Prime Minister, Mr Lionel JOSPIN, appeared before COSAC to present the state of negotiations at the IGC on institutional reform, which he declared had been very "rich". However, since the views of national parliaments on institutional reform were as different as those among governments, COSAC did not try to provide detailed advice to the IGC, but settled for a call on Member States to reach an agreement that would "ensure efficient, transparent and legitimate institutions".

For the first time in five years, COSAC was used as a platform for an exchange of information and best practises on national parliamentary scrutiny of EU Affairs. The Presidency had prepared discussions thoroughly by submitting a questionnaire in advance of the conference to get an overview of the procedures in place for scrutiny in the national parliaments. Special emphasis was put on how the provisions in the Amsterdam protocol on transmission of EU proposals to national parliaments were functioning. As a consequence, COSAC called on the IGC to modify the protocol to ensure that a minimum of 15 days, or one week in urgent cases, should be observed between the reading in COREPER and the final decision in the Council.

COSAC also agreed that the French Presidency should consult national parliaments about setting up a working group that could meet during the forthcoming Swedish Presidency to allow COSAC to meet in between conferences. Several topics were proposed for the working

group to discuss: Justice and Home Affairs, the scrutiny procedures of national parliaments and social affairs.

XXIV COSAC in Stockholm (Sweden)

The **XXIV COSAC in Stockholm** on **20-22 May 2001** was dominated by discussions on the future of the EU. The decision of the Nice IGC to launch a wider and more in depth debate on the future development of Europe, with a view to agreeing a new round of reforms at an IGC in 2004, triggered a lot of interest.

The Swedish Prime Minister, Mr Göran PERSSON, addressed COSAC and encouraged it to contribute to the discussions on the debate on the future of Europe. National parliaments were, however, split on that question and so COSAC could not adopt a position. Despite this, COSAC agreed on reiterating its criticism of the functioning of the Amsterdam protocol's provisions on transmission of documents to national parliaments, which it considered had not been fully implemented. COSAC noted that the protocol had not specified whether it was the Commission or the Member State governments who were responsible for forwarding consultation documents to national parliaments. COSAC therefore called on the two institutions to clarify the division of responsibility.

As regards the way in which national parliaments should be involved in the debate of the future of Europe, the Stockholm COSAC suggested two possibilities: via COSAC or via assembling a convention composed of national parliamentarians and European Parliamentarians, government representatives and representatives from the Commission.

XXV COSAC in Brussels (Belgium)

The **XXV COSAC** took place in **Brussels** on **4-5 October 2001**. At the Brussels COSAC, the Belgian Prime Minister, Mr Guy VERHOFSTAD, launched the idea that national parliaments by means of an 'alarm bell' should be involved in monitoring the demarcations of EU competences.

However, the Brussels COSAC did not try to agree on any proposals for changes to the EU Treaties. Instead, COSAC favoured the idea of assembling a Convention to prepare the IGC, underlining that it should not be a discussion forum. Rather, it should present "a coherent draft proposal to the 2004 IGC contributing solutions to the problems it was confronted with".

Following the XXV COSAC conference, a special meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons was convened on 1 December to inform national parliaments about the outcome of a tour of capitals, which had been conducted by Chairman of the Belgian Joint European Affairs committee, Mr Philippe MAHOUX, and the Chairman of the Chamber of Representative's Foreign affairs Committee, Mr Pierre Chevalier. The two members of the Belgian Parliament had been asked by the Belgian Prime Minister, Mr Guy VERHOFSTAD, to go on this mission with a view to providing input for the European Council's important meeting in Laeken that would give the green light for the establishment of a Convention to prepare the 2004 IGC. The meeting of COSAC Chairpersons supported establishing a Convention.

VII. The future of Europe – COSAC in the reform mode

XXVI COSAC in Madrid (Spain)

The **XXVI COSAC in Madrid on 12-14 May 2002** was the first COSAC following the decision by Member States to involve national and European parliamentarians directly in the preparations of the 2004 IGC via a Convention.³⁰ COSAC followed the proceedings of the Convention both closely and actively throughout the period, because many national parliamentarians participating in COSAC were at the same time also representatives of their parliaments in the Convention, which created a certain spill over effect between the two processes.

The conference in Madrid welcomed the decision taken by the Heads of States or Governments in Laeken to establish the Convention and agreed to monitor its progress step by step. It was decided to keep the question of the future of the EU on COSAC agenda for as long as the Convention would work and keep the Convention informed about any contributions from COSAC. It was finally agreed that a special meeting should be convened before the IGC started to adopt a contribution for the IGC.

At the same time, a window of opportunity was opened for another round of reforms of COSAC. The Presidential Troika was called upon to prepare a detailed proposal for a more effective COSAC, focusing its activities more on the role of national parliaments. It was agreed as a guiding principle that the reform process should focus on how to make COSAC function more effectively within the existing framework of the Amsterdam Protocol. All questions that would require a Treaty amendment were left for the Convention, because of the overlap between the debates that took place in COSAC and the Convention.

XXVII COSAC in Copenhagen (Denmark)

The **XXVII COSAC in Copenhagen on 16-18 October 2002** launched an ambitious reform programme, which was to preoccupy COSAC for more than a year.

A working group composed of the Chairmen of the European Affairs Committees of the national parliaments, chaired by Mr Claus LARSEN-JENSEN, was established with a comprehensive reform mandate, which among other things included drafting a code of conduct for effective national parliamentary scrutiny of EU matters, considering how to involve special committees in COSAC, drafting proposals for establishing a COSAC Secretariat and how to introduce majority decisions in COSAC. It was also proposed to highlight that the main role of COSAC should be defined as assisting national parliaments to improve their effectiveness in EU matters, especially their scrutiny of government activities in the EU, by sharing best practise and information.

³⁰ The Convention was established by the European Council in Laeken December 2001. It was composed of 30 representatives of national parliaments, 16 from the European Parliament, 15 government representatives and two from the Commission. In addition, the 13 accession states each participated with two national parliamentarians and one government representative. The Convention therefore included a significant quota of national parliamentarians (i.e. 56 out of 105) The Convention was chaired by the former French President Mr Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; the two vice-presidents were former Prime Ministers of Belgium and Italy, Mr Jean-Luc Dehaene and Giuliano d'Amato.

The working group agreed on a set of recommendations which were passed on to the Greek Presidency on 10 January 2003.³¹ These recommendations included among other things an agreement on the introduction of qualified majority in COSAC and in principle the establishment of some kind of “secretarial support” for COSAC. But no agreement could be reached on the composition, financing and procedure for appointment of the secretarial staff. The working group rejected the idea of involving special committees in COSAC, but suggested that COSAC should make itself available as a supporting structure, if special committees wanted to organise meetings. The working group also agreed to recommend a number of minimum standards for national parliamentary scrutiny.

As agreed at the previous meeting in Madrid, COSAC also debated the future of Europe. Ms Gisela Stuart, Chairperson of the working group in the Convention dealing with the role of national parliaments, addressed COSAC and gave an overview of the work in the Convention.

XXVIII COSAC in Brussels (Belgium)

An **extraordinary COSAC** was held **in Brussels on 27 January 2003** in the premises of the European Parliament (but under the Greek Presidency) to finalise the reform of COSAC and to discuss the future of the EU in order to adopt a contribution for the Convention that had just begun writing the first draft articles of what was to become the Constitutional Treaty.

As regards the reform of COSAC, some progress was made: there was general agreement that the reform should enable national parliaments to be better informed about EU affairs and to exchange best practises. Almost symbolically, COSAC also managed to adopt a set of minimum standards for national parliamentary scrutiny on EU affairs - after having inserted a number of safety clauses assuring delegations that the minimum standards were merely guidelines and not legally binding.

The model for majority voting was in principle agreed by COSAC. COSAC should still seek to adopt contributions by consensus, but in case this was not possible, contributions could be adopted with a majority of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the votes cast – constituting at least 50 per cent of all votes. However, the final adoption of the COSAC rules was postponed to the next COSAC in Athens in May 2003.

Finally, it was proposed that the “secretarial support” for COSAC could be provided by staff seconded from the national parliaments of the Presidential Troika on a rotating basis, but no agreement could be reached on the question of establishing a COSAC Secretariat. The decision on this issue was therefore also postponed to the next meeting.

XXIX COSAC in Athens (Greece)

The **XXIX COSAC in Athens on 4-6 May 2003** revised the Rules of Procedure.

Most importantly, it was agreed to focus the activities of COSAC more on the work of national parliaments within the EU. The old aim of using COSAC as a platform for exchanging

³¹ The working group met in Copenhagen on 17-18 November and on 15-16 December.

information and best practises was strengthened and the objective was for the first time clearly expressed in the Rules of Procedure:

“The principal business on every agenda shall be derived from the role of COSAC as a body for exchanging information, in particular on the practical aspects of parliamentary scrutiny”.³²

COSAC also formally approved the new voting regime, allowing COSAC to adopt contributions by a qualified majority.

Finally, COSAC agreed the formula for setting up a secretariat to facilitate its work. COSAC endorsed a set of guidelines proposing a secretariat comprised of one permanent member and four members seconded from the three national parliaments on the Presidential Troika (the former, the current and the future Presidencies) and the European Parliament.

COSAC also had a discussion on the future of Europe. The work of the Convention had entered its final stages, where the difficult institutional questions were debated. This was the last opportunity for COSAC to try to influence the work of the Convention. COSAC concentrated its efforts on setting out a number of recommendations concerning the question of the role of national parliaments. COSAC generally supported the proposals that had been tabled by the Presidium of the Convention. But on certain issues COSAC also took stands that differed from those of the Presidium. COSAC called for “constitutional recognition of national parliaments”, by inserting two articles in the Constitutional Treaty: one defining the principle of subsidiarity and one defining the role of national parliaments. As regards the role of COSAC itself, the proposal from the Convention was criticized for being too vague, and the Convention was encouraged to clarify the text following the model of the Amsterdam Treaty Protocol. Finally, COSAC called for national parliaments to have direct access to the European Court of Justice to be able demand a judicial review of whether EU legislation complied with the principle of subsidiarity.

XXX COSAC in Rome (Italy)

The **XXX COSAC** took place in **Rome** on **6-7 October 2003**. It was the first COSAC after the European Convention had concluded its work, and the meeting was therefore used to a large extent as a first opportunity to assess the outcome of the Convention. But delegations were also preoccupied with the final negotiations for establishing the COSAC Secretariat, on the basis of the guidelines agreed in Athens.

COSAC took note of the draft Constitutional Treaty which the Convention had produced. In particular, COSAC welcomed the provisions in the Treaty for involving national parliaments in the control of the subsidiarity principle via a “subsidiarity early warning mechanism”. COSAC also considered the improved rules for transmission of EU documents as significant.

COSAC encouraged Member States to conduct the IGC in as transparent a way as possible and to ensure public access to all conference documents. The Italian Presidency of the Council had agreed to inform COSAC on the proceedings of the IGC. COSAC therefore called on the Presidency to report to COSAC at a special meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons later in the autumn.

³² Paragraph 7.1a of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC.

COSAC also agreed on a compromise for its secretariat, along the lines set out in the guidelines from Athens, which paved the way for first secretariat to be established in Brussels from 15 January 2004 for a trial period of two years.³³

VIII. The implementation of the reform - a platform for an exchange of information and best practice

XXXI COSAC in Dublin (Ireland)

The **XXXI COSAC in Dublin on 19-20 May 2004** was the first meeting after the reform of the Rules of Procedure. The agenda gave national parliaments a platform to exchange of information and best practises on procedures for national scrutiny of European affairs.

An exchange of information between national parliaments took place - in accordance with Rule 7.1 of the Rules of Procedure - on recent development in the Member States on aspects of parliamentary scrutiny. In particular, the conference heard reports about the scrutiny systems of the national parliaments of the ten new Member States.

Another agenda point also focused on the role of national parliaments in the EU. The Constitutional Treaty, which had not yet been signed, meant that this issue remained at the centre of discussions. Delegations engaged in an intensive debate on how national parliaments could implement the “subsidiarity early warning mechanism” and how they might organise their individual subsidiarity checks. The debate was facilitated by the first Bi-annual Report on EU procedures and practises drafted by the COSAC Secretariat, which reported on the new “subsidiarity mechanism”.

This 1st Bi-annual Report covered the following topics:

- Overview of the recent developments in EU procedures and practices;
- Implementation of reforms: better lawmaking;
- The Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality;
- Policy cycle of the European Union;
- Legislative procedures of the European Union;
- Recent developments in scrutiny procedures and practices by national parliaments on EU legislation;
- Proposals on the draft treaty establishing a constitution for Europe.

The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Brian COWEN, addressed COSAC reporting on the progress in the IGC. XXXI COSAC called on “all parties to conclude the IGC by the European Council in June”.

³³ For details concerning the composition and financing of the COSAC Secretariat look at: <http://www.cosac.eu/en/meetings/previous/30/>

XXXII COSAC in The Hague (the Netherlands)

The **XXXII COSAC in The Hague** on **22-23 November 2004** was primarily taken up with deliberations on the Constitutional Treaty, which had been signed on 18-19 June by the Member State governments. The key item for discussion at the COSAC meeting was again the “subsidiarity early warning mechanism”.

The Dutch Parliament had already decided how to organise its national subsidiarity check. It had opted to establish a special “Joint Subsidiarity Committee”, comprising members of both Houses of the Dutch Parliament. An exchange of views and information took place on the basis of a report drawn up by the Dutch Presidency as well as the second biannual report produced by the COSAC Secretariat, which had asked national parliaments how they would organise their subsidiarity checks. At the time, only a few parliaments had a clear picture of this. In order to facilitate debate and allow national parliaments to reflect further on this issue, COSAC agreed to conduct a “pilot project”, which would allow national parliaments to test how their subsidiarity early warning mechanisms might work in practice, by examining a specific piece of draft EU legislation. It was agreed that the Commission’s third Railway Package would be the subject for this pilot project.

The 2nd Bi-annual Report of COSAC dealt with the following subjects:

- Proposals having direct implications for national parliaments;
- Budgetary and financial provisions of the European Union;
- Transparency and traceability;
- Documents from governments to national parliaments concerning EU draft legislation (explanatory memoranda);
- Ratification of the constitutional treaty in EU-25

Finally, COSAC was not able to agree on introducing a new language regime.

XXXIII COSAC in Luxembourg (Luxembourg)

The **XXXIII COSAC** took place in **Luxembourg** on **17 and 18 May 2005**. For the first time in the history of COSAC, a specific piece of EU draft legislation was examined by national parliaments within COSAC. The Commission’s 3rd railway package was examined by 31 of the 37 national parliamentary chambers in the 25 Member States.

National parliaments started their scrutiny of this package on 1 March 2005 and completed it six weeks later on 12 April. All participating parliaments drew up a report summarising how they conducted the pilot project, including any lessons learnt during the experiment, which they sent to the COSAC Secretariat.³⁴ At the COSAC meeting in Luxembourg in May 2005, national parliaments reported on the experience they had had examining the legislative proposals of the 3rd railway package and on any difficulties they had encountered.

COSAC unanimously adopted a contribution addressed to the EU institutions criticizing the Commission for providing insufficient justifications for how its proposals complied with the

³⁴ On the basis of the replies from the national parliaments, the COSAC Secretariat made a report to facilitate the exchange of views and best practises between delegations at the XXXIII COSAC. The report can be found on the COSAC website: <http://www.cosac.eu/en/info/earlywarning/pilotproject/>

subsidiarity principle. COSAC called on the Commission to produce more in-depth arguments in future and declared that further work should be done to clarify the distinction between the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

COSAC welcomed the pilot project and decided to carry through a second test of the subsidiarity early warning mechanism. The incoming UK COSAC Presidency was asked to propose a new subject and timetable for the test.

The 3rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC covered the following topics:

- Establishment of the European Affairs Committees in EU-25;
- Scrutiny of EU-matters by European Affairs Committees and special committees;
- Country-specific section on procedures for scrutinizing European matters in national parliaments;
- Monitoring the principle of subsidiarity;
- The role of national parliaments in the area of freedom, security and justice under the constitutional treaty;
- The role of MEPs in national parliaments.

XXXIV COSAC in London (United Kingdom)

The meeting of Chairpersons on 17-18 July 2005 prepared the ground for the XXXIV COSAC meeting on a number of procedural and administrative matters. In the light of developments on the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, the Chairpersons also held an exchange of views with Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM, Vice-President of the Commission and Commissioner for Institutional Relations and Communications Strategy, on the way forward for the Treaty's subsidiarity mechanism, and methods of scrutiny of the Annual Work and Legislative Programme of the Commission.

The **XXXIV COSAC** was held in London on **9-11 October 2005**. In setting the agenda for this plenary meeting of COSAC, the United Kingdom Parliament had clearly in mind a recent change to the Rules of Procedure of COSAC which now require that the principal business on each agenda shall be derived from the role of COSAC as a body for exchanging information, in particular on the practical aspects of parliamentary scrutiny.

Accordingly the two major topics discussed were scrutiny of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, and scrutiny of impact assessments (with the participation of Mr Moavero MILANESI, Deputy Secretary General of the European Commission).

The meeting also heard a presentation by the Rt Hon John PRESCOTT MP, Deputy Prime Minister, on behalf of the UK Presidency of the Council.

In the light of developments on ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, COSAC also debated parliamentary aspects of the Treaty including the Council meeting in public and enhanced scrutiny of subsidiarity. There was consensus that, whatever the future of the Constitutional treaty, national parliaments could do more to enhance parliamentary scrutiny of subsidiarity and proportionality under existing provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty. Agreement was reached that national parliaments would scrutinise EU legislation for subsidiarity and proportionality using the provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty. National parliaments were asked

to suggest topics on which during the following year there could be a concerted effort to examine subsidiarity and proportionality in depth in all national parliaments wishing to do so.

COSAC also agreed that its Secretariat should continue to operate; that Presidency parliaments should be able to invite special guests as observers for debates when an item on the agenda warranted it; and took note of suggested possible topics for future discussion, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of COSAC.

Finally, COSAC adopted a Contribution addressed to the EU Institutions that focused on CFSP scrutiny, better regulation and openness in the Council. Following the meeting, steps were taken to raise the profile of the Contribution by for the first time translating it into all Community languages, by publishing it in the Official Journal of the EU, and by sending it to the Presidents of the EU Institutions. Positive reactions to the Contribution were received from Commission President, Mr José Manuel BARROSO, and Vice-President, Mr Gunter VERHEUGEN.

The 4th Bi-annual Report drafted by the COSAC Secretariat dealt with the following topics:

- Scrutiny for CFSP and ESDP in national parliaments;
- Scrutiny of impact assessments;
- Raising European awareness;
- Transparency in the Council;
- Co-decision: first and second reading agreements.

XXXV COSAC in Vienna (Austria)

The **XXXV COSAC in Vienna on 22-23 May 2006** put an emphasis on a stronger role of national parliaments on the basis of the existing *acquis communautaire*. Following the Conference on Subsidiarity in St. Pölten in April and the Joint Parliamentary Meeting on the Future of Europe in Brussels in May 2006 this COSAC meeting took up the topic of the future of the Constitutional Treaty and subsidiarity review by national parliaments.

In this regard the COSAC contribution welcomed the commitment of the President of the Commission to transmit directly all new legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments, inviting them to react so as to improve the process of policy formulation. Furthermore COSAC asked “the Commission to take into account comments from National Parliaments – in particular with regard to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles – and within an acceptable timeframe to acknowledge receipt and offer a reasoned response”. This commitment which also can be found in the communication of the Commission of 10 May 2006 (COM (2006) 211 final) was then welcomed by the European Council of 15-16 June 2006. The European Council reiterated the request to duly consider comments by national parliaments and encouraged national parliaments to strengthen cooperation within the framework of COSAC when monitoring subsidiarity.

An exchange of views with Federal Chancellor, Mr Wolfgang SCHÜSSEL, on Europe – perspectives and pragmatism as well a discussion on the Western Balkans and the European Neighbourhood Policy with Commissioner, Ms Benita FERRERO-WALDNER, and the

Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, Mr Erhard BUSEK, were additional point on the agenda.

The 5th Bi-annual Report drafted by the COSAC Secretariat covered the following topics:

- Period of Reflection;
- Subsidiarity;
- Scrutiny in national parliaments of civilian ESDP operations;
- Impact assessments;
- Transparency in the Council.

XXXVI COSAC in Helsinki (Finland)

The COSAC Chairpersons meeting on 11 September 2006 heard an introduction by Ms Margot WALLSTROM, Vice-President of the European Commission, concerning the Commission's initiative for direct transmission of legislative proposals and working documents to national parliaments, which had been put in place on 1 September 2006.

