

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC
Sofia, Bulgaria, 21 January 2018

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

CHAIR: Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*

Mr Jaak MADISON, Deputy-Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Standing Sub-Committee on European Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*, Mr Edgar MAYER, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*; and Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, Vice-President, European Parliament.

AGENDA

- 1. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**
- 2. Approval of the draft programme of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**
- 3. Debate on the draft programme of the LIX COSAC**
- 4. Approval of the outline of the 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC**
- 5. Letters received by the Presidency**
- 6. Letters sent by the Presidency**
- 7. Any other business**

PROCEEDINGS

1. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

Mr VIGENIN welcomed the delegations of the Presidential Troika of COSAC (hereinafter referred to as "the Troika").

The agenda of the meeting of the Troika was adopted without amendment.

2. Approval of the draft programme of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

Mr VIGENIN outlined the topics on the programme of the meeting that would take place the following day.

The first session would focus on the “priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU” and would be presented by Ms Lilyana PAVLOVA, Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The second session would deal with “the future of the European Union - strength in unity” and would be presented by Ms Iliana IOTOVA, Vice-President of the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission and Ms Iskra MIHAYLOVA, Chair of the Committee on Regional Development, European Parliament.

Finally, the third session would focus on “the role of EU macro-regional strategies for sustainable development, stability and security”, with Ms Denitsa NIKOLOVA, Deputy Minister of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria and National Coordinator for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region; Mr Raul MÄLK, Ambassador-at-Large for Baltic Sea Region, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Chair of the National Coordinators group of the EU Strategy for the

Baltic Sea Region; and Ms Audrone PERKAUSKIENE, Head of division, Regional Cooperation and the OSCE, European External Action Service, as keynote speakers.

After the Chair noted a slight change in the speakers' order of appearance during the first session, the draft programme of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC was approved without amendment.

3. Debate on the draft programme of the LIX COSAC

The Chair informed the Troika members that the LIX COSAC would take place on 17-19 June 2018 in Sofia. He then outlined the five sessions of the draft programme and the keynote speakers.

The first session would focus on the achievements of the Bulgarian Presidency; the second session would deal with the integration and connectivity of the Western Balkans; the third session would address the European Pillar of Social Rights; the fourth session would tackle the future of the Cohesion Policy; and the fifth and final session would focus on the role of the EU Interparliamentary cooperation in the context of the debate on subsidiarity and proportionality.

Mr VIGENIN stated that these topics were of key importance to the future of the European Union and expressed his hope that First Vice-President TIMMERMANS would join the debate for the last session, in order to include the work completed by the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently" in the discussion.

The debate closed without any interventions, and the Chair promised that an updated agenda would be sent subsequently.

4. Approval of the outline of the 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Outlining the structure of the 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, Mr VIGENIN reported that the first chapter would be divided in two sections: one focusing on the work of the "Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently"" and the expectations of the national Parliaments in this regard, while the other would pay special attention to the possibility of future enlargement of the Union and on the respective opinion of Parliaments on the topic. The second chapter would focus on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. The third chapter would deal with the "European Pillar of Social Rights".

The questionnaire would be distributed by 13 February and the replies would be expected by 19 March 2018.

Ms McGUINNESS praised the outline and the topics chosen for the 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, but added that it was important to ensure that people were aware of the feedback of national Parliaments and the contents of the report, and to ensure that the findings are distributed and hopefully taken on board. She concluded by pledging the EP's assistance in achieving this and establishing wider acknowledgement of the report.

The Chair welcomed and agreed with these sentiments, and stressed the importance of the way questions were formulated.

5. Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received:

- Letters from Ms Tamar KHULORDAVA, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, *Parliament of Georgia*, Ms Jóna Sólveig ELÍNARDÓTTIR, Chair of the Foreign Affairs

Committee, Icelandic *Althingi*, Mr Olemic THOMMESSEN, President of the Norwegian *Storting*, Mr Thomas AESCHI, Member of the National Council, President of the EFTA/EU Delegation, Swiss *Assemblée fédérale*, and Ms Blerta DELIU-KODRA, Chairwoman of the Committee on European Integration of the Assembly of Kosovo,* requesting participation in COSAC meetings.

- A letter from Mr Jean BIZET, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*, requesting an additional item to be included on the agenda of the LIX COSAC regarding the participation of national Parliaments in the process of negotiating trade agreements between the EU and third countries.
- A letter from Mr TIMMERMANS in reply to the Troika's letter of 6 December 2017 on the possible extension of the composition and timeframe of the Task Force's work.
- Letters from Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu* and Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs at the Austrian *Nationalrat*, informing the Presidency about their respective participation in the Task Force.
- A letter from the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* addressed to Mr Jean Claude JUNCKER, President of the Commission, and Mr TIMMERMANS, on the Task Force.
- A paper from the Czech *Senát* on "How to better apply the principle of subsidiarity and the subsidiarity control mechanism".

After consultation with the Troika, the Parliaments requesting participation had been invited as special guests. Georgia however, had not registered.

The Chair also noted that, during the meeting, only delegations from EU Member States would have both names and flags of their countries on their tables, because of concerns raised by some countries, especially Serbia, with regard to Kosovo's participation. Considering the fact that five Member States did not recognize Kosovo, and given that Spain had also become sensitive to the issue, the proposed arrangement was deemed the best way to ensure participation while respecting sensibilities, thus prompting the decision to do without flags and names for non-Member States.

