

Bratislava, 15th November 2016

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LVI COSAC

13 – 15 November 2016, Bratislava

Contribution of the LVI COSAC

1. Strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU

1.1 COSAC appreciates the progress of the current European Commission (2014 -) in improving the relations with national Parliaments, as documented in the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, notably through the increased number of visits of Commissioners to national Parliaments/Chambers, and encourages the European Commission to further pursue this effort to create a form of lasting dialogue with national Parliaments. This dialogue supports the competencies of the national Parliaments to keep their national Governments accountable and to scrutinise their national and EU policies.

1.2 In the field of political dialogue between the European Commission and national Parliaments, COSAC sees potential for improvement of responses to national Parliaments' reasoned opinions and therefore suggests that the European Commission better addresses national Parliaments' specific concerns within a period of no more than eight weeks and analyse all possible points of views when preparing its responses, especially the responses when the so-called "yellow card" mechanism is triggered. COSAC also stresses the importance of discussions and exchanges of views in the subsidiarity check procedure between national Parliaments.

1.3 COSAC, in light of the established political dialogue with the EU Commission, invites the European Parliament to enhance, for its part, the consideration of the national Parliaments' opinions in the framework of the political dialogue in the relevant parliamentary committees.

1.4 COSAC considers the „green card” mechanism an important tool to improve the role of national Parliaments and therefore encourages national Parliaments to continue exploring future possibilities of using the initiatives under the „green card”.

1.5 COSAC notes that communicating the EU issues effectively in current circumstances proves to be one of the crucial elements in bridging the gap between the European Union and its citizens and recognises the role of national Parliaments in engaging citizens, providing them with impartial information and raising general awareness of EU related issues. In this respect it is important to underline the democratic mandate the national Parliaments have representing the voters. In the context of the outcome of the UK referendum, COSAC recognizes the crucial role of national Parliaments, as institutions of direct democratic mandate and accountability, in contributing to the functioning and the future of the unique project of the European Union.

1.6 COSAC invites all parliaments to play a more vocal role in communicating the EU issues and to achieve this, encourages national Parliaments as well as the European Parliament to share

their experience and best practices in the field of communication among them. Furthermore, COSAC notes that targeting and adapting the content of communication of EU issues may prove useful when engaging with specific groups, such as universities, schools, etc.

1.7 To make full use of available technologies, COSAC invites Parliaments to fully explore possibilities arising from using social media channels, which may increase awareness about EU issues and about Parliaments as the most relevant centres of debate, especially in relation to the European youth.

2. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks)

2.1 COSAC recognises that EU's trade policy is of utmost geopolitical and economic importance for Europe to shape globalisation, to strengthen international standards and to increase access to foreign markets; COSAC considers that fairly negotiated, transparent and widely shared comprehensive trade agreements with third countries, negotiated with a view to reaching mutually beneficial results can be important tools that are capable of improving the EU's share of global trade; COSAC notes that international rules will be set by others, if the European Union does not act now.

2.2 COSAC views balanced trade agreements as a chance to promote growth and job creation, as well as to strengthen sustainable development, enforcing human rights, labour and social standards, and environmental sustainability on a global scale, but also to ensure the provision of services and municipal services. COSAC demands that the European Union better defends its interests in the negotiations and insists on principle of reciprocity.

2.3 COSAC acknowledges the differences in opinion and the scepticism being voiced by many European citizens about the content of these trade agreements and urges the European institutions, national Parliaments and the governments to address the concerns, to clearly demonstrate the impacts of the trade agreements and to ensure transparency of the negotiation processes.

2.4 COSAC welcomes the Commission's improved transparency measures of the TTIP negotiation process, however, it stresses the need to achieve an even higher level of transparency for all trade agreements that could address the concerns of European citizens and parliamentarians.

2.5 COSAC is convinced that the negotiation process and the outcomes of this process should fully respect the principles of freedom, democracy, rule of law, dignity and social cohesion, on which European Union is founded, and in this way ensure a solid guarantee that there will be a strengthening, rather than weakening of European regulations and standards, in case of the conclusion and signing of TTIP.

2.6 COSAC emphasises that the national Parliaments, as well as the European Parliament, must be able to scrutinise the TTIP negotiation process in line with provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (notably article 218). COSAC considers that TTIP can only be provisionally applied, once the European Parliament has given its consent to a final agreement concluded by the Council. COSAC therefore urges the Commission and the governments of Member States to continue the process of intensified communication with national Parliaments and the European Parliament. COSAC also reminds that it is expected that TTIP is a mixed agreement, therefore an eventual entering into force of TTIP will be subject to the relevant national ratification procedures in all Member States.

3. 2016: Energy Union's „year of delivery”

3.1 COSAC welcomes the project of the Energy Union and its ambitions to lead the EU towards a more secure and sustainable energy policy, putting it at the forefront of renewable energy production and the fight against climate change. This cannot be achieved on purely intergovernmental level, therefore common European solutions are needed.

3.2 COSAC notes that the EU is the biggest importer of energy in the world, whereby reliance of a number of its Member States on a single supplier makes the EU extremely vulnerable. COSAC sees the high energy prices in the EU compared to competitors with concern. Therefore, COSAC is in favour of strengthening consumer rights that can, inter alia, effectively help in the fight against energy poverty. COSAC therefore recalls that the goal of the Energy Union is to provide European consumers with not only secure, sustainable and ecological energy, but also with energy which is competitive and more affordable. In attaining this objective, sovereign decisions of the Member States must be respected, while supporting solutions, which are better achieved at the EU level.

