MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC
Athens, Greece, 27 January 2014

AGENDA:

1. **Welcome address by Mr Vangelis MEIMARAKIS, Speaker of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon***
   Introductory remarks by Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Deputy Speaker and Chairman of the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*
2. **Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, procedural issues and miscellaneous matters**
3. **Re-connecting Europe with its citizens: the role of the institutions-keynote speaker: Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Inter-institutional Relations and Administration**
4. **Exchange of views on relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments-speaker: Mr Carlo CASINI, Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament**
5. **Priorities of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union-keynote speaker: Mr Evangelos VENIZELOS, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic**

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon.*

1. Introductory remarks by Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Special Standing Committee on European Affairs of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*; welcome address by Mr Vangelis MEIMARAKIS, Speaker of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*

Mr TRAGAKIS welcomed the delegates to the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC and invited Mr Vangelis MEIMARAKIS, Speaker of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon,* to open the meeting.

Mr MEIMARAKIS welcomed the delegates to the Hellenic Parliament and to Greece - the country which gave birth to democracy. He recalled the Interparliamentary conference on economic governance of the European Union (EU) in Brussels on 20-22 January 2014. This conference, he said, was the best starting point for the parliamentary dimension of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the EU, as it addressed the issues most important to the EU.

Mr MEIMARAKIS pointed out that the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC included very important topics, such as re-connecting Europe with its citizens, as, unfortunately, Europe was witnessing how distant its citizens were from the EU.

He continued by pointing out that that was the 5th Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the EU and that this was a critical period for the EU and for Greece.

The Speaker presented the priorities of the Hellenic Presidency, which reflected the needs of EU citizens. Parliaments had to give convincing solutions to citizens' concerns. To that end, national Parliaments needed to be more active and more involved in shaping decisions. There should be more cooperation and communication between the European Parliament (EP) and national Parliaments, as they had distinct, as well as complementary roles. This cooperation should give convincing guarantees that the citizens would come and vote in the elections to the EP in May.

Referring to the crisis, Mr MEIMARAKIS stressed that, although Greece was perceived as a negative symbol for some time, it could now turn into a symbol of resilience and hope, as it had found ways of solving the problems, for which it was not even responsible. According to him, more Europe, more democracy, more communication and better cooperation among Parliaments were solutions to this situation. It was proved that emergencies could be handled more effectively when united. Solidarity was the key answer, he underlined.

He emphasised that the crisis allowed the questioning of democratic institutions, which had to be redefined through a dialogue between members of the EP and of national Parliaments. The crisis was an opportunity to correct mistakes and address omissions and weaknesses, as the EU proved to be incapable of taking decisions within the existing mechanisms. In this regard, he made reference to the countries subject to economic reform programmes and, emphasising the mistakes of and the haste with which these programmes had been prepared, underlined the importance of the "Troika's" accountability.

Mr TRAGAKIS made his introductory remarks. He started by mentioning the situation in Ukraine, where clashes and unrest were continuing and intensifying. The EU could not remain indifferent. Insecurity and uncertainty persisted both in the Southern and in the Eastern neighbourhoods of the EU. The EU, he said, had the obligation to assume a leading role in international developments.

He continued by reminding that COSAC had celebrated its 50th anniversary in Vilnius the previous year. During the years, COSAC had evolved to a great extent, however not enough. The Bi-annual Report that the Hellenic Presidency was going to prepare would raise this issue.

The Chair talked about the democratic deficit and the need to fix the crumbling foundations of the EU. It was important, he stressed, to convince EU citizens to turn out massively at the elections to the EP in May. It was the duty of parliamentarians to convince the citizens.

Finally, Mr TRAGAKIS welcomed the Chairs attending the COSAC meeting for the first time: Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Mr Michele BORDO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, and Mr Karlheinz KOPF, Austrian *Nationalrat.*

2. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, procedural issues and miscellaneous matters.

Mr TRAGAKIS informed the meeting that the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC had been approved the previous evening by the Presidential Troika.

He presented the topics and the speakers of the meeting. The agenda of the meeting was adopted by the Chairpersons without amendment.