The European Energy Policy was the other main topic for the debate. The topic was introduced by Mr Mauri PEKKARINEN, Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr Jean-Baptiste RENARD, President of British Petroleum Europe and Professor Peter LUND, Chairman of the EU Advisory Group on Energy Policy. The presentations focused on the current state of energy supply on a global scale as well as within the EU Member States, strategies to enhance energy security EU-wide, the development of new technologies, alternative energy sources and the increase of energy efficiency also with regard to environmental implications of energy consumption.

The issue of co-financing of the permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat in the future was debated during the chairpersons meeting on the basis of a note drafted by the Finnish Presidency to follow up the Conclusions of the XXXIV COSAC. The chairpersons agreed to establish a reflection group to work on this question via electronic exchange of information.

The ordinary meeting of the **XXXVI COSAC** was held **in Helsinki** on **21-22 November 2006**. The meeting started with the debate on the results of the subsidiarity and proportionality check on the Commission Proposal on applicable law and jurisdiction in divorce matters, which was initiated by COSAC in July 2006. Most of the participating parliaments did not find a breach of the principles of subsidiarity or proportionality; however about one third of the participants found that the Commission has given an insufficient justification for its proposal.

The keynote speaker of the Conference, Prime Minister, Mr Matti VANHANEN, summarised what had been accomplished so far during the Finnish Presidency and outlined some of the work still to come. Delegates voiced their thoughts especially on future enlargements and the union's integration capacity.

The topic of the Justice and Home Affairs and the Mid-term Review of the Hague Programme was introduced by a statement of the Commissioner, Mr Franco FRATTINI, focussing on the *passerelle* clause, the enlargement of the Schengen area, various issues in the fight against terrorism and organized crime, questions of illegal and legal migration and the subsidiarity and

proportionality check on a proposed directive on matrimonial matters recently concluded by national parliaments.

The Speaker of the Finnish Eduskunta, Mr Paavo LIPPONEN placed EU-Russia relations high on the Finnish Presidency agenda during his introduction of the topic of the Northern Dimension during the second meeting day. Mr Andrej KLIMOV, the Chairman of EU Affairs Sub-Committee of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian *Duma* stressed that an attentive analysis showed that virtually all spheres of common activities of Russia and the EU had good perspectives for a strategic cooperation that would be as beneficial for both parties. Nevertheless, a majority of deputies of the Russian *Duma* would reject any notion of political blackmail in the dialogue between Russia and the EU. Common challenges and threats for the EU-Russia relations, like nuclear proliferation, terrorism, environmental protection and illegal migration could be tackled much better by joining efforts.

In the following debate the questions and comments focused on energy issues, where a number of delegates expressed their expectation for solidarity from EU Member States. EU needs to speak to Russia with one voice, the freedom of press needs to be guaranteed, the conditions for activities of the civil society created and more attention paid to environmental protection and climate change. Questions regarding Russia's relations with former members of the Soviet Union and frozen conflicts were raised.

The results of the working group on co-financing of the permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat were also debated. The German and the Portuguese delegation as representatives of the two incoming presidencies supported the idea of co-financing as well as of stipulating the COSAC Secretariat in the Rules of Procedure. Already 15 parliaments expressed their will to contribute to the co-financing mechanism.

The Conference concluded by unanimous adoption of the contribution to the EU institutions and the conference conclusions of the XXXVI COSAC.

The 6th Bi-annual Report of COSAC covered the following topics:

- Subsidiarity and proportionality;
- Cooperation with the Commission;
- Justice and Home Affairs: the question of the *passerelle*;
- Comitology;
- Future cooperation with the European Parliament;
- Northern Dimension of the European Union.

XXXVII COSAC in Berlin (Germany)

The XXXVII COSAC meeting was held in **Berlin** on **14-15 May 2007**. It focused on the debate about the Constitutional Treaty and started important initiatives with regard to the future role of national parliaments within the EU and its own functioning.

The debate about the Constitutional Treaty was introduced by Federal Chancellor Ms Angela MERKEL. The Chancellor's speech focussed on constitutional issues, the role of the EU in climate protection and the Eastern dimension of the EU. She also made clear, for the first time publicly, that the German Presidency hoped for the European Council Meeting in June 2007 to

agree not only on a roadmap but also on the main features of a solution of the current institutional impasse.

COSAC welcomed the idea of convening an intergovernmental conference in the second half of 2007 and stressed that national parliaments and the European Parliament should be kept fully involved in its work. Any institutional settlement should strongly respect the substance and objectives of the Constitutional Treaty and take into account the important role of national parliaments in the European policy formulation process. The future role of national parliaments must be at least equally as strong as foreseen in the Constitutional Treaty.

For the first time in the framework of COSAC, a debate on the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy for 2008 was held. The aim was to raise awareness for the importance of the document in the EU policy formulation process. COSAC called on the Commission to duly take into account the statements of parliaments on the Annual Policy Strategy when formulating its Legislative and Work Programme for 2008.

Following a thorough evaluation of the subsidiarity and proportionality checks organised by COSAC in the past, the conference decided to continue with this exercise. At least two EU proposals from the Commission's Legislative and Work Programme will be scrutinized per year. Incoming presidencies were encouraged to hold a debate on subsidiarity and proportionality aiming at a better understanding of the two principles as well as of the procedure to be followed between Parliaments and the European institutions.

The initiative of the Commission, started in September 2006, to directly transfer its documents to national parliaments for comments was assessed as having an added value. COSAC made clear that the Commission should submit its answers to Parliaments within two months and visibly react where a significant number of parliaments raise concerns over a specific proposal. COSAC called on national parliaments and the Commission to upload their statements and correspondence on the IPEX website.

A political consensus was reached on a Presidency draft for the inclusion of a COSAC Secretariat and its permanent Member in the COSAC Rules of Procedure. A great number of parliaments expressed their willingness to contribute to the co-financing of the COSAC Secretariat.

The 7th Bi-annual Report of COSAC covered the following topics:

- Evaluation of Subsidiarity and Proportionality Checks conducted by COSAC;
- Evaluation of Cooperation with the European Commission;
- State of the debate on the Future of Europe;
- Climate Change and Climate Protection - An EU Policy.

XXXVIII COSAC in Estoril (Portugal)

The **XXXVIII COSAC** was held in **Estoril** on **15-16 October 2007**. This COSAC meeting took place a few days before the informal meeting of the European Council where the final negotiations for an agreement over the EU Reform Treaty were to be held. Therefore, this was a very important topic on the COSAC agenda.

The Speaker of the *Assembleia da República*, Mr Jaime GAMA, opened the meeting with a speech stressing the role of national parliaments in bringing more legitimacy to the European project, adding that the Treaty of Lisbon will enhance this role.

For the first time ever, the President of the European Commission addressed the COSAC plenary. Mr José Manuel Durão BARROSO delivered a speech about A Europe of Rights and Results.

The Prime Minister of Portugal and President of the EU Council, Mr José Sócrates, highlighted the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency: the Reform Treaty, international relations of the European Union, the Lisbon Agenda and fight against climate change, also stressing the enhancement of the role of national parliaments.

Mr Luís AMADO, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs of Portugal, gave a speech about the Mediterranean Dimension of the EU.

Three representatives of the European Parliament in this Conference, Mr Elmar BROK, Mr Enrique BARÓN CRESPO and Mr Andrew DUFF, exchanged views with the COSAC plenary about the ongoing IGC negotiations for the EU Reform Treaty.

As far as procedural matters were concerned, the XXXVIII COSAC adopted the revised Rules of Procedure, following a troika proposal, enshrining in the Rules the COSAC Secretariat and its role. The decision to appoint a new permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat for the period 2008-2010 was postponed for the Ljubljana Chairpersons Meeting, due to take place on 18 February 2008. As for the co-financing of the post, 23 letters of intent had already been received, which means that the required threshold (minimum of 14 national parliaments) to move ahead with the co-financing had been achieved.

COSAC also took note of suggested possible topics for future discussion, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, on the basis of a document prepared by COSAC Secretariat compiling the answers given by all parliaments.

The 8th Bi-annual Report included the following subjects:

- Overview of the EU scrutiny systems of the national parliaments of the EU-27;
- National parliament expectations of the IGC;
- The role of parliaments in the Lisbon Strategy;
- The Mediterranean Dimension of the European Union;
- Monitoring of EU financial programmes by national parliaments: setting priorities and allocating funds.

XXXIX COSAC in Bled - Brdo pri Kranju (Slovenia)

The XXXIX COSAC was held in **Bled** and **Brdo pri Kranju** in Slovenia on **7-8 May 2008**. This was the first COSAC meeting in one of the Member States that acceded to the EU in its biggest enlargement in May 2004.

Mr Janez JANŠA, the President of the Council of the EU, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, highlighted the priorities of the Slovenian EU Presidency and the future of the European Union: a launch of a new, three-year cycle of the Lisbon Strategy with introduction of a 'fifth freedom' - free movement of knowledge; energy and climate change; stabilisation of the financial markets; completion of the network of Stabilisation and Association Agreements in the Western Balkans and ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in the Member States.

Mr Dragutin MATE, Slovenian Minister for Interior, gave a presentation on the recent accomplishments and on-going projects of the EU in the field of Home Affairs and on the cooperation with the Western Balkan countries in this very specific field.

Mr Janez POTOČNIK, Commissioner for science and research, spoke about achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. He emphasised that the Lisbon Strategy is the EU key policy instrument to face global challenges such as climate change, new emerging economies and aging populations.

The XXXIX COSAC was informed about the decision of the Ljubljana COSAC Chairpersons Meeting on 18 February 2008 to appoint Ms Loreta RAULINAITYTĖ, Permanent Representative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania to the European Union, as the new permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat for the period 2008-2010. Until the XXXIX COSAC meeting at Brdo pri Kranju 26 letters of intent on the co-financing of the post had been received.

The XXXIX COSAC adopted the 9th Bi-annual Report drafted by the COSAC Secretariat. This report covered the following topics:

- Involvement of national parliaments in the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon;
- The Treaty of Lisbon - implementation and its consequences for the national parliaments of the EU;
- The Lisbon Strategy;
- Enlargement of the Schengen Area;
- Involvement of the parliaments of the European Union in negotiations on accession to the EU.

A Contribution which, *inter alia*, included proposals for further development of the mechanism, through which the Commission directly transmits its legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments, was adopted by consensus. It was sent to the Presidents of the EU Institutions and published in the Official Journal of the EU.

XL COSAC in Paris (France)

The XL COSAC meeting was held in **Paris**, in the hemicycle of the French *Sénat*, on **3-4 November 2008**. It foremost focused its debates on political topics.

The first debate, in presence of Mr François FILLON, Prime Minister of France, was on the French Presidency of the European Union. In addition to the four priorities originally chosen by France for its Presidency (the Climate-Energy package, Immigration, Common Agricultural Policy, European Defence Policy), François FILLON spoke at length on the

international financial and economic crisis and on the conflict between Georgia and Russia. He expressed wish that the Treaty of Lisbon were ratified by all the Member States, including Ireland, so that Europe could swiftly benefit from an institutional set-up which was more adapted to the challenges of the day.

COSAC expressed its support to the conclusions of the European Council of 15 October 2008 on the financial and economical crisis. Considering that this crisis should not interrupt the work on the Climate-Energy package, COSAC called for carrying on efforts with a view to reaching an agreement before the end of 2008. Finally, COSAC hoped that the concerns expressed by the Irish people in the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon would be addressed so that the process of ratification could be completed.

COSAC then held a debate on the energy security of the Union and the Member States on the basis of the report written by Mr Claude MANDIL, former executive director of the International Energy Agency. The importance of diversifying energy sources (including renewable energy) and supply routes was underlined as well as the necessity for the Member States to show more solidarity, in particular through setting up of an internal energy market which would create favourable conditions for collective decisions.

Then, with the participation of Mr Jean- Pierre JOUYET, Secretary of State for European Affairs, COSAC discussed the issue of bringing Europe closer to its citizens. Participants exchanged views on possible remedies to the disaffection of the citizens with the European Union, which became evident after two consecutive treaties aimed at modification the Union's institutional functioning were rejected by referenda in three different Member States. COSAC considered that in order to be understood by the citizens, the Union should concentrate on priority issues of common interest, for which it is the most appropriate level and communicate them efficiently to the public. The idea of an annual debate on "the State of the Union" has also been brought up.

COSAC also dealt with issues related to the area of freedom, security and justice and to the association of national parliaments to the construction of this area. Mr Jacques BARROT, Vice-president of the European Commission, Mr Max-Peter RATZEL, Director of Europol and Mr Jose Luis LOPES DA MOTA, President of the College of Eurojust participated in the debate. COSAC exchanged views on possible forms of cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament. COSAC expressed wish that proposals on possible forms of participation of national parliaments in the scrutiny of Europol's activities and the evaluation of Eurojust's activities, provided by the Treaty of Lisbon, would be debated during its next meetings. COSAC also wished that the European Commission sent a consultation document on the involvement of national parliaments before finalising its proposals for regulation concerning the activities of Europol and Eurojust.

The XL COSAC in Paris had two debated on the application on the principle of subsidiarity. First, it debated the conclusions of the working group constituted by the representatives of the national parliaments to the European Union. The working group was established under the Slovenian COSAC Presidency and aimed at drawing proposals for better cooperation between national parliaments in the application of Protocol 2 on the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon. Agreement was reached on the following points: use of the IPEX network for exchange of information on subsidiarity, encouraging

informal exchanges through the network of representatives of national parliaments to the European Union, role of the COSAC Secretariat in informing national parliaments when one of the thresholds provided for by Protocol 2 was reached.

Finally, COSAC discussed the results of the COSAC-coordinated subsidiarity check on the proposal for a directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The participants of the debate welcomed an informal indication by the Commission to take into consideration parliamentary recess if it coincided with the period of eight weeks for submitting reasoned opinions of national parliaments. Several delegations wished that the European Parliament and the Council would take a similar decision.

The XL COSAC adopted the 10th Bi-annual Report drafted by the COSAC Secretariat. This report covered the following topics:

- The Treaty of Lisbon and its ratification - Expectations of national parliaments and the European Parliament,
- Report on the results of the working group of the national parliaments' representatives to the EU on the implementation of the Protocol 2 on the Application of the Principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality as attached to the Treaty of Lisbon,
- Involvement of parliaments of the EU in European Defence Policy,
- Scrutiny of the agreements negotiated by the European Community.

A Contribution was adopted by consensus. It was sent to the Presidents of the EU Institutions and published in the Official Journal of the EU.

XLI COSAC in Prague (the Czech Republic)

The **XLI COSAC** was held at the Žofín Palace **in Prague** in the Czech Republic **on 11-12 May 2009** only a few days after the appointment of a new Government of the Czech Republic.

Mr Jan FISCHER, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and the President of the Council of the EU, underlined the intention of the new government to continue fulfilling, in a smooth and efficient manner, the tasks of the Council Presidency. He reaffirmed the three priorities of the Czech Presidency: "Economy, Energy and Europe in the world" and outlined its plans for the next two months. Then Mr Miroslav KALOUSEK, outgoing Minister of Finance of the Czech Republic, and Mr Eduard JANOTA, incoming Minister of Finance of the Czech Republic, addressed the issue of the current economic and financial situation. This topic had been introduced in the agenda after numerous demands expressed during the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting on 9-10 February 2009 and it brought a fruitful discussion, the conclusions of which were reflected in the Contribution of the XLI COSAC.

In 2007 the XXXVII COSAC meeting debated for the first time the Commission's Annual Policy Strategy in order to raise awareness for the importance of this document in the EU policy formulation process. The Annual Policy Strategy for 2010 was introduced to XLI COSAC by Mr Vladimír ŠPIDLA, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal

Opportunities. Delegations reiterated the intention to discuss the Annual Policy Strategy of the European Commission on a regular basis.

In relation with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, and liberation of Central and Eastern European countries from communism, the Czech Presidency of COSAC put on the agenda the question of the role of the EU in defending democracy and human rights in the world. The topic was opened by a video address of Mr Václav HAVEL, former President of the Czech Republic and former dissident, and continued by the presentation of Mr Michael KOCÁB, Minister for Human Rights of the Czech Republic.

The XLI COSAC adopted the 11th Bi-annual Report drafted by the COSAC Secretariat. This report covered the following topics:

- Parliamentary control of Europol and evaluation of Eurojust
- The role of the EU parliaments in the protection and promotion of human rights in the world
- Representatives of national parliaments to the EU
- Evaluation of COSAC Bi-annual Reports.

The discussion on the 11th Bi-annual Report was focused on the role of EU parliaments in the control of Europol and evaluation of the activities of Eurojust.

The XLI COSAC Meeting was an opportunity to discuss the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy among the Members of Parliaments of the EU countries and the Members of Parliaments of the Eastern Partnership countries, who were invited to this meeting as special guests. The Eastern Partnership was one of the main priorities for the Czech Presidency and had been formally established a few days before the XLI COSAC by a summit held on 7 May 2009 in Prague. Mr Jan KOHOUT, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, participated in the discussion at the COSAC meeting.

XLII COSAC in Stockholm (Sweden)

The **XLII COSAC** was held in the plenary chamber of the *Riksdag* in **Stockholm** on **4-6 October 2009**. The meeting was opened by Mr Per WESTERBERG, Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, and chaired by Ms Anna KINBERG BATRA, Chairperson of the Committee on European Affairs. Part of the meeting took place in the presence of Her Royal Highness Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden.

The conference took place only two days after the Irish referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon, in which the Irish people voted in favour of the Treaty. COSAC welcomed the clear and positive result of the Irish referendum, a result which motivated a number of interventions during the meeting regarding future work in the light of the new Treaty, for example the upcoming cooperation between national parliaments.

The Prime Minister of Sweden, at the time also President of the European Council, Mr Fredrik REINFELDT, addressed the meeting highlighting the priorities of the Swedish Presidency and reporting on how work in the EU was progressing in various areas. The Prime Minister participated in a lively debate with the participants of the COSAC meeting. Other ministers of

the Swedish Government also addressed COSAC and participated in debates; the Minister for Justice, Ms Beatrice Ask, and the Minister for Migration and Asylum Policy, Mr Tobias BILLSTRÖM both reported on developments in the Stockholm Programme and presented their views. The Minister for the Environment, Mr Andreas CARLGREN, spoke on the subject of the climate challenge. Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM, Vice President of the European Commission, and Mr Björn VON SYDOW, Member and former Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, gave speeches on openness and transparency in the EU institutions and in national Parliaments when handling EU matters; these speeches were followed by a lively debate.

The XLII COSAC meeting adopted the 12th Bi-annual Report, which contains two chapters: Transparency of the parliamentary scrutiny process and Parliamentary scrutiny of the Stockholm Programme. Both subjects were debated during the meeting.

The result of the COSAC-coordinated subsidiarity check on the proposal for a Council Framework decision on the right to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings (COM (2009) 338), which took place during a parliamentary summer recess and the following autumn, was welcomed by the COSAC meeting. During the discussion it was stressed that parliamentary recesses presented a difficulty for a number of national Parliaments in completing the check on time. COSAC therefore welcomed the informal commitment of the European Commission to deduct four weeks of the month of August from the calculation of the deadline for receipt of reasoned opinions.

The COSAC meeting also discussed and took note of proposed subjects to be dealt with during 2010.

Based on the proposal from the Presidential Troika, which took place on 4 October, Ms Loreta RAULINAITYTĖ, a candidate put forward by the Lithuanian *Seimas*, was reappointed as the permanent member for the COSAC Secretariat until 31 December 2011. On the proposal of the Swedish Presidency, the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting in July had decided to continue the system of co-financing of the COSAC Secretariat. At the time of the XLII COSAC, a large number of letters of intent to participate in the co-financing for the period of 2010-2011 had been received from national Parliaments.

The XLII COSAC meeting endorsed by consensus a contribution containing the following topics:

- Institutional issues and the Treaty of Lisbon,
- The economic and financial crisis,
- The climate challenge - the road to Copenhagen,
- The Stockholm Programme,
- Regional strategies and neighbourhood policy,
- Enlargement.

IX. Post Lisbon Treaty - a new era for EU Parliaments

XLIII COSAC in Madrid (Spain)

The **XLIII COSAC** was held in the *Sala Ernst Lluch* of the *Congreso de los Diputados* in **Madrid**, on **31 May-1 June 2010**. The meeting was opened by Mr José BONO MARTÍNEZ, Speaker of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, and chaired by Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE, Chair of the *Cortes Generales* Joint Committee for the European Union. The Spanish Prime Minister, Mr José Luis RODRÍGUEZ ZAPATERO, intervened also in the opening session, defining the role of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union, whose main objectives were the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon and the strengthening of the joint actions towards European economic governance.

