

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LVII COSAC

Malta, 29-30 May 2017

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*

AGENDA:

1. Opening of the LVII COSAC

- 1.1 Welcome by Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*
- 1.2 Adoption of the agenda
- 1.3 Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters
 - Briefing on the outcome of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
 - Letters received by the Presidency
- 1.4 Presentation of the 27th Bi-annual Report of COSAC by Ms Christiana FRYDA,

Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat

2. Session I - 'Reflections on the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union'

Keynote speaker: Mr George VELLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta

3. Session II - 'The role of national Parliaments in the future of the EU'

Keynote speaker: Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President, European Commission

Speakers: Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Member of the European Union Policy Committee of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*

4. Session III - 'Outcome of the UK referendum - State of play'

Keynote speakers: Mr Michel BARNIER, Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament

5. Session IV: 'Expanding the Blue Economy - Towards a more sustainable EU Integrated Maritime Policy'

Keynote speakers: Mr Karmenu VELLA, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*, Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

- Debate on the draft Conclusions of the LVII COSAC

7. Session V: 'Migration - Combatting human smuggling and trafficking and establishing a humane and effective return and readmission policy'

Keynote speakers: Mr George VELLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, Ms Maite PAGAZAURTUNDÚA RUIZ, Member of the European Parliament

Presentation by Mr Lucio ROMANO, Chair of the Committee on EU Policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, on the visit to the hotspot in Pozzallo, Sicily

8. Adoption of the Conclusions of the LVII COSAC

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the LVII COSAC

1.1 Welcome by Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*

Mr FARRUGIA opened the meeting and invited the plenary to observe a minute of silence in honour of the victims of the terrorist attack in Manchester that had taken place on 22 May 2017. He then welcomed the participants, especially Mr Toomas VITSUT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, and Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, European Parliament, participating in COSAC for the first time.

Mr FARRUGIA then explained the exceptional circumstances under which the LVII COSAC meeting was being held. The Maltese Parliament had been dissolved and a general election had been called for 3 June 2017. In view of Malta's Constitutional provisions, Members of Parliament, with the exception of the Speaker who remained in office until the first sitting of the new Parliament, effectively lost their seat upon dissolution. Despite these circumstances, the Maltese Parliament remained committed to its obligations arising from Malta's EU Presidency. The Speaker explained that he would be chairing the LVII COSAC, but that there would be no Maltese delegation at the meeting. In this light, it was not deemed possible for the Presidency to present a Contribution for adoption. In consultation with the Troika, the Presidency was, however, proposing the adoption of brief Conclusions not comprising political statements.

Mr FARRUGIA underlined the importance of COSAC as the longest established interparliamentary meeting. He also referred to the challenges undertaken by the Maltese Parliament regarding the organisation of the interparliamentary dimension of the EU Presidency held by Malta under the exceptional circumstances explained above; the challenges were embraced as opportunities and led to successful results.

1.2 Adoption of the agenda

The Chair presented the draft agenda of the LVII COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

1.3 Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

Briefing on the outcome of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

On the draft Conclusions, Mr FARRUGIA explained that they were discussed and approved at the Troika meeting the day before. There had been no amendments submitted.

On the co-financing of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2018-2019, Mr FARRUGIA said that the current agreement was expiring at the end of 2017 and announced that the Presidency, following its letter sent to national Parliaments on 5 April 2017, had received 23 letters of intent from 20 national Parliaments. He encouraged national Parliaments to send the remaining letters as soon as possible. The term of the current Permanent Member would expire at the end of 2017 and the Estonian Presidency was tasked with the selection of the next Permanent Member to be appointed at the LVIII COSAC in Tallinn.

Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received by the Presidency:

- Letter from Ms Jóna Sólveig ELÍNARDÓTTIR, Chair of the Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*, regarding participation in COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.
- Letter from Mr Jean-Charles ALLA VENA, Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Mr Christophe STEINER, Speaker of the National Council of the Principality of Monaco, regarding participation in COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.
- Letter from Mr Carles ENSENAT, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Consell Generall of Andorra, regarding participation in COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation was extended.

- Letter from Mr Pedro AGRAMUNT, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), regarding participation in COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.
- Letter from Ms Mariia IONOVA, Deputy Chair of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, regarding participation in COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.

In addition, the Presidency had received from the Slovak *Národná rada* the conclusions of the meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the Visegrad Group countries held in Bratislava on 21-23 May 2017.

1.4 Presentation of the 27th Bi-annual Report of COSAC by Ms Christiana FRYDA, Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat

Mr FARRUGIA then gave the floor to the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Ms Christiana FRYDA, to present the 27th Bi-annual Report of COSAC. Ms FRYDA briefly referred to the three chapters of the 27th Bi-annual Report of COSAC. The first one dealt with scrutiny procedures and practices enabling national Parliaments to scrutinise their governments and EU proposals during the legislative phase; the second one focused on the outcome of the UK referendum and the future of the EU; and the third one concentrated on migration, combatting human smuggling and trafficking and establishing a humane and effective return and readmission policy.

2. Session I - ‘Reflections on the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union’

Keynote speaker: Hon. George VELLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta

Mr George VELLA took the floor to give an overview of the work done by the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, remarking that, as Malta was entering the last month of its Presidency, one could now reflect on what had been achieved. Mr VELLA also said that the disconnect between the administration and the man in the street had become even more palpable. The European Citizen had to be put back at the centre, he added.

Mr VELLA recalled the six main priority areas of the Maltese Presidency: migration; security; neighbourhood policy; the single market; maritime; and social inclusion.

Addressing the first priority, Mr VELLA stated that migration was here to stay, and that there was no short-cut solution to the issue. It was important for the EU to act in unison, and collaborate with countries of origin and countries of transit. He urged for better control of borders, documentation and entry/exit systems. He recalled the Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration, following the Informal meeting of EU heads of state or government held in Malta earlier during the year.

Mr VELLA also recalled the Valletta European Africa Summit of 2015, which had brought together European and African Heads of State and Government in an effort to strengthen cooperation and address the challenges but also the opportunities of migration.

Mr VELLA also called for solidarity with countries on the front lines. Malta had worked hard with the aim of providing EU delegations in New York and Geneva in connection with two global compact to be adopted by 2018.

The Minister remarked how the media reported extensively on migration issues, yet the narrative employed was often negative. The Maltese Presidency had strived to put success stories in the limelight, with a focus on EASO, Euromed Migration Forum, and other organisations. In particular,

a Migration Media Award was established to recognise and reward excellence of journalistic pieces reporting on migration, especially the positive aspects.

The Presidency had also focussed on disrupting illicit activity connected with migration.

On a more positive note, visa liberalisation for Georgia had been endorsed, and the Council was ready to kickstart negotiations with China on short term visas.

Turning to security, Mr VELLA stressed that attention to this topic was imperative, with the ultimate goal being to ensure friendly but secure borders. Following the recent spate of attacks around Europe, terrorism had been a significant threat to security. In this regard, Mr VELLA reminded everyone that security in Europe and outside, particularly in the neighbouring regions, were interlinked.

On 7 March 2017, the Council had adopted a directive on combating terrorism, introducing a new set of measures to respond to the new threats of terrorism, as well as contributing to global security and the fight against fraud.

Mr VELLA stressed that the Union must respond to these emerging threats in a timely manner, adding that the political instability in Libya and the war in Syria had turned the neighbourhood into one of the most turbulent regions in the world. The Western Balkans was another crucial region which needed immediate attention, and the Presidency had steered the EU toward and provided the necessary impetus for foreseeable desirable prospects for western Balkan countries.

Mr VELLA recalled that the chapter on education opened within Serbia's EU accession negotiations had been closed at the Intergovernmental Conference held in Brussels in February. He stressed that the Union would not be complete until the Western Balkans were part of the European family.

Mr VELLA talked about the importance of stepping up relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and EU Member States, adding that diplomacy and dialogue were very important. Malta had always supported the Union for the Mediterranean and the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean. The latter had an important role to play in ensuring security and the ability to promote dialogue and allow the exchange of information. The European Commission – League of Arab States Liaison Office, inaugurated in Malta on the 14th of October 2009 fostered dialogue between the Commission and the Arab States.