Mr TRAGAKIS presented the procedural issues. He briefed the participants on the results of the Presidential Troika meeting held the day before. The Chair presented the agenda of the LI COSAC, the draft outline of the 21st Bi-annual Report and the letters received by the Presidency.

He presented the topics on the draft programme of the Plenary, which included the following: 1. State of play of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union; 2. Sharing a vision on Europe 2025; 3. Democratic legitimacy and European leadership: the day after the European elections; 4. Rethinking the European employment Strategy; 5. Youth Guarantee Scheme: Best Practices; and 6. Encouraging Creativity and Young Entrepreneurship.

Mr TRAGAKIS informed that the questionnaire prepared for drafting the 21st Bi-annual Report would be distributed within the forthcoming days and that the deadline for the replies would be 28th March 2014.

Furthermore, he informed that the Presidential Troika had agreed that the Statement on current events in Ukraine proposed by the Lithuanian *Seimas* should be adopted, as amended, by the Chairpersons of COSAC.

Then Mr TRAGAKIS asked Mr Averof NEOFYTOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, to present the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on European Union Affairs of the Parliaments of the EU South, which took place in Nicosia on 24-25 January 2014.

Mr NEOFYTOU announced the establishment of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on European Union Affairs of the Parliaments of the EU South, which would meet twice a year in order to contribute in a substantial manner to the proceedings of the COSAC meetings. He presented the adopted declaration and briefed about the results of the first meeting.

In the debate that followed, 7 parliamentarians took the floor.

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT, Polish *Senat*, proposed a debate on the situation in Ukraine at the COSAC meeting. This proposal was supported by Mr Nico SCHRIJVER, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, and Ms Eva KJER HANSEN, Danish *Folketing.* Mr Dominic HANNIGAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, and Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Latvian *Saeima*, expressed their support to the proposal from the Lithuanian *Seimas* to adopt the COSAC Chairpersons' Statement on current events in Ukraine.

Mr SCHRIJVER endorsed the letter from the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* on the overlapping of the dates of several important international assemblies and requested to take this issue into account when planning COSAC meetings.

Ms Anne-Wil LUCAS, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, suggested holding a side event during the plenary meeting of COSAC in June, on accountability of the EU funds and shared management. Ms KJER HANSEN supported this suggestion and Mr TRAGAKIS agreed to hold the meeting. On the other hand, Mr Herman DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des*

représentants, expressed his concern that side events could overshadow the main COSAC meetings in the future.

3. Re-connecting Europe to citizens: The role of the institutions - keynote speaker Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Interistitutional Relations and Administration

Vice-President Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ underlined the vital importance of the well-known ancient Greek saying "United we stand, divided we fall", a phrase that, according to him, continued to have great resonance, in particular in relation to the EU. This principle had to be reaffirmed above all this special year, when the elections to the EP and the two Constitutional renewals would take place. An EP electoral campaign focusing on discussions on the European response to the economic crisis as well as on the way the Union was run, with specific reference to the imbalances between its institutions' responsibilities, could be the way to introduce divisions and to undermine European achievements. In deep discontinuity with the past and due to the economic crisis and citizens' dissatisfaction, the electoral campaign would therefore turn around Europe. He stressed the fact that the citizens' lack of trust and confidence towards Europe partly depended on the perception of its disconnection and distance from people's "ordinary" lives. Moreover, the complexity of the European decision-making process, characterised by seeking consensus among different players did not help in reducing the distance between the citizens and the European institutions. He noted that the functioning of the EU should have been explained to citizens also at national level. Citizens, according to him, seemed to be negative on the solutions both at EU and national level. He urged the European institutions and national Parliaments to encourage citizens to vote in the 2014 elections avoiding the negative tendency to reduce the recognition of the positive role played by the European Union through the "nationalisation" of the successes and the "Brusselisation" of the failures.

He stressed the need for young generations not to forget the crucial role that the EU played in fostering peace and development and in promoting fundamental rights, above all in countries that had for 40 years suffered under totalitarian regimes. He underlined the role the EU had played in inspiring the principle of freedom also to third countries like Ukraine.

