

Contribution of the LIII COSAC

Riga, 31 May – 2 June 2015

1. EU Energy and Climate Policy

1.1. COSAC recognises the outstanding nature of challenges associated with the energy sector in the EU, in particular the high dependency of EU Member States on imported energy resources, and therefore emphasises the importance of solidarity, trust and enhanced coordination in dealing with risks and challenges.

1.2. COSAC emphasises the key importance of optimising energy flows and energy consumption, as increased energy efficiency has a key role in reaching this goal. Moderation of energy demand, as well as treating energy efficiency as an energy source in its own right, are keys to achieving the energy policy goals of the EU. Furthermore, higher energy efficiency contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and to achieving EU's climate targets, the importance of which cannot be stressed enough ahead of the 2015 UN climate negotiations in Paris.

1.3. Underscoring the importance of climate-related actions, COSAC welcomes the suggested framework for achieving an effective transition to a low-carbon economy set forth in the Communication of the Commission titled *The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020* that was tabled together with the Energy Union framework and refers to decarbonisation of the economy as a whole.

1.4. COSAC notes the role of research and technological innovation in boosting the competitiveness of Europe's energy sector and the economy as a whole. Moreover, new solutions which enable for more efficient use of renewable energy resources, as well as smart technologies applied to the production, supply and balancing of energy demand and supply, should be the key elements of the EU's future energy landscape.

1.5. COSAC acknowledges that a fully integrated European energy market can be achieved only through proactive and simultaneous development of energy infrastructures, as well as implementation and application of EU energy regulations. In terms of connecting with other EU partners, some Member States can still be regarded as energy islands requiring particular attention, including financing, to end their isolation from neighbouring energy markets. Therefore, COSAC calls upon the European Commission to take steps that will facilitate development of necessary interconnections, and strongly encourages Member States to implement the EU legislation that sets the framework for introduction of a fully and effectively functioning internal energy market for electricity and natural gas. The better and the more

efficiently an increasingly integrated EU-wide energy market operates, the better the odds of protecting energy consumers and alleviating energy poverty.

1.6. In this context, COSAC welcomes the initiative for establishing the European Energy Union with the strategic goal to achieve greater energy security, sustainability and competitiveness. It stresses the importance of steps already taken, as per the Communication from the European Commission on a Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change policy¹ supported by the Roadmap for the Energy Union.

2. Parliamentary Scrutiny of EU Affairs

2.1. COSAC reaffirms its belief that the involvement of Parliaments in the European decision-making process strengthens the overall democratic legitimacy of the EU, and welcomes the continuing debate on the current and future role of Parliaments and the scope of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs.

2.2. COSAC emphasises that there is a general willingness of Parliaments to play a stronger role in the EU through full and efficient use of the existing mechanisms, such as general scrutiny of their respective Governments, subsidiarity control, political dialogue and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

2.3. Moreover, COSAC notes that the 22nd Bi-Annual Report indicated that a majority of Parliaments would be favourable to the creation of new tools enabling parliamentary involvement and cooperation without formal Treaty amendments, thus strengthening the role of Parliaments even further. In this context, COSAC acknowledges that there is broad support from the Parliaments for initiatives, such as introduction of the “green card” procedure; furthermore, COSAC takes note of the ongoing debate on parliamentary scrutiny of European Commission’s annual work programmes.

2.4. COSAC invites the European Commission to support the willingness of Parliaments to play a more proactive role and to engage with both the existing and new forms of cooperation in line with the EU Treaties and the existing balance of power between the institutions, in the spirit of its previously announced commitment to forging a new partnership with national Parliaments. In this respect, COSAC welcomes the initiative of the new European Commission to coordinate and strengthen the interaction of all Commissioners with national Parliaments, as well as individual commitments of Commissioners to increase the frequency of meetings with national Parliaments in order to discuss legislative proposals and/or other initiatives of the Commission and to take an active part in formulating responses to the contributions from the national Parliaments.