In the ensuing debate, several topics were raised, such as the economic crisis and the measures being taken by the Council, especially in the context of the EUROPE 2020 Strategy; the institutional scheme of the EU; the European citizen's initiative; the energy policies in the EU and the problems which FRONTEX entails.

The XLIII COSAC adopted the 13th Bi-annual Report, which contains two Chapters: the implementation of the new powers of national Parliaments after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the future role of COSAC. Both subjects were debated during the meeting.

The conclusions of the Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the European Union were presented by Mr Per WESTERBERG, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, as they dealt basically with the same main issues as the XLIII COSAC, with a special focus on interparliamentary cooperation.

The meeting took place in a period of serious challenges for the European Union due to the economic and financial crisis. Accordingly, the presentation made by Mr Maros ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission, exposed the priorities of the Commission focusing on the economic issues, as the EUROPE 2020 Strategy and the EU budget review.

The present model for relations between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament was dealt with by four key speakers: Mr Elmar BROK, Member of the European Parliament; Mr José María GIL-ROBLES Y GIL-DELGADO, former President of the European Parliament; Mr Vitalino CANAS, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese Parliament; and Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee for European Co-operation Organisations of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*. These interventions were followed a lively debate on interparliamentary cooperation, where ideas such as the proposal of an annual parliamentary debate on the State of the EU to be held simultaneously in all national Parliaments, were raised.

The XLIII COSAC meeting endorsed by consensus a Contribution, which dealt with topics such as:

- The economic crisis, after the measures agreed for the financial stabilisation of Greece;
- The Climate challenge – and the preparation for the Cancun Summit;
- The institutional framework, after the appointment of Mr Herman VAN ROMPUY as President of the European Council, and of Baroness Catherine

- Ashton as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission;
- The EU institutional balance, the use of inter institutional agreements between the European Parliament and the European Commission,
- Regional strategies, as the Union for the Mediterranean, the relationship between the European Union and Latin America and the EU Baltic Sea Region Strategy.

XLIV COSAC in Brussels (Belgium)

The **XLIV COSAC** was held in the **Brussels Egmont Palace on 24-26 October 2010**.

The participants were welcomed by Senator Philippe MAHOUX, Co-Chairman of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs of the Federal Parliament of Belgium, and by Mr Herman DE CROO, Member of Parliament and former Speaker of the Belgian House of Representatives.

The meeting adopted the 14th Bi-annual Report with the analysis of the replies of the 41 Chambers/Parliaments. This report contained the three following chapters: (1) Sustainable Development in the Europe 2020 Strategy, (2) Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Common Security and Defence Policy and (3) the Future Role of COSAC after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon (continuation).

Each of these topics was debated after being introduced by Prof. ir. Bernard MAZIJN, Ghent University, Prof. Dr. Jan WOUTERS, Catholic University of Leuven, and Mr Herman DE CROO, Member of Parliament and former Speaker of the Belgian House of Representatives, respectively.

Mr Yves LETERME, Prime Minister of Belgium, highlighted the Presidency's priorities³⁵ and sketched the obtained results. Moreover, he reported on the state of play regarding the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Agreement on the European Patent and the Conclusions of the so-called Task Force on Economic Governance. As to the remainder of the Belgian Presidency, Mr LETERME stressed the importance of the G20 Summit in Seoul and the Climate Conference in Cancún. In the ensuing debate, the Members of COSAC asked the Prime Minister, *inter alia*, about the enlargement of the EU, climate change, the economic crisis and its solutions and the EU common foreign and security policy.

Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission, reminded the Members of COSAC of the origins of the political dialogue between national Parliaments and the European Commission. In this context, the President specifically suggested that national Parliaments would play a role in the preparation of the Commission's Work Program for 2012. In addition, he focused on the economic reform and on the pillars it is based on³⁶. During the debate that followed this intervention, several issues were raised, such as e.g. the (victims of the) totalitarian regimes, the need for cooperation between the European Commission and

³⁵ i.e.: the economic and social issue, the execution of the Stockholm Programme, the social dimension of the EU, climate and foreign policy

³⁶ i.e. a reform of the European financial system, a stronger approach to economic governance and the Europe 2020 Strategy

national Parliaments in the framework of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Patent System.

It was the first time in the history of COSAC that Mr Herman VAN ROMPUY addressed the Conference in the capacity of the President of the European Council. The President started his intervention by reflecting on the Union's institutional framework after the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in general and on the new post of the President of the European Council in particular. Regarding the latter, he stressed his role as a consensus facilitator. Mr VAN ROMPUY also stressed the double democratic legitimacy as articulated by the European Parliament and by national Parliaments. Furthermore, the President outlined the results of the Task force he had chaired³⁷. He also emphasized that the current crisis, although not of the European origin, needed a European solution. Subsequently, the Members of COSAC asked Mr VAN ROMPUY about specific proposals advanced by the Task force, about the possibility of sanctioning Member States that had become a liability to the Stability and Growth Pact and about the planned increase of the EU budget for 2011.

The XLIV COSAC adopted a Contribution containing positions on: (1) sustainable development in the Europe 2020 Strategy, (2) the parliamentary scrutiny of the common foreign and security policy and the common security and defence policy, (3) economic governance in the EU, (4) the future role of COSAC and (5) the cooperation with EU institutions.

XLV COSAC in Budapest (Hungary)

The XLV COSAC was held in the former Upper Chamber Hall of the Hungarian National Assembly (*Országgyűlés*) in **Budapest** on **29-31 May 2011**.

In his introductory remarks Mr László KÖVÉR, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, noted that the activities of the parliamentary dimension of Hungary's first ever EU Presidency fitted well into the priorities of the country and also the agenda of the European Union. The meeting was chaired by Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, who, in his introductory speech, talked about the most important challenges of the EU that the Hungarian Presidency aimed to tackle.

Following the welcoming addresses by the Speaker and the Chairman, the Prime Minister Mr Viktor ORBÁN reviewed the results of the Hungarian Presidency. He stated that some EU Member States are plagued by unprecedentedly high debt levels and low employment rate, therefore the Hungarian Presidency incorporated the burning issues in its program. The priorities included the creation of economic governance, the formation of a new European financial regulatory system, the maintenance of the momentum of the enlargement process, and the formulation of a uniform European Roma strategy. The Prime Minister stated that the Union had to work on the creation of the "workfare society", a society and economy that are based on employment. As the credibility of the EU depended on the success of the enlargement process, the aim of the Presidency was to conclude the negotiations with Croatia in June 2011.

³⁷ I.e.: the review of the Stability and Growth Pact, the broadening of the scope of monitoring developments on national level and an enhanced coordination of national policy decisions

The second point on the agenda was a presentation by Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration, who reviewed the economic situation of the Union, like economic governance, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester. The Vice-President welcomed the fact that COSAC put on its agenda a debate on the current issues of the EU, which was confirmed by the extremely large number of requests for the floor by the participants. The Vice-President stated that Member States and the EU institutions had to work on achieving the Europe of results in order to win back the trust of citizens. He explained that the reform of European economic policy based on three pillars: the comprehensive reform of the financial system, the strengthening of the European competitiveness with the aid of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the reform of economic governance. He mentioned that in the frame of the European Semester the European Commission was expected to publish its evaluation of the national reform programs of the Member States on 7 June 2011. The Vice-President also touched upon the relations of the European Commission with national Parliaments with special focus on the subsidiarity issues.

The participants of the XLV COSAC meeting were presented with a short briefing on the developments of the EU Speakers' Conference that was held in Brussels on 4-5 April 2011.

For the first time in the history of COSAC a general policy debate on the State of the Union was held. The keynote speaker was Mr György SCHÖPFLIN, MEP and Jean Monnet professor, who addressed the COSAC with his speech entitled "*Quo vadis Europa?*".

The closing of the COSAC plenary meeting symbolised a great success of the parliamentary cooperation among EU parliaments since a consensus was reached on the amendments of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC which were brought in line with the wording of the Treaty of Lisbon.

In addition, during the meeting the 15th Bi-annual Report of COSAC was approved. It was drafted by the COSAC Secretariat on the basis of the answers to the questionnaire sent by 38 national Parliaments/Chambers from 26 Member States and the European Parliament. The report concentrated on one major topic, i.e. the economic issues.

At the end of the Conference, the Contribution and Conclusions of the XLV COSAC were adopted. The Contribution, which was later - just as the amended Rules of Procedure of COSAC - published in the Official Journal of the European Union included the views of COSAC on the following topics: (i) the way to recovery: Economic governance, Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester, (ii) parliamentary scrutiny of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the common security and defence policy (CSDP), (iii) the State of the Union, and finally on (iv) cooperation with the institutions of the European Union.

XLVI COSAC in Warsaw (Poland)

The XLVI COSAC was held in the plenary hall of the *Sejm* of the Republic of Poland in **Warsaw on 2-4 October 2011.**

Mr Grzegorz SCHETYNA, Marshal of the *Sejm* of the Republic of Poland, and Mr Bogdan BORUSEWICZ, Marshal of the *Senat* of the Republic of Poland, delivered their opening

speeches, concerning topics such as the current crisis situation, negotiation of the Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2014-2020, cohesion policy and the role of COSAC.

Mr Stanisław RAKOCZY, Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, informed the participants of the decisions of the Troika which met the previous day. The Troika *inter alia* had interviewed two candidates for the post of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat. The Troika had not reached a consensus on the selection of a candidate for the post and had decided to ask the Chairpersons to make the decision by voting.

The meeting adopted the 16th Bi-annual Report with the analysis of the replies of the 41 Chambers/Parliaments. Chapter 1 of the Report focused on the MFF for Europe 2020, while Chapter 2 dealt with the experience of national Parliaments and the European Parliament two years after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The next point of the agenda was focused on the MFF 2014-2020 from the EU budget perspective. Keynote speakers: Mr Janusz LEWANDOWSKI, Commissioner for Budget and Financial Programming, and Mr Salvador GARRIGA POLLEDO, rapporteur of the European Parliament on the MFF, presented this topic from the point of view of the European Commission and the European Parliament. Multiannual Financial Framework for the years 2014-2020 from the cohesion policy perspective was presented by Mr Waldemar SŁUGOCKI, Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Regional Development of the Republic of Poland.

During the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC Ms Libby KURIEN was appointed as the next Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for a two-year term starting on 1 January 2012.

Mr Mikołaj DOWGIELEWICZ, Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland spoke on the state of play of the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

This point of the agenda was followed by the topic "Two years after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon" with keynote speaker Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the Commission for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration, who delivered a speech, entitled "National Parliaments: Key Partners in Setting the EU Agenda" presenting relations between the European Commission and national Parliaments.

The XLVI COSAC adopted the Contribution and Conclusions. The Contribution, was later published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

XLVII COSAC in Copenhagen (Denmark)

The XLVII COSAC in **Copenhagen** on **22-24 April 2012** focused on the re-launch of the Single Market. In the light of the economic crisis and the 20th anniversary of the Single Market (in 2012), the European Commission presented the Single Market Act in October 2011 which included 12 key actions for strengthening the Single Market. At the COSAC meeting in Copenhagen different areas of the Single Market were discussed. As the first keynote speaker Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, talked about the 20 years

anniversary of the Single Market and emphasised that its full potential could only be achieved if there was a shared commitment to the governance of the Single Market. Hereafter the Danish Prime Minister, Ms Helle Thorning-Schmidt, gave a speech on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe where she called on the national parliamentarians to choose optimism over pessimism and focus on job creation and growth while also ensuring stable economies. Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, Mr Michel Barnier and Mr Malcolm Harbour, Chair of the Committee for the Internal Market and Consumer Protection of the European Parliament, both spoke about the full implementation of the Services Directive. Commissioner Barnier stated that the free movement of services was the least accomplished of the four freedoms and if the Services Directive was fully implemented 1,5 % could be added to the European GDP by 2020. Mr Harbour highlighted the work done by the IMCO-Committee on reviewing the implementation of the Services Directive and invited national Parliaments to be more closely involved in the work of the Committee. Commissioner for the Environment, Mr Janez Potočnik, talked about promoting the transition to a resource efficient economy in Europe. The Commissioner stressed that the economy and the environment were inter-related and inter-dependent and that the Single Market could be a driving force for greening the economy. Ms Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the Commission responsible for Digital Agenda spoke about a digital Single Market and the fact that three things were needed to create this: broadband networks, a digitally literate workforce and legal frameworks - all three issues were on the Commission's agenda.

Although the debate in Copenhagen was mostly focused on political issues, COSAC agreed on a proposal of strengthening the political dialogue between the national Parliaments and the European Commission. Based on an initiative from the Danish presidency of COSAC, the Commission was asked to improve the cooperation with national parliaments in the following areas:

- The European Semester - COSAC asked that a representative of the Commission should appear before the competent committees of national Parliaments to respond to questions on the European Semester.
- Written enquiries - COSAC called on the Commission to give national Parliaments the opportunity to submit enquiries in writing to the Commission on legislative proposals and consultation documents.
- Pre-legislative phase - COSAC invited the Commission to alert national Parliaments to all public consultations thereby giving the national parliaments the opportunity to feed views into the pre-legislative phase of the EU proposals.
- Publication of contributions - the Commission was invited to make contributions received from national Parliaments public under a specific heading of the Commission website and to ensure that, where appropriate, national Parliament contributions on consultations are explicitly referred to in the explanatory memorandum accompanying Commission proposals.

The XLVII COSAC meeting agreed a Contribution addressing the following topics:

- Re-launching the Single Market
- A Single Market for Services
- Sustainable growth and green economy
- The Digital Single Market
- Transposition and enforcement
- Proposal for strengthening the political dialogue with the European Commission

During the Danish presidency of COSAC the 17th Bi-annual Report was drafted on the basis of answers from all 40 national Parliamentary chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had two chapters focusing on Information flow to and from the Parliaments and the Re-launch of the Single Market and Parliaments.

XLVIII COSAC in Nicosia (Cyprus)

The **XLVIII COSAC** was held at the Filoxenia Center in **Nicosia** in the Republic of Cyprus on 14 - 16 October 2012.

The participants were welcomed by Mr Averof NEOFYTOU, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs of the House of Representatives. Following the welcoming addresses by Mr Christos CHRISTOFIDES, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr Demetris CHRISTOFIAS, and Mr Sophoclis FITTIS, on behalf of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Yiannakis L. OMIROU. As first keynote speaker, Mr Andreas MAVROYIANNIS, Deputy Minister for EU Affairs, presented the State of Play and the Priorities of the Cyprus Presidency of the European Union. He said that the Cyprus Presidency had tried to set realistic and achievable goals and that the main topics of the Presidency had been determined by the ongoing developments in the European Union.

Mr Maros ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice President of the European Commission for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration and Mr Carlos CASINI, Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, next gave speeches on the topic "From words to action: making 'more Europe' a reality". Vice President Šefčovič said that the desire for "more Europe" was not a power grab by Brussels or an attack on national sovereignty, but about "europeanisation" of national politics to the advantage of Member States and citizens. Mr Casini concentrated his remarks on how he thought "more Europe" should be legitimised by reigniting the European Parliament elections and through interparliamentary cooperation.

Following on from a presentation by Mr Günther Oettinger, European Commissioner for Energy, at the COSAC Chairpersons meeting held in Limassol on 8-9 July, the third point on the plenary agenda was a presentation by Mr Solon KASSINIS, Director of Energy Service, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of the Republic of Cyprus, who informed the meeting about the most updated technical details concerning recent discovery of own natural gas resources in the exclusive economic zone of the Republic of Cyprus, stating that these recently discovered resources of Cyprus together with interconnectivity could help diversify Europe's energy sources and complete the internal market in energy.

The next point on the agenda addressed the issue of the Europe 2020 strategy – recovery from the economic crisis. Key-note speaker, Mrs Pervenche BERÈS, Chairwoman of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament, argued that the Europe 2020 strategy was one of the essential tools that would help European countries together to find a way out of the financial crisis. As a consequence of the failed Lisbon strategy, according to her, the Europe 2020 strategy had to be brought to life at all levels and the National Reform Programmes (NRP) should enter the public arena and be debated not exclusively between the EP and the Council of Ministers, but also in national Parliaments with their governments.

On the following topic on Single Market Governance, the key note speaker, Mr Pierre DELSAUX, Deputy Director General, Directorate General, Internal Market and Services, European Commission, emphasised, in the context of the financial crisis, the need to improve the banking system in Europe and to complete the internal market. In this context, he made reference to the Single Market Act I and the Single Market Act II, as well as to the transposition of the directive regarding governance. During the debate, there was general support to the strengthening of the internal market.

During the Cyprus' Presidency of COSAC, the 18th Bi-annual Report was drafted on the basis of answers from all 40 national Parliamentary chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The four chapters of the report focused on: 1) Relations between the European Institutions and national Parliaments, 2) The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union and the role of Parliaments, 3) Energy - Trans-European Energy Infrastructure, and 4) Single Market Governance.

The XLVIII COSAC meeting adopted Conclusions and the Contribution. The latter, published in the Official Journal, addressed the following topics: 1) The Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the European Union, 2) From Words to Action: Making More Europe a reality, 3) Energy, 4) Single Market Governance, 5) Europe 2020 Strategy – Recovery from the Economic Crisis, and 5) Political dialogue with the European institutions.

In the framework of the last topic on the political dialogue with the European Commission addressed in the Contribution, COSAC noted, amongst others, that, for the first time since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, a sufficient number of national Parliaments or Chambers submitted a Reasoned Opinion in order to trigger the "yellow card" mechanism on the proposal for a Regulation on the exercise of the right to take collective action within the context of the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services. In this context, COSAC called upon the European Commission to provide individual responses to the Reasoned Opinions submitted and reasoning for why it considers that the principle of subsidiarity had not been breached.

XLIX COSAC in Dublin (Ireland)

The XLIX COSAC conference in Dublin on 23 - 25 June 2013 was chaired by Mr Dominic HANNIGAN T.D., Chairman of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs of the Houses of the Oireachtas. The opening address was given by Mr Seán BARRETT T.D., Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann who noted that Ireland was celebrating the fortieth anniversary of its membership of the EU in 2013 and that it was the seventh Presidency Ireland had held. He noted also that although the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency had evolved considerably over time and increased in importance and the question how to increase Parliamentary control and, in particular, how to reinforce the role of national Parliaments, on EU affairs was still valid given the erosion of public trust in politics and institutions at both EU and national levels in the face of the economic crisis. He also addressed the themes of increased inter-governmentalism, the role of Parliaments in policy formation, decision making and oversight processes and the importance of communications for the democratic process.

The 19th Bi-annual Report examined Genuine Economic and Monetary Union, EU Enlargement, and the mobilisation of interparliamentary cooperation in relation to scrutiny of subsidiarity.

An Taoiseach Mr Enda Kenny T.D., Prime Minister of Ireland addressed the issue of taking Stock and Looking to the Future and in doing so reviewed the achievements of the Presidency. He praised the input of COSAC to previous Treaties noting that each of these key institutional steps brought progress in terms of democratic legitimacy and accountability, including enhanced roles for national Parliaments and that each of those steps brought the European Project to a new stage in its development. He took questions from the floor on, among other things, banking union; solidarity in the EU; how the role of European and national Parliament members could be strengthened in budget negotiations; youth employment; the ERASMUS programme; tax harmonisation and the EU-US trade agreement.

Mr Herman De Croo, Former Speaker of the Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, and Mr Brendan Halligan, Chairperson, Institute of International and European Affairs presented their analysis on the future of European integration. Both remained optimistic and ideas relating to closer involvement of national Parliaments and the creation of a European Senate composed solely of members of national Parliaments were discussed.

In a new panel format, Dr Mo Ibrahim, Chairman, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Ms Michèle Striffler, Vice-president of the Development Committee of the European Parliament and Mr Barry Andrews, Chief Executive, GOAL spoke about delivering on development aid targets, about the failure of systems to deliver aid more effectively and the importance of good governance.

A session was dedicated to a European future for young citizens. Mr Joe COSTELLO, Minister of State and three young Europeans spoke on this issue: Ms Nevin Öztop (Turkey) spoke from the perspective of a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT), Ms Rachel Creevy (Ireland), a young disabled citizen, emphasised the differences in attitudes between the United States and in Europe and Ms Marietta Herfort (Hungary) an ethnic Roma, reported that despite the European Roma strategy, members of her ethnic group still did not enjoy the same rights in 2013. In a refreshed format Dominic Hannigan conducted the interviews from the floor to promote a more interactive debate.

In the final session there was a debate about maintaining momentum in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy. The keynote speakers were Dr Valentin Inzko, High Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina and Mr Erwan Fouéré, Associate Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels. The progress that had been made in the 10 years since the Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki was reviewed. COSAC concluded that momentum in the transformative process of enlargement should be maintained, and that a realistic prospect of eventual accession needed to continue to be offered to candidate and potential candidate countries in order to incentivise the necessary reforms.