He praised the efforts undertaken by the EU in the enlargement process and referred to the euro as one of the most remarkable achievements of the last decade.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ said that the positive economic indicators in Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece showed the effectiveness of the European recovery plans put in place in those countries. In that respect, he praised Greek citizens for their enormous efforts and sacrifices to help the country out of the economic emergency, urging them not to lose hope, as 2014 was showing some first signs of economic growth.

He then referred to some examples of EU positive actions acknowledging that for small Member States the EU had represented, thanks to the Internal Market legislation, the concrete possibility to compete in the European and global markets. In this regard, he also mentioned the financial benefits for the UK and the Netherlands.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ stressed the necessity for the EU to keep improving in the crucial fields of transparency, democratic accountability and in cutting red tape. This specific objective could be tackled more properly in cooperation with national institutions through an adequate

process of transposition of EU law in national law. He emphasised the importance of using instruments for direct involvement in the decision-making process, such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) and the participation in public consultations.

In the debate which followed 26 speakers took the floor.

Mrs Eva KJER HANSEN, Danish *Folketing*, distributed a report of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish *Folketing* and briefly presented the 23 recommendations on how to strengthen the role of national Parliaments in a changing European Governance and asked for feedback. Mr Michele BORDO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, emphasised the risks of an anti-European Parliament emerging from the May elections to the EP and supported the priority of recreating a strong link between citizens and the European institutions. In order to reconnect citizens to the European integration, the EU should promote economic growth through a concrete engagement in giving more time to Member States willing to undertake structural reforms and to admit a more flexible interpretation of the Stability Pack for States and Regions using the European funds. Mr L'uboš BLAHA, Slovakian *Národná rada*, agreed on the importance of the tools that enabled citizens' direct involvement in the EU decision-making process as the ECI and the so called participatory budget, through which citizens were involved in crucial financial decisions. He highlighted that trade Agreements between the EU and third countries should be discussed also with national Parliaments. He agreed upon the decision taken by the Commissioner on Trade De GUCHT to exclude the clauses that could have been given too much power to international corporations from the Agreement with the USA.

Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, expressed the view that the negative polls on the lack of trust and confidence towards European institutions may be linked not only to the economic crisis, but also to the increasing social frustration generated by the limited possibilities to influence the shaping of the European decision-making process.

Mr Miguel Angel MARTÌNEZ MARTÌNEZ, European Parliament, pointed out the importance of connecting Europe to citizens through the very concrete instrument of multilingualism, as no *lingua franca* ever existed. He underlined the need to raise citizens' awareness on their ownership of the European project. He argued it was a paradox that the EU project was more necessary but more threatened than ever, and urged national Parliaments to join the EP's efforts in communicating and informing citizens, warning that otherwise the democratic identity of the European project would be threatened.

Lord Timothy BOSWELL, UK *House of Lords*, made reference to members of the European Commission (Commission) being less responsive to the "yellow card", expressing hope that those members of COSAC who felt the importance of the procedure was minimised and disregarded, would take active role in representations to the new Commission. In this respect, he emphasised the importance of collective action in putting national Parliaments' views across. He highlighted the input of the Dutch and Danish Parliaments on how to strengthen the role of national Parliaments informing that the House of Lords would be making its own contribution in good time for the elections to the EP. He expressed hope that the COSAC Secretariat would have a role in collating and coordinating the work done by national Parliaments and the EP with the aim to prepare a paper for COSAC's June meeting.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ thanked national Parliaments for what they had been doing in order to address the common reflection on democratic accountability; he noted that all the

initiatives and ideas coming from them on these documents would be seriously taken into consideration by the Commission, in the framework of the Treaties and the political dialogue. He stated that the definition of the future relationship between national Parliaments and the Commission would be one of the most important political issues for the new Commission.

As to the criticism raised by several speakers about "Troika's" activities in some Member States, he reminded that this innovative mechanism had been a national Governments' decision and that the EU paid the highest political price for its unpopularity. He stated that the most crucial challenge for the next future would be the financing of the economy together with the completion of the banking union. He stressed his disappointment to see that crucial EU instruments designed to finance the economy were picked up with reserves by the national Finance Ministers.