¹ COM(2015) 80 final

On subsidiarity checks

2.5. COSAC welcomes better cooperation and coordination between national Parliaments in the conduct of subsidiarity checks. With a view to rendering this exercise more efficient and effective, COSAC discussed the possibility of elaborating informal guidelines on the conduct of subsidiarity assessment and the reasoned opinion procedure. The majority of Parliaments whose views are presented in the 23rd Bi-Annual Report have expressed their support to issuing a voluntary, non-binding set of best practices and guidelines on the basic elements of subsidiarity analysis. COSAC invites Parliaments willing to cooperate more closely towards the elaboration of such informal guidelines to contribute their efforts in exploring further practical ways to achieve this within the framework of COSAC.

2.6. However, COSAC emphasises that there is a clear preference of Parliaments not to standardise the format in which reasoned opinions and political dialogue contributions are drafted and submitted to the European Commission, and underlines that these formal matters should be left within the competence of respective Parliaments and their established internal practices.

On the “green card”

2.7. COSAC believes that, in addition to the existing forms of parliamentary scrutiny and involvement, the “green card” procedure constitutes a valuable opportunity for national Parliaments to play a proactive role in the EU decision-making process and thus contribute further to the good functioning of the EU.

2.8. COSAC emphasises that the “green card” mechanism would build entirely on the existing political dialogue and would further encourage national Parliaments interested in proactive involvement to make constructive suggestions regarding policy or legislative proposals to the European Commission, without undermining the Commission’s right of legislative initiative under the EU Treaties or its competences in dealing with reasoned opinions, as laid down in Protocol 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon. Given the support expressed by the vast majority of Parliaments to the introduction of such a procedure, as reflected in the 23rd Bi-Annual Report, COSAC invites the Luxembourgish Presidency to continue work on the scope and procedural framework of the “green card” mechanism while ensuring its compliance with the existing institutional balance of powers.

2.9. COSAC acknowledges the fact that some national Parliaments would not be able to use this procedure due to internal constitutional restrictions on the Parliaments' power in EU affairs.

2.10. COSAC highly values the European Commission's constructive commitment to political dialogue with national Parliaments and hopes that in this spirit it will support the "green card" mechanism as a new enhanced form of political dialogue.

On the programming of the European Commission

2.11. COSAC takes note of the ongoing debate on enhanced cooperation and exchange of views between the Parliaments and EU institutions involved in relation to the European Commission's annual and multiannual planning of work, as well as the recent cluster meetings of the willing Parliaments seeking to define the scope and procedural aspects of such cooperation.

On cooperation with the European Parliament

2.12. COSAC welcomes the new idea of cooperation put forward by the European Parliament which enables the willing Parliaments to voice their positions and share background knowledge on implementation of EU legislation that the European Commission intends to amend. COSAC notes that Parliaments have broadly expressed their willingness to exchange best practices and share ideas on parliamentary monitoring on transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU law with the European Parliament while emphasising the position of some national Parliaments that such monitoring is within the competence of the executive and/or the European Commission.

2.13. COSAC looks forward to strengthening the political dialogue between national Parliaments and the European Parliament on selected legislative dossiers, among others, by enhancing cooperation between the rapporteurs of the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

3. EU Trade Policy and the Role of Parliaments

On the future of EU trade policy

3.1. COSAC emphasises that free trade and exchange of goods and ideas have historically contributed to reducing tensions and establishing peace and prosperity; therefore, COSAC expects the ongoing and future EU trade negotiations with its strategic partners to tap into this long-established tradition.

3.2. COSAC calls on the European Commission to deliver an ambitious future trade strategy aimed at creating economic opportunities for EU citizens, delivering lasting

and durable prosperity in the EU and around the world, and setting high international and global standards based on the values laid down in the EU Treaties.

