

CONTRIBUTION OF THE L COSAC

27–29 October 2013, Vilnius

1. COSAC's Contribution to the Strengthening of Interparliamentary Cooperation in the European Union

1.1. On the occasion of its jubilee 50th plenary meeting in Vilnius, COSAC welcomes its founder Mr Laurent FABIUS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France, former Speaker of the French *Assemblée nationale*, and wishes to express its profound gratitude to Mr FABIUS for his 1989 initiative and subsequent efforts in bringing about the establishment of the Interparliamentary Conference of Bodies Specialised in European Affairs, known as COSAC.

1.2. As the oldest interparliamentary conference recognised in the Treaties of the European Union (EU), COSAC remains committed to the strengthening of democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU, promoting the pro-active role of national Parliaments in the EU decision-making process and cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

1.3. COSAC calls on the EU institutions to start a discussion with Parliaments on how to exploit to full extent the possibilities provided in Article 10 of Protocol 1 of the Treaty of Lisbon.

2. State of Play of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

2.1. COSAC takes note of the political agreement reached on 27 June 2013 at the highest political level between the European Parliament, the Presidency of the Council and the Commission on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and looks forward to the swift conclusion of the complementary legal acts that will be decisive for making the new financial framework operational, consistent, transparent and better adapted to the needs of the citizens of the Union. COSAC is of the opinion that the EU budget should play a significant role in stimulating growth, providing the needed investments in research and innovation, as well as helping to address the problem of intra-EU macroeconomic imbalances. COSAC stresses that the prime goal now is to ensure that the financial funds for the period 2014-2020 would reach the European citizens and businesses in time.

2.2. COSAC welcomes the agreement reached by the European Council in June 2013 on a €6 billion youth jobless fund, known as the “youth guarantee”, to implement the youth employment package, yet stresses that further concrete steps are urgently needed. COSAC emphasises that

efforts to combat youth unemployment must rely on a comprehensive strategy, including measures to support small and medium enterprises, foster entrepreneurship among young people and reduce failure at school.

2.3. COSAC is of the opinion that the completion of a fully functional internal energy market as well as the completion of the work on the Directive concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services, which besides the energy market and digital technology and in accordance with the national laws relating to wages and social protection, would complete the creation of the Single Market, are among the major EU objectives which in turn would stimulate the development of a more stable and competitive European economy, thus leading to a greater role for the EU internationally. Therefore it urges the EU institutions to do everything possible to achieve tangible progress in these fields, including providing policy certainty that will incentivise medium and long-term investments.

2.4. COSAC recognizes the EU's interest to have safe, stable, economically strong and pro-European Eastern Neighbours and emphasises that the success of the Eastern Partnership could only be achieved upon joint efforts of the EU institutions, EU Member States and the Eastern Partners themselves.

2.5. COSAC welcomes Croatia as the 28th Member State of the EU. COSAC emphasises the importance of the implementation of the "fundamentals first" principle reflected by the recent European Commission progress reports, and recognises the accession process as the right tool to continue the reunification of Europe also with the Western Balkans region.

2.6. COSAC welcomes the start of historic negotiations between the EU and the United States on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment partnership and considers that, if concluded in a way that fully respects the legitimate interests of the European enterprises, the TTIP could provide the much needed boost to EU economy, possibly adding, according to the Commission's estimates, up to 400,000 new jobs and 0.5% of additional GDP growth per year. However, COSAC denounces unauthorised cyber interceptions directed at institutions and individuals.

2.7. COSAC expresses its deep sadness and regret at the tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean and calls on the EU and the Member States to take determined action in order to avoid that such human tragedies happen again. COSAC notes the measures discussed in this regard by the European Council on 24-25 October, in particular the newly established Task Force on the Mediterranean, and 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 TFEU.