Referring to the ECI, he noted that the Commission had to make this instrument more user-friendly. As to the trade Agreement with the USA, he pointed out the importance of evaluating its convenience for the EU. He underlined that, in order to encourage people to vote at the elections to the EP, candidates should focus on precise and concrete goals, particularly in the fields of youth employment, digital agenda and free trade.

He also agreed on the importance of languages to create a real link with the citizens, informing that the Commission's services had been extended to the summaries of the impact assessment studies and to public consultations.

On the "yellow card" procedure he admitted that there was some room for improvement from the Commission’s side. As to the specific case of the proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (COM/2013/0534), he noted that the Commission decided not to withdraw it because of the need, as stressed by many national Parliaments, for the EU to have a more efficient tool against financial fraud.

Mr Nico SCHRIVER, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Mr Gunter KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, and Mr Karlheinz KOPF, Austrian *Nationalrat*, encouraged national Parliaments to put more effort in restoring citizen's confidence in Europe. Mr SCHRIVER shared the good practice of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* of posting questions addressed to the Commission, in the framework of the political dialogue, on the website of *Eerste Kamer* and criticised the delays of the Commission's answers asking it to ensure more timely responses to reasoned opinions and political dialogue submissions made by national Parliaments. Mr KOPF encouraged national Parliaments to cooperate better with national governments and with the EP. He also mentioned that the Austrian public radio station constantly informed about European issues and recommended that all EU Member States use their State radio stations "to bring the European idea closer to people".

Regarding public information on EU matters, Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, suggested establishing a special radio station which would facilitate better provision of information to citizens on EU matters. He also underlined the need for wider inclusion of women in politics and in leading roles in EU institutions. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, highlighted the importance of informing citizens about the measures taken at EU and national level to tackle the consequences of the economic crisis for the outcome of the upcoming elections to the EP. Mr Herman DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, agreed and called for citizens to be made aware at a larger scale of the achievements reached by and the challenges of the EU as well as its future prospects.

Ms Anne-Wil LUCAS, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, shared some ideas on how the role of national Parliaments in the process of European decision-making could be strengthened. She suggested setting up a "Group of forty-one" of political representatives of Committees on European Affairs of national Parliaments. Accordingly to her, the group could have a role in carrying out or improving the "yellow card" procedure or in practical elaboration of various new ideas.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ assured that the Commission had implemented special measures (i.e. installed a new IT system) to ensure more timely responses to reasoned opinions, contributions and political dialogue submissions made by national Parliaments. He welcomed the initiative of Dutch *Eerste Kamer* to make public all communication (exchange of letters) with the Commission on the website of the Parliament and informed the Commission did the same. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ agreed that future legislative efforts should focus on priorities and on important issues. He explained that the way the Commission Work Programme was prepared had been changed. Amongst others, impact assessments had been introduced for delegated and implementing acts with relevance to the citizens and several ways of better informing the legislator and the Member States on acts currently explored. The Vice-President agreed that the social dimension, education and employment measures for young people were of the highest importance. He suggested developing the existing network of radio stations ("Euranet") for it to provide more EU information to citizens. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ gave data on gender balance to illustrate the positive trend in EU institutions. While talking about the idea of a "Group of forty-one", he suggested that national Parliaments should not focus on "yellow cards" as a restrictive instrument, but should participate more in dialogues with EU institutions and among each other sharing ideas for the future. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that communication among institutions had improved: the Commission sent to national Parliaments all the information that was sent to the Council. He stressed that ownership of the European project in Member States was important and called national Parliaments and EU institutions to act jointly on EU affairs.

Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, emphasised that the Committee of the Regions, composed of regional and locally elected representatives, developed into a very professional and important institution. He suggested greater engagement of members of the Committee of the Regions into the dialogue on EU affairs.

Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, pointed out that, in view of the elections to the EP, the social dimension of the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) was of crucial importance, in the context of increasing poverty and persisting unemployment. She suggested providing clear explanation to EU citizens about the mechanisms and actions taken to tackle these challenges.