Malta has also emphasised the need to strengthen cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbours, through the Union for the Mediterranean and capacity building projects, as well as job creation and entrepreneurship, especially amongst the youth.

Mr VELLA made it clear that it was only by empowering the younger generations and creating jobs that the emerging threats to democracy could be addressed. In this respect, the Anna Lindh Foundation Mediterranean Forum, hosted in Malta at the end of last year brought together a large number of delegates with global reach and visibility, providing a platform for action. On 23 March, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Federica MOGHERINI, had expanded this invitation by launching the Young Med Voices Plus, giving youths from the region a voice to discuss in person with EU high-officials the global issues of the day and create innovative solutions to common challenges affecting societies. The Intercultural Trends Survey results launched last April in Malta complemented the successful outcome of the forum Anna Lindh.

The Maltese Presidency had also strived to consolidate the EU's efforts for an international legally binding instrument under convention of use of the sea and the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (BBNJ). The recently adopted

council conclusions together with the related ocean governance framework and sustainable use of the oceans were important steps in this regard.

The Maltese Presidency had also prioritised the single market, and great progress in the involvement of consumers and key consumer protections laws had been made.

Some of the progress made related to corporate tax avoidance and closing hybrid mismatches; enabling citizens to connect to one another through the digital single market; use of 470-790 MHz frequency band in the union; roaming markets; online content services. The Presidency had also worked hard on the energy sector, including measures to safeguard security of gas supply and organic farming. It had also made progress on ETS and exchange of info between member states, and improving the safety of medical devices.

Turning his attention to social inclusion, Mr VELLA said much work had been focussed on this sector, with conclusions on solidarity and education and rights of the child. There had also been continued negotiations with the European Parliament on the implementation of the Marrakesh treaty.

Apart from the official priorities set by the Maltese Presidency, work had continued in other priority areas for the Union; other dossiers such as new European consensus on development; work related to African and Caribbean partners, and work in the humanitarian sector. The question was raised as to how the EU and its Members States could work together in assisting partner countries achieve their sustainable development goals.

The 2017 Presidency had also led the council during provisions for the MFF 2014-2020, adopting conclusions on the budget guidelines. It had contributed to the joint employment report, and to work related to EU's ongoing efforts on climate.

The Maltese Presidency had also focussed on stopping the financing of conflict, as this was key to a number of other priority areas, most notably migration and security, but also stability and prosperity in the affected neighbouring regions.

Mr VELLA concluded by saying that the Presidency should not be seen in isolation but in context. He said that Malta was proud to have been able to carry out its responsibilities and contribute to the European project.

In the ensuing debate, 12 members took the floor.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, said Malta was extremely committed and had made its Presidency a wonderful success. A number of members echoed this sentiment (Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*; Mr Terry LEYDEN, Irish *House of the Oireachtas*; Mr Malik AZMANI, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*; Mr Jaroslaw Wojciech OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*; Ms Agnieszka POMASKA, Polish *Sejm*; Mr Toomas VITSUT, Estonian *Riigikogu*).

Some speakers (Mr BIZET; MR Yves POZZO DI BORGO, French *Sénat*) further noted that the Maltese Presidency, and the Union as a whole, had faced a number of challenges during this period. One of these challenges, referred to by a number of speakers, was clearly that of migration. Mr BIZET said the migratory crisis was indeed of great concern, and called for solidarity with the Greek and Italian colleagues who found themselves at the forefront dealing with these challenges, adding that security was another issue where the Union had to do its utmost in supporting its Member States, including in ensuring the systematic monitoring of those crossing borders without visas. Mr OBREMSKI stressed that migration should be approached in a holistic manner and not in a way which just dealt with the symptoms, while Ms POMASKA said that the issue of migration required

a carefully developed policy not based on human fear, and also emphasised the importance of solidarity. Mr KRICHBAUM said it was important that the EU keep a close eye on its external borders. Mr Georgios GEORGIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, focussed on the humanitarian crisis with Europe witnessing many refugees dying and drowning in its waters. He decried the attitude of setting up more barriers instead of finding solutions, and warned Europe against ignoring President Erdoğan's provocations.

The digital single market was also referred to by a number of members. Mr BIZET stressed that this market must be furthered so as to ensure that European business could move into new and global markets. Mr OBREMSKI lauded efforts in this sector, while Mr VITSUT promised this would feature heavily in the programme of the Estonian Presidency.

Mr LEYDEN said there was a role for COSAC in the management and running of the EU, including the delegation concerned with Brexit negotiations, and Malta had dealt with this very well indeed. He was confident that Malta would continue to play a vital role in the future of the EU and Brexit.

Mr Adrijan VUKSANOVIĆ, Parliament of Montenegro (*Skupština Crne Gore*), said that the EU was standing at crossroads, facing a number of challenges like Brexit and the recent terrorist attacks. He called for EU enlargement, saying this had brought economic prosperity. Montenegro had 26 out of 33 chapters opened, with two closed. It was planned that this year would see the opening of the chapters on regional policy and free movement of goods, workers and services and the closing of the chapter on external relations. He expressed hope that the Maltese and Estonian Presidencies would give impetus to reform efforts and ensure that the EU became even more present economically, politically and culturally in Montenegro.

Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbian *Norodna Skupština*, also touched upon the subject of enlargement. She said that Malta had proved to believe in the unity of Europe and the Balkan inclusion, confirming that the intergovernmental conference in Brussels had opened two chapters (chapter 20 and chapter 26) in connection with her country's accession, and also expressed hope that this positive trend would continue in the future.

Ms Juhana VARTIAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, called her colleagues' attention to the Russian threat, and called on everybody to deepen and strengthen links in Europe both at national and regional level. Strict rules for budgetary policies were needed to avoid excessive debt. EU-wide cooperation had to increase, even on tax and military issues. Ms VARTIAINEN reminded everyone of the EU's huge potential in the global arena.

Mr POZZO DI BORGO also mentioned the EU's military, saying that the rebuilding of the Union had to include building a European defence system. He added that, while it was true that 75% of NATO was funded by the United States (US), it was also true that 80% was purchased from the US to the detriment of Europe's economies, which made it imperative that the latter ensure their independence.

Concluding the debate, Mr VITSUT went over the priorities of the forthcoming Estonian Presidency, saying that he looked forward to welcoming colleagues to Tallinn in a month where they would be able to carry on with the topics that had been raised during the Maltese Presidency. He stressed that the complicated times faced at the moment could not be ignored: Brexit; migration; and the future of the European Union would all feature one way or another. The Estonian Presidency would also be proposing digital themes, and, at the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC in July, would like to discuss start up innovations and entrepreneurship as a lot depended on how well the EU managed to compete in these markets, regardless of whether it did so with the US or with China.

Taking the floor to reply, Mr VELLA lauded the spirit of openness present in COSAC, where everybody strived to be realistic, honest and critical. This, he said, was the essence of parliamentary diplomacy. Furthermore, everybody had spoken on their own behalf without binding the government with remarks and suggestions, and this was the beauty of parliamentary conferences such as COSAC, which allowed for someone to convey ideas without being in a governmental position.

Mr VELLA reiterated his strong belief that the future of the Union lay in the inclusion of Western Balkan countries, and was pleased to see applicants Montenegro and Serbia. Mr VELLA also underlined the fact that High Representative MOGHERINI had had meetings with all the heads of Western Balkan countries and had shown willingness to move in the direction of having these countries as full members.

With regard to the recurring issue of migration, Mr VELLA advised the incoming trio to deal with issues as they presented themselves. He stressed that migration was a problem which the Union had to guard against becoming a divisive issue. He called for an agreement on the external aspect of migration, and, while conscious of different opinions as to solutions to the issue, he insisted that an agreement had to be reached whereby everybody involved would be sharing the same responsibilities. Consistency within the EU was imperative.

In this regard, Mr VELLA warned against harbouring the idea that any country was not doing anything on migration; what was needed, rather, was effective solidarity, whereby what was not being done by one country would be done by another; in any case, it was important not to pinpoint any one country as not complying rigidly, but rather work together to ensure that the issue is tackled effectively as a whole by the Union.

Turning his attention to the issue of Brexit, Mr VELLA said the UK had contributed a lot to the EU, and, while the decision taken by its people had to be respected, it was also important to safeguard trade, security and future relations.