The Contribution from COSAC focussed on;

- Economic governance
- Democratic accountability and legitimacy
- Youth employment

- Enlargement
- Development
- Subsidiarity and
- Political dialogue

In terms of Subsidiarity and following the triggering of the first yellow card COSAC invited the Commission to review, to improve and to clarify how these arrangements should operate for both the yellow and orange card and highlighted the view that a future Treaty revision should take account of the opinion of national Parliaments that a period longer than eight weeks would make the process easier and mitigate the impact of periods of holidays and parliamentary recess

On political dialogue COSAC called on the Commission to give special attention and consideration to opinions on a specific legislative proposal or specific aspects of a proposal that have been issued in the context of the political dialogue by at least one third of national Parliaments

In an innovative feature the Dutch Tweede Kamer led a lunch time debate on parliamentary practices in selective EU scrutiny.

The informal networking meeting of officials after the COSAC was also continued in Dublin by the Irish Presidency.

The Dublin COSAC also saw the introduction of the idea of "first responder" in debates after the keynote speakers. This helped to set the tone and direction for the succeeding debate and recognised the expertise of the first responder in the policy area.

L COSAC in Vilnius (Lithuania)

The L COSAC took place in the historical Hall of the Act of 11 March of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, in **Vilnius**, on **27-29 October 2013**.

The participants of the jubilee L COSAC meeting discussed the state of play of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, prospects of the Eastern Partnership, the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament in 2014, cyber-security challenges and prospects as well as benefits for business.

The L COSAC started with the informal meeting of the Members of eight EU national Parliaments (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) who held a discussion on the recent developments in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

The official part of the L COSAC started with the welcome address by H. E. Ms Loreta Grauzinienė, Speaker of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. The video message by Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, was screened. He congratulated COSAC on its 50th jubilee meeting and its development into a substantial factor in interparliamentary cooperation on European Union policies.

Chair Mr Kirkilas presented the 20th Bi-annual Report of COSAC. Forty-one Chambers provided information, their views and positions on drafting the 20th Bi-annual Report which consisted of three parts: 1. European Elections 2014: Platform for Debate on the EU Future with its Citizens. 2. Democratic Legitimacy in the EU and the Role of EU Parliaments. 3. Implementation of the *Europe 2020* Strategy. The first chapter showed support for establishing stronger links between European and national parties as well as for the nomination of party candidates for the post of the President of the European Commission. The second chapter showed the overriding importance that national Parliaments accorded to the democratic control of their own governments in EU affairs as well as the value of COSAC, political dialogue and IPEX as tools of interparliamentary cooperation. The third chapter demonstrated the increasing focus of Parliaments on the fight against unemployment and described parliamentary procedures and best practices related to the implementation of the *Europe 2020* Strategy.

Mr Algirdas Butkevičius, Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, presented the state of play of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, highlighting the progress made so far, for example, concerning the agreement on the 2014-2020 Financial Programme, the debates on the Single Resolution Mechanism, the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative.

Presenting his views on the contribution of COSAC to strengthening interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union, Mr Laurent Fabius, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, former President of the French National Assembly and the founding father of COSAC, pointed out that the reasons that justified the creation of COSAC in 1989 were still valid and probably even more pertinent today. According to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, the aim behind setting up COSAC was to allow national Parliaments to participate in the life of the European Community and to promote interparliamentary cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

Referring to the upcoming European elections in 2014, Mr Pat Cox, former President of the European Parliament, observed the rise in populist parties since the onset of the crisis. “One could conjecture, as I venture to do now, that in the next European Parliament possibly up to one third of its membership could be composed of parties who could be described as Eurosceptic or populist. And that puts a very big onus on the two thirds or more of the rest who will be charged with the responsibility to find a common way forward,” Mr Cox said.

Mr Pat Cox also gave a detailed account of the monitoring mission to Ukraine conferred upon him and Mr Aleksander Kwaśniewski, former President of the Republic of Poland, by the European Parliament in May 2012. He concluded that despite positive developments, overall Ukraine was not yet in compliance with the conditions set by the European Union.

The achievements and challenges of the implementation of the *Europe 2020* Strategy, the EU’s growth strategy for the coming decade, were presented by Mr Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Inter-Institutional Relations and Administration.

While admitting that the crisis caused a much slower launch of the implementation of the Strategy than expected, Mr Šefčovič noted that the goal of the document that had been framed in 2010 was shared by most of us. “The integrated EU strategy should deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth for Europe. We decided to simplify it as much as possible and

learn the lessons from the Lisbon Strategy which was there before and had simply too many criteria and too many targets. Now we are looking only at five of them. They are key indicators which can show us whether we are moving to the right direction to keep our competitiveness and preserve our competitive edge if we were to compare ourselves with our major economic partners, who are at the same time our competitors.”

The L COSAC also focused on democratic legitimacy of the European Union and the role of EU Parliaments. Mr Hans Gert Pöttering, former President of the European Parliament, currently Member of the European Parliament, noted that the EU had the right to act and reinforce democracy at the same time. “We should not forget that no democratic country in the world, regardless of the complexity of its internal architecture, is comparable to the EU with a population of 500 million and 28 Member States. Such a complex democracy cannot be found anywhere else. Our Member States have different identities and live under differing agendas. This creates the need for us to be patient, listen to each other and understand each other; accordingly, the willingness to compromise is essential in debates on the future. This highlights the crucial importance of dialogue and democratic participation in the EU,” said the former President of the European Parliament and highlighted that the EU values were unquestionable.

During the event, Mr Hans Gert Pöttering, Ms Eva Kjer Hansen, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish *Folketing*, and Mr Dominic Hannigan, Chair of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs of the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas, discussed the opportunities of granting national Parliaments the right to legislative initiative.

Mr Rudolf Peter Roy, Head of the Security Policy and Sanctions Division of the European External Action Service, discussed the cyber-security challenges. He noted that information and communication technologies and related activities in recent years created over 20 % of GDP growth in the largest economies of the world.

However, the importance of the Internet goes far beyond its direct economic benefit. “Cyberspace helps us to achieve a better future. It provides access to education, promotes freedom of speech, it connects people worldwide and enables essential services. It acts as a global equaliser,” Mr Roy said. Mr Ilja Laurs, Chief Executive Officer of GetJar, winner of “European Manager of the Year 2011 Award” presented by the European Business Press, introduced the problems, challenges and opportunities that technological entrepreneurs faced in Europe.

An informal lunch time session, initiated by the House of Lords of the United Kingdom, on the role of national Parliaments in shaping and scrutinising EU decision-making also took place during the L COSAC. It was highly appreciated by the participants as it provided a possibility to be engaged in spontaneous, dynamic and open exchange of views, *inter alia*, with the European Commission.

Last but not least, during the jubilee L COSAC meeting, the COSAC Women’s Forum was set up. The participants of the Forum adopted the declaration on the establishment of the COSAC Women’s Forum, which emphasised the necessity to draw attention of the European political parties to the issues of gender equality, equal opportunities policy, gender balance within society and more active participation of women in politics. The meeting was chaired by Prof

Marija Aušrinė Pavilionienė, Member of the Seimas, who was appointed the coordinator of the COSAC Women's Forum.

Also at the Meeting, the Cypriot candidate, Ms Christiana Fryda, was elected as the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat.

The Meeting was concluded by adopting the Contribution and the Conclusions of the L COSAC.

The said documents focus on the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, implementation of the *Europe 2020* Strategy, prospects of the Eastern Partnership and the forthcoming European elections in 2014.

In the Contribution of the L COSAC adopted by consensus, COSAC underlines the importance of active participation of the citizens of the Union in the 2014 European elections and invites national Parliaments to consider and make operational the measures on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, and to engage in political debates on the key issues prior to the elections.

COSAC also supports the focus of the European Council on the need to boost investment and encourage innovation in the digital sector; calls for a coordinated approach to migration flows guided by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility as laid down in Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; welcomes the agreement reached by the European Council in June 2013 on the EUR 6 billion youth jobless fund, known as the “youth guarantee”; and welcomes the Commission’s undertaking to pay particular attention to subsidiarity issues and its firm commitment to communicating directly with national Parliaments.

LI COSAC in Athens (Greece)

The LI COSAC was held at the Apollon Divani Hotel in Vouliagmeni-Athens on 15-17 June 2014. The conference was chaired by Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Vice-President of the Hellenic Parliament and Chair of the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs. In his introduction, Mr TRAGAKIS noted that the 21st Bi-annual Report of COSAC was drafted on the basis of the answers of all 43 Chambers of the 29 Member States and the European Parliament and consisted of four chapters: 1. The future of COSAC 2. The cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament 3. Developing the social dimension of the EMU: the role of Parliaments 4. Democratic Legitimacy and Accountability in the budget process.

In his welcome address, the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Vagelis MEIMARAKIS stressed that the trust of EU citizens had fallen to an unprecedented low percentage, giving rise to radical parties of both the right and the left, thus reflecting a tendency in euroscepticism and projecting the call of society for politics to reconnect to the needs of the citizens. Thereupon, he underlined that cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament could bear fruit.

The Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Antonis SAMARAS, presented the State of Play of the Hellenic Presidency of the EU Council noting that 67 legislative proposals had been completed and significant political documents had been adopted on the security and wellbeing of the European citizens. He underlined that the Hellenic Presidency placed emphasis on the promotion of the Banking Union, on halting the recession and tackling unemployment and immigration, as well as on border protection and mobility. It also focused on promoting maritime policies of the EU as a horizontal issue, with a view to maximising the use of “the capabilities offered by the Sea for growth and job creation”.

In the recorded message that followed, the President of the European Commission, Mr Jose Manuel BARROSO, presented his vision for Europe 2025 noting that the EU had taken the necessary measures for fiscal consolidation to smoothen any macro-economic imbalances and to ensure financial stability; it had, in addition, ensured all prerequisites for sustainable development.

The next point of the agenda was the crisis in Ukraine and the challenges for the EU. The Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, Mr Elmar BROK was critical of the policy followed by Russia, but stressed that all diplomatic means must be exhausted to prevent further escalation expressing the hope that the new President of Ukraine would manage to build bridges of communication with Russia.

During lunch, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* led an informal meeting on next and best practices for the accountability of EU funds.

In the afternoon session, the participants exchanged views on democratic legitimacy and European leadership in the aftermath of the European elections. Mr Konstantinos TASOULAS, Minister of Culture and Sport of the Hellenic Republic, referred to the impact of the financial crisis on the Greek society, stressing that, if unbalanced fiscal consolidation policy continued, there were a risk of further enhancement of nationalism and extremism. Summing up, he said that the wager of a Unified Europe could be won by the pro-Europeans, as long as there was solidarity, balanced growth, convergence between the north and the south and acts that lead to growth. In reference to the same subject, Mr Carlo CASINI, Chairman of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, stressed that euroscepticism was a result of the distance that European citizens felt separating them from European policy and institutions. He conceded that there was a serious democratic deficit in Europe; however, he deemed the articulation of citizens in the EU elections very positive. He summed up his intervention by saying that Europe needed to rediscover its roots in order to become a common place of hope and perspective.

The second day of the LI COSAC started with the Women’s Forum. Mrs Aikaterini SIDIROPOULOU - PAPAKOSTA, Secretary of State for Health of the Hellenic Republic, addressed the issue of the impact of the economic and financial crisis on women, while Prof. Marija Aušrinė PAVILIONIENĖ, Member of the Lithuanian *Seimas* and Coordinator of the COSAC Women's Forum, talked about the integration of gender perspective in the EU growth strategy.

The second day of the plenary was devoted to the topic of addressing the social deficit in the EU. Mr László ANDOR, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, spoke

of re-examining European policy on employment. He stressed that improving social policy was a necessary prerequisite in order to achieve convergence in Europe and referred to the mechanisms that had been adopted in the framework of the EU in order to increase employment. He noted with regret that the eurozone crisis had created many imbalances, threatening the stability of the EMU and stressed that more efforts were required to attain sustainable growth.

In the final session three Members of national Parliaments presented different aspects of youth employment policies: Mr Paulo Mota PINTO, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, in his intervention “Investing in European Youth: the way out of the economic crisis”, stressed that the financial crisis could turn into an opportunity for European youth. The main objective of the EU, he said, was to discourage young people from migrating outside of the EU and to adopt mobility policies in order to provide employment within EU borders, thus tackling the demographic issue as well. Mr. Silvia MODIG, Member of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, took the floor to present her country's best practices, such as the “Youth Guarantee Scheme”, focusing on prevention, education and training mechanisms that were implemented, while noting the lack of adequate housing and mental health services threatening young people with social exclusion. Mrs Zanta KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA, Chairperson of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian *Saeima*, noted that the development of creative entrepreneurship was the future of the EU and that the digital economy, employment and growth would be one of the objectives of the Latvian EU Presidency in 2015.

The LI COSAC adopted Conclusions and a Contribution, which focused on the following topics: 1) European Elections, 2) Economic Governance – Deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union, 3) Freedom, Security and Justice, 4) EU maritime policies, 5) Ukraine 6) Democratic Accountability, 7) Addressing the Social Deficit in the EU, 8) Rethinking the European employment Strategy and 9) The female capital against the backdrop of the economic and financial crisis.

LII COSAC in Rome (Italy)

The LII COSAC was held at the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, in Rome, on 30 November - 2 December 2014. The Conference was chaired by Mr Vannino CHITI, President of the Committee on EU Policies of the Italian Senate, and Mr Michele BORDO, President of the Committee on EU Policies, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*.

In his welcome address, the Speaker of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Mr Pietro GRASSO noted that COSAC had developed into the most appropriate forum for debating broad European policies and the role of Parliaments. Concerning the Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy, he mentioned the approval of Juncker's plan and the flexibility in the interpretation of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). He also noted that in the two areas of neighbourhood policies, the Great Mediterranean and the Eastern borders, the EU should be able to respond with strategic and pragmatic political process.

In his introduction, Mr CHITI recalled the delicate issues that Europe was facing on its Eastern and Southern borders. He stressed the importance of growth, with the Juncker's investment plan as the starting point of a European "New Deal", and he added that employment should be

the first and fundamental goal. In order to strengthen the dialogue with the European institutions, he asked the European Parliament to examine the contributions on the content of the documents issued by national Parliaments. He concluded quoting "Il manifesto di Ventotene" on the definitive abolition of the Europe division in national Sovereign States.

In his introduction, Mr BORDO stressed that citizens ask to Parliaments and European institutions to re-launch growth and employment, to reduce poverty, to cancel the unacceptable development gaps inside the Union, to manage migration flows in an effective way and on the basis of the solidarity principle, to reduce the cost of energy, to guarantee effective protection against organised crime and terrorism and to protect the environment and the European territory. In this context, national Parliaments should affirm their position by acknowledging their complementary roles to the European Parliament and by replacing competition with mutual trust.

As concerns procedural matters, Mr CHITI, after the presentation of the 22nd Bi-annual Report of COSAC, focused on Europe 2020, the Future of the EU Institutions, the Mediterranean and EU Agencies, and informed about the document on practices regarding voting on Contributions, drafted by the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat in 2012 and updated by the Italian Presidency, after consultation with the Troika, and with the assistance of the COSAC Secretariat.

In the session on the 'State of play of the Italian Presidency of the EU Council', the Italian Prime Minister Mr Matteo RENZI, President of the Italian Council of Ministers, stressed that Europe was currently in a phase of persistent economic stagnation and "crisis of ideals". He stated that Member States had to be loyal to the SGP and undertake the necessary structural reforms to re-launch growth. He stressed that the Italian Presidency urged for more investments in growth and welcomed Juncker's investment plan together with the need for more flexibility of fiscal rules.

The next point on the Agenda was dedicated to "The future of supranational democracy 5 years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty: What role for the European institutions and national Parliaments?" In this session, Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission, stated that he was committed to working more closely with national Parliaments in cooperation with the European Parliament. He added that it was necessary to spend more time on impact assessments of Commission proposals and stressed the importance of lightening administrative burden on SMEs. Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chairwoman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, stated that democratic legitimacy could not be reached by declaring it as a remote target, but democratic legitimacy was instead and should be the way in which institutions carry out their daily work. Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO, Chairman of the EU Select Committee, UK *House of Lords*, referred to the UK House of Lords' report on the role of national Parliaments in the European Union and said that national Parliaments, the European Parliament, the Commission, and national Governments must work together. Mr Marc ANGEL, Chairman of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, explained that cooperation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments starts at home, with the possibility of members of the European Parliament to attend national Committee meeting.

After an informal lunchtime session, on “Health and safety at work: a good practice”, in the afternoon session the participants exchanged views on the ‘Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy: growth, employment, competitiveness’.

Mr Pier Carlo PADOAN, Italian Economy and Finance Minister, noted that the issue of growth and employment must lie at the very core of Europe's economic policy. He mentioned the lack of demand and, at the same time, lack of supply. Structural reforms had to be made, so as to improve productivity in the Member States, as also a stronger integration in the internal market is needed. Besides, a solid investment policy, as the Juncker's plan, is called for, in order to stimulate, at the same time, demand and supply and make use of the opportunities offered by widespread structural reforms. Ms AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, pointed out that lack of visibility and of a sense of ownership on the part of the stakeholders had been some of the main reasons why the Europe 2020 Strategy has not been properly implemented. As suggestions for achieving growth, she mentioned the Youth Employment Guarantee and the setting a European minimum salary differentiated by country. Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the German *Bundestag*, recalled the importance of holding a vision that the EU should become the most growth-promoting and innovative region in the world, but that objectives and rules set out in Europe 2020 Strategy have to be taken seriously. He invited to review the Strategy and to apply what is decided. Mr Juan MOSCOSO HERNÁNDEZ DEL PRADO, Member of the Finance Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee in the Spanish *Cortes Generales*, indicated that, to avoid the risks of deflation and stagnation, any solution should first include means of boosting Europe's overall demand and, second, a shift from the current policies favouring austerity.

The first day ended with the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, that considered the draft Contribution and Conclusions.

The second day of the LII COSAC started with the Women's Forum, focusing on Work life balance in Europe.

The first point on the Agenda of the plenary was devoted to the topic of ‘European integration prospects: Global role of the European Union and projection of its policies in the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe’.

Mr Ramón Luis VALCÁRCEL SISO, Vice-President of the European Parliament, outlined that since its creation in 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been necessary to promote a zone of stability, security and wellbeing in the east and south of the EU. He also stressed the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. Mr Claudio MARTINI, Member of the Committee on EU Policies, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, underlined that, on the macro-region of the Mediterranean, the cooperation with the countries of the Mediterranean should now be based on decentralised cooperation, capable of giving proper value to sub-national levels and partnerships, and giving priority to the cultural and youth sector. Mrs Lolita ČIGĀNE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, Latvian *Saeima*, stressed that military expansion of Islamic fundamentalists in Iraq, Syria and Libya, as well as Russia's blatant aggression in Ukraine, significantly destabilised the EU's Southern and Eastern regions. She added that the Eastern Partnership would be one of the priorities during the Latvian Presidency. Mr Sandro GOZI, Italian Under-Secretary of State in charge of European Affairs,

noted that the situation in the Mediterranean and the Eastern partnership, as well as relations with Russia, were essential. The external borders must be considered common borders and thus dealt with shared responsibility and a sense of solidarity.

The final session was related to 'Democratic control of European agencies'. Mr Morten KJÆRUM, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), made an in-depth presentation of the accountability mechanisms governing the work of agencies. He added that parliamentary oversight over the EU agencies may be welcomed and he referred to the ever closer ties forged by many EU agencies to Member States. In his intervention, Sir William CASH argued that the democratic control of European agencies was seriously deficient, which was symptomatic of the democratic deficit problem of the EU as a whole. In his view, a radical redesigning of the treaties was necessary.

The LII COSAC adopted a Contribution, which focused on the following topics: 1) Midterm review of Europe 2020 Strategy, 2) Future of the EU - EU Institutions and Parliaments, 3) The role of the EU in the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe, 4) EU Agencies and national Parliaments. The LII COSAC also adopted Conclusions, which focused on the following topics: 1) The Bi-annual Report, 2) New instruments and ideas aimed at involving national Parliaments in the EU decision-making process, 3) More efficient use of subsidiarity checks, 4) Voting of COSAC's Contribution and Conclusions.

LIII COSAC in Riga (Latvia)

The **LIII COSAC** was held for the first time by the Latvian Presidency in Riga on 31 May - 2 June 2015. The meeting was opened by Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE, Speaker of the *Saeima* of the Republic of Latvia and chaired by Ms Lolita ČIGĀNE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the *Saeima*.