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT, Polish *Senat*, pointed out that good communication (letters, documents, decisions) with the Commission and other EU institutions was very important. He suggested that Commissioners visited national Parliaments to exchange views with national parliamentarians. He mentioned the 10th anniversary of the 2004 enlargement of the EU and the public opinion poll showing that 70 per cent of the population of Poland was satisfied with EU membership. Mr WITTBRODT highlighted the importance of education and proposed to start discussions about the EU in schools.

Mr William CASH, UK *House of Commons*, pointed out that the role of national Parliaments, especially in scrutinising their governments, was of the highest importance. He referred to the

Protocol on the role of national Parliaments of the Treaty of Lisbon and, stressing the role of national Parliaments in scrutinising the government, underlined the crucial question of primacy in the UK. He warned that talk of "more Europe" and "more integration" was disconnecting people from the European concept and could cause new disorders, as well as the further rise of the far right.

Mr Vitalino CANAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, criticised the "Troika" for not being transparent and flexible. He pointed out that the elections to the EP would be focused on EU affairs for the first time and that the issue of democratic accountability was of crucial importance.

Mr Dominic HANNIGAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, agreed that the disconnection between the EU institutions and citizens had been growing in recent years. He said that the recovery of the economy was fragile and depended on how EU Member States would deal with debt issues.

Ms Agnieszka POMASKA, Polish *Sejm*, regretted that EU laws were controversial and not fully understandable to citizens or even some EU Member States.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ agreed with the suggestion to involve members of the Committee of the Regions in the dialogue on EU affairs not only with the Commission, but also with national Parliaments and COSAC in the future. He pointed out that elected members of the Committee of the Regions could forward to citizens valuable information concerning the decisions of EU institutions. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ mentioned that crises often required swift measures and actions, which could explain the feeling of "de-parliamentarisation of democratic processes in Europe" experienced by national Parliaments. He assured that the recovery of the economy would allow coming back to the democratic standards and that actions would be much better understood by citizens. The Vice-President emphasised that the social dimension, poverty, unemployment and the level of debt were issues that would remain at the top of the agenda of the EU for some time and that would be tackled by the new Commission.

4. Exchange of views on relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments - speaker: Mr Carlo CASINI, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, rapporteur of the EP on relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments

Mr CASINI pointed out that national Parliaments were part of a European parliamentary system having as one of their main tasks to bring citizens closer to Europe. He stressed that the EP had devoted much attention to the role of national Parliaments in order to deal with the issue of democratic deficit in the EU and to find valuable allies in the construction of a European consciousness. He inquired to which extent the provisions of the Treaties on national Parliaments had been implemented and how to integrate national Parliaments in the context of European institutions, as foreseen in the Treaty of Lisbon. In the light of these provisions, the relationship of the EP and of national Parliaments could not be one of competition or contradiction, but of collaboration. Mr CASINI identified two main tasks for national Parliaments according to the Treaty of Lisbon: scrutiny of national governments and an advisory role, within the framework of the political dialogue. In this context, he stated that it was of utmost importance for the democratic legitimacy of the EU that national governments reflected the positions of national Parliaments in the Council. Mr CASINI

strongly emphasised that national Parliaments did not constitute a third chamber in the constitutional structure of the EU, but that they were the bodies that scrutinised their governments and rendered the second chamber, i.e. the Council, democratic. At the same time, he added, the subsidiarity check should not be perceived as a blocking instrument or as a negative indication of what the EU should not do, but rather as a positive suggestion of what it needed to do.

Mr CASINI stated that the political dialogue between national Parliaments and the EP had to be structured and regulated. He acknowledged the added value of established conferences with specific subjects that had taken place. However, he underlined, these meetings' good results did not deprive COSAC of its functions, which should be, amongst others, to verify the progress of the work towards integration. COSAC should be thought as the place where the dialogue on the state of the Union would be developed. Furthermore, he mentioned that reciprocal information between the EP and national Parliaments could facilitate the transposition of EU law. In view of the upcoming elections to the EP, Mr CASINI underlined the responsibility of national Parliaments to enhance citizens' European consciousness.

During the debate that followed, 5 speakers took the floor.