This directly impacted the need for growth and competitiveness, as this would be the biggest challenge the EU would face in the coming months, especially when coupled with Brexit. It was of the utmost importance that the EU keep its place when compared to other big economies in the world. Mr VELLA expressed confidence that through innovation the EU could have a strong economy.

The fact that reforms had to take place in the EU was something that had to be faced, he said; the Union could not become static. Mr VELLA gave full support to the digital economy, a topic to be brought up by the Estonian presidency, and one the single market had not come to full agreement on.

On the resurgence of Russia, Mr VELLA agreed that this country was now playing a different role on the global stage. That said, the policies of the US must also be kept under scrutiny. Ideas which were deemed disturbing had been conveyed during the latter's electoral campaign, but the country's President was now settling in to a more conventional style. As for defence, Mr VELLA agreed that it was true that the Union ought to have its own facilities, but in the end the Union's main defence would always have to be in NATO. Naturally, there could be different organisations and relationships, but it was nevertheless a reality one must accept.

Mr VELLA also underlined the importance of transatlantic relations as far as trade was concerned. He further stressed that any US action in Syria and Libya would affect the neighbouring regions, including Europe.

One final thought on Libya Mr VELLA expressed was that Malta had brought attention to the region years back, because the island had experienced way before other EU countries the instability and

threat of migration coming out of there. Libya was still problematic, and surely the incoming troika would keep this in mind.

3. Session II - ‘The role of national Parliaments in the future of the EU’

Keynote speaker: Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President, European Commission

Speakers: Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice President of the European Parliament, Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Member of the European Union Policy Committee of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*

Addressing the participants as a keynote speaker, Mr TIMMERMANS opened his speech directly with a reference to the “White Book on the Future of the EU” which the European Commission had put forward as its contribution to the on-going reflection on the future of the European project. Mr TIMMERMANS stated that producing such a reflection paper, which offered several options for the outlook of the EU, and opening it up to a broader discussion, also with the national Parliaments, was a new and potentially surprising approach. He further added that the original “White Book” would be supplemented by several other topical reflection papers, including on the topic of social Europe, globalisation, defence and financial matters. According to Mr TIMMERMANS, the President of the European Commission Mr JUNCKER would attempt to draw some conclusions on the debate as regards the “White Paper” in his State of the Union address in September.

Mr TIMMERMANS then continued with a reflection on the consequences of globalisation, particularly for citizens. He posited that, while globalisation needed to work for all and while it had had a very positive impact in many areas, some people that had been and had felt left behind were not as optimistic about their own future and the future of their children. This is why, according to Mr TIMMERMANS, people absolutely needed to be part of the debate on the solution. The involvement of national Parliaments was vital in this respect. In relation to the role of national Parliaments, Mr TIMMERMANS also stated that national Parliaments should clarify who was responsible for what in the EU and at what level. He mentioned that, while not all the subjects that needed to be covered were in the competence of the EU, they needed to be tackled nonetheless. He feared that if they were not tackled at the EU level they might not be tackled at all.

Furthermore, Mr TIMMERMANS addressed the issue of citizens’ initiative and how to improve it. The European Commission would launch a public consultation in order to identify ways to improve it and make it less bureaucratic and more transparent. Mr TIMMERMANS also stressed that the Juncker Commission had markedly increased dialogue with national Parliaments, engaging in some 550 meetings with national Parliaments since November 2014. He argued that this was a move in the right direction and that more could still be done on this front. Additionally, Mr TIMMERMANS also mentioned that the number of opinions received from the national Parliaments on legislative proposals had increased as well, approximately 240 opinions in total this year. He also added, that the European Commission was doing its utmost to send timely responses to those opinions.

Mr TIMMERMANS concluded his address with some remarks concerning the “yellow” and “green” card. He expressed a personal attachment to the institution of the “yellow card”, as he had been involved in the drafting of this provision in the Lisbon treaty. As regards the “green card”, Mr TIMMERMANS stated that this could be a great success, of which there were two examples already, which showed that national Parliaments could have a positive contribution in creating legislation at the EU level.

Ms McGUINNESS commenced her address by stating that national Parliaments were at the core and centre of the EU and that it needed to be acknowledged how close national Parliaments were to the citizens. According to Ms McGUINNESS, national Parliaments should not be overwhelmed by the challenges encountered, but rather seize the moment to become stronger. National Parliaments needed

to become stronger, about and within the EU, also in their partnership with the European Parliament. She stated that we needed to devote time to the important issues and translate good intentions into concrete actions on the future of Europe, and engage on the White paper presented by the Commission in the short time there was before autumn. She stated that there was need for trust in the EU to be restored and argued that one of the results of Brexit was that people were talking more about Europe now, especially about things that worked which had been taken for granted previously. As regards the institutional framework, Ms McGUINNESS emphasised that the “union method” was an important element; she also urged national Parliaments to deepen their engagement with the national governments. Considering COSAC as an important platform, she underlined the need for parliamentarians to get the most added value out of these meetings, and at the same time to work on other platforms in order to intensify engagement at formal and informal level. She reiterated the readiness of the European Parliament to engage with national Parliaments, including at the level of the political families, and stated that more meetings would be taking place in the future, as had already been the case since Brexit.

Ms McGUINNESS also argued that we needed to challenge citizens to take ownership of the EU and engage them in parliamentarians’ work, in order to make them understand the value the EU brought to their lives. The role of the national Parliaments was vital in creating a future for the EU at a time when so many other global institutions were threatened with disintegration.

Ms BERLINGHIERI also addressed the growing distance between people and institutions. She stated that many countries had already expressed that current rules needed to be updated and that perceptions of the EU had changed. She claimed that sometimes it was difficult to define the solutions necessary, but that policies and initiatives of the EU needed to be strengthened, particularly relating to security, migration, the fiscal compact and others. Additionally she argued that it was necessary to ensure that those policies were understood by the citizens.

Ms BELINGHIERI further mentioned that in those aspects more attention needed to be devoted to national Parliaments, underlining that there needed to be better information exchange between various institutions; she stressed the role of the dialogue with the European Parliament and welcomed the inclusion of all submissions of national Parliaments in the meeting documents of the European Parliament. She posited that sometimes information came to national Parliaments late and that the European Commission needed to look into this matter carefully in order to avoid more criticism from the citizens. She further stated that discussions needed to be more concrete and that national Parliaments needed to cooperate better concerning European issues, for example as regards discussions on the future of the EU, a matter on which an in-depth discussion could be held in cooperation with the European Parliament and further debated by the next EU Speakers Conference.

Thirty-four participants intervened in the subsequent debate.

Many speakers emphasised the important involvement of national Parliaments in the EU decision making process. Mr Phillippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Sénat*, recalled the recent ruling of the Court of Justice of the European Union, referring to the ratification of trade treaties by national Parliaments. Mr MAHOUX also stated that it fell to the national Parliaments to safeguard the role of freedoms in the EU. Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, argued that the role of national Parliaments was increasing because of Brexit and that the main goal should be to consolidate and continue the EU project within the existing scope of the treaties and through full implementation of already taken decisions. Mr Maximos CHARAKOPOULOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, also argued in favour of greater participation of national Parliaments as injustices were increasing and decisions taken in Brussels should not be simply accepted. Ms Marinka LEVIČAR, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, stated that the European Commission should respect national Parliaments’ competences and provide better and more concrete answers to their submissions.

Mr Börje VESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, argued that simply referring to national Parliaments' scrutiny role over national governments was not a good basis for cooperation. He also stated that insufficient time had been allocated to national Parliaments in this discussion. Ms Gordana COMIC, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, urged participants to recall the beauty of the European idea and the need to retain the will to find a new paradigm for it. Mr Olavi ALA-NISSILÄ, Finnish *Eduskunta*, asked for better mutual cooperation in order to decrease bureaucracy in the EU.