The plenary debates were devoted to the following subjects: the state of play of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Union Energy policy: state of play, challenges and opportunities, the EU Trade policy for the next five years: focus on the EU-US TTIP negotiations, as well as future of the parliamentary scrutiny of European Union affairs: main focus on steps towards an enhanced political dialogue.

Ms Laimdota STRAUJUMA, Prime Minister of the Republic of Latvia, presented the state of play of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, highlighting the progress made until that moment, among others, the agreement reached on the European Fund for Strategic Investments; the launch of the Riga process for creating the European Energy Union; the progress made on several legislative acts developing the Digital Single Market Strategy. She then focused on two challenges the Presidency had to deal with: the fight against terrorism and migration issues, as well as informed on the results of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit.

COSAC then held a debate on the European Union Energy Policy with the Vice-President of the European Commission Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ opening this debate, followed by two other distinguished speakers: Mr Jerzy BUZEK, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy of the European Parliament and Mr Petr HLOBIL, Chair of the *Green 10*. The

participants expressed broad support to the creation of an Energy Union and regarded this as an opportunity.

A formal lunch time session, initiated by the Parliaments of the South, dealt with the security concerns in the Middle East and North African Region.

In the afternoon session, the participants exchanged views on EU trade policy focusing on the EU-US TTIP negotiations. The keynote speaker Mrs Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Trade gave an overview of the economic and strategic benefits of the TTIP agreement, and of the steps taken to deliver sustainable solutions to people's concerns and expectations. She was followed by Mr Artis Pabriks, Member of the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament, who analysed the free trade agreements such as TTIP or CETA, and suggested what the next steps could be. The participants outlined the importance of the estimated benefits flowing from TTIP, provided it respected European values and high standards, but also voiced their concerns that it might not be always the case. A number of speakers called for ratification of this agreement by the national Parliaments.

The second day of the LIII COSAC started with the informal morning session on EU Passenger Name Record proposal organised by the initiative of the Latvian Presidency.

The plenary meeting was entirely devoted to the topic of future of the parliamentary scrutiny of European Union affairs focusing on the following three issues:

1) National Parliaments' current involvement in EU decision-making looking at the existing instruments; with keynote speakers: Mr Herman DE CROO, Member of the Flemish Parliament and Mr Gunter KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the German *Bundestag*.

2) Developments towards an enhanced political dialogue, possible introduction of the "Green card"; with keynote speakers: Mr Dominic HANNIGAN, Chair of the Joint Committee on European Affairs of the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas and Mr Paolo TANCREDI, Vice-Chair of the EU Policies Committee, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*.

3) The role of Parliaments in the European Commission's multiannual work programming; with keynote speakers: Ms Maria João RODRIGUES, Member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament and Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*.

During the debate, a consensus emerged on enhancing the role of political dialogue by introducing a "green card", and this consensus was further reflected in the COSAC contributions, which invited the Luxembourg Presidency to set up a working group on strengthening the political dialogue by introducing a "green card" and improving the reasoned opinion procedure ("yellow card").

The Contribution was adopted by the LIII COSAC meeting and subsequently published in the Official Journal, addressing the following topics: 1) The EU Energy and Climate Policy; 2) Parliamentary Scrutiny of EU Affairs; 3) EU Trade Policy and the Role of Parliaments; 4) Fight against Terrorism and EU-Wide Passenger Name Record Framework; 5) Security

Concerns in the Middle East and North African Region; 6) Outcomes of the Eastern Partnership Summit.

The LIII COSAC meeting also adopted a statement on the recent entry bans imposed by the Russian Federation.

During the Latvian Presidency of COSAC, the 23rd Bi-annual Report was drafted on the basis of answers from 40 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had three chapters focused on: 1) EU energy policy: state of play, challenges and opportunities, 2) The future of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs, and 3) EU trade policy and the role of Parliaments.

LIV COSAC in Luxembourg (Luxembourg)

The **LIV COSAC** took place in Luxembourg from 29th November to 1st December 2015 and was chaired by Mr Marc ANGEL, President of the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs, Defence, Cooperation and Immigration of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg. The conference started with a welcome address by H. E. Mr Mars Di BARTOLOMEO, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, stressing the Luxembourg Presidency's decision to focus on citizens, who call for concrete results and who expect the EU to bring answers to the current crises.

With regard to the procedural questions, it was highlighted that the agreement on co-financing mechanism of the COSAC secretariat would expire by the end of the year and that national Parliaments were invited to send back letters of intent confirming their willingness to continue participating in a co-financing mechanism for 2016 and 2017.

The first plenary session dealt with the European Agenda on migration and was divided into two parts: 1) the common asylum policy and the regular migration policy; and 2) the fight against irregular migration and the external borders security.

Mr Gaston STRONCK, Director of the International Economic Relations and European Affairs from the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Ms Laura FERRARA, Member of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and Mr Jean-Pierre SCHEMBRI, from the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) were keynote speakers for the first part of session I.

Mr STRONCK explained that it was essential for national Parliaments to be involved in the development of the EU Migration policy. He highlighted the challenges the EU was facing related to migration and described the difficult situation in the Western Mediterranean and Balkan route as well as the need for solidarity among EU Member States. Mr STRONCK also informed participants about the recent developments in the Council and stressed the important role of the hotspots and their effective functioning in order to carry out the decisions that had been taken by the EU Member States.

Ms FERRARA pointed out three key elements in solving the current migration crisis. First, there was a need for a direct response from the EU institutions and implementation of urgent joint actions from Member States to tackle the emergency of the refugees. Secondly, with regards to the medium- and long-term measures, coherent policy for refugees and economic

migrants had to be developed, as the current system had reached its limits. Finally, there was a need for fair and shared responsibility and solidarity as laid down in Article 80 TFEU.

Specifically mentioning the increased flow of unaccompanied minors, Mr SCHEMBRI gave a global overview in relation to the latest figures on the asylum situation in the EU.

The keynote speakers for the second part of the first session were Mr Michele BORDO, Chairman of the Committee on EU policies of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* as well as Rear Admiral Hervé BLÉJEAN, Deputy Commander of EUNAVFOR MED.

Mr BORDO stressed that the EU could not close its borders and must try to contain the flows by tackling the problems at their root. He reminded participants that the majority of refugees were not in the EU but in the neighbouring countries, particularly in Turkey. Stressing that the frontline countries could no longer face the flows alone, Mr BORDO underlined the need to strengthen EU cooperation and development policies with the Mediterranean, which could become a major source of security and growth for our countries.

Rear Admiral BLÉJEAN referred to the shocking sinking of a vessel in April 2015, which galvanised the EU into making necessary efforts and, following which, the European Council decided on 20 April to launch a 10-points action plan of which the mandate focused on combatting the criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers. He presented the four phases of the operation at the Libyan border of which the guiding principles were combatting criminal networks and avoiding loss of human lives. He explained that the operation was a policing mission that could not be carried out in Libyan waters without the consent of the Libyan authorities and without a UN Security Council resolution.

During an informal lunch session, organized at the request of the UK delegation, delegates took the opportunity to discuss the current negotiations on EU reform ahead of the referendum on UK membership.

During the second session, participants exchanged views on the topic “A Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe” with keynote speakers Mr Andrus ANSIP, Vice-President of the European Commission for the Digital Single Market, Mr Jean-Paul ZENS, Premier Conseiller de Gouvernement, Service des médias et des communications, Ministère d'Etat du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, Mr Kalle PALLING, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the *Riigikogu* of Estonia and Ms Angelika MLINAR, Member of the European Parliament.

Mr ANSIP stated that the goal was to make sure that the best of the online world was available in Europe for its people and businesses in the safest and most open environment. The Digital Single Market (DSM) strategy had opened up all areas of the digital economy facilitating the identification of what needed to be changed and modernised. It was about reforming consumer rules, VAT, telecom rules, geo-blocking, data and even parcel delivery.

Mr ZENS stressed that the potential for wider cross border market for many companies and start-ups was very important and also highlighted the importance of parliamentarians' role, as it was both national and European policy that determined the success for companies. New proposals should not place additional burdens on entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs. Diverging regulations did not help companies and consumers.

Mr PALLING focused on the positive outcome of DSM and explained the Estonian experience of complex governmental reforms. He concluded that Europe was facing a decrease of population and unsustainable social welfare costs. Government size and efficiency was at the heart of the next economic growth wave and much could be learned from the private sector. A solution for the EU would be good governance, smart country infrastructure and a seamless society where everything worked.

Ms MLINAR explained that the European Parliament was currently working on an own initiative report on the DSM in response to the European Commission's communication published in May. The completion of the Single market being of high importance for the European Parliament, Ms MLINAR considered that a key element was to make Europe a leader in the digital economy. One of the biggest challenges and goals was to remove the barriers in the digital sphere that currently existed and to be more successful.

The first day ended with the Meeting of COSAC Chairpersons that analyzed the draft contribution and the draft conclusions. Furthermore, the Chairpersons confirmed the appointment of the permanent member of the COSAC secretariat for 2016 and 2017.

The second day of the LIV COSAC was devoted to the topic of "Enlargement Policy". Mr Simon MORDUE, Director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Mr Kamal Izidor SHAKER, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the *Državni zbor* of Slovenia and Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the German *Bundestag*, took the floor as keynote speakers.

Mr MORDUE explained that unlike previous years, this year the European Commission opted for an overarching strategy that would set the approach of the Commission for its entire mandate. Every year there would be intermediate reports, within the frame set up the overarching package.

Mr SHAKER stressed that probably the previous enlargement had been successful due to the fact that the criteria accession had been clearer. From this point of view, he indicated two important points: progress must be clear inside the candidate country, and the EU must help the candidate to realize reforms and progresses.

Reminding that the history of enlargement of the EU was a success story for which the EU was envied, Mr KRICHBAUM underlined it was important to give the message to all candidates that it was essential to carry out the needed reforms upright. He emphasized that these reforms were in the interest of the candidate countries themselves and stressed that ownership was the key point probably still missing. He considered that not having enlargement in the following years was generally interpreted as a way of giving oxygen to the EU, but noted that he could not see among the candidates any one which could realistically accede in the following five years, because the reforms needed were so substantial that it was impossible to see how the process could be faster.

The COSAC conclusions were focused among others on the "yellow card" procedure. The COSAC contribution was mainly based on replies to a questionnaire analysed by the 24th Bi-

annual report and addressed the following topics: a European Agenda on Migration, a Digital Single Market Strategy for Europe, Enlargement Policy, improving the “yellow card” procedure and introducing “green cards” (enhanced political dialogue).

LV COSAC in The Hague (Netherlands)

On 7 and 8 February 2016 the Chairpersons of the European Affairs committees of the various national parliaments and a delegation from the European Parliament met together in the Hall of Knights in The Hague. This Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC formed the kick-off of the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency.

Among the topics for debate was the question of how national parliaments can best exert influence on EU proposals. Minister of Foreign Affairs Bert Koenders discussed the priorities of the Dutch government during the EU Presidency and EU commissioner Kristalina Georgieva discussed the work programme of the European Commission. The conference also addressed the Bi-Annual report: an overview of the working methods of national parliaments with regard to the EU. This conference set the agenda of the COSAC plenary conference in July 2016.

The final interparliamentary meeting of the Dutch EU Presidency was on more effective collaboration between the member states, the rule of law, parliamentary diplomacy, accountability and migration. On Monday 13 and Tuesday 14 June 2016, over 250 parliamentarians from every country in the European Union came together in the Hall of Knights in The Hague for the 55th COSAC plenary meeting.

In her opening speech, President of the Dutch Senate Ankie Broekers-Knol, stressed the importance of the rule of law. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte used his speech to emphasise the key role that national parliaments can play if they work together well: *"A single parliament can only play a limited role in European decision making. But working together with other parliaments enables you to achieve a huge amount, and it also makes your own parliament stronger. This is why the COSAC is so important."* Subjects raised during the discussion with the Prime Minister included the referendum on the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, TTIP and migration.

The debate then moved on to the instruments available to national parliaments for exercising influence on EU policy. Frans Timmermans, first Vice-President of the European Commission, spoke about the red and yellow card procedures that national parliaments can use. These procedures work as a signal from the national parliaments when they feel certain issues should be addressed at the national rather than at the European level.

Member of the European Parliament Sophie in 't Veld and Pieter van Dijk, former member of the Venice Commission, discussed the rule of law. In 't Veld: *"It would be good if we could develop a common framework for rule of law, because it is not just a national affair."* At the end of the conference Frans Timmermans talked about the tension between democracy and the rule of law: *"Democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, you can't say that any one of these is more important than the other. They are all necessary."* This was followed by a debate on the increasing importance of parliamentary diplomacy.

Day two of the conference started with a debate between the parliamentarians and Alex Brenninkmeijer and Ville Itala, members of the European Court of Auditors. Itala: *"In order to reach the goal of accountability, for example in agriculture, we need better regulations that can be implemented with fewer mistakes."*

The closing debate of the COSAC meeting was on the topic of migration, and in particular the EU-Turkey Agreement on preventing irregular migration flows to the EU. Gerald Knaus, Chair of the European Stability Initiative, referred to the basic idea behind the agreement with Turkey: *"The idea was to move from a chaotic flow of people – which also coincided with the loss of control of the European borders – to an ordered transfer of refugees. Let us make sure that the Agreement works."* said Knaus.

Another speaker during the plenary COSAC meeting was the winner of the essay competition for students initiated by the Dutch parliament. Andrea Finesso presented his vision on a key issue, namely on the role of national parliaments in 25 years' time. Following this the plenary COSAC adopted a document containing the contributions from this two-day conference. In this document the parliamentarians requested that in future the European Commission formulate its work programme as realistically as possible. This will also enable national parliaments to better align their own work to the European legislative process.

LVI COSAC in Bratislava (Slovakia)

The **LVI COSAC** was held in the National Council of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava on 13-15 November 2016. The meeting was opened and chaired by Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The plenary debates were devoted to the following subjects: 1. State of play of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2. Strengthening the role of national parliaments in the EU, 3. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks), 4. Energy Union's "year of delivery" and 5. Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration.

The state of play of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union was presented by Slovak Prime Minister Mr Robert FICO, with questions later answered by State Secretary for European Affairs and *Ministre Délégué*, Mr Ivan KORČOK. Mr FICO recalled the difficult times in which the Slovak Presidency was taking place in light of the ongoing migration crisis as well as the then recent result of the referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom. In this respect, he reflected particularly on the Bratislava Summit of the EU27 held in September 2016 and on the results of the Presidency thus far, including on files related to the Digital Single Market, the energy union, the taxation package, the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the Paris Climate agreement and enlargement policy.

The session on "Strengthening the role of national parliaments in the EU" was introduced with a keynote speech of First Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr Frans TIMMERMANS. The key note speech was followed by a parliamentary debate introduced by two panellists, Ms Anna BIRCHALL, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, and Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on

European Affairs of the German *Bundestag*. It was moderated by the Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the host Parliament, Mr Martin KLUS. In addition to the topics of the “yellow, green and red card”, a resonating theme in the debate was also the decrease in trust in political institutions and the therewith-connected need to bring citizens closer to EU policies, where national Parliaments play a crucial role.

The session on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership sought to highlight both the opportunities, as well as the challenges associated with such a future agreement. Ms Susan GEORGE, political scientist, activist and writer on global social justice, and Mr Hiddo HOUBEN, EU Deputy Chief Negotiator for TTIP, delivered the keynote speeches. Panellists from the national Parliaments for this session included Ms Danuta HUBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, and Ms Guler TURAN from the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs of the Belgian *Sénat*. The debate was moderated by former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe and former Slovak Minister of Finance, Ms Brigita SCHMÖGNEROVÁ.

Mr Maros ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union, introduced the session on Energy Union’s year of delivery. His keynote speech was followed by a panel consisting of Ms. Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Kalle PALLING, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*, and Mr Antonio COSTA SILVA, member of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese *Assembleia da Republica*. The session was moderated by editor-in-chief of Euraktiv.sk Ms Zuzana GABRIŽOVÁ and concentrated mostly on the legislative proposals in relation to the Energy Union, which were to be released by the European Commission in December 2016.

The last discussion session focussed on the topical issue of migration and particularly the problematic of securing EU’s external borders. The session was opened with a keynote speech from Mr Robert Kalinak, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Affairs of the Slovak Republic and current Chair of the Justice and Home Affairs Council. The subsequent panel included Mr Richard HÖRCSIK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, and Mr Lucio ROMANO, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*. The discussion was moderated by Ms Katarina CSEFALVAYOVÁ, Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*.

A Contribution adopted by the LVI COSAC focussed on the following: 1. Strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU, 2. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks), 3. 2016: Energy Union’s “year of delivery”, and 4. Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration.

During the Slovak Presidency of COSAC, the 26th Bi-annual Report was drafted on the basis of replies to the related questionnaire from all 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of 28 Member States and the European Parliament. It covered three topics: 1. the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the United States: parliamentary scrutiny of the negotiation process, 2. 2016: Energy Union’s “year of delivery”, and 3. improving the role of national Parliaments in EU processes.

LVII COSAC in Valletta (Malta)

On 28-30 May 2017 the **LVII COSAC** was held for the first time in Malta. The agenda of the meeting organised within the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Maltese Presidency comprised five main sessions which were addressed by a number of distinguished guests.

During the first session on *Reflections on the Maltese Presidency of the Council* Hon. George VELLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs highlighted that taking over the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time was an important milestone, huge challenge and great responsibility for Malta. The six priority areas identified by Malta were namely: Migration, Security, Neighbourhood, the Single Market, Maritime and Social Inclusion.

Session II dealt with the role of national parliaments in the future of the EU First Vice President of the European Commission Mr Frans TIMMERMANS spoke about the need to increase transparency at EU level and to ensure that national Parliaments take control of the tools available to them to carry out parliamentary scrutiny of EU policies and activities. Furthermore, First Vice President Timmermans also called on national Parliaments to step-up dialogue with the European Commission. During this session, Ms Mairead Ms MCGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament highlighted that national Parliaments should be at the core of European Union decision making and that it is imperative for national Parliaments to bridge the divide between the EU and their respective constituency. Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Member of the European Union Policy Committee of the Italian *Camera dei deputati* elaborated further on the need to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens and ensure that euro-scepticism is collectively countered. Ms Berlinghieri underlined the necessity to improve synergies between national Parliaments and the Commission and further promote constant and uninterrupted dialogue.

Session III focused on the outcome of the UK referendum. Mr Michel BARNIER emphasized that in spite the regrettable decision by the UK to leave the EU and possible resentment by some members of the European fora, the European Commission is committed to not take a punitive approach towards the UK. Furthermore, Mr Barnier emphasised that European citizens will be placed at the forefront of the discussions. From a European Parliament perspective, Ms HÜBNER highlighted that the European Parliament remains strongly committed to be a key actor during the negotiating process of the UK exit from the EU. Furthermore, Ms Hübner explained that the role of national Parliaments is of utmost importance and central to ensure European citizens have a direct voice in European Union decision-making processes, thereby ensuring a better implementation of the democratic principle.

The afternoon session of the LVII COSAC on Monday, 29 May 2017 addressed issues and opportunities linked to the Blue Economy and the need to create a sustainable EU Integrated Maritime Policy. For this session EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Karmenu VELLA was invited to speak on the potential of the Blue Economy and on the innovative opportunities for all. Speaking on the European Agenda for blue growth, Commissioner Vella highlighted the importance of ensuring access to finance, enhancing skills and qualifications through the Blue Careers Initiative and further promoting regional

cooperation. From the national Parliament's perspective Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu* and Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly, gave a presentation on their national maritime policy in relation to the European Integrated Maritime policy.

The LVII COSAC addressed the topic of migration, more specifically the need to combat human smuggling and trafficking and establishing a human and effective return and readmission policy. During his address, Minister VELLA explained that the migration phenomenon is presenting three key challenges related to: (i) the emergence of new routes, (ii) an increase of young unaccompanied migrants and (iii) the mutating business model. Minister Vella recognised that cooperation with third-countries, especially within a return and readmission portfolio, is an important and strategic approach to ensure that migration is managed in a more efficient and humane manner. Furthermore, Minister Vella highlighted the need to promote legal migration and step up information campaigns in countries of origin and transit, thus providing concrete information to prospective migrants. Ms Maite PAGAZAURTUNDÚA RUIZ explained that the year 2017 is an important and should be the year European develops harmonised migration policy guided by the principles of ethics, human rights and human dignity. Highlighting the need to promote legal channels for migration and thus effectively act as a deterrent for smuggling, Ms Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz quoted the Canadian model as a possible example of well managed migration. Mr Lucio ROMANO, provided a detailed account of the recent visit to Italian hotspots. Following Italy's request, a delegation of the COSAC held a visit to Sicily on 5-6 May 2017 to enhance awareness of MPs from Member States on the challenge of migration.