Ms Nadia GINETTI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica,* noted that it was important to reinforce parliamentary cooperation by putting forward to other European institutions, through COSAC and other interparliamentary meetings, the common positions of national Parliaments and the EP. Ms Eva KJER HANSEN, Danish *Folketing,* urged for a clear purpose and a clear outcome of the interparliamentary meetings organised by the EP, so that these would become more appealing to national parliamentarians. Mr DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des représentants,* asked for the inclusion of regional Parliaments in the framework of interparliamentary cooperation, whereas Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale,* underlined, amongst others, the importance of introducing the European dimension into aspects of national competence, such as budgetary and social issues. Finally, Mr Marc ANGEL, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés,* asked for a balanced representation of national Parliaments and the EP in the parliamentary control unit for Europol.

5. Priorities of the Hellenic Presidency of the Council of the European Union - keynote speaker: Mr Evangelos VENIZELOS, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic

Mr VENIZELOS stated that the Hellenic Presidency attached particular importance to the cooperation with the EP and national Parliaments and underlined the strengthened and critical institutional role of national Parliaments in the functioning of the EU architecture. He referred to the previous four Hellenic Presidencies, linked to the two major enlargement waves in 1995 and 2004 and the issue of the European Constitution which had paved the way for the Treaty of Lisbon.

Answering to the objections referring to Greece's legitimacy to exercise the Presidency, Mr VENIZELOS said that the rotating Presidency was an institutional obligation provided for by the Treaties, which symbolized the fundamental principle of equality of all Member States. The Presidency was also of great national significance, as it would be an opportunity to project the post-crisis profile of the country, due to the major fiscal achievements accomplished in Greece following four years of harsh sacrifices by the people. The Deputy Prime Minister referred to the close cooperation of the Hellenic Presidency with the

permanent Presidencies, the Secretariat General of the Council, the Commission and the EP, as well as the complexities of the semester due to the elections to the EP and the intensifying pan-European debate on the future of Europe. He pledged that Greece, as Presidency, would be playing a coordinating and consensus-oriented role so that the European Council could say more alluring and specific things for European citizens.

Mr VENIZELOS summarised the priorities of the Greek Presidency in three main domains: returning to growth rates for Europe, responding to the problem of unemployment and restoring social cohesion, underling the need for immediate implementation of the decision taken by the European Council and the EP; deepening of economic governance, with special focus on the banking union; protecting European boarders, managing migration flows and promoting mobility. Integrated maritime policy constituted the horizontal priority of the Greek Presidency. Mr VENIZELOS announced that, along with the Italian Presidency, 2014 would be a Mediterranean Year, highlighting issues such as energy sources, protection of the environment, maritime spatial planning, fisheries, implementation of the International Law of the Sea and delimitation of maritime zones in the Mediterranean.

On the level of CFSP and CSDP the major problems of the Southern Neighbourhood, as well as the acute crisis in Ukraine and the Central African Republic were high on the list of priorities. Referring to the enlargement policy, Mr VENIZELOS expressed his satisfaction for the opening of Serbia's accession negotiations and of chapter 22 in the accession negotiations with Turkey, underlining the importance of complying with the Copenhagen criteria and the respect of international law. He also stressed the importance attached to the re-examination of EU-Russian relations and the completion of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

During the debate, 16 speakers took the floor.

Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, recalled that the main results of the Lithuanian Presidency were interlinked with several priorities of the Hellenic Presidency (development of the Strategy for the Western Balkans countries, border security and immigration, the EU common internal energy market, the development of the EMU and the banking union). Mr Michele BORDO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, inquired about possible initiatives of the Hellenic Presidency on issues that would be a priority for the Italian Presidency, namely the EU's political integration and foreign policy, dealing with the sovereign debt, European shares and refocusing EU's economy. Mr Jožef HORVAT, Slovenian *Državni Zbor*, deplored that the enlargement policy was not one of the Presidency's priorities and recalled that the Thessaloniki agenda for the Western Balkans confirmed the accession perspectives for these countries. Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, recalled that combatting deficit should be coupled with measures to support growth, preserve social cohesion, consolidate the Eurozone and democratic legitimacy; he hoped the Presidency would manage to strike a balance between North and South. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlé*, saw the launch of official negotiations with Serbia as a milestone in relations between the EU and the Western Balkans; regarding migration, he reaffirmed Hungary's support to the Presidency for common solutions based on the principle of burden sharing and recalled the alarming situation at the Hungarian land borders. Mr Miguel Angel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ, European Parliament, inquired how the Presidency intended to ensure that the fragile growth benefits reached those in need, by making use of the cohesion policy, as studies showed that 0,3% of EU's GDP invested in cohesion created 1% additional growth; he also asked what measures had foreseen to counter the enormous level of fraud and tax evasion, particularly by the main Internet