Several participants also addressed the specific issue of scrutiny of subsidiarity. Mr BIZET, for example, stated that the deadline for submission of reasoned opinions should be extended from eight to ten weeks and that the European Commission needed to react more quickly and substantially to the reasoned opinions and political dialogue submissions. He further stated that delegated acts of the Commission should be submitted to the national Parliaments for scrutiny. Furthermore, he stated that national Parliaments should not be stuck in an "opponent" role, and that the "green" card should therefore be implemented as soon as possible. Support for the "green" card was also expressed by Ms Regina BASTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, and Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, who also expressed support for initiating new meeting frameworks such as a European week, during which all parliaments could have a dialogue with the European Parliament,.

Mr Terry LEYDEN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, praised the good cooperation with the European Commission, whose members had visited Dublin on several occasions. He further stated that the work of the national Parliaments needed to be recognised by EU institutions and vice-versa. He also posited that British citizens were misled about the work of their European politicians for decades, and the work of the EU therefore needed to be better recognised in the future, instead of Brussels being blamed for what was in reality the responsibility of individual Parliaments.

Several participants argued that, as regards the ongoing reflection on the future of the EU and the Commission's "White Book", the autumn deadline was insufficient. Mr KRICHBAUM stated that proper time needed to be taken for this discussion, especially in light of important elections in several Member States. Similarly, Mr Nicos TORNARITIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* agreed that this was not enough time, particularly as there was a need to change the picture of the EU in order to bring it close to the citizens. As regards the future of Europe, Ms Idoia VILLANUEVA, Spanish *Senado*, argued that the Lisbon Treaty did not live up to expectations as regards the role of national Parliaments. She stated that national Parliaments needed to be more proactive and not just reactive and that citizen participation should play a greater role in the future. Ms Rūta GELŪNAS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, stated that there was support in her country for the EU to do more together, and that national Parliaments needed to be encouraged to actively participate.

Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Romanian *Senat*, urged that we needed to stop the rumour that the EU had already done its job and needed to address discontent in society by promoting new and alternative models of organising. She also posited that responsibility needed to be taken for the failure of political parties.

Several speakers also addressed the "yellow" card raised in regard of the legislative proposal on posting of workers. Mr Konrad GŁĘBOCKI, Polish *Sejm*, implored that the European Commission needed to take the issue of the "yellow" card seriously. He stated that, in order for the EU to function well, all voices needed to be heard. In this respect, he regretted that the "White Book" made no reference to national Parliaments, as the Rome Declaration did. He furthermore called for a "red" card, which would enable national Parliaments to give a definite stop to legislative proposals. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, praised the Commission for its commitment to come to national Parliaments. However, he found recent tendencies concerning subsidiarity less favourable, as exemplified by the treatment of the "yellow" card for the posting of workers directive. He also

mentioned that scrutiny of trilogues was difficult. Mr Václav HAMPL, Czech *Senát*, also described the rejection of the “yellow” card for the posting of workers directive as disconcerting. Additionally, he suggested choosing fewer discussion topics in the COSAC meetings in order to allow more discussion time for individual issues. Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, also supported the idea that trilogues needed to be more transparent, particularly as regards composition and their agenda. He also reflected on the practice of delegated acts, which he described as abusive and moving away from the original goal.

Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, stated that a second round in the subsidiarity procedure could be useful, as, by the time some opinions of the national Parliaments were given, the legislative proposals had already changed, as discussion on them in the Council had already begun. Mr Erik EZELIUS, Swedish *Riksdag*, similarly deplored the practice of pushing through legislative proposals before the time limit for reasoned opinions had expired. Mr Peter LUYKX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, stated that Europe needed to take matters in its own hands not only in external affairs, but also internally. He asked whether Europe had taken seriously issues such as possible referendums in Catalonia and Scotland and the reunification of Ireland.

Mr Eurico BRILHANTE DIAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, regretted the democratic gap between the EU and the national level. He expressed support for the “green” card and stated that the EU must work more and better on issues such as tax evasion. Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, stated that more transparency was needed, and that national Parliaments should work hand in hand with the European Parliament and the European Commission on the basis of a close relationship. Mr Thorsten FREI, German *Bundestag*, also argued for working close together in areas where that would be of added value. However, according to Mr FREI, Europe needed to withdraw from areas where there was no added value and that this should not necessarily be seen as a negative development. He also argued that national Parliaments must be able to put a stop to certain initiatives. Ms Danuta HÜBNER, European Parliament, emphasised that the role of national Parliaments was irreplaceable, while noting the institutional erosion of the national capacity to deliver on EU commitments, and stressing the European Parliament’s interest in a common reflection and an exchange of good practices on this issue. She also called for wide parliamentary discussions on the “White Paper”, which were vital for ensuring the active engagement of European citizens. Mr Bernard DURKAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, stressed that there was an urgent necessity for national Parliaments to recognise Europe as a friend and look at EU institutions as sources of support and help.

Ms Tytti TUPPURAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, called for better cooperation on the European semester and better use of common funds. She also advocated the deepening of defence and security cooperation, which should include non-NATO members as well. Mr Tibor BANA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, stated that the integration process had been accelerated since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and called for a Europe of nations, where Member States could decide on their own. He also asked for more rights for national Parliaments. Mr Jaak MADISON, Estonian *Riigikogu*, argued that the EU was a union of sovereign countries, and that, while there was a common denominator, big differences existed as well, which should be taken into account.

Ms AUROI advocated for more association for national Parliaments to budgetary decisions and a better integrated Eurozone. Similarly, Mr Malik AZMANI, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, supported stricter involvement of national Parliaments in EU decision-making and total access for national Parliaments to the political process at the EU level. He also called for more transparency in the Council, whose secrecy he described as not line with EU treaties. He further mentioned the Inter-institutional Agreement on Better Law-making and asked for an update on the implementation of the current priorities set under it.

Ms Laura CASTEL, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, recalled that the rule of law and fundamental rights were the core of the EU and argued that prerogatives of parliamentarians, as well as the participatory democratic process, were being denied in Catalonia. Mr Borys TARASYUK, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, thanked the EU for the ratification of the association agreement with Ukraine, as well as for progress on visa liberalisation and asked parliamentarians for further support for sanctions against Russia. She also urged parliamentarians to oppose a conference to be held in St. Petersburg in October of this year.

In her reply, Ms BERLINGHIERI stated that national Parliaments must indeed have an important role as they were at the heart of the issue of democratic legitimacy. She also stated that in the European Parliament there was a recognition of this key role of the European project. She also called for leaving behind the idea that the relationship of EU institutions and national Parliaments must be based solely on individual scrutiny of each other.

Ms McGUINNESS noted parliamentarians' desire for answers from the European Commission. Furthermore, she reminded national Parliaments of more informal ways of influence which could produce effective results. She also noted that, while the debate on the future of the EU would not come to a conclusion by the autumn of this year, it was important to give citizens a clear sense of Parliaments' engagement on that debate. She concluded by saying that, while not all in the EU might move in the same direction, Parliaments should nonetheless have the same goal of defending a strong Europe.

Finally, Mr TIMMERMANS stated that the best contribution to creating more realism and more balanced views was to take responsibility for both successes and failures. He stressed that the Commission was willing to do that and it should be done equally in the Member States. He argued that Brexit was a logical consequence of negative portrayal of EU policy, but that a change could be seen now. He stated that he himself was more positive about cooperation in the EU now than he was two years ago. On the issue of subsidiarity, Mr TIMMERMANS emphasised that the European Commission was ready to work with every national Parliament, but that there were boundaries set by the treaties. Specifically, the deadline for reasoned opinions could not be extended as it was set in the treaties. He also stressed that, as regards the "yellow" card on the posting of workers directive, this was rejected by the European Commission, because the "yellow" card did not concern issues of subsidiarity, but rather objections to the actual content of the proposal, which was not what subsidiarity scrutiny was about. He added that the European Commission did understand from the opinions submitted that there was a political problem with the proposal which the Commission could attempt to fix further down the line. Mr TIMMERMANS also stated that Member States could not use the idea of sovereignty to pick and choose which EU policies they liked and which they did not, and that, in the case where Member States did that, the European Commission had the right to take them to court. As regards the reflection on the future of the EU, he stressed that the State of the Union address in autumn did not constitute an end to the debate, but rather intended to mark the progress. More time would be needed to set the scene for future developments. As regards comitology and practice of delegated acts, he stated that this procedure was a matter of debate. Furthermore, he stated that the current Commission cut down heavily on presenting new legislation and instead was concentrating on reviewing existing standards, which he described as the right way forward. To conclude, he assured parliamentarians that the Commission had no intention of entering into debates about constitutional structures in the Member States themselves, and that the Commission's work was naturally limited by the will of the Member States.