On the role of Parliaments in EU trade policy

3.3. COSAC notes that EU negotiations on free trade agreements with third countries have recently generated a lot of interest among EU Member States and welcomes the debate on the role of Parliaments in this process; nevertheless, it calls for a greater involvement of national Parliaments from the outset. In this context, COSAC takes note of the Conclusions of the Presidency of the Conference of the Speakers of the European Union Parliaments held in Rome on 20-21 April 2015 on this matter.

3.4. COSAC invites the European Commission to engage in active dialogue with national Parliaments taking into account that Parliaments use different systems to scrutinise individual EU trade and investment agreements with third countries.

3.5. COSAC recognises the growth in the European Parliament's powers with regard to EU trade policy since the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty and looks forward to full-fledged cooperation and information exchange between national Parliaments and the European Parliament on trade issues that benefit EU citizens.

On TTIP

3.6. COSAC welcomes the ongoing free trade negotiations between the EU and the U.S. towards reaching a comprehensive and ambitious TTIP agreement, as well as a potential positive impact of the agreement on the EU and U.S. economies in terms of more opportunities for growth and employment.

3.7. COSAC stresses that the EU has set and enforces high standards on food safety, health, animal welfare, the environment, labour, consumers and data protection; therefore, COSAC highlights the importance of safeguarding these standards and anchoring them globally while ensuring effective free trade through removal of unnecessary regulatory barriers and increased regulatory cooperation.

3.8. COSAC notes that the majority of Parliaments have held debates on TTIP in a wide variety of fora and many intend to carry on with further discussions; in this regard, COSAC stresses the role of Parliaments in ensuring further transparency of the TTIP negotiation process and raising the awareness among citizens.

3.9. Moreover, COSAC urges the governments of EU Member States to step up their communication on the *pros* and *cons* of TTIP and other free trade agreements currently being negotiated, thus keeping their citizens informed on the economic impact of TTIP on their respective economies.

3.10. COSAC welcomes the transparency initiative for TTIP negotiations launched by the European Commission in November 2014 and urges upholding and promoting openness and information sharing with all stakeholders; COSAC believes that

information on the progress of negotiations needs to be delivered in a more detailed and transparent way than has hitherto been the case, thus striking the right balance between the provision of information to Parliaments, their involvement in the negotiation process and ensuring the necessary confidentiality of the negotiations.

4. Fight against Terrorism and EU-Wide Passenger Name Record Framework

4.1. COSAC welcomes the Statement by the members of the European Council adopted at the informal meeting held in Brussels on 12 February 2015 expressing a commitment to step up action against terrorist threats in full compliance with human rights and the rule of law.

4.2. COSAC acknowledges the need for better implementation and further development of already existing tools, and highlights the importance of agreeing on a single EU-wide framework for Passenger Name Record data as one of the most urgent and appropriate counter-terrorism measures.

4.3. COSAC invites all relevant EU institutions to reach an agreement on the proposal for a directive on the use of Passenger Name Record data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime, thus ensuring enhanced security for all EU citizens while observing the standards enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

5. Security Concerns in the Middle East and North African Regions

5.1. COSAC draws attention to the enormous challenges that the situation in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region is posing to the EU, namely the expansion of terrorist organisations and the catastrophic human tragedies brought about by human trafficking in the Mediterranean. Appalled by the scale of the recent tragedies in the Mediterranean, COSAC expresses deepest condolences to the families of victims.

5.2. COSAC notes that the EU still lacks a clear approach to the challenges posed by the Mediterranean basin and, in particular, to cross-Mediterranean migration, and underlines that it has a responsibility to take all steps necessary to prevent recurrence of tragedies such as those recently witnessed in the Mediterranean.

5.3. In this context, COSAC welcomes the commitment of the extraordinary European Council of 23 April 2015 expressed in its Statement to take a number of specific measures aimed at strengthening the EU's presence at sea, fighting traffickers in accordance with international law, preventing illegal migration flows and reinforcing internal solidarity and responsibility.

5.4. COSAC stresses the need to develop joint measures in close cooperation with the relevant agencies against