

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LVIII COSAC

26–28 November 2017, Tallinn

Contribution of the LVIII COSAC

1. Future of the European Union

- 1.1. COSAC acknowledges that the last 60 years have been the most peaceful and prosperous times in the history of Western Europe, in which the European Union has had an essential role. The EU was founded on values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, which are as valid now as they were 60 years ago.
- 1.2. COSAC recognises that the EU needs strength and determination to maintain unity and integrity to better respond to the expectations of its citizens. COSAC acknowledges that challenges such as Brexit, the migration crisis, global competitiveness, different security threats and growing economic and social inequalities should be treated as windows of opportunity to make the necessary reforms and improve the work of the EU. In this process, the chances of future generations need to be considered.
- 1.3. COSAC supports the goals and commitments of the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap, the Declaration of Rome and the Leaders' Agenda and welcomes the efforts of the European Commission to provide a framework for debate on a new and effective EU, whilst emphasising that decisions concerning the future course of European integration should be taken with highest possible level of engagement of all Member States and European citizens.
- 1.4. COSAC believes that a well-functioning Single Market and the maintenance of its four freedoms should remain at the very core of the EU. The EU must find ways to use the full potential of the Single Market, including the services sector, whilst ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach all parts of society. COSAC supports the efforts made towards continuing to increase the physical and digital connectivity between the Member States.
- 1.5. COSAC underlines that the EU is built to be a better place for its citizens, no matter where they live, and will continue to work for enhanced convergence of all European regions and for cohesion at large.
- 1.6. COSAC supports the European Pillar of Social Rights, which was proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg.
- 1.7. COSAC underlines the importance of the stability and prosperity in its immediate neighbourhood to the east and south. COSAC, taking note of the respective conclusions of the European Council that enlargement should remain a key policy of the EU as an investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability of our continent, underlines that EU enlargement should be based on the respect for the values of the EU and the principle of own merit and conditionality.
- 1.8. COSAC supports the Southern Neighbourhood Policy recognising it as an enabling factor for fostering cooperation and stability in the region. COSAC, recognising the importance of the Eastern Partnership, acknowledges that the dialogue and European aspirations for the Eastern Partnership countries are the key motivators for further reforms and in finding peaceful solutions to conflicts. COSAC stresses that Russia has to fully implement the Minsk agreements and to respect international law.

Brexit

- 1.9. COSAC emphasises the importance of the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the EU and expresses the hope that it will take place in a planned manner. The goal of the EU should be to reach a fair deal with the United Kingdom that would maintain the integrity of the Single Market.
- 1.10. COSAC supports the Conclusions of the European Council on 20 October 2017 on the assessment of the Brexit negotiations. COSAC highlights that the rights of the EU and the United Kingdom's citizens living in each other's territory and the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland should remain among the first dossiers during the Brexit negotiations. COSAC stresses the need to continue to protect the Good Friday Agreement and to avoid a hard border. The financial consequences of Brexit should not undermine the implementation of the existing multiannual financial framework.
- 1.11. COSAC stresses that on the above mentioned issues, substantial progress is necessary in order to start the negotiations between the EU and the United Kingdom on the framework for the future relationship and on the transition phase.
- 1.12. COSAC, stressing the importance for the national Parliaments to be directly informed about Brexit negotiations, invites the EU Chief Negotiator to continue informing COSAC about the state of the negotiations on a regular basis.

2. Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens

- 2.1. COSAC emphasises the need for national Parliaments to be included and integrated in the discussions and policy-making process relating to the future of the EU in order to contribute to the necessary democratic legitimacy of the process.
- 2.2. COSAC stresses the relevance of citizen participation from the early stages of the decision making process and calls the national Parliaments to provide for the necessary early consultation tools.
- 2.3. COSAC stresses its pledge to listen to the concerns expressed by citizens on EU matters. One of the tasks national Parliaments and the European Parliament have with regard to EU matters is to improve the communication about the EU and to address citizens' fears, hopes and expectations, having as its ultimate goal the regaining of trust and legitimacy of European citizens.
- 2.4. COSAC underlines the importance of active participation of the European citizens in the European elections, which provide a platform for a debate on the future of the Union. COSAC invites national authorities to promote the European elections and political parties to engage in political debates on the key issues prior to the European elections in 2019.
- 2.5. COSAC acknowledges that Parliaments are using different tools and face-to-face actions to encourage citizens to participate in discussions on EU related matters. COSAC encourages Parliaments to find more ways of direct involvement of civil society organisations and citizens by, for example, inviting them to participate at hearings before the committees.
- 2.6. COSAC recognises that the majority of the EU Affairs Committee meetings in national Parliaments are regularly open to the public and that most national Parliaments have written minutes of these, while most of them share the information about the EU discussions by making the written minutes of the discussions available to the public. COSAC calls on the EU to promote a more effective and transparent decision-making process and encourages national Parliaments to be more open to the public.
- 2.7. COSAC acknowledges that the majority of national Parliaments debate EU matters at the plenary whether at regular intervals or on an ad hoc basis. COSAC acknowledges that more plenary debates on EU matters raise the visibility of the Union and give citizens the opportunity to learn more about the agenda of the EU and the positions of political parties on these issues.