4. Session III - 'Outcome of the UK referendum - State of play'

Keynote speakers: Mr Michel BARNIER, Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament

Mr Angelo FARRUGIA, Speaker of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, in his brief introductory speech on the outcome of the UK referendum pointed out that the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament would be instrumental in securing a just and favourable deal for the EU 27. He also informed participants that due to the snap elections to be held in the UK there was no UK delegation taking part in the meeting.

Mr Michel BARNIER, Chief Negotiator for the Preparation and Conduct of the Negotiations with the United Kingdom, recalled the very first meeting of COSAC that took place in the French Parliament in 1989. He said that national Parliaments had a key role to play in European affairs. He further informed the participants that he had started a tour of the 27 capitals as a result of the UK referendum. He also thanked the Maltese Presidency for its excellent work.

Mr BARNIER expressed his hope that the negotiations would start immediately after the U K general election. Transparency and engagement in public debate would be key in the process. He reiterated the key role national Parliaments would play in forging unity of the EU 27 and, reminding that the new partnership would be a mixed agreement, referred to its ratification by national Parliaments. Mr BARNIER referred to the Council negotiating directives that were adopted on 22 May and that would lay the ground for the first stage of the negotiations. He commended the work of the European Parliament through its resolution and specifically praised Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament; Mr Antonio TAJANI, President of the European Parliament; and Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT, lead Brexit negotiator for the European Parliament. The first part of the negotiations would deal with the future relationship between the EU and the UK, of which free trade would constitute a large part. He called for caution in the second part of the negotiations in order to guarantee that the future agreement on free trade would not infringe on EU social standards concerning the environment and consumer rights.

Mr BARNIER then went on to discuss the matter of transparency in which he referred to national Parliaments and the Commission's readiness to make all key documents available for scrutiny. The priority would be to guarantee the rights of EU citizens working and living in the UK and of UK citizens living and working in the EU citizens based on reciprocity. In this context, he referred to the importance of exchange of best practices among national Parliaments, committees and members of the European Parliament.

Mr BARNIER then reminded the participants of the progress the EU had witnessed, underlining that only by being united could the EU reform matters that needed to be reformed. He further acknowledged that the UK's decision to leave the EU was a very serious decision and that Member States would be much stronger together than separate. He concluded his intervention by saying that Europe's destiny was in the hands of the Member States.

Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, acknowledged that the Brexit negotiations were a very complex process, not only technically, but also politically. It would lead the EU to completely uncharted waters due to both long and short term multidimensional challenges. She then pointed out that Brexit could be seen by some as an opportunity for Europe, but that reforms should be carried out with or without the UK. According to her, the City would be less influential, but the European Monetary zone would not automatically get stronger on its own. The UK leaving the EU would make the EU smaller both economically and politically, as well as demographically. Ms HÜBNER said that the European Parliament was fully committed to respect the choice made by the citizens of the UK. According to her, the European Parliament was committed to act as an honest broker in the interest of the EU and its citizens, provided that discussions remained within the framework of the treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. A withdrawal without an agreement would have negative consequences for

all parties involved and for the European Parliament it was absolutely necessary to defend throughout the negotiations the integrity of the Union's legal order and by doing so respecting the treaties as ultimate boundaries.

On transparency, Ms HÜBNER referred to the Commission's resolve to keep all the institutions informed throughout the whole process and the role of the European Parliament in giving its consent to the withdrawal agreement. The final withdrawal, she explained, could only happen on the basis of recommendation drawn by the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) on the basis of which the European Parliament will give its consent. She pointed out that the consent procedure needed to be finalised before the European elections in May 2019, a challenging deadline.

Ms HÜBNER then went on to discuss the priorities set out by Mr BARNIER, which the European Parliament fully shared and had expressed in its resolution adopted on 5 April 2017. Since the first concern would be the rights of citizens, it would be necessary to define from the outset the constitutional framework in which the decisions would be made. The difficulties faced by EU citizens had already been brought to the attention to the European Parliament with 16% of all petitions received by the institution concerning the restrictive application of EU law by the UK while still being a Member State. This should be the starting point of the negotiations. The negotiation on financial settlements should also be one of the primary concerns, but also a chance to review the structure and funding of the EU budget.

Ms HÜBNER also fully recognised the challenging position Northern Ireland found itself in, with 7% of its employees originating from the EU. The aim, she said, was to avoid a 'hard border' with the Republic of Ireland and preserve the Good Friday Agreement.

Ms HÜBNER informed the participants that the AFCO Committee was resolved to be inclusive and work together with political families, as well as with individual committees on sectoral issues. The European Parliament's resolutions served both as a way to influence the guidelines adopted by the Council, and a point of reference for the preparation of the AFCO recommendation for the consent procedure on the withdrawal agreement. She emphasised that the process was completely open to stakeholders and said the European Parliament was open to any form of cooperation with national Parliaments on this topic.

Thirty-six participants intervened in the debate.

Many speakers concentrated on the issue of transparency of the negotiations and of unity of the EU 27. Mr Eskil ERLANDSSON, Swedish *Riksdag*, remarked that being transparent would force the UK also to be transparent and would prevent untrue information being spread. In a similar vein, Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée Nationale*, commended Mr BARNIER's call for transparency and for national Parliamentarians' involvement. Mr Kalle PALLING, Estonian *Riigikogu*, expressed his concern about the process and the continuing plurality that surrounded the negotiations. He therefore called for all involved parties to remain calm and work towards a unitary approach, allowing the negotiators to do their job. Mr Anne MULDER, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, echoed those sentiments. The need for unity was also reaffirmed by Mr Kamal Izidor SHAKER, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, and Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, who emphasised that negotiations should take place within the EU 27. Mr KRICHBAUM called for the EU to speak with one voice.

The rights of citizens were considered by many as number one priority in the negotiations. Mr Maximos CHARAKOPOULOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, and Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, pointed out that it was imperative to find solutions for EU citizens to continue their life and work. In the same vein thought Mr Angelos VOTSIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, who emphasised the

indivisibility of the four freedoms. Ms Idoia VILLANUEVA, Spanish *Senado*, and Ms Marie GRANLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, asked for guarantees *vis-à-vis* the rights of citizens. The protection of citizens was also the main topic in the intervention of Mr HÖRCSIK. Under the same rubric, the future of young people and the ERASMUS programme was mentioned by Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, and Ms Maria Luis ALBUQUERQUE, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*.

The question of borders was considered by a number of participants as a crucial issue. Mr Neale RICHMOND, Mr Bernard DURKAN and Mr Gerard Philip CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, acknowledged the important impact Brexit would have on Ireland and the Good Friday agreement. Mr DURKAN demanded that Ireland be considered as one entity. Many expressed their solidarity towards Ireland, among whom were Mr Jaroslaw Wojciech OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*, and Ms AUROI.

The UK's financial obligations and its future with the Single Market were mentioned by Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, Mr SHAKER, Ms MORKŪNAITĖ MIKULĖNIENĖ, and Ms Anne-Mari VIROLAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*. When discussing the necessity not to punish the UK with financial measures, Mr Ondrej BENESIK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, said that Brexit would be painful for both sides and punishing the UK might give rise to further euro scepticism. Mr KOURAKIS called for caution when being negative towards the UK since we needed to find a solution that would allow us to continue cooperating with the UK. Mr Jaak MADISON, Estonian *Riigikogu*, and Mr BANA, reminded participants that the UK would remain an economic partner of the EU.

Mr Svein Roald HANSEN, Norwegian *Storting*, expressed his concern about the impact of Brexit on EEA EFTA countries. Mr Hans-Peter PORTMAN, Swiss *Nationalrat*, pointed out that Brexit might create an opportunity for non-EU countries to further collaborate. Ms McGUINNESS mentioned the UK's willingness for a parallel negotiation process on both the withdrawal and the new partnership with the EU, and inquired on what could be considered sufficient progress allowing to move from one stage to the next in 2018.