During the Maltese Presidency of COSAC, the 27th Bi-annual Report was drafted on the basis of answers from 40 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had three chapters focused on: 1) scrutiny of government by national Parliaments of EU proposals, reports and implementation of EU law 2) the outcome of the UK referendum and the future of the European Union 3) Migration: combatting human smuggling and trafficking and establishing a humane and effective return and readmission policy.

The LVII COSAC was held in exceptional political circumstances due to the dissolution of the Maltese Parliament on 1st May 2017 and an election held on 3rd June 2017. In consultation and agreement with the Troika, the Maltese Presidency presented draft conclusions that did not include political statements. These conclusions were adopted by the LV COSAC.

LVIII COSAC in Tallinn (Estonia)

The LVIII COSAC was held in Tallinn, Estonia, on 27-28 November 2017. The meeting was opened and chaired by Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*.

The agenda of the LVIII COSAC was in line with the priorities of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Estonian Presidency and covered five main sessions: 1) The future of the European Union; 2) Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens - what are the best practices of national Parliaments?; 3) Digital Single Market - current developments of e-services; 4) State of play - building an effective and sustainable Security Union; and 5) The external dimension of migration - preventing and combating irregular migration.

The first session on the Future of the European Union was introduced with a keynote speech by H.E. Ms Kersti KALJULAI, President of the Republic of Estonia and followed by Mr Michel BARNIER, EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit, and Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament. The session was moderated by Mr VITSUT and covered issues ranging from Europe's competitiveness to Brexit, to new undertakings in order to secure the future of the Union. The resounding themes of the ensuing debate were the risk of alienating European citizens, the need for more subsidiarity in the workings of the European Union, and a focus on a new vision for economic growth.

The session on 'Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens' sought to address the current challenges faced by the European Union when it comes to overcoming the democratic disconnect and providing citizens with ownership in EU affairs. Ms Katrin AUER, Associate Professor in the Research Group European Integration, Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies, delivered the keynote speech. Panellists from national Parliaments for this session included Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Member of the European Affairs Committee, Dutch *Tweede Kamer* and Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*. The session was moderated by Ms Monika HAUKANÖMM, Member of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*.

Session III focussed on the current developments of e-services and strengthening the Digital Single Market. It was introduced by a keynote speech by Mr Siim SIKKUT, Deputy Secretary General for Communications and State Information Systems, Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. The speech was followed by a parliamentary debate led by two panellists, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, most recent Chair of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, German *Bundestag*, and Mr Jean BIZET, President of the European Affairs Committee, French *Sénat*. The debate was moderated by Mr Kalle PALLING, Member of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*. In addition to the topic of digitalisation of the public sector, a number of resonating themes emerged during the debate: growth and jobs in the digital economy; education and training to prepare the population for the digital era; and the need to address new security concerns arising from digital services.

The morning session on the second day of the LVIII COSAC addressed the current state of play of building an effective and sustainable Security Union and kicked off with a keynote speech by Mr Julian KING, European Commissioner for Security Union. After giving an overview of the current security threats, Mr KING called for a strategic dialogue with national Parliaments on the wider security landscape. The subsequent parliamentary debate focussed on terrorism and its presence in the cyber world. The session was moderated by Ms Marianne MIKKO, Member of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*.

The final session centred on the external dimension of migration with Mr Simon MORDUE, Deputy Director General for Migration, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, as the keynote speaker. The subsequent panel included Mr Edward ZAMMIT LEWIS, Chair of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, and Ms Anne-Mari VIROLAINEN, Chair of the Grand Committee, Finnish *Eduskunta*. The debate explored the root causes of irregular migration and questioned the reasons behind disproportionate migratory flows. Current national and supra-national policies were addressed and a call for a common EU policy was made. The session was moderated by

Mr Jaak MADISON, Vice-Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*.

The Contribution adopted by the LVIII COSAC focussed on the following topics: 1) Future of the European Union; 2) Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens; 3) Digital Single Market: development of e-services; 4) Building an effective and sustainable Security Union; and 5) Preventing and combatting irregular migration.

During the Estonian Presidency of COSAC, the 28th Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had three chapters: 1) The future of the European Union; 2) Bringing the EU closer to its citizens; 3) Digital Single Market.

LIX COSAC in Sofia (Bulgaria)

The LIX COSAC was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 17-19 June 2018, and was opened by Ms Tsveta KARAYANCHEVA, President of the Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie* and by Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European funds, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, who also chaired the meeting.

Welcome addresses were delivered by Mr Rumen RADEV, President of the Republic of Bulgaria and Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament.

The agenda of the plenary meeting consisted of five topics: 1) Achievements of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU; 2) Integration and connectivity of the Western Balkans – a new impetus to EU Enlargement Policy; 3) European Pillar of Social Rights - building a more inclusive and fairer Europe; 4) A strong and effective Cohesion Policy post 2020; and 5) EU interparliamentary cooperation in the context of the debate on subsidiarity and proportionality.

The first session was chaired by Ms Ivelina VASSILEVA, deputy Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie* and moderated by Prof. Dr Ingrid SHIKOVA, professor at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Speeches were delivered by Mr Boyko BORISSOV, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria and Ms Lilyana PAVLOVA, Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018. The Prime Minister addressed what in his opinion were currently two of the most important and sensitive topics: the future of the Western Balkans and dealing with the migratory flows from outside of the EU. Ms PAVLOVA concentrated on specific dossiers where the Presidency had managed to achieve progress over the last six months.

Session II was chaired by Ms Imren MEHMEDOVA, Deputy Chairperson of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie* and moderated by Amb. Biserka BENISHEVA, Director for EU Affairs at PanEuropa Bulgaria. Keynote speeches were delivered by Ms Ekaterina ZAHARIEVA, Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria; Mr Nikola DIMITROV, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and

Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*. Among the topics discussed were the security of the Western Balkan region and the need to improve its connectivity (economic, infrastructural, cultural, etc.) with the EU.

Ms Polina TSANKOVA-HRISTOVA, Member of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie*, chaired the third session with Prof. Dr Katia VLADIMIROVA, Professor at University of National and World Economy and New Bulgarian University acting as moderator. The keynote speakers for this session were Mr Luca JAHIER, President of European Economic and Social Committee (EESC); Mr Marcel HAAG, Director, Policy Co-ordination, I Directorate, Secretariat General, European Commission; and Dr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Slovak *Národná rada*. The participants in the debate discussed the key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as the possible ways to finance and implement them.

During the first day of the plenary meeting, an informal lunch session dedicated to the issue of transparency was hosted by the Dutch and Danish parliaments.

The second day of the meeting started with a session on the future of the Cohesion policy, which was chaired by Mr Petar PETROV, Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie*, and moderated by Ms Milena MILOTINOVA, Journalist, TV host, “Bulgaria ON AIR”. Keynote speeches were delivered by Mr Tomislav DONCHEV, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria; Ms Dana SPINANT, Director for Budget, Communication and General Affairs, DG REGIO, European Commission; and Ms Iskra MIHAYLOVA, Chair of the Committee on Regional Development (REGI) of the European Parliament. The participants debated on different aspects of the policy, such as the level of financing, possible simplification of the rules, improvement of the accountability, etc.

The last session was dedicated to the topics of subsidiarity and proportionality and it was chaired by Mr VIGENIN. The moderator was Mr Kiril VALCHEV, Journalist, Host of “The Week” political broadcast, Darik Radio, and the keynote speakers included Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission; Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), European Parliament; Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Chair of the Standing Committee on European Affairs, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*; and Prof. Dr Jur. Sc. Atanas SEMOV, LL.D., Professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. During this session, the participants discussed the work of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently”.

The Contribution adopted by the LIX COSAC focussed on the following topics: 1) EU parliaments and citizens; 2) Subsidiarity and proportionality; 3) Integration and connectivity of the Western Balkans; 4) Cohesion Policy after 2020 (including the EU Macro-regional strategies); and 5) European Pillar of Social Rights.

During the Bulgarian Presidency of COSAC, the 29th Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European

Parliament. The report had three chapters: the first one was dedicated to the debate on the future of Europe; the second one dealt with the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the third one concentrated on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

LX COSAC in Vienna (Austria)

The **LX COSAC** was held in Vienna, Austria, on 18-20 November 2018, and was opened by Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs, Austrian *Nationalrat*.

The welcome addresses were delivered by Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*, and Ms Inge POSCH-GRUSKA, President of the Austrian *Bundesrat*.

The agenda of the plenary meeting consisted of four topics: 1) State of Play of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU; 2) Brexit - current state; 3) Climate Policy and Energy Union; and 4) A transparent European Union closer to its citizens in light of the upcoming elections of the European Parliament.

Mr LOPATKA and Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee, Austrian *Bundesrat*, chaired the first session on the State of Play of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The keynote speech was delivered by Ms Karoline EDTSTADLER, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Interior of Austria, who talked about the fruition of the priorities of the Austrian Presidency - 1) Security and the fight against illegal migration; 2) Securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation; and 3) Stability in the European neighbourhood - EU perspective of the Western Balkans/South Eastern Europe) - as well as the challenges of the final Brexit negotiations and the importance of strengthening the principle of subsidiarity.

The Session on the current state of the Brexit negotiations was chaired by Mr BUCHMANN and sought to address the challenges at the final stage of the negotiations, both from a European perspective as well as from a Member State perspective. The keynote speakers were Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament; Sir William CASH, Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, UK *House of Commons*; and Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO, Chair of the EU Select Committee, UK *House of Lords*. During the ensuing debate, the work of the EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit, Mr Michel BARNIER, was praised. So too was the EU 27's unity during the negotiation process, and the significance of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland was stressed.

Both Mr LOPATKA and Mr BUCHMANN chaired the third session, which focussed on the progress made in the Climate Policy and the Energy Union while also highlighting the present challenges. The session was introduced by a keynote speech from Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President for the Energy Union, European Commission, who underlined the major success of the European Union in turning the Energy Union into reality while also reminding delegates that much more needed to be done about climate change in order to keep global temperatures from rising beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius. Ms Monika LANGTHALER, Director of R20 Austrian World Summit, who highlighted the positive and negative effects of the present evolution of the energy demand, gave the second keynote speech. Climate change and environment protection were central notions during the subsequent debate.

The last session, taking place on the second day, was again chaired by Mr LOPATKA and Mr BUCHMANN and was dedicated to the creation of a transparent European Union, closer to its citizens, especially in light of the upcoming elections of the European Parliament. The keynote speakers were Mr Josef MOSER, Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice, and Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament. Mr MOSER stated that trust in the European Union could only be re-established if the Union was brought closer to the citizens, while at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity. Ms McGUINNESS added that more transparency was also needed at the national level and called for better communication between parliamentarians at all levels. During the debate, participants discussed the importance of getting citizens more involved in the fight against Euroscepticism and discontent.

The Contribution adopted by the LX COSAC focussed on the following topics: 1) Security and the fight against illegal migration; 2) Securing prosperity and competitiveness through digitalisation; 3) Western Balkans/South Eastern Europe and EU neighbourhood; 4) Brexit - current state; 5) Climate Policy and Energy Union; and 6) A transparent European Union closer to its citizens in light of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament.

During the Austrian Presidency of COSAC, the 30th Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had three chapters: the first one concentrated on the involvement of citizens in parliamentary proceedings; the second one dealt with Climate Policy and the Energy Union; and the third one was dedicated to the state of play of Brexit as well as implications for the future of the EU.

LXI COSAC in Bucharest (Romania)

The **LXI COSAC** - the first COSAC held in Romania - took place on 23-25 June 2019, at the Palace of Parliament, in Bucharest.

Mr Florin IORDACHE, Vice-President of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, welcomed participants, paid tribute to COSAC's contributions throughout its 30-year history, and stressed the increasing need for the national Parliaments to make themselves heard and to engage more in the EU decision-making process.

The groundwork for the meeting was laid during the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting, which took place on 20-21 January 2019, at the Palace of Parliament, and was chaired by Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*, and by Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*. Participants were welcomed by Mr Călin POPESCU-TĂRICEANU, President of the Romanian *Senat*, and Mr Florin IORDACHE, Vice-President of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, both pointing out the context, challenges and determination of the Romanian Presidency to succeed.

Discussions had focused on presenting the Romanian Presidency's priorities and on highlighting the need to increase cohesion and convergence using the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework.

The LXI COSAC was chaired by Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, and by Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*. Debates focused on the Romanian Presidency's achievements, on the EU's international trade relations and the Brexit status, on the European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market, and on the social impact of the EU's new economy based on innovation and technological progress.

Ms Viorica DĂNCILĂ, Prime Minister of Romania, Mr George CIAMBA, Romanian Minister-delegate for EU Affairs, and Mr Victor MICULA, Secretary of State at the Romanian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, presented the Romanian Presidency's achievements. All of them referred to the unexpectedly high number of files closed during this presidency, underlining as such the important steps undertaken to strengthen the European project in all fields of action.

Participants welcomed as well the Romanian Presidency's efforts and success, especially as regards convergence and cohesion policy, energy, work-life balance and social rights, industrial policy and digitalisation, defence, security and migration.

Rt Hon. Lord WHITTY, Chair of the UK *House of Lords*' EU Internal Market Sub-Committee, and Mr Luca JAHIER, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, referred to the EU's international trade relations, including those with the United Kingdom in the post-Brexit era. While Lord WHITTY regretted the United Kingdom's still-unclear position in relation to Brexit and warned that a disorderly withdrawal would be damaging for both parties, Mr JAHIER mainly referred to the EU's potential to determine the global economic and social agenda by means of international trade agreements.

Participants called for a solution to support the Irish peace process and preserve the EU Single Market principles at the same time. There was also a broad agreement to support multilateral trading system and to ask the EU to promote its social, environmental and climate standards.

Ms Vanessa DEBIAIS-SAINTON, Head of the European Commission' Unit responsible for Higher Education, and Acad. Ioan DUMITRACHE, Romanian Academy' Secretary General, pleaded for the European Education Area and for ambitious goals and standards in education and training policies, particularly as a result of the new digital and more and more technological working environment.

Participants expressed their support for the European Education Area, while stressing the Member States' responsibilities in the field of education.

At the initiative of the Dutch delegation, a side meeting on transparency issues also took place during the COSAC plenary's first day, on Monday 24 June 2019.

During the second day, Ms Elżbieta BIENKOWSKA, EU Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Mr Remus PRICOPIE, Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, and Mr Ștefan-Radu OPREA, Romanian Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, referred to the new EU economy based on innovation and technological progress and to its social impact. They

mainly supported the ideas of leading the technological change, while fostering the education system to help take up the newly created jobs.

Participants mainly agreed that education and innovation were crucial, but also outlined the importance of increasing relevant budgets and protecting social rights.

At the end, participants adopted the LXI COSAC's Contribution and Conclusions in a very consensual way. LXI COSAC's Contribution was published in the Official Journal of the European Union, on 3 September 2019.

The 31st Bi-annual Report, based on the replies received from the 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament, was divided in three chapters, with the first one dealing with the EU's international trade relations, including those with the United Kingdom in the post-Brexit era; the second chapter on the European Education Area; and the third and final chapter addressing the new EU's economy based on innovation, technological progress and artificial intelligence.

LXII COSAC in Helsinki (Finland)

The **LXII COSAC** was held in Helsinki, Finland, on 1-3 December 2019. Mr Matti VANHANEN, Speaker of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, opened the meeting.

In line with the priorities of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, the agenda of the LXII COSAC included five main sessions. The sessions were:

- 1) The Finnish Presidency of the EU Council;
- 2) Promoting the Rule of Law in the EU and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- 3) Intervention by Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission;
- 4) A Winning Climate Strategy for Europe and
- 5) Intervention by Mr Michel BARNIER, Head of the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom.

Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ presented the priorities of the new Commission led by President Ursula von der LEYEN and Mr Michel BARNIER spoke of the current state of play regarding the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU.

After the keynote speech delivered by Mr Antti RINNE, Prime Minister of Finland, outlining the main outcomes of the Finnish Presidency, a spontaneous debate was held on the Conference on the Future of Europe. The debate was initiated by the Chair of the meeting, Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN, Member of the Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta*. The consensus was that national Parliaments should be fully and adequately involved in the Conference.

The session on 'Promoting the Rule of Law in the EU and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights' sought to take stock of achievements in these fields and to suggest what direction the EU should take. Ms Tytti TUPPURAINEN, Minister for European Affairs, and Mr Michael O'FLAHERTY, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, delivered opening

speeches. Mr Kimmo KILJUNEN, Member of the Grand Committee, Finnish *Eduskunta*, moderated the session.

In the third session Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission, presented the priorities of the new von der LEYEN Commission and addressed the Commission's plans for inter-institutional relations and foresight, including an active approach to subsidiarity control. The speech was followed by a parliamentary debate moderated by Ms Mairéad McGuinness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, where topics such as the EU budget, climate change and transparency of the EU featured repeatedly.

The morning session held on the second day of the LXII COSAC began with keynote speeches of Ms Mari PANTSAR, Director, Carbon Neutral Circular Economy, the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra; Professor Markku OLLIKAINEN, Chair of the Finnish Climate Change Panel and Mr Pekka TIMONEN, Mayor of the City of Lahti. The speeches focused on strengthening the EU's climate policy and climate leadership. The subsequent parliamentary debate was on financial solidarity and cohesion, as well as economic opportunities related to the transition towards a carbon-neutral economy. Ms Satu Hassi, Chair of the Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, moderated the session.

In the fifth and final session, the keynote speaker, Mr Michel Barnier, Head of the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, addressed the priorities in the negotiations with the UK. In the ensuing parliamentary debate, a strong emphasis was put on the objectives of placing people first and basing the future partnership with the UK on a level playing field. The need to deal with and prioritise different policy areas in the negotiations on the future partnership during the 11-month transition period was also addressed. Ms Satu Hassi, Chair of the Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, moderated the session.

The Contribution adopted by the LXII COSAC focused on the following topics:

- 1) Appointment and work programme of the von der LEYEN Commission;
- 2) Conference on the Future of Europe;
- 3) Multi-annual Financial Framework;
- 4) Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law;
- 5) A Winning Climate Strategy for Europe; and
- 6) The European Union's Future Relationship with the United Kingdom.

During the Finnish Presidency of COSAC, the 32nd Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 40 out of 41 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 28 Member States and the European Parliament. The Report had three chapters: 1) Overview of parliamentary activities; 2) Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the 2020s; and 3) Evaluation of Bi-annual Report.

X. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Conference on the Future of Europe and the war in Ukraine - new challenges for EU Parliaments

LXIII COSAC in Zagreb (Croatia)

The LXIII COSAC was scheduled to take place from 24 to 26 May 2020 in Zagreb, Croatia, but had to be cancelled due to the global COVID-19 outbreak and the consequences of an earthquake that affected Zagreb on 22 March 2020. An Extraordinary Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC was held instead via videoconference on 16 June 2020.

In line with the priorities of Croatia's Presidency of the Council of the EU, and particularly in light of the unprecedented circumstances in which the meeting was taking place, the agenda of the LXIII COSAC consisted of debates covering two topics:

- 1) the common European response to the coronavirus outbreak and the repercussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021 – 2027, and
- 2) the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Mr Jan OLBRYCHT, Vice-President of the EPP Group in the European Parliament, and the Co-Rapporteur on Multi Financial Framework (MFF), pointed out that the pandemic crisis was also bearing the opportunity for real change, and presented the developments regarding the MFF negotiations. Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission, highlighted the importance of solidarity among the 27 Member States and presented the key elements of the recovery plan. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ further underlined the crucial role of national Parliaments, particularly with regard to the own resources policy of the European Union, and invited all Parliaments to engage in fruitful discussions with the European Commission.

In her pre-recorded video message, Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission, referred to the role of national Parliaments in the Conference on the Future of Europe and urged participants to ask their respective governments to conclude the negotiations in the Council in order to pave the way for a Joint Declaration on the Conference, to be agreed by the EU institutions. Ms Mairead McGuinness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, referred to the European Parliament's short resolution on the Conference, and urged the Council to agree on a position. According to Ms McGuinness, the launch of the Conference was becoming more urgent with COVID-19 and the related EU recovery plans.

The extraordinary meeting of the Chairs of COSAC did not adopt any Conclusions or Contribution, but rather proposed a letter addressed to the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Council, the President in Office of the Council of the European Union, and the President of the European Commission, outlining the main accents of the meeting, to be signed by interested Chairpersons of COSAC.

During the Croatian Presidency of COSAC, the 33rd Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 36 out of 39 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The Report had three chapters: 1) Follow-up to the 32nd Bi-annual Report; 2) Co-operation with the European institutions, advisory bodies and agencies – best

practices; and 3) Parliamentary oversight – tools and mechanisms, constitutional and legal practices.