3. Ensuring the Success of the Eastern Partnership

3.1. COSAC emphasises the strategic importance of the Eastern Partnership to the long-term security, democratic development and economic prosperity of its Eastern neighbours. COSAC expects that the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius will deliver concrete results and open the door to closer political association and deeper economic integration for those Eastern Partnership countries that meet the necessary commitments and requirements. COSAC welcomes the progress that has been achieved in the negotiations on the bilateral Association Agreements

and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the Eastern partners and expects that agreements with Georgia and Moldova will be successfully initialled during the Vilnius Summit.

3.2. Bearing in mind that the economic and political situation in the countries of the Eastern Partnership varies, COSAC stresses the particular importance of Ukraine for the success of the Eastern Partnership. COSAC commends the results of the European Parliament Monitoring mission to Ukraine and wishes to thank Mr Pat COX, former President of the European Parliament and Mr Alexander KWASNIEWSKI, former President of the Republic of Poland, for their relentless commitment and dedication for resolving selective justice problems and facilitating the necessary judiciary reforms in Ukraine. COSAC hopes that Ukraine will continue with reforms in order to fulfil the required conditions, as formally defined by the 10 December 2012 Foreign Affairs Council and supported by the European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2012, and that the Association Agreement with Ukraine will be signed during the Vilnius Summit. COSAC supports the provisional application of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement upon signature and expresses its intent to proceed swiftly with the full ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in respective national parliaments, once all the necessary requirements are met. COSAC would like to stress the importance of solidarity in all ways with the Ukraine both during and after the process of Association.

4. Democratic Legitimacy in the EU and the Role of EU Parliaments

4.1. COSAC notes that the democratic deficit persists within the political and institutional architecture of the EU decision-making process. COSAC recalls that 2013 is the European Year of Citizens and therefore believes that it is necessary to take measures ensuring that the EU governance, in particular economic governance, and the functioning of its institutions are democratic and transparent, with the aim of reducing the gap between the European citizens and the EU institutions.

4.2. COSAC notes that the institutional architecture of the EU is based on a dual legitimacy resting on both national and European levels, and that the right balance has to be found between parliamentary control exercised by national Parliaments and by the European Parliament. COSAC, aiming at reinforcing the parliamentary dimension of the Union, urges national Parliaments to exercise full parliamentary scrutiny of decisions taken at the Union level and to engage in a thorough discussion on how to use the powers provided by the Treaty of Lisbon to their full extent in their efforts to build a more accountable and legitimate system of governance in the EU.

4.3. COSAC notes that a sufficient number of national Parliaments or Chambers have submitted a Reasoned Opinion triggering the "yellow card" mechanism, this time on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office¹.

4.4. COSAC calls upon the European Commission to learn lessons from the experience of the first "yellow card" in response to the "Monti II" proposal, as highlighted in the Contribution of the XLIX COSAC. COSAC welcomes the Commission's undertaking to pay particular attention to subsidiarity issues and for reaffirming the procedures as laid out in the Annex to President BARROSO'S letter of 1 December 2009 and its firm commitment to communicating directly with national Parliaments.

4.5. COSAC reaffirms its commitment to enhancing the democratic legitimacy in the EU and therefore suggests the following:

- COSAC calls on the EU institutions to demonstrate the impact of reasoned opinions and political dialogue contributions made by national Parliaments
- COSAC calls on the European Commission, again, to ensure better quality and more timely responses to reasoned opinions and political dialogue contributions made by national Parliaments
- COSAC underlines the important role played by national Parliaments in the national decision-making process on EU affairs. EU affairs need to be integrated into the daily life and work of national Parliaments. Respecting each Member State's national procedural legislation and established practices, COSAC calls on Ministers, gathered in the Council of Ministers, to safeguard the involvement of national Parliaments in forming the positions represented by Member States in the Council.

5. Political Dialogue

5.1. COSAC invites the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, to engage with national Parliaments in a closer, more effective and more constructive political dialogue aimed at tangible results on topical EU matters, especially on its flagship initiatives and other. COSAC recalls the Contributions of the last three Presidencies, which contain proposals on how to improve political dialogue between the European Commission and national Parliaments.

5.2. COSAC invites the European Commission to take into consideration the comments by national Parliaments expressed in the 20th Bi-annual Report of COSAC on the effectiveness of the political dialogue focusing on the quality rather than the quantity of interactions.