Ms Olena SOTNYK, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, addressed the issue of euro scepticism being used as the main tool in hybrid warfare.

In response to the remarks and questions, Ms HÜBNER mentioned that, while the UK made known its intention to cooperate with the EU on security, no trade-offs, giving access to the Single market constituted by the four indivisible freedoms, would be possible. She expressed the view that the future relationship with the UK could involve some form of a comprehensive free trade agreement. The European Parliament would be open to the idea of an association agreement which would allow several other policy areas to be covered. She also commented on possible scenarios of revocation of Article 50. This matter had been discussed with the legal community at length.

Responding to questions, Mr BARNIER reiterated that the EU could not be divided. He emphasised that the UK had a sovereign right to leave the EU, but that it could not expect a win-win situation. At the end of the negotiations it would be better to be inside the EU rather than to be outside. Mr BARNIER further pointed out that a third country should not and could not be equivalent to a Member State, thereby answering the questions of Mr PORTMAN and Mr HANSEN. He also vehemently advocated for guaranteeing mutual rights of citizens and rebutted many claims that there would be punishment of the UK. Instead, Mr BARNIER said that, in the case of the UK, as in all cases of divorces, there would need to be a balancing of the books. On the topic of borders, Mr BARNIER reminded participants that the UK was a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and that a solution would need to be found in cooperation with the UK.

5. Session IV: ‘Expanding the Blue Economy - Towards a more sustainable EU Integrated Maritime Policy’

Keynote speakers: Mr Karmenu VELLA, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*, Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*

Mr Karmenu VELLA, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, announced that the EU was looking toward a full agenda on blue growth for the coming years. This would start with the upcoming Our Ocean conference to take place in Malta on 5-6 October. The Committee of the Regions report on maritime policy and blue growth had been adopted on 12 May. At the European Parliament, work was being done through an inter group, but there was also a push for the establishment of a maritime committee in the European Parliament.

Mr VELLA stressed that success depended on engagement and political backing, but insisted that the Blue Economy could bring welfare and prosperity. It was an area of the economy which could boost growth and create new jobs. He stated that unemployment was at its lowest since 2009 and growth was picking up, so it was important to ride the wave of this economy recovery. He added that blue growth was building up a good track record of its own, investing heavily in research and development, also thanks to the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. There was a need for new macro regional strategies with focus on blue growth, and to this end a Blue Economy Business and Science Forum had been set up.

Mr VELLA said that marine resources must be looked after, as they constituted the very essence of our blue economy. He called for blue growth the European way: sustainable and guaranteeing high social standards and living conditions.

He said that Europe was the global leader in developing ocean energy technologies, with 90% offshore wind capacity installed in European waters, and aquaculture steadily rising. Coastal tourism was also booming, with Europe being the second largest cruise ship destination. Marine biotech research was bringing innovative products to the market, including cosmetics, biofuel, and other environmentally friendly generation of economic activities.

Mr VELLA informed the audience that last month ministers had discussed in Malta three blue economy papers which lay the foundation of what could be the focus in the months and years to come.

Despite all this progress, Mr VELLA pointed out three areas where more work needed to be done: access to finance (as access to funding can be difficulties at times); skills and qualifications (the right skills and convincing young people to follow careers related to the blue economy); regional cooperation (as working together is often cheaper and more efficient and above all more effective; 46 million euros had been secured for marine funding for 2016-2017 by pooling efforts).

Furthermore, Mr VELLA also noted with pleasure that North Sea countries had agreed to work on renewable energy projects. This was not only the responsibility of coastal countries however, as the Blue Economy could only be created successfully through the involvement of inland European Member States. Austria had about 7k jobs related to marine industry, while Slovakia had a strong shipbuilding industry.

Moreover, when it came to marine litter and plastic pollution, it was important to note that 80% of litter originated on land and found its ways to the sea from all parts of Europe. Design and production processes could help mitigate the problem by facilitating recycling.

Mr VELLA concluded by recalling that, in November, an international declaration on marine governance adopted by the Commission and the High Representative had been welcomed by EU Ministers.

Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*, said that it was important to support the blue growth in the marine and maritime sectors as a whole, as seas and oceans had great economic potential for innovation and growth. The Blue Economy, Mr VITSUT stated, represented 5 million jobs, and this sector still had potential to growth. Blue Growth initiatives were important in the Baltic Sea region, which had a strong tradition of transnational cooperation. This was exemplified in the area of nautical tourism, where the cooperation between the Baltic States and the Nordic countries was on the increase. Estonia itself had seen a constant rise of cruise tourists and passengers.

A major initiative of the Estonian Presidency was the digitalization of the maritime transport. In cooperation with other Baltic Sea countries, Estonia had launched a pilot project to enable ship crews to use electronic certificates stored on the cloud, thus saving time and money spent on filling paper documents when ships entered port by connecting data providers and data consumers as directly as possible. Mr VITSUT also noted the potential for unmanned and remote controlled vessels, which paved the way for autonomous ships. Mr VITSUT closed by reminding colleagues that digitizing the maritime sector also meant moving a step closer to realising the objectives of the Paris Agreement by increasing efficiency.

Ms AUROI said that the Blue Economy was both about risks and victims and great opportunities that oceans and seas represent at the time of climate change. Joint efforts were necessary when dealing with our oceans. A Blue Economy without sustainable development and environmental sustainability would not allow for development. Ms AUROI said Malta was at the forefront of integrated maritime policy and it was also no secret that Malta was successful in maritime affairs. It was not surprising that the 2017 Our Ocean conference was going to be hosted on the island. The EU was also doing its part, and had recently entered into strong commitments, with ministerial declarations regarding sea transport and the blue economy a few weeks ago.

Ms AUROI spoke of the 10th edition of the European Maritime day, which was held on 20 May, an event which proved to be popular with many. The maritime sphere and the European Neighbourhood Policy were helping in bridging the southern and east coast of the Mediterranean. France was the second largest maritime area in the world thanks to its overseas territories and had therefore huge responsibility when it comes to this dossier. Maritime issues had always been part of European public policies.

Ms AUROI asserted that integrated maritime policy had become stronger despite certain obstacles such as lack of legal ground. The dossier was crosscutting in nature and therefore did not need to be laid down in a foundation text. Another difficulty facing maritime policy was the lack of a dedicated financial tool: finance came from various funds and budgetary sources, which presented challenges. Governance was therefore very important: the need for good coordination and focus on simplification with well targeted instruments, ensuring quality before quantity, was therefore imperative.

As to the content of integrated maritime policy, Ms AUROI noted the possibility for growth and development, with maritime economies representing 14% of national wealth in France. Progress made in the last five years after Limassol adoption of the new maritime agenda for growth and jobs. The blue economy could strengthen ties between the European countries and provide ways to mobilise citizens in trade affairs. Protecting fragile ecosystems which were threatened was however a *sine qua non*: growth could not come at their expense. Indeed, when it came to maritime policy issues about biodiversity and resistance to climate change come to mind. Overfishing, climate change

and pollution were the biggest challenges that were being faced. Seas and oceans must be protected against pollution and waste; plastic litter was the biggest culprit.

The blue economy also provided the economic opportunity to move towards a circular economy. A paradigm shift was needed, and all stakeholders had to participate by banning deep sea fishing beyond 800m and introduce tighter control of small scale fishing.

Ms AUROI stressed that it was also important to include a social dimension in blue economy, in particular to safeguard workers' rights aboard ships. A safer maritime space, targeting human smuggling and ensuring safe migrant crossing were main objectives the EU strive toward attaining.

On a positive note, Ms AUROI said that good decisions were taken in the EU to achieve the goals that the Member States had set out together to achieve, both on the European and international stage, including the goals proposed under the Europe 2020 and the Paris agreement. It was important to ensure there was national legislation in place to implement these goals.

Twelve speakers took the floor in the ensuing debate.

Two members from the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr António COSTA SILVA and Mr António GAMEIRO, both stressed how this was a very important topic for their country, given the that Portugal has one of the largest maritime in the world and the peninsula had invested in this area since 1999, making it one of the national priorities. Mr GAMEIRO added that it was important to ensure the Blue Economy would be very resilient and well-defined, and to this end rapid investments were needed.