3.3 COSAC stresses the importance of the Member States' solidarity and trust to achieve energy security in the EU and underlines the importance of their common approach with regard to third countries. In this context, COSAC expresses concern at projects, which are perceived as technically, environmentally, economically and geopolitically ungrounded and counter-productive from the energy security point of view. On the contrary, in regards to the strengthening of the Single Market and energy security, COSAC supports efforts to maximise the EU's use of indigenous sources of energy including those for stable and secure electricity generation and optimal diversification of energy supply routes, while underlining the importance of closer regional cooperation.

3.4 COSAC recalls that 12 Member States remain below 10% electricity interconnection target and thus largely isolated from the internal electricity market. COSAC calls for the European Fund for Strategic Investments to give special attention to projects that address the most significant lack of sufficient interconnectivity.

3.5 COSAC welcomes the Paris Agreement and considers it as a milestone in the fight against climate change and as a strong commitment to the environment and next generations. COSAC

also welcomes the swift ratification of this agreement by the EU and calls for its unconditional implementation. COSAC considers that the project of Energy Union can make a substantial contribution to achieve the Paris Agreement's goals and, in the longer term, help meet energy and climate targets set by the EU for 2020, 2030 and 2050.

3.6 COSAC underlines the importance of research and development investment for the Energy Union and stresses their potential in constructing a secure, effective and ecological Energy Union and in reducing energy production costs with a clear priority in respect of the Paris Agreement on Renewable Energy. In this respect COSAC also welcomes the work for a better Emission Trading System (ETS) which contribute to modernise the European Energy.

3.7 COSAC believes that efforts in developing innovative low-emission technologies and solutions as well as progress in cost-effective innovations play an irreplaceable role in strengthening EU's competitiveness.

3.8 In order to achieve as large energy savings as possible, COSAC supports measures at the local level focused on building reconstruction and increasing the share of the public transport usage.

4. Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration

4.1 COSAC recognizes all humanitarian aspects of solving the migration and refugee crisis. COSAC further stresses the importance of finding safe and legal ways for eligible asylum seekers and refugees to come to the EU. COSAC appreciates the EU's cooperation with countries of transit and origin of migration flows, and stresses that protection of human rights of migrants and asylum seekers and refugees must be at the centre of EU actions undertaken in order to solve the migration crisis. COSAC considers securing the EU's external borders as a matter of immediate priority for the successful management of current and future irregular migratory flows.

4.2 COSAC reaffirms the importance of solidarity, responsibility and fair burden sharing among member states based on the need for an acceptable solution to irregular migration in accordance with Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) while respecting human rights and all international treaties and conventions. COSAC encourages the European Union to address and eliminate the root causes of migration. COSAC invites the Slovak Presidency, but also future Presidencies, to submit compromise proposals and to actively contribute in finding effective and acceptable solutions on migration issues with a special focus on human rights, solidarity and humanity, as well as on easy-to-access reception management on the ground.

4.3 COSAC also underlines the necessary internal European and global solidarity for effective resettlement programs to support states such as Italy and Greece in tackling refugee care and shelter.

4.4 With regard to the maintaining and tightening of controls of the Eastern Mediterranean route, COSAC calls for an immediate implementation of the EU-Turkey statement and reminds the need for its full and uniform application towards all Member States of the European Union.

4.5 COSAC endorses the recognition made by the European Council, at its October meeting, of “the significant contribution, including of financial nature, made by frontline Member States in recent years”; COSAC calls on the European Institutions to take into special consideration the efforts put forth by these States to fulfil the humanitarian obligation that are: to save the lives of the growing numbers of asylum seekers that arrive to Europe’s external borders, to provide for rescue operations, identification, health care assistance, shelter, clothes, food, and social integration. To this end, these specific expenditures should be considered in the calculation of the structural government budget balance.

4.6 COSAC highlights that the European Union, as an area of freedom of movement and opened borders, needs to pursue a joint European migration policy with emphasis on both the protection of EU’s citizens and external borders, safety and solidarity with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants while respecting human rights and all international treaties and conventions. COSAC strongly supports all initiatives aiming at the protection of the external borders and restoring regularity in the Schengen area and therefore welcomes the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard. COSAC underlines the importance of prompt implementation of the regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard and solving the problem of insufficiently quick returns, by taking full advantage of the EBCG’s mandate. In this context, COSAC recalls the need for personnel and material supply for the effective functioning of the European Border and Coast Guard.

4.7 COSAC welcomes ongoing work on the project of linked SIS (Schengen Information System) – AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) for identification of missing persons based on fingerprints, as well as the feasibility study and legislative proposal on the EU Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) to be published soon which will help secure EU borders and determine if the person did not exceed the permitted time of stay in the EU. COSAC underlines the challenge of effective implementation of these new tools within the shortest possible time.

4.8 Stressing the challenges linked to the security and the control of external borders of the EU, COSAC asks that the discussions in the European Parliament on the implementation of the EU entry/exit system for recording entries and exits of third country nationals crossing the external borders of the EU Member States and on establishing of a registered travellers programme (RTP) are finalised as soon as possible, while addressing concerns as to the costs, proportionality and data protection.

4.9 Finally, COSAC stresses the importance of sharing good practices in integrating migrant youth and families in local societies providing education and good work.