LXIV COSAC in Berlin (Germany)

The **LXIV COSAC** took the form of a Virtual Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), which took place on 30 November and 1 December 2020. The meeting was opened and chaired by Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German Bundestag, and Guido WOLF, Chair of the Committee on European Union Questions, German Bundesrat.

In line with the priorities of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU, the agenda of the Virtual COSAC consisted of four sessions and a topical debate on transatlantic relations with which the conference began. The representatives of the EU affairs Committees of Member States' national Parliaments and of the European Parliament saw the outcome of the US presidential election as grounds for cautious optimism in terms of more reliability and a revival of cooperation in multilateral fora, although there was a note of self-criticism in calls for the EU to show greater self-reliance in the field of defence and internal security.

The second session dealt with cooperation in the EU regarding pandemics and preventive health care. In the debate with Dr Andrea AMMON, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), and Thomas GEBHART, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Health, demands were raised, e.g. for better digital interconnection and for a system of data exchange based on uniform criteria. Difficulties associated with testing and tracing and the need for harmonisation of travel rules within the EU were also mentioned. Some delegates also advocated for strengthening the ECDC.

In the third discussion session, Federal Chancellor Dr Angela MERKEL provided an interim review of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU. A wide range of issues were addressed in the debate, including the Multiannual Financial Framework and the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, the Union's external relations, the enlargement policy, migration and asylum as well as the climate goals for 2030. The latter had to be ambitious but attainable for industry, according to the Federal Chancellor.

The fourth session with Dr Ursula VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission, was devoted to the future of the Union. The President of the Commission responded to a key demand expressed by numerous national Parliaments, assuring them that she would advocate for their appropriate involvement in the planned Conference on the Future of Europe, including the steering body. The debate was characterised by a focus on strategic issues, such as the green transition and enlargement of the EU. According to President VON DER LEYEN, the Multiannual Financial Framework and the recovery fund should also be seen as opportunities to modernise the European economy.

The final item on the agenda initiated a discussion between the delegates and invited African guests. In his keynote address, former President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Professor Horst KÖHLER, encouraged the delegates not to view Africa as an object of welfare but rather as an independent political actor with its own visions, its own political will and its own options for action and as an equal partner. This resonated strongly with the delegates and the African

guests. The subsequent discussion highlighted uniting factors and some existing challenges, for example with regard to agricultural policy.

The Virtual COSAC did not adopt any Conclusions or Contribution, but rather proposed a letter addressed to the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Council, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union and the President of the European Commission, outlining the expectations of the national Parliaments with regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe.

During the German Presidency of the COSAC, the 34th Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 36 out of 39 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The Report had two chapters: 1) The Conference on the Future of Europe; 2) Lessons learnt from the pandemic.

LXV COSAC in Lisbon (Portugal)

The **LXV COSAC** was held on 31 May and 1 June of 2021, in a videoconference format due to the pandemic situation, and chaired by Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chair of the European Affairs Committee the *Assembleia da República*. The President of the Portuguese Parliament, Mr. Eduardo FERRO RODRIGUES, delivered the welcome message.

The agenda of the LXV COSAC was in line with the priorities of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Portuguese Presidency and covered four main sessions: 1) The Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU; 2) Social Europe: what model for the triple economic, digital and climate transition?; 3) Implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans – the role of national Parliaments; 4) Conference on the Future of Europe: state of play.

The keynote speakers of the first session included the Prime Minister of Portugal, Mr António COSTA, the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Ms Roberta METSOLA, and the Vice-President of the European Commission, Mr. Margaritis SCHINAS. Parliamentarians focused on the vaccination strategy and economic and social recovery programmes of the European Union, as well as the EU's position in the world and issues related to migration and freedom of movement.

The second session was dedicated to the topic of Social Europe, with the participation of the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, Mr Nicolas SCHMIT, and the Portuguese Secretary of State for Social Security, Mr Gabriel BASTOS. The session addressed the triple economic, digital and climate transition, focusing on the Porto Social Summit and the European Pillar of Social Rights, its implementation and relationship with the economic and social recovery of Europe, as well as the situation of young people in this context. The participation of the social partners (European Trade Union Confederation and Business Europe) and the European Youth Forum in this debate was also highlighted.

The session on the implementation of the national recovery and resilience plans was centred around the tripartite perspective of the European Commission, through Commissioner Mr Paolo GENTILONI, the European Parliament, with the intervention of the First Vice-President Ms Roberta METSOLA, and the national Parliaments, with the presence of the Chair of the

European Affairs Committee of the National Assembly of Slovenia, Mr Marko POGAČNIK. The discussion focused mainly on the involvement of national Parliaments in the preparation of the plans and the future monitoring and scrutiny of their implementation, as well as the importance of the reforms, their implementation and their focus on the digital and ecological dimensions, and the importance of own resources.

Session IV focused on the Conference on the Future of Europe, where the co-chairs Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT, Member of the European Parliament, and Ms Dubravka ŠUICA Commissioner for Democracy and Demography, European Commission, referred to the organisation of the Conference and the steps taken so far, notably with regard to the composition of the plenary, working groups and citizens' panels. The Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs, and co-chair of this Conference, Ms Ana Paula ZACARIAS, sent a video message on the work already accomplished and the future of this Conference. The importance of holding a Conference of and for citizens, placing them at the centre of the discussions and dialogue, was highlighted, as was the need to achieve concrete results based on the conclusions of the debates to be held, both at national and European level.

This session was moderated by Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, and by the Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, Mr Antonio TAJANI, both of whom gave brief speeches on the work carried out within the scope of this Conference and its preparation.

The President of the Portuguese Republic, Mr Marcelo REBELO DE SOUSA, closed the meeting through a video message.

Since the meeting was held in a virtual format, no contributions or conclusions were adopted. Nevertheless, a letter, co-signed by the members of the national Parliaments of the Presidential Troika (the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, the German *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*, and the Slovenia *Državni zbor* and *Državni svet*), was sent to the European institutions noting the activity developed within COSAC during the parliamentary dimension of the Portuguese Presidency.

During the Portuguese Presidency of COSAC, the 35th Bi-annual Report was drafted based on the replies of 38 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had four chapters: 1) Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights; 2) EU-Africa Strategy; 3) Next Generation EU: scrutiny of National Recovery and Resilience Plans – implications for the European Semester and 4) Conference on the Future of Europe.

LXVI COSAC in Ljubljana (Slovenia)

The Plenary Meeting of the LXVI COSAC was held on 29-30 November 2021 in Ljubljana via videoconference. The meeting was chaired by Mr Bojan KEKEC, Chair of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs, Slovenian *Državni svet* and Mr Nik PREBIL, Deputy Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*. Mr Marko POGAČNIK, Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, was unable to co-chair the Plenary Meeting of LXVI COSAC due to exceptional circumstances.

The agenda of the meeting of the LXVI COSAC was structured in four main sessions that were topically based on the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency to the Council:

1. Session I – ‘Achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU’
2. Session II – ‘Working Towards a European Perspective for the Western Balkans’
3. Session III – ‘The Future Role of Young People in EU Decision-Making Processes and Beyond’
4. Session IV – ‘Conference on the Future of Europe’

The first session focused on the Achievements of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU which were presented by Mr Gašper DOVŽAN, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr DOVŽAN outlined progress in the four priority areas of the Slovenian Presidency: resilience and recovery, the Conference on the Future of Europe, the rule of law, and a secure European Union and the Western Balkans. The following debate touched upon the achieved results in building the European health union, approval of national recovery and resilience plans and green and digital transformation with the focus on ‘Fit for 55’ package and the Digital Services and Digital Markets Act. Furthermore, the need for more concrete steps in legislative work and Council positions was emphasized in areas of migration, rule of law and enlargement to the Western Balkans.

The second session on the European perspective for the Western Balkans opened with a video message from Mr Olivér VÁRHELYI, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement. This was followed by introductory remarks by Mr Gašper DOVŽAN, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia; Mr Branimir GVOZDENOVIC, Chair of the Committee on European Integration of the Parliament of Montenegro and Ms Slavjanka PETROVSKA, Member of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. In addition to the topic of the EU enlargement process the subsequent debate also emphasized topics such as economic recovery, migration management and security cooperation.

The theme of the third session was the future role of young people in EU decision-making processes with keynoted addresses given by Ms Roberta METSOLA, First Vice-President of the European Parliament; Mr Damir OREHOVEC, State Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia; Ms Biliana SIRAKOVA, EU Youth Coordinator. In addition, a brief contribution was given by Ms Anja FORTUNA, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum. The speakers raised several issues and opportunities concerning youth participation in decision making processes. These also resonated during the debate, where calls for concrete measures to improve the position of young people in various areas were made and the importance of the education process, funding and strengthening the trust of young people in the EU was stressed.

Fourth session was dedicated to the Conference on the Future of Europe and addressed its state of play and future prospects. The keynote speakers were the three Co-Chairs of the CoFE: Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT, Member of the European Parliament; Mr Gašper DOVŽAN, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia (via video message) and Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Democracy. In addition, two national representatives, Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the

Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale* and Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Sénat* shared their insights from the perspective of national Parliaments. In the ensuing debate calls for more transparency of the CoFE workings and greater citizens' engagement were made.

Due to the online nature of the meeting, the LXVI COSAC did not adopt the Contribution or Conclusions of COSAC. The Presidency had therefore drafted a letter on the work of COSAC during the semester and addressed it to the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Council, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union and the President of the European Commission, also circulating it to the delegations of COSAC.

During the Slovenian Presidency of COSAC, the [36th Bi-annual Report](#) was drafted based on the replies of 36 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 26 Member States and the European Parliament. The report had three chapters:

1. Digitalisation of Parliaments/Chambers during the pandemic and digital transition,
2. The Future Role of Young People in Decision-Making Processes and Beyond,
3. Conference on the Future of Europe.

LXVII COSAC in Paris (France)

Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons (13-14 January) and LXVII COSAC (3-5 March) in Paris (France)

The meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, which took place in the Senate on 13 and 14 January 2022, was the first conference organised as part of the interparliamentary dimension of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. After two years of pure video-conference meetings, this meeting was also the first one organised in hybrid mode, in the chamber of the *Palais du Luxembourg* equipped for the occasion with a multilingual video-conference system.

This meeting - co-chaired by Mr. Jean-François RAPIN, President of the European Affairs Committee of the Senate, and Ms. Sabine THILLAYE, President of the European Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, and opened by Mr. Gérard LARCHER, President of the Senate - made it possible to prepare the Plenary meeting of the LXVIII COSAC. It was also the opportunity to formalise the creation of two working groups proposed by the French Presidency: one on the role of national Parliaments within the European Union, and the other on the European values at the heart of the sense of belonging to the Union.

Three sessions were organised in the context of this COSAC: the first aimed to present the priorities of the French Presidency, as did by Mr. Clément Beaune, Secretary of State to the Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, responsible for European Affairs; the second was about the new working methods within COSAC, and aimed in particular to create the two working groups mentioned above. The Presidency's wish was thus to enhance the effectiveness and visibility of COSAC's work through these groups, which are an essential tool for interparliamentary dialogue and cooperation on European issues.

The third session - dedicated to the euro, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the single currency - was an opportunity for Ms. Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank, to assess the 20 years that have passed since the introduction of the euro in fiduciary form and to present the challenges that Europe and the euro area could face. Considering that the euro area countries had managed to emerge stronger from the recent crises, Ms. Lagarde identified three key directions for the future: providing stability, strengthening the supply side and ensuring strategic autonomy.

The LXVII COSAC was held from 3 to 5 March 2022 entirely in person, due to the improved pandemic situation. The meeting took place in the chamber of the *Palais Bourbon* and was co-chaired by Ms. Sabine THILLAYE, President of the European Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, and Mr. Jean-François RAPIN, President of the European Affairs Committee of the Senate. Ms. Laetitia SAINT-PAUL, Vice-President of the National Assembly, opened the meeting with a welcome address.

In line with the priorities defined by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the agenda of the LXVII COSAC meeting was divided into six sessions, the last of which was devoted to a topical debate.

1. Session I – “First assessment of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union”
2. Session II – “European recovery plan and exit from the crisis”
3. Session III – “Climate change and energy transition”
4. Session IV – “The Conference on the Future of Europe”
5. Session V – “Progress reports from the working groups”
6. Session VI – “Debate on Ukraine”

The first session enabled the French Prime Minister, Mr. Jean CASTEX, to make an initial assessment of the French Presidency of the Council, particularly with regard to strategic autonomy in the context of the war in Ukraine. Most of the speakers welcomed the unity of the European Union in this crisis and supported the need for the Union's autonomy in energy, economic and defence matters.

The second session, dedicated to the European recovery plan and the exit from the crisis, opened with introductory remarks by Mr. Othmar KARAS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr. Ivan STEFANEC, President of SME Europe, and Mr. Daniel GROS, Member of the Board of Directors at the *Centre d'étude et de prospective stratégique* (CEPS), who welcomed the historic rebound in growth of the euro area. They also underlined the fundamental progress represented by the Next Generation EU recovery instrument and called for progress in the creation of new own resources. Discussions focused on the economic impact of the war in Ukraine and on the possibilities of adapting the Stability and Growth Pact in this context.

The third session of the LXVII COSAC was devoted to a debate on climate change and energy transition. Following introductory remarks by Mr. Werner HOYER, President of the European Investment Bank, Mr. Pierre GATTAZ, President of BusinessEurope, and Mr. Christian GOLLIER, General Manager of the Toulouse School of Economics and Visiting Professor at

the *Collège de France*, the speakers affirmed the need for the European Union to consolidate its economic and energy autonomy following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The debates highlighted the need to diversify energy sources and to invest in new technologies such as green hydrogen. Several speakers also argued for an inclusive transition, protecting citizens from its possible negative effects, notably on purchasing power. The subject of the carbon adjustment mechanism at the borders, a priority of the French Presidency, was also debated, with a view to preserving the competitiveness of European companies.

The fourth session, dedicated to the Conference on the Future of Europe, opened with a video message from Ms. Ursula VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission. Following the opening remarks of the two co-chairs of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr. Guy VERHOFSTADT, Member of the European Parliament, and Ms. Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Democracy and Demography, the delegations welcomed this exercise of citizen participation, while stressing the conclusions of the Conference, as representatives of the citizens of the Member States. Several speakers emphasised that the role of national Parliaments should be strengthened, for example through the creation of a “green card”, or through better consultation upstream of the preparation of proposals for European acts.

During the fifth session, Ms. Sabine THILLAYE and Mr. Jean-François RAPIN each presented a progress report on the two working groups set up within COSAC, one on the role of national Parliaments within the European Union, and the other on the European values at the heart of the sense of belonging to the Union. The final reports of these working groups were presented and adopted on 14 June 2022, at the final meeting of each of these groups in Paris. The [working group on the role of national Parliaments put forward fourteen proposals](#), including the establishment of a common and indirect right of initiative for national Parliaments ("green card") and a right of written questioning for the chairpersons of the European affairs committees of each chamber, on the model of that available to MEPs. The [working group on the place of European values presented ten proposals](#), including the creation of an internal COSAC working group of rapporteurs appointed by each European affairs committee to follow rule of law issues, and the holding of an annual European conference on the rule of law bringing together representatives of national Parliaments, European institutions, governments, local authorities, social partners and citizens

The sixth session of the LXVII COSAC was devoted to a topical debate on Ukraine, during which delegations unanimously condemned the Russian invasion and supported the united response of the European Union. The Chairpersons of the parliamentary delegations from all Member States and from five candidate and neighbouring countries co-signed a declaration of support for Ukraine under attack by the Russian Federation. The declaration calls for a ceasefire, to ensure safe access to humanitarian aid, to get organised at the EU level to welcome the millions of Ukrainian refugees, to involve national Parliaments in managing this crisis, to deepen the common defence and security policy, and to consolidate European sovereignty, particularly in the area of energy and food.

As not all delegations were able to travel to Paris due to the pandemic situation, no contributions or conclusions were adopted. Nevertheless, a letter from the Presidency on the work of COSAC during the six months was sent to the President of the European Parliament,

the President of the European Council, the President of the Council of the European Union and the President of the European Commission.

During the French Presidency, the [37th Bi-annual Report](#) was drafted on the basis of responses from 37 national Parliaments/Chambers of the 27 Member States and the European Parliament. The report was divided into three chapters:

1. The role of national Parliaments in the European Union
2. The rule of law
3. The Conference on the Future of Europe.

LXVIII COSAC in Prague (Czech Republic)

The **LXVIII COSAC** was held on 13-15 November of 2022, in person. It was chaired by Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Mr David SMOLJAK, Member of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Czech *Senát*, Mr Petr FIFKA, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Ms Lucie POTUČKOVÁ, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* and Mr Jaroslav BŽOCH, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*. The Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies, H. E. Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, delivered the welcome speech.

The agenda of the LXVIII COSAC was in line with the priorities of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Czech Presidency and covered five main sessions: 1) The Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU; 2) Future of the EU; 3) Strategic autonomy of the EU; 4) Ukraine - state of play, reconstruction, migration; 5) European Perspective of the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.

Before the beginning of the first thematic session the COSAC was addressed by the President of the European Commission, Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN via video message in which she focused mainly on the need for overall help to Ukraine, Europe's energy crisis and Commission's initiatives to solve it, she also emphasised the importance of renewables for Europe's future. She concluded by recalling the need for defence of European values.

The keynote speaker of the first session was the Minister for European Affairs, Mr Mikuláš BEK who addressed wide range of issues that the Czech Presidency was dealing with including the Czech top priority: support to Ukraine. In the debate, parliamentarians expressed mainly their support and solidarity with Ukraine, underlining the need to strengthen even further the help provided to Ukraine and the importance for the EU of staying united. Other interventions focused mainly on energy crisis, enlargement of the EU or green transition of the EU.

The second session was dedicated to the topic of Future of the EU, with the participation of the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS and Vice-President of

the European Commission for Values and Transparency, Ms Věra JOUROVÁ. The session addressed beside others the state of play after the CoFE, whose participants has jointly agreed on and published its final Conclusions in spring 2022. The following debate further addressed the Europe's challenge of facing permanent crisis of various nature for years already and the need to find solutions by the political representation. Many of the interventions also touched upon the Treaty change and in connection to that, the need for Convention. The enlargement process and neighbourhood policy linked to the Russian aggression context was also discussed. The topic of decision - making process in the Council was also addressed, whereas the debate had shown different scale of views.

The third session on Strategic autonomy of the EU was opened by the speeches of Mr Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission for the Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight and H. E. Mr Václav Bartuška, Ambassador-at-Large for Energy Security of the Czech Republic. The session focused mainly on the energy crisis and its solutions including green transition, self-efficiency in various areas or building new partnerships, especially in the context of raw materials. The need for defence of democratic values and the need to stay united were emphasised. During the ensuing debate many speakers had mentioned the need for strengthening strategic energy autonomy of the EU.

The fourth session's topic was Ukraine - state of play, reconstruction, migration. The keynote addresses were given by Mr Tomáš POJAR, Advisor to Prime Minister of the Czech Republic on Security and Foreign Affairs Issues and Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH – TSINTSADZE, Chairperson of the Committee on Ukraine's EU Integration, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. They both praised the help to Ukraine at both the EU and national level. While noting (Mr POJAR) that it was the USA who had been guaranteeing peace in Europe again and that Europe should catch up to ensure its own security. Ms KLYMPUSH – TSINTSADZE further elaborated on the development of war since the last meeting of COSAC Chairpersons in July 2022, mentioning the sham referenda, Iran's provision of drones to Putin's regime or the scale of destruction across her country. She mentioned the idea of not only freezing of the Russian assets but also their seizure in order to partly fund future recovery fund for Ukraine. In the following discussion, almost every intervention mentioned support to Ukraine, whereas the need to condemn Russian leadership as a terrorist regime was emphasised. Many of the further interventions touched upon the topics of continuous assistance to Ukraine in any possible terms. Some speakers had mentioned strong support for facilitation of the Ukraine's integration process. Further topics discussed were also Ukraine's NATO membership and the need for compensations for the human and material destruction caused by Russia. Setting up a special tribunal for the crimes committed in Ukraine was also supported by many parliamentarians.

The last fifth and final session of LXVIII COSAC was dedicated to the European Perspective of the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. The keynote interventions were presented by Mr Mirek TOPOLÁNEK, Former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and Mr Salvatore DE MEO, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. During this session the importance of this topic was emphasised, whereas the Czech Presidency was praised for putting the topic back and high on the agenda of the EU. Many speakers in the debate encouraged the enlargement process, especially in the current unstable geo - political situation,

while at the same moment reiterating that there could be no enlargement without alignment to conditions set and that no fast-track procedure existed.