Many other members, e.g. Mr BIZET, Mr Sylvi GRAHAM, Norwegian *Stortinget*, Mr KOURAKIS, Ms Monika HAUKANÖMM, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Pol VAN DE DRIESSCHE, Belgian *Sénat*, considered this a vital area for their country and for the Union in general.

Mr Heinz-Joachim BARCHMANN, German *Bundestag*, said it was important to work together, but highlighted the need for the European Parliament's involvement in this area.

Mr BIZET, on the other hand, stressed the importance of international action on managing seas and oceans. Whereas he supported the goals of the Commission, he nevertheless advised to keep a watchful on the mandate given to the Commission.

Ms GRAHAM agreed that the blue economy was a European key market for products and services. She noted that Norway participated in EUMETSAT, Galileo and Copernicus, adding that research and innovation was very important and was keen on strengthening cooperation in this area. Finally, she urged members to fight illegal fishing.

Ms Johanna KARIMÄKI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, picked up on this last point, denouncing the setting of higher quotas than fishing can maintain, and saying that scientific advice in this area had been ignored for short-term goals. She demanded environmental sustainability in fishing policies, and appealed for increased efforts to fight marine pollution as micro-plastics harm ecosystems. Ms HAUKANÖMM agreed on the importance of a long-term strategy needed to ensure sustainable growth, and also underlined the importance of having a one stop shop. On a related point, Mr DRIESSCHE spoke of the need for sustainable tourism and, in this regard, suggested to make the tourist operators partners in this journey.

Ms Bryndís HARALDSDÓTTIR, Icelandic *Althingi*, said it was important to ensure that maritime did not become a topic of crisis, and reminded colleagues that the dossier was a matter for all countries

regardless of geographical position. She encouraged further cooperation in maritime research as this was essential to ensure a sustainable future. She added that in Iceland the focus was on the Arctic.

Mr CRAUGHWELL said his country was home to 149 beaches blue flag or green coast areas. Oceans were routinely used as dumping ground for waste and plastic. He flagged the point raised by his Finnish colleague regarding microplastic pollution and noted that Iceland was introducing legislation on this very issue.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, European Parliament, asked whether the integrated maritime policy would be possible without engagement of the UK.

In her replies, Ms AUROI noted that there seemingly was agreement to have a joint platform. She reiterated her opinion that France's overseas departments give it a better globalised picture of the situation. Ms AUROI agreed that maritime transport could be a source of income, but noted that it could also be responsible for pollution and a threat to our waters.

She affirmed that an integrated policy was the true answer, and accepted that, in this regard, Brexit was indeed a problem the Union and its Member States should look into. The EU and the UK must negotiate with regard to Blue Economy, and here the experience gained with working with non-EU countries (like African countries) could be of use.

On his part, Mr VITSUT said that the Blue Economy covered many different aspects; many areas where agreement should be reached. The discussion had touched upon only some of possible problems; discussions had to be pursued further.

As for inclusion in the Estonian Presidency programme, Mr VITSUT regretted that this had already been set, and so it could be promised that maritime issues would feature on a detailed basis. However, the topic, he added, could be tied to others (for instance, in the framework of digital issues).

Mr VITSUT noted that the sea had no physical borders, and most issues could only be solved in negotiations between countries. In light of this, he suggested that the wider the range of issues agreed with the UK, the better the prospects for future cooperation.

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

The Chair informed participants that, due to upcoming early elections, the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* had been dissolved and that effectively the parliamentary mandate of all members of Parliament, with the exception of the Speaker of the Parliament, had seized. Consequently, there was no official delegation of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* to the LVII COSAC meeting. The Chair informed that, in light of these special circumstances that had an effect on the usual arrangements and practice of the COSAC meeting, the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* had decided not to present a Contribution for adoption. Instead it was proposed to adopt non-political Conclusions. The Chair informed that the Presidency's proposal had been discussed and unanimously agreed in the Troika. The Chair also thanked all Troika members for the support received in the organisation of the meeting in these special circumstances.

The draft text of the proposed Conclusions had been distributed to all delegations on 15 May 2017 and no amendments had been received to the text. The draft text of the Conclusions of the LVII COSAC was subsequently adopted without further debate.

7. Session V: ‘Migration - Combatting human smuggling and trafficking and establishing a humane and effective return and readmission policy’

Keynote speakers: Hon George VELLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta, Ms Maite PAGAZAURTUNDÚA RUIZ, Member of the European Parliament

Presentation by Mr Lucio ROMANO, Chair of the Committee on EU Policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, on the visit to the hotspot in Pozzallo, Sicily

Minister VELLA explained that the increase in migratory flows correlated with the spread of trafficking and smuggling networks in Africa, and that stabilising Libya should be a top political priority. The Malta Declaration, adopted at the Informal summit of EU heads of states or governments on 3 February 2017, provided operational proposals for disrupting the business models of smuggler and saving lives. Malta also proposed the EU the drafting of legislation on controlling exports of equipment likely to be used by smugglers and traffickers. The minister commended the results of the operation EUNAVFOR MED/ Sophia.

Minister VELLA gave a well-documented account of the rising numbers of migrant and refugee children, especially unaccompanied ones, and of missing migrant children; he supported the recent initiatives of the Council of Europe to counter this trend.

He noted that the application of existing return and readmission agreements remained limited, and in some cases nil. In his view, the finalisation of specific return arrangements with key countries would also act as a deterrent for future migration, thus mitigating against loss of life during the migratory journey. He stressed the need for legal channels of mobility for limited stays; information campaigns on the risks of embarking on dangerous journeys; and voluntary returns. In conclusion, Minister VELLA argued that cooperation on migration was a need, and no longer a choice.

Ms Maite PAGAZAURTUNDÚA, Member of the European Parliament, praised Malta’s focus on migration and stressed the need for urgent action in Libya a potential hotspot for the entire region. She referred to the need to develop an effective and humanitarian return and readmission policy, building on the existing tools at EU level. She mentioned that, in 2017, the European Parliament hoped to adopt the recast of the ‘Dublin Regulation’.

She pointed to the inconsistent application of the EU legislation on international protection across the EU, and recalled that there were 40 ongoing infringement proceedings against Member States not applying the EU legislation on the Common European asylum system.

Ms PAGAZAURTUNDÚA deplored the low rate of relocation, within the set deadline, of 160 000 migrants, mostly women and children. She stressed the responsibility of politicians in designing a policy based on dignity and ensuring both security and the full respect of human rights. She personally believed that opening up safe legal routes for asylum-seekers was possible and would deter trafficking and smuggling networks.

Mr Lucio ROMANO, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs Policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, presented the outcome of the visit of a COSAC delegation to the hotspot in Pozzallo, Sicily, organised by Italy. The visit, a new and positive activity for COSAC according to Mr ROMANO, took place on 5-6 May 2017, in order to enhance the awareness of and encourage discussion among MPs from Member States on the challenge of migration and the need of a Europe-wide approach, applying the values of solidarity and human rights. Twenty-eight COSAC parliamentarians from 18 Member States had participated, while two other Parliaments were represented by their staff. There were also several MEPs, the speakers of four Regional councils on behalf of all Italian Regions, and 11 Italian MPs.

The visit included a meeting held in Ragusa with national leaders and representatives of civil society, and the visit to the Hotspot at Pozzallo. Mr ROMANO explained that the main purpose of the Pozzallo Hotspot was to ensure primary assistance and to identify, register, and fingerprint new migrants, as all migrants reaching Italy had to undergo those processes.

Mr ROMANO stressed the role played by the staff of European agencies such as FRONTEX and EASO. He dwelled on the challenge of migrants non - eligible for protection who placed a burden on welfare and reception systems. While acknowledging that it was a politically divisive matter, he recalled the legal and moral obligation to save people at sea and the need to comply with European rules.

Mr ROMANO also mentioned the uncooperative attitude of third countries on migrants' readmission and the delays with regard to resettlement in other Member States. He mentioned among others the importance of the resolution approved by a large majority of the European Parliament in favour of requiring EU States to honour their commitments to transfer 160,000 asylum seekers from Greece and Italy by September 2017 and to accelerate the relocation of refugees, particularly children.