With regard to the letter sent by Mr BIZET, the Chair noted that there were no plans to include this as a separate item, but encouraged Mr BIZET to raise this topic during the 5th session.

As for Mr TIMMERMAN's letter on the Task Force, the Chair noted that this stated that neither timeframe nor participation would be extended. Also with regard to the letters from Mr VITSUT and Mr LOPATKA, the Chair had informed Mr TIMMERMANS accordingly.

The letter from the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* and the paper from the Czech *Senát* would be shared with the rest of delegations.

Mr LOPATKA had also asked to discuss the European Parliament's decision and the possibility of sending a letter to its President, Mr Antonio TAJANI, and the Chair asked Ms McGUINNESS for the European Parliament's position regarding this.

Ms McGUINNESS replied that the Conference of Presidents had unanimously agreed not to participate on institutional grounds. She stressed that the European Parliament was however not against the idea of having a Task Force or discussing the important topics suggested, but rather, the refusal to participate was made on the grounds of a well established principle: "Whereby no Member of Parliament should

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council and to the opinion of the ICJ on the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

take part in any capacity in working groups or advisory fora set up by the Commission where these bodies dealt with subject matters in which the Parliament was co-legislator.”

Ms McGUINNESS pointed out that the European Parliament’s position on subsidiarity and related issues featuring for debate by the Task Force would be reflected in its AFCO and JURI Committees’ report on the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better law-making to be adopted in plenary in May. Annual reports on the principle of subsidiarity were also being drawn up by JURI. In AFCO, an implementation report largely dealing with subsidiarity and proportionality would soon be adopted. While the principle position of the European Parliament upheld by the Conference of Presidents was that there was no place for the European Parliament as part of the Task Force because of its institutional role, Ms McGUINNESS noted that it was still interested in its work. She personally believed the voice of national Parliaments was important in the exchange with the Commission on the principle of subsidiarity, and hoped that the Task Force would identify any areas where more power could be given back to Member States or otherwise. She added that the European Parliament, represented in the Troika would be supporting the work of the working group within COSAC and would facilitate the holding of its meetings in Brussels.

Mr LOPATKA replied that the European Parliament’s refusal to participate did not mark a good start for the Task Force. He underlined the importance of showing how the European Parliament, COSAC and Regions were working together in a way that citizens would see there was a common goal shared by all.

Mr MAYER said the Task Force was a step in the right direction, and the European Parliament’s decision made it look like the European Parliament was against the itwith their decision. If the European Parliament was interested in the work, it should join the Task Force.

Mr MADISON welcomed the idea of having a Task Force and agreed with his Austrian colleagues. He noted that the European Parliament was a very important part of the future of the EU, and hoped that it would at least work in some way with the Task Force. At the same time, he also respected the decision of the European Parliament.

Mr VIGENIN said the Commission itself had not presented the Task Force in an ideal way and obviously, without consultation with the European Parliament, but also noting that, on the other hand, it was true that non-participation would lessen the credibility of the results of the Task Force, as the European Parliament would not need to commit to anything agreed. He hoped that the European Parliament would find the way to at least follow the work of the Task Force and give some recommendations that could be taken into account in its work.

Ms McGUINNESS appreciated all comments and remarks and promised to convey them back to the European Parliament. She said that there was a common understanding on how to do this work, but noted that there was a precedent and explained how a similar invite had been made in the past and the European Parliament could not participate for the same reasons. Ms McGUINNESS was aware that timeframe was also short, and so invited colleagues to use all the resources available in the European Parliament on the topics at hand. While noting the importance of looking into ways of supporting the working group, she stressed that rules were necessary and it was important to stick to them. Nevertheless, the European Parliament would be deeply interested in whatever results the Task Force came up with, and it was the will of President TAJANI to engage the Task Force, as he had stated in plenary. She referred to the exchange held during December plenary between the President of the Commission and the President of the European Parliament, in which the latter stated the will of the Parliament to cooperate and to engage.

6. Letters sent by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters sent:

- Letter from Mr VIGENIN outlining his vision of how the working group, which the 58th COSAC had invited the Bulgarian Presidency to set up, should be composed.

The Chair explained how in that letter he proposed to have the working group composed by one representative of each member accompanied by one staff member. He informed the Troika that he had been approached informally, especially by bi-cameral parliaments, regarding this arrangement, and asked for views on the composition of the working group, in particular with regard to possible pressure from bi-cameral parliaments, and whether it would be possible to have an extra member for the bi-cameral parliaments.

Mr MADISON agreed with this idea, but asked whether it would be two members for two chambers, or for all chambers. He concluded that, for the Estonian Parliament, it did not matter.

The Austrian delegation supported the proposal but questioned whether a Working Group with 56 members would be too big.

Mr VIGENIN expressed his opinion that this was still manageable, and that, in the name of fairness, it would be best to invite Parliaments to send up to two members. Only one meeting was being foreseen, but if there were need for another, the Presidency would coordinate with the Troika and decide.

The first meeting of the Task Force would take place on 25 January 2018.

7. Any other business

No other business.