- 2.8. COSAC calls on all EU institutions to fully and faithfully apply the transparency regulation to all their documents. It calls on the other informal bodies like the Eurogroup and the EU-27 in Brexit format to do likewise.
- 2.9. COSAC underlines that digital platforms allow citizens to be more engaged in Union matters and send their opinion on topics being discussed. COSAC takes note that the majority of Parliaments are already using digital platforms such as contact forms on their website, webpages for citizens to express their views, Facebook pages, twitter accounts, Instagram sites, e-petition forms and Internet blogs, and encourages others to follow their example.

3. Digital Single Market: development of e-services

- 3.1. COSAC supports the goals and commitments of the Tallinn Digital Summit and Conclusions of the European Council on 19 October 2017 acknowledging the need to bring the government and the public sector into the digital age to improve public services for citizens and businesses.
- 3.2. COSAC stresses the need to implement the eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 and welcomes the Commission's proposal for a single digital gateway.
- 3.3. COSAC reminds that the digitalisation of public services helps to improve their efficiency and cost effectiveness, contributes to the achievement of the full potential of the Single Market, and improves the quality of life of citizens by promoting social and economic development.
- 3.4. COSAC stresses that the EU has to introduce principles and measures such as once-only or one-stop government, into the digitalisation of our national administration to facilitate interoperability and cross-border digital public services.
- 3.5. COSAC acknowledges that the EU's public sector should encourage the transformation of public services by leading the use of electronic procurement and making all communication between public authorities, businesses and citizens digital.
- 3.6. COSAC stresses that digital transformation requires digital skills and abilities and highlights the need to prepare the citizens for these new challenges in the business environment, public administration and in everyday life.
- 3.7. COSAC emphasises that the EU should consolidate the momentum of European investment in the digital field as well as in the other industrial sectors and should, in particular, create a European network of ecosystems that serves innovation, growth and employment.
- 3.8. COSAC stresses that digital transformation requires high capacity networks, such as 5G, to facilitate modern e-services and support innovation. The EU should work towards removing obstacles for the spread of 5G, including the lack of investments in telecoms infrastructure and standards development.
- 3.9. COSAC acknowledges that the public sector should encourage the transformation of public services by leading the use of e-signing and implementing eIDAS making all communication between public authorities, businesses and citizens digital.
- 3.10. COSAC welcomes that most Parliaments consider the digitalisation of public sector very important. COSAC invites Parliaments to fully explore the possibilities to increase the use of e-solutions in parliamentary work.
- 3.11. COSAC acknowledges that most Parliaments consider data protection concerns to be the main challenge in further developing the digitalisation of public sector and therefore stresses that, in digital transformation, privacy protection rules should be observed.

4. Building an effective and sustainable Security Union

- 4.1. COSAC encourages Member States to improve the exchange of information and intelligence, and stresses the importance of maximising the benefits of existing information systems, especially the

Schengen Information System, to address the gaps in the EU's architecture of data management, and to strengthen the interoperability of information systems.

- 4.2. COSAC emphasises that the fight against terrorism demands action both at EU and national level. In that regard, COSAC welcomes related EU legislative proposals and stresses the need to speed up their adoption.
- 4.3. COSAC, taking into account that recent terrorist attacks have focused on soft targets, recognises the need to strengthen the protection of public spaces and welcomes the Commission's recent anti-terrorism package.
- 4.4. COSAC, having in mind that prevention is the most effective counter-terrorism tool, invites all the parties to address the root causes of extremism by tackling the surge of hate speech as well as the dissemination of extremist or terrorist material online.
- 4.5. COSAC underlines the need to strike a fair balance between the freedom of expression and the fight against hate speech.
- 4.6. COSAC recognises the progress made in order to enhance security at the external borders and encourages all the parties to continue their efforts. In this respect, COSAC welcomes the adoption of the revised Schengen Borders Code and the Entry-Exit System and supports the speedy adoption of European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

5. Preventing and combating irregular migration

- 5.1. COSAC underlines the need to address the root causes of irregular migration and stresses the importance of development assistance to countries of transit and origin.
- 5.2. COSAC acknowledges the results that have been achieved in jointly managing migration flows with countries of origin and transit as well as countries of first reception. COSAC urges the Member States to strengthen the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the new External Investment Plan in order to tackle the root causes of irregular migration through growth, job creation and sustainable development.
- 5.3. COSAC reiterates strong support for the EU's continued action on preventing and combating criminal activity by smugglers and traffickers along the entire migration route.
- 5.4. COSAC invites all concerned parties to take forward the discussions with a view to reaching a compromise concerning the legislative framework of the Common European Asylum System.
- 5.5. COSAC, emphasising the need to strengthen the EU's return policy mechanism, welcomes the decision of the European Council on 19 October 2017 and strongly supports its initiative to create and apply necessary leverage, by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development, trade and visa, to achieve measurable results in terms of returning irregular migrants, provided that these are compatible with the fundamental principles of international law.
- 5.6. COSAC reiterates that a full and non-discriminatory implementation of EU Readmission Agreements with third countries vis-à-vis all EU Member States, is necessary.
- 5.7. COSAC draws attention to legal pathways as alternatives to irregular and dangerous journeys.