The ensuing debate saw 42 speakers taking the floor. Many speakers saluted the Malta Declaration with some acknowledging the usefulness of the visit to the Pozzallo hotspot.

Several speakers stressed the fact that the migratory and humanitarian crisis called for an urgent adequate European response based on solidarity and EU's values, and stressed the need to honour the commitments already made. Among them were Ms Clara Isabel SAN DAMIÁN, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, who called for a fair and effective migration policy and compliance with EU's obligations, and Mr Giovanni MAURO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, who argued that ongoing wars and poverty would make migratory waves unstoppable.

Other speakers, such as Mr Bernard DURKAN, *Irish Houses of the Oireachtas*, stressed the need to act collectively and share the burden in order to help people who are seeking a better life. Ms Maria PLASS, Swedish *Riksdag*, called for the implementation of existing decisions or the identification of new measures on burden-sharing. Mr Konstantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, addressed the issue of Europe's hypocritical policy against smuggling, as the situation in Libya and Turkey showed.

Mr Yves POZZO DI BORGO, French *Sénat*, wondered whether the EU should not be granted the right to intervene in territorial waters of countries such as Libya. Ms Zühal TOPCU, *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, called for shared responsibility, as Turkey hosted the largest refugee population in the world. Ms Valeria CARDINALI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, mentioned that all Member States must receive refugees using EU resources, and called for a common European migration and security policy. Ms AUROI stressed that solidarity should not be an ever-changing notion. Ms SAN DAMIÁN called for cooperation on root causes of migration rather than controls, and for a Marshall plan for countries of origin.

Mr Börje VESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, mentioned the economic migration of Europeans to the US in the 19th century, and Sweden's readiness to accept migrants from some states before their accession to the EU. Ms Katarina CSEFALVAYOVA, Slovak *Národná rada*, thanked Malta for having picked up on the notion of "effective solidarity" put forward by the Slovak Presidency. Mr Maximos CHARAKOPOULOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, stated that setting up barriers between states showed there was no solidarity. Mr Borys TARASYUK, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, called for assistance to deal with the internally displaced persons because of Russian aggression in the Crimean and Donbas region.

Many speakers listed the actions needed to disrupt business models of smugglers and traffickers in migrants. For instance, Ms Dovilė ŠAKALIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, called, among others, for mutual trust in intergovernmental anti-trafficking operations and the efficient sharing of intelligence data on smugglers. Mr Veli YÜKSEL, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, inquired on the need of a mandate allowing for the prosecution of smugglers arrested under operation Sophia. Ms Marianne MIKKO, Estonian *Riigikogu*, called for the implementation of the Malta Declaration and existing legislation, rather than a new legal framework, and stressed the importance of cooperation with third countries and the private sector. For Ms AUROI the issue of traffickers called for more work upstream and for safe legal routes to the EU, an idea supported by Ms Idoia VILLANUEVA, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*. Ms Johanna KARIMÄKI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, mentioned the issue of family reunification, and the need for legal and safe routes, and humanitarian visas.

The need for actions which would deal with the root causes of economic migration was addressed by several speakers. Mr Giovanni MAURO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, called for the training of African people in the countries of origin and Mr Gerard Philip CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, agreed with this view. Mr PALLING, deplored the insufficient financial commitments to tackle the crisis, and supported the idea of investing in countries of origin and transit. Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, believed the Union for the Mediterranean could contribute to the prosperity of the region. Ms Maria PLASS, Swedish *Riksdag*, focussed on the need to link migration with security and development policies.

Several other speakers pointed to the need to differentiate between economic migrants and refugees, and to put in place registration processes. Mr CRAUGHWELL called for registration of all migrants by seconded national officers in places of arrival. Mr Lech KOŁAKOWSKI, Polish *Sejm*, argued that some countries burdened other Member States with the consequences of migration, stressing that Poland accepted only war refugees. In reply, Mr Thorsten FREI, German *Bundestag*, explained the legal and factual impediments to returns and supported the creation of reception centres in Northern Africa. Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, stressed the need for a common system to determine the country of origin, and called for new return agreements. Mr Johannes HÜBNER, Austrian *Nationalrat*, shared the view that there were no returns in practice and that quotas were incentives for smugglers. Ms Marta GOLBIK, Polish *Sejm*, argued that the difference between economic migrants and refugees had to be explained to the citizens.

Several speakers concentrated on the shortcomings of some of the measures adopted in response to the crisis. Ms VILLANUEVA expressed concerns over the agreement with Turkey and other third countries, which introduced new border checks in countries with no human rights standards. Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, questioned the compatibility of EU return and readmission agreements with the principle of *non – refoulement*, and the practice of expedited asylum application processing. Mr Börje VESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, expressed frustration with the lack of legality of the methods for assessing the legality of migrants' stay in Europe. Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS pointed to the difficulty of implementing very strict return policies of the EU, in the absence of solidarity with Greece and rejected the notion of or flexible solidarity. Mr Pedro Filipe SOARES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, explained that solidarity did not mean agreement with all EU policies, as some measures such as relocation did not work.

The issue of securing EU's borders was a recurrent theme. Mr Ljubo ŽNIDAR, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, supported the idea of a full operational capability of the European Border and Coast Guard and mandatory controls only at the external borders of the EU. Along the same lines, Mr HÖRCSIK, explained that Hungary's investments for protecting the EU's external borders were part of solidarity, and that the placement of migrants in transit zones could not be assimilated with detention. Ms Dusica STOJKOVIC, Serbian *Norodna Skupština*, referred to Serbia's effort to manage the mixed migration flows.

Mr Konrad GŁĘBOCKI, Polish *Sejm*, mentioned support to refugees provided in third countries where hotspots should also be set up. Mr BENESIK argued EU's response finally in line with the long-standing Czech position on migration. Mr Atis LEJŅŠ, Latvian *Saeima*, explained that Latvia accepted refugees on the basis of a strict screening procedure.

Some speakers linked the uncontrolled flow of illegal migrants to security risks. Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, contended that a pre-condition of a human return policy was cooperation with the host state on identification of migrants; he also mentioned citizens' discontent and the rise of populism. Ms Anne LOUHELAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, argued that the feeling of internal security of the Finns had diminished with the arrival of migrants. Mr BANA referred to the radicalisation of second and third generation migrants. Ms Helena LANGSADLOVA, Czech *Poslanecká Sněmovna*, argued that some of the minor migrants were under 18 -year old males non-eligible for protection, and that, giving them false hope before return, posed a risk for their radicalisation. Mr BIZET mentioned the need for a proper system of registration of entries, given the increase of terror attacks; he also called for hotspots to be set up in third countries.

Mr Jaak MADISON, Estonian *Riigikogu*, stated that solidarity also meant protecting the Schengen area; he stressed the need to correctly identify migrants who lied about their age, and to consider the Australian model. Mr Václav HAMPL, Czech *Senát*, pointed to the massive abuse of the asylum mechanism by non-eligible migrants, the need to accelerate relocation, and the opposition to permanent relocation quotas.

In response to the interventions, Minister VELLA rejected the idea of the Australian model and called for human solutions. He supported the distinction between refugees and economic migrants who should benefit from legal routes. He warned against the idea of hotspots outside Europe, given the ongoing abuse in African detention centres. He called for solidarity with countries which did not have land borders and could not build walls to stop migration.

Mr ROMANO stated that the question of migration was a stress test for the EU and that politicians had to ensure solidarity, which did not mean the EU could accept everyone, but live up to its values.

Ms PAGAZAURTUNDÚA outlined the important role of countries such as Malta, Greece, and Italy in sharing data and solutions on migration. She clarified that on-spot returns were illegal and would be investigated. She argued that the lack of solidarity would endanger the future of the EU community, and pointed to the Canadian model, which showed migration could be an opportunity.

8. Adoption of the Conclusions of the LVII COSAC

The text of the Conclusions of the LVII COSAC was unanimously adopted with no amendment.

Mr FARRUGIA gave the floor to Mr VITSUT, who informed the delegations about the upcoming COSAC Chairpersons' meeting in Tallinn on 9-10 July 2017 and the LVIII COSAC on 26-28 November 2017. A short video about the Estonian Presidency was screened.

Mr FARRUGIA thanked the participants for the dialogue and the cooperation, as well as the meeting's organisers.