The [Contribution](#) adopted by the LXVIII COSAC focused on the following topics:

- 1) On Ukraine
- 2) On the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership
- 3) On strategic autonomy
- 4) On the future of the EU
- 5) On the inter-parliamentary cooperation and the 38th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

During the Czech Presidency of COSAC, the [38th Bi-annual Report](#) was drafted based on the replies of 38 out of 39 national Parliaments/Chambers of 27 Member States and of the European Parliament. The report had three chapters:

- 1) Conference on the Future of Europe – parliamentary procedures and institutional affairs; 2) Proposals of COSAC Working Groups;
- 3) The European Union and Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

LXIX COSAC in Stockholm (Sweden)

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAS 29-30 JANUARY 2023

The meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC took place in Stockholm on 30 January 2023 and was preceded by a meeting of the COSAC Presidential Troika on 29 January 2023. Both meetings were held in the Former Second Chamber of the Riksdag, and chaired by Mr Hans WALLMARK, Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Riksdag. The Chairpersons' meeting was opened by Dr Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the Riksdag. In his welcoming speech, he emphasised the crucial role of national parliaments in democratic societies.

The first thematic session focussed on what the EU can do in the area of organised crime, with several prominent speakers including Ms Ylva JOHANSSON, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs. In her intervention, she gave an account of various initiatives to combat cross-border organised crime and terrorism in the EU, and stressed the importance of continued enhanced collaboration between law enforcement authorities in different countries. The second speaker, Mr Johan OLSSON, Head of the National Operations Department of the Swedish Police Authority, also emphasised the significance of international police cooperation, and spoke about how using artificial intelligence could be an effective way of combating organised crime. The third speaker, Ms Anna Karin HILDINGSON BOQVIST, Secretary General of ECPAT Sweden, a children's rights organisation working to combat the sexual exploitation of children, underlined the need to intensify the fight against criminal networks involved in the sexual abuse and trafficking of children.

The second session dealt with the priorities of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU with Mr Christian DANIELSSON, State Secretary to the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, as keynote speaker. He gave an account of the priorities of the Swedish Presidency: security, competitiveness, the green and energy transitions, democratic values and the rule of law. He stated that a principal objective for the Presidency was to uphold unity of the EU in support of

Ukraine. The next speaker was the Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS, who emphasised the need for national parliaments to support the priorities and key initiatives of Sweden's Presidency, especially the need for continued support of Ukraine, adopting the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and reducing the EU's dependency on energy. He also highlighted the need to complete the Fit-for-55 package, implement the outcomes of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and defend liberal democracy as well as parliamentary systems.

LXIX COSAC Plenary meeting, 14–16 May 2023

The LXIX COSAC Plenary Meeting took place in the Chamber of the Swedish *Riksdag* in Stockholm on 14–16 May 2023, and included four thematic sessions.

In the opening session, the Speaker of the Riksdag, Dr Andreas NORLÉN, welcomed all delegations to Stockholm and expressed his delight at receiving parliamentarians from all over Europe in the Chamber of the Riksdag for political dialogue on issues of common concern. Mr Hans WALLMARK and Ms Matilda ERNKRANS, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Riksdag, also made opening remarks, which was followed by a keynote video message from Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission.

The first thematic session was devoted to the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU with Ms Jessika ROSWALL as keynote speaker. In her intervention, she described the ongoing work and negotiations in the Council, and assured that the Swedish Presidency was doing its utmost to contribute to a safer, greener, and freer Europe. As the first speaker of this session, Mr Salvatore DE MEO, Chair of the AFCO Committee of the European Parliament, acknowledged the overall achievements so far during the Swedish Presidency, especially its involvement in the implementation of the conclusions of the Convention on the Future of Europe.

The second thematic session focussed on the Single Market and its 30-year anniversary with First Vice-President Mr Othmar KARAS as keynote speaker. In his intervention, he underlined the importance of the Single Market, with its four freedoms, to achieve prosperity for the European continent. At the same time, he called for the further deepening and completion of the Single Market, for example in the fields of energy, security and defence, as well as in the banking and capital markets. Ms Kerstin JORNA, Director-General at the European Commission, further expanded on the progress of the Single Market since its institution 30 years ago, and deliberated on how it could further develop. After the keynote interventions and the debate, an interactive session took place, centred around a quiz on the further development of the Single Market. Delegates were confronted with different statements related to the Single Market and were invited to indicate preferred options from a predefined set of alternatives in a non-binding fashion. The result was displayed in the Chamber and commented on by a distinguished panel of members representing the present COSAC Troika. This session also included interventions from representatives of the Swedish social partners.

The third thematic session dealt with the green transition with keynote interventions by Ms Heléne FRITZON, member of the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament; Mr Daniel MES, Member of Cabinet of Executive Vice-President Timmermans of the European

Commission; and Mr Johan KUYLENSTIERNA, Director General of Formas Research Council for Sustainable Development. All speakers underlined the urgency of tackling climate change, including the common responsibility to implement rules and measures in order to meet already agreed targets.

The fourth and final thematic session dealt with Ukraine, and included a keynote intervention by Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Chair of the Committee on Ukraine's integration into the EU. She acknowledged all the support given by the EU and its Member States and stated that the ongoing war would not end before Ukraine had regained its territorial integrity. She further stressed the need to rebuild and reform Ukraine to promote its rapid integration into the EU. Additional keynote speeches were also made by Mr Anders AHNLID, Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Party on Frozen and Immobilised Assets to support Ukraine's reconstruction and Mr Jean-Erik DE ZAGON, Head of the European Investment Bank Representation to Ukraine, where they stressed the massive need for the reconstruction of Ukraine, and discussed different ways of leveraging financial support to that end.

During the closing session, the plenary adopted by consensus the contribution and conclusions of the LXIX COSAC. The contribution addresses mainly the topics that were debated in the plenary: Ukraine; cooperation on organised crime and corruption, the Single Market and the green transition.

LXX COSAC in Madrid (SPAIN)

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC, 17-18 SEPTEMBER 2023

The meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC took place in Madrid on 18 September 2023 and was preceded by a meeting of the COSAC Presidential Troika on 17 September 2023. Both meetings were held in the Upper Chamber of the *Cortes Generales*, the *Senado*, and co-chaired by Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Member of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* and Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Member of the Spanish *Senado*. The Chairpersons' meeting was opened by Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA, Speaker of the *Senado*. In his welcoming speech, he recalled the great progress made in terms of the active participation of the national Parliaments and of the European Parliament in defining the main lines of the Union's various policies. The first thematic session was devoted to the presentation of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency with Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO, Minister for Foreign Affairs, as keynote speaker. After having underlined the importance which the Spanish Presidency was to give to addressing the unjust invasion of Ukraine, he gave an account of the four main priorities of the Spanish Presidency: reindustrialisation of the EU, green transition, social and economic justice, and upholding European unity. The next speaker was the Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS, who urged the Spanish Presidency to finalise as many open files as possible, e.g. the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the regulation of artificial intelligence, the economic governance review and the Fit for 55-package, before the end of the legislative term. Mr KARAS briefly mentioned his proposal of a "Charter on the role of parliamentarism in a functioning liberal democracy".

The second session dealt with the future of Ukraine in Europe and had Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's

Integration into the European Union of the Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, and Mr Hans WALLMARK, Chairperson of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*, as keynote speakers. Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE argued that the war in Ukraine had not started in February 2022, but in 2014 with Russia's occupation of Crimea, and it was still on with endless Russian military attacks. She asked for increased support from partners in order to win the war, rebuild the country and reach the goal of becoming both an EU and NATO member. Mr WALLMARK pointed out two central aspects of the current state of affairs in Europe. First, the fact that a full-scale war had been taking place in Europe for 18 months, which should have consequences. Second, in the foreseeable time ahead, probably decades, the EU would have to deal with a nationalistic, imperialistic, and well-armed Russia.

LXX COSAC Plenary meeting, 26-28 November 2023

The LXX COSAC Plenary Meeting took place in the *Meliá Castilla hotel* in Madrid, on 26-28 November 2023, and included five thematic sessions. In the opening session, Mr LANDALUCE welcomed all the delegations to Madrid and recalled that the aim of COSAC was to strengthen the role of national Parliaments, as a vehicle to express social concerns and, amongst the different topics that would be dealt with, he focused on the importance of stability and cohesion for the EU. Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA emphasised that, in a moment when Europe had to face such important challenges and uncertainties in an increasingly volatile world, Europeans had to demonstrate that they were capable of developing appropriate responses to those challenges. He stressed that Europeans must defend and highlight the shared values and interests that have made possible the enormous success of the EU. The first thematic session was devoted to the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU with Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO, Minister for Foreign Affairs, as keynote speaker. In his video message, the Minister started by underlining the fact that, 34 years after having been created in Madrid, COSAC was back in Spain. Regarding some of the ongoing negotiations, he alluded to the Critical Raw Materials Act, the regulation on Artificial Intelligence, the negotiation of free trade agreements and the ecological transition. Mr ALBARES BUENO also focused on social justice, which he considered to be the DNA of the Spanish Presidency. After the message of the Minister, the debate started, with all questions being jointly replied at the end of the session by the Secretary of State for the European Union, Mr Pascual NAVARRO. The second thematic session focussed on the Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU, and had the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Fernando Grande MARLASKA GÓMEZ, the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms Ylva JOHANSSON and Mr Othmar KARAS as keynote speakers. All of them agreed in expressing their hope for the referred Pact to be approved during the Spanish Presidency. The third thematic session dealt with the energy crisis and green transition and had Mr Nicolás GONZÁLEZ CASARES, member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur on the State of the Energy Union and Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, member of the German *Bundestag*, as keynote speakers. Both speakers underlined the urgency of tackling the energy crisis via, amongst other tools, the reform of the electricity market and the research for alternative energy sources. The fourth thematic session dealt with the situation in Ukraine and relations with the European Union. In his keynote addresses, Admiral Juan Francisco MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ, Secretary General for Defence Policy, Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Chairperson of the Committee on EU Policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, and Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH TSINTSADZE, focussed on different aspects of this war, amongst others, the massive need for the reconstruction of Ukraine, and different

ways of leveraging financial support to that end. The fifth and final thematic session focussed on the objective of Open Strategic Autonomy and relations with Latin America. The first keynote speaker, Mr Juan FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO, Secretary of State for Ibero-America and the Caribbean and for Spanish around the World, highlighted the importance of deepening economic and trade relations with the Latin-American and Caribbean region (LAC) in order to reduce the EU's dependence and to diversify the sources of energy and raw materials. The second keynote speaker, Mr Carlos MALAMUD RIKLES, Senior Analyst at the *Real Instituto Elcano*, underlined the importance of Latin America for the global economy, as a continent with numerous resources that would be key for the green transition. He presented the proposal for the creation of an EU-LAC Trade and Technology Council to steer continental relations and expressed his hope for the conclusion of the EU-Mercosur agreement.

During the closing session, the plenary adopted by consensus the contribution and conclusions of the LXX COSAC. The contribution addresses mainly the topics that were debated in the plenary: Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU, energy crisis and green transition, Ukraine, Open Strategic Autonomy and relations with Latin America.

LXXI COSAC in Namur and Brussels (Belgium)

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC 14-15 JANUARY 2024

The Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons took place in Namur on January 14-15, 2024, under the joint chairmanship of the Co-Chairs of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, Ms. Eliane TILLIEUX, Speaker of the Belgian Chambre des représentants/Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers, and Mr. Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Member of the Belgian Sénat/Senaat. The meeting started with a focus on procedural issues, including the outcomes of the Presidential Troika meeting, the draft program for the LXXI COSAC Plenary Meeting, and the outline of the 41st Bi-annual Report of COSAC. Various letters were discussed on a request to put the issue of additive design of online services on the agenda, two requests to organize side events and a request from the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada to issue a joint statement on the situation in Ukraine. Furthermore the issue was raised on the withdrawal of access for national parliaments to the delegates portal.

The Chairpersons meeting discussed three main topics:

- the priorities of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU;
- the European Pillar of Social Rights;
- the impact of EU enlargement on the future of the Union.

LXXI COSAC PLENARY MEETING 24-26 MARCH 2024

The LXXI COSAC Plenary Meeting was held in Brussels from March 24-26, 2024, under the chairmanship of Ms. Eliane Tillieux and Mr. Gaëtan Van Goidsenhoven. The Plenary Meeting focused on reviewing the 2019-2024 European legislative term and discussing the Council's strategic agenda for 2024-2029, gender policy and the representation of women and men in parliament, open strategic autonomy, and democracy and the rule of law in Europe.

During the opening session, welcome addresses were delivered by Ms. Eliane Tillieux, Mr. Gaëtan Van Goidsenhoven, and Mr. Othmar Karas, First Vice-President of the European Parliament. During the procedural questions three letters were addressed. A letter from the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada that requested to put forward a joint statement on Ukraine. The content of the joint statement was integrated in the Contribution from COSAC. A letter from several heads of delegation asking to put Ukraine on the agenda and a letter on accessibility of

information which was integrated in the Contribution as well. Mr. Georges Gilkinet, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Mobility, and Ms. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Chair of the Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU, provided keynote interventions during the first session, which focused on a review of the 2019-2024 European legislative term. The second session on gender policy featured keynote addresses from Ms. Marie-Colline LEROY, Belgian Secretary of State for Gender Equality, Equality Opportunities, and Diversity, Ms. Latifa GAHOUCI, Belgian Senator and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Ms Agnes HUBERT, Founding Member of Gender5+ and Professor at the College of Europe; and Ms Maruša GORTNAR, Head of Research and Policy Support Unit at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The third session on open strategic autonomy included speeches by Mr. Nicolas SCHMIT, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, and Mr. Thierry BRETON, European Commissioner for the Internal Market. The final session on democracy and the rule of law featured Mr. Didier REYNDERS, European Commissioner for Justice, along with a panel of experts for an interactive debate. The Plenary Meeting concluded with the adoption of the COSAC Contribution and Conclusions, reflecting the debates held during the meeting and including a specific focus on supporting Ukraine, enhancing European competitiveness, and reinforcing the rule of law within the EU.

LXXII COSAC in Budapest (Hungary)

MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC 28-29 JULY 2024

As the opening event of the parliamentary dimension of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Hungarian National Assembly hosted the Chairpersons' Meeting of COSAC, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union on 28-29 July 2024 at the Parliament building. The conference was opened by Mr István JAKAB, Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly. In his address he emphasised that the aim of the Hungarian National Assembly in general is to further strengthen the role of the national parliaments and promoting the prevailing of the subsidiarity principle. As one of the priorities of the Hungarian presidency he accounted in detail the reasons of the necessity of a farmer-centered EU agricultural policy and shaping a competitive, crisis-proof, sustainable, knowledge-based and farmer-friendly European agriculture.

As first point of the agenda of the conference Mr János BÓKA, Minister for European Union Affairs presented the programme and priorities of the Hungarian presidency which acts as an honest broker, and referred also to some other priority issues, such as the fight against anti-Semitism, the national minorities, the enlargement of the Schengen area and the representation of the EU's position at the COP29 climate conference. The speakers in the debate expressed their support for the Hungarian priorities, with many stressing the importance of supporting Ukraine, and some referred to their reservations about the Hungarian Prime Minister's visit to Russia in early July 2024. Regarding the issue Mr BÓKA underlined the importance of the common positions and stressed the importance of diversity and dialogue among those having dissenting views.

Regarding the state of play of the Western Balkan and Eastern enlargements of the European Union Mr Olivér VÁRHELYI, Commissioner for the Neighbourhood and Enlargement presented the situation of the 10 countries concerned and drew attention to the importance of

the Growth Plan. He said that, according to the European Commission, internal EU reforms and enlargement could go hand in hand. Mr Péter SZTÁRAY, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary stressed the strategic importance of enlargement, Hungary's commitment to it and the importance of recognising the progress made and involving the candidate countries in the negotiations. He underlined the role of national parliaments not only in law-making but also in sharing experience. The speakers in the debate supported the merit-based progress, but also raised the issue of the EU's preparedness for enlargement and on behalf of the candidate countries the need for equal treatment and progress. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK stressed that in the context of enlargement, we need to strengthen our commitment to welcoming new member states, because in his opinion enlargement is not an opportunity, but a necessity.

In his closing address Mr Zoltán TESSELY, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian National Assembly, stressed the importance of enlargement policy and praised the contribution of Commissioner VÁRHELYI to the candidates' as great as possible progress in the European integration process. He referred to the motto of the Hungarian presidency, which can also be interpreted in the context of the enlargement of the European Union, and underlined the importance of dialogue.

LXXII COSAC PLENARY MEETING 27-29 OCTOBER 2024

The series of parliamentary events linked to the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2024 continued with the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union, the LXXII Plenary Meeting of the COSAC. Mr Zoltán TESSELY, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian National Assembly hosted the event organised in Budapest on 27-29 October 2024. The conference was opened by Mr László KÖVER, Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly. He stressed that Hungary has taken over the presidency of the Council of the European Union under extraordinary circumstances and challenges, among which he highlighted the Russian-Ukrainian war, the negative demographic trends, the vulnerability of international supply chains, the effects of climate change and the migration pressure. He highlighted that Hungary supports a strong European Union based on the cooperation of strong nation states, but this should not stand in the way of finding common solutions to common EU challenges, for which open, honest and democratic debates are essential. Among the innovations of the Lisbon Treaty, he referred to the European Citizens' Initiative, in relation to which he said that the European Commission often rejects successful initiatives for political reasons, citing the "Minority SafePack - One million signatures for a diverse Europe" as an example.

The first point of the conference agenda, presenting the programme and results of the Hungarian presidency of the Council of the European Union, was introduced by a keynote speech of János BÓKA, Minister for European Union Affairs of Hungary. He highlighted a number of elements of the Hungarian Presidency's programme, such as the adoption of the New European Competitiveness Pact; the common management of migration policy at EU level; the strengthening of the common agricultural policy; the development of a cohesion policy to address demographic challenges and to ensure job creation; the promotion of a merit-based and credible enlargement policy; and the strengthening of European defence and industrial policy. He underlined that the Hungarian presidency, as an honest broker, is in a position to raise issues and make proposals for the peace, security and prosperity of Europe.

The participating members of parliaments exchanged views on the state of the European Union in the year of institutional transition and also commemorated the 15-year application of the Treaty of Lisbon. Related to this topic Mr Barna Pál ZSIGMOND, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Hungarian Ministry of European Union Affairs considered it important to examine what institutional conversion, or attempts at transformation, might result from the ongoing institutional transition and how this might reshape the daily functioning of the European Union. EU and national competences should be clearly defined and the EU institutions should respect these boundaries. He stressed that the Hungarian presidency would continue its efforts to facilitate discussions on the future of EU policies, helping to make Europe a continent of peace and prosperity again. According to Mr Sven SIMON, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament the EU today faces challenges that can only be tackled through joint EU actions, especially in policy areas such as defence, energy and innovation. Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Chairman of the EU Policies Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies claimed the importance of effective application of subsidiarity review mechanisms, which requires greater communication and coordination among national parliaments. He underlined that EU regulations have now become the main instrument for legal harmonisation, thus supplanting the use of directives and weakening national parliaments, which are increasingly relegated to the role of implementing centralised majority decisions and thus losing national sovereignty. Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, executive Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the European Green Deal, Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight welcomed the participants of the conference by video message.

The third point of the agenda of the event was the European demographic trends and responses at national and European level. Ms Zsófia KONCZ, State Secretary for Family Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation of Hungary described in detail the main elements of the family support system introduced in Hungary in 2010 and continuously expanded since then. Based on her opinion, the family must be the basis for sustainable demographic development. Mr TESSELY underlined that Hungary has chosen a different way to tackle demographic challenges than most EU member states: family support system instead of migration. Many of the members of parliaments who spoke during the agenda item referred to Hungary's family policy practice as a good example of real actions rather than just words to tackle the demographic challenge.

In the framework of the fourth session, the European security and defence, Mr Esteban GONZÁLEZ PONS, Vice-President of the European Parliament considered it vital for the EU to enhance its cooperation at international level with countries that also share fundamental values and principles such as rule of law and democracy. He also considered it necessary to strengthen the European defence industry, through investment in both, innovation and research. Mr Péter SZTÁRAY, State Secretary responsible for security policy and energy security of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade underlined that one of the priorities of the Hungarian presidency is to strengthen the EU's defence policy. He described the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on European defence and Hungary's contribution to European defence within the NATO and the EU. He said that NATO is the ultimate and most important defence guarantee for Europe.

After the adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXXII COSAC, in his closing address Mr. TESSELY stressed that the agenda of the conference covered some of the topics that determine the future of the European Union, as competitiveness, demography, peace and the formation of the new European Commission are issues that determine the future of EU citizens in the short and long term.