companies, rendered possible by the lack of coordination and harmonisation of tax legislation in the EU. Mr DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des Représentants*, inquired about the Presidency's lack of proactivity on the Cyprus-Turkey dispute and whether Greece displayed sufficient openness towards Member States regarding taxes on immovable property and military expenses. Mr Vitalino CANAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stressed that the time was ripe for discussions on the imbalance of the EMU that had generated some of the problems Member States faced.

In his intervention, Mr VENIZELOS explained the Presidency's focus on pending issues at Council and European Council level (management of migratory flows, the banking union, the European social state) and its choice of adding new input with the horizontal maritime policy. These priorities were also relevant for the upcoming Italian Presidency with which an integrated agenda for the Mediterranean Year was established. He added that enlargement was on the EU institutional agenda and that the Presidency had to implement the framework established by the EU decisions which were the result of common negotiations. He expressed Greece's support for all Western Balkans states and Turkey to join the EU, specifically mentioning that Greece was in favour of extending candidate status to Albania, that Montenegro could move rapidly ahead, that in Bosnia and Herzegovina European prospects were not foreseeable as long as the institutional system was highly fragile, and welcomed the negotiations under way with Serbia recalling the repercussions on Kosovo and the negotiating framework requirements in this respect. Concerning FYROM, a country with many economic ties with Greece, he stressed that the name issue was not a bilateral dispute, but an international one, which had to be addressed as foreseen in the decisions of the UN. He recalled that, beyond the unresolved name dispute on which the Greek position was constructive and moderate, other EU Member States were opposed to FYROM's accession to EU and NATO, due to the situation of fundamental rights, press freedom, democracy, neighbourly relations etc.

On migration, Mr VENIZELOS deemed the Dublin framework inappropriate for border Member States and assured that the Presidency would take important steps in this field, that Italy was expected to build upon. In his view, tackling the problem at the root in countries such as Syria or Libya would help end human trafficking in the Mediterranean; while reminding Greece's efforts to deal with migrants that did not belong to the categories of asylum seekers or refugees, he also urged for an EU approach based on solidarity.

As for the energy market, he emphasised the necessity of common European negotiations on the cost of gas imported from third countries in order to have a single European price, the importance of interconnecting energy grids and the need to develop links with countries like Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. He deplored that the focus of European integration policies on economic matters, the EMU and the banking union was unmatched by similar efforts aiming to develop further EU's political body and that the EU was not playing a more assertive role on the international scene.

On Cyprus and Turkey, Mr VENIZELOS stated that, as a country, Greece supported a politically and institutionally stable European Turkey and recalled in this respect the open diplomatic channels between the two. The Cyprus issue was however a pending international matter, described by the European Court of Human Rights judgements as a case of invasion and occupation, a challenge to international law and an infringement to the decisions of the UN Security Council. While he hoped for new momentum for discussions, provided President ANASTASIADES' proposal on issuing a common press release providing for a settlement in

line with the *acquis communautaire* and as described in the decisions of the UN Security Council and the high-level agreements was accepted, he stressed that Turkey's position, which did not recognise Cyprus, was the underlying crucial factor.