6. European Elections 2014: a Platform for Debate on the EU Future with its Citizens

6.1. COSAC expresses its conviction that the success of the European project is impossible without the active engagement of the citizens of the Union. Realising that the powers of the European Parliament are greater than ever before, COSAC underlines the importance of active participation of the citizens of the Union in the 2014 European elections and invites national Parliaments 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. The approval of the statute of European political parties could also represent a tool of great importance for raising the interest of the European citizens on the main European topics.

6.2. COSAC emphasises that the 2014 European elections will be the first held elections after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which stipulates that the European Council must take into account the elections to the European Parliament and having held the appropriate consultations shall propose a candidate for President of the European Commission to be *elected* by the newly assembled European Parliament. COSAC believes that the establishment of such a link between the European Council, constituted by the heads of state and government, mandated by national Parliaments or through direct elections, and the elections to the European Parliament,

as an institution directly elected by the citizens on the one hand, and the selection of the President of the European Commission on the other hand will be a significant step in reducing the democratic deficit in the EU.

6.3. COSAC regrets that until now European election campaigns have been focused primarily on issues of national significance, leaving the debate on specific EU matters outside the remit of the campaigns. COSAC therefore calls on national and European political parties to seek that the 2014 European elections should become a platform for a constructive, informative and inclusive debate on the future of Europe with its citizens. 6.4. COSAC welcomes the commitment expressed by Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission, in his 2013 State of the Union address to present ideas on the future of the Union and on measures to consolidate and deepen the community method.

7. Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy

7.1. COSAC supports the ambitious goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy; however, it considers that in order to achieve these goals, it is crucial to strengthen the structure of management of the Strategy and to improve the mechanisms of funding of the priorities of the Strategy, in particular by more effective absorption of cohesion funds, by involving such institutions as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as by attracting more private capital.

7.2. COSAC notes that progress towards smarter, more sustainable and inclusive, resource-efficient and job-creating growth and the promotion of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the EU should be more actively addressed at the national level and that national Parliaments should exercise on-going parliamentary scrutiny of the progress achieved with regard to the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy. COSAC also considers that the implementation of the seven Europe 2020 flagship initiatives should be evaluated with a clear indication of what has been achieved and of the ways to remove the existing remaining obstacles.

7.3. COSAC considers that the current level of engagement of national Parliaments in the process and procedures of the European Semester could be developed further based on the experience of the recent interparliamentary meetings on this subject. COSAC calls on the European Commission to follow through on its commitment within the framework of the European Semester, as outlined in the official replies of the Commission to the Contributions of the XLVII COSAC and the XLIX COSAC. COSAC encourages national Parliaments to actively scrutinise the national reform programmes and stability and convergence programmes of their respective governments before they are submitted to the Commission. COSAC stresses the need for national Parliaments to actively engage in accelerating the necessary structural reforms in their respective countries.

7.4. COSAC expresses its deep concern about the negative long-term social consequences caused by the recent economic and financial crisis, particularly in terms of increased unemployment, especially among young people, and deepened social exclusion throughout Europe. COSAC, therefore, welcomes the communication of the European Commission on strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), adopted on 2

October 2013ⁱⁱ, and encourages the EU Parliaments to actively engage in the debate on the development of the social dimension of the EMU.

8. Digital Agenda: Benefits for Business

8.1. In the context of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the single market in Europe COSAC expresses its concern that the EU Digital Single Market has not been fully implemented yet. COSAC invites competent EU institutions and national Parliaments to actively contribute to the creation of an effective Digital Single Market in Europe, which would have a significant positive impact on Europe's competitiveness and job creation and would serve as an impetus for the development of digital industry in Europe, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, such as start-ups.

8.2 COSAC underlines that e-commerce is becoming an essential part of trade and an important impulse for consumer choice, competitiveness and technological innovation. It therefore considers that further development of e-commerce and other online services would positively contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy. COSAC takes note of the Commission's communication on e-commerce and other online servicesⁱⁱⁱ and encourages the Commission to continue identifying means to ensure the protection of consumer rights in the digital market. In this context, COSAC wishes to point out that many European citizens are still unable to access the digital market. It is important to counteract the creation of a digital exclusion as a consequence of the increased availability of the Internet.

8.2. COSAC considers that in international competition Europe, thanks to its internal market and its tradition geared towards knowledge and learning, is in a perfect position to think of an ambitious digital strategy. A regulatory system that is favourable to digital development should therefore be promoted as a driver for growth and European integration balancing the demands of investment, jobs, business competitiveness, innovation, respect for personal data, consumer protection, spatial planning, and development of use and security of networks.

8.3. COSAC welcomes the conclusions of the European Council of 24-25 October 2013 on the guidance towards the completion of the Digital Single Market by 2015. COSAC supports the focus of the European Council on the need to boost investment and encourage innovation in the digital sector. It therefore considers essential that the regulatory framework in the digital sector is streamlined across the EU, that a single copyright regime is established, licensing procedures are facilitated, while a high level of protection of intellectual property rights is ensured taking into account the cultural diversity. COSAC trusts that the funding instruments to encourage innovation in the digital sector, such as COSME, Horizon 2020 and the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility, will be fully made use of and that the European Research Area will be completed by the end of 2014. COSAC supports the insistence of the European Council that pending legislative proposals should be finalised as soon as possible, especially in areas such as e-identification and trust services and e-invoicing and payment services. COSAC shares the concern expressed by the European Council about the mismatch of skills that exists in the labour market in the EU's digital sector and the concrete steps that the European Council is proposing to redress the situation.

9. Digital Agenda: Cyber Security

9.1. COSAC welcomes the Cyber Security Strategy of the EU put forward by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy^{iv}. It also welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a Directive concerning measures to ensure a high common level of network and information security across the Union^v. COSAC is convinced that cyber security is a vital component of the business and security policies of the EU and should be one of the strategic pillars of the security and defence policy in every Member State.

9.2. COSAC expresses its concern over fundamental differences that exist in Member States in their preparedness, security, strategic culture and ability to draft and implement national strategies on cyber-security. A number of Member States having not adopted their national strategies on cyber-security also remains a source of concern.

ⁱ COM(2013) 0534 final

ⁱⁱ COM(2013) 690 final

ⁱⁱⁱ COM(2013) 627 final

^{iv} JOIN(2013) 1 final

^v COM(2013) 48 final

ANNEX

DECLARATION
ON THE FOUNDING OF THE COSAC WOMEN'S FORUM

29 October 2013, Vilnius

We, women parliamentarians,

having been elected to national Parliaments of the European Union Member States and candidate countries and the European Parliament;

taking part in the inaugural Meeting of the COSAC Women's Forum held during the COSAC Meeting on 27–29 October 2013 in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in Vilnius and

seeking more effective use of the existing forms of interparliamentary cooperation and more active engagement in the activities of COSAC;

recognising that sometimes women, at the beginning of their political careers and aspiring to implement their ideas and fulfil their expectations, lack self-confidence and support from experienced politicians;

support the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, as the Presidency Parliament, to set up the COSAC Women's Forum aimed at promoting more active involvement of women parliamentarians in the activities of COSAC; **and**

emphasise the necessity to highlight to the European political parties the issues of gender equality, equal opportunities policy, gender balance within society and more active participation of women in politics, thereby urging them to focus more on those matters; **and**

call on:

1) politicians to be actively engaged in meetings of the COSAC Women's Forum and to discuss the most relevant matters on the political agenda of the European Union;

2) leading women parliamentarians to widely communicate the achievements of women politicians, aiming to encourage women to be more ambitiously and actively engaged in politics and decision-making in the European Union;

3) women parliamentarians to contribute more actively to parliamentary scrutiny, which ensures democratic legitimacy and accountability, by focusing more on those areas which lack attention from governments; and

4) the upcoming Presidency Parliaments to take over and continue developing the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of promoting engagement of women parliamentarians in the activities of COSAC.