Mr Christopher FEARNE, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, reminded the marked increase in the burden that would be placed on Mediterranean states after the introduction of the Common European Asylum System in 2015 and underscored the need for the EU to do more to repatriate failed asylum seekers, to amend the Dublin II Regulation and to ensure increased mobility of the refugees within the EU once refugee status granted. Ms Aylin NAZLIAKA, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, a member of the Republican People's Party (CHP), the main opposition party, that considered full EU membership for Turkey to be imperative, stated that the Gezi Park events and the December 2013 anti-corruption operations brought Turkey closer to the EU. She proposed opening Chapters 23 and 24, as they were crucial for addressing corruption and democratising the judicial system. Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, inquired on the negotiation prospects between the EP and Council on the Single Resolution Mechanism and on whether a specific intergovernmental treaty was foreseen; she also asked for more details on possible progress on own resources and the financial transactions tax. Mr Janvit GOLOB, Slovenian *Državni svet*, focused his intervention on extending transport infrastructure between the states in South-eastern Europe and on the economic importance of the Adriatic and Ionian Macroregion for Southern countries. Ms Carlota RIPOLL, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, believed Greece was an example of how the EU could overcome the economic and financial crisis, but warned that the EU had to learn from its mistakes in dealing with the crisis. Mr Hajrula MISINI, *Sobranie* of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia *Assembly*, although regretting enlargement was not a Presidency's priority, hoped nevertheless for negotiations for membership to start during this Presidency and for Greece's support to FYROM's accession. Mr Averof NEOFYTOU, Cyprus *Voulḯ tōn Antiprosṓpōn*, recalled the importance of stability in the Middle East for Europe and for energy. He stated his country would not have any problem with the opening of any negotiation chapter with Turkey provided the country implemented its European obligations as foreseen by the Additional Protocol, arguing that the EU accession of Western Balkan countries and of Turkey was a solution to the EU's energy security problem. Mr Edmund WITTBRODT, Polish *Senat*, suggested a mid-term assessment of the progress achieved towards the Strategy Europe 2020, in order to avoid a scenario similar to the collapse of the Lisbon Strategy.

In reply to the second round of questions, Mr VENIZELOS stated that combating tax evasion was a European and national priority and mentioned Greece's major legislative intervention on internet gambling, on raising banking confidentiality and on off-shore companies. He also outlined the importance for Greece of shipping capital and the need to ensure that strict taxation terms would not make operators discontinue shipping activities in Greece. He reiterated that Turkey's progress towards Europe depended on Turkey itself and that all EU Member States were ready to open new chapters wishing to see Turkey on a stable, democratic path. However, fundamental matters needed to be settled first and, in this respect, he recalled that Cyprus was ready to discuss a viable solution.

On FYROM, Mr VENIZELOS mentioned the existing open communication channel and Greece's efforts for finding an agreed solution on the name (a compromise solution of a composite name with a geographical determinant to be applied to the name ‘Macedonia’).

On the legal nature of the Single Resolution Mechanism, he stressed that, if it could be dealt

with through a regulation under the Lisbon Treaty which would ensure the EP's involvement, the Presidency would be favourable, but should there be an aspect that required an intergovernmental approach, this issue would need to be addressed. On the financial transactions tax, the Minister said he would address the Plenary of the EP in Strasbourg in February and reminded the audience that Greece supported it, but that resistance came from other countries; on the own-resources he explained they represented very little in terms of the requirements of the European integration. On the Trans European links, a topic addressed already in 1994 under the Hellenic Presidency, he announced Greece's intention to exploit these networks, as access to land roads to and through Europe was a crucial aspect. Mr VENIZELOS assured the audience that Greece attached great importance to the Ionian - Adriatic question and the Europe 2020 strategy. He concluded by thanking Europe for its solidarity which came at great political and social cost.

Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, put to discussion the proposed amendments on the COSAC Chairpersons' Statement on current events in Ukraine. The new paragraph suggested by the Spanish delegation was accepted, as was the change of the word "order" suggested by the Irish delegation. Mr DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, suggested adding the words "on all sides" to the amendment proposed by Ireland. The amended Statement was adopted unanimously.

In his concluding remarks, Mr TRAGAKIS stated that the meeting had provided the opportunity for a fruitful discussion and mentioned that the COSAC Secretariat was established during the last COSAC meeting held in Greece. In the context of the upcoming elections to the EP, he stressed the need for more Europe, growth and employment, underlining the historical duty of all parliamentarians to present a new narrative to their societies and a new future after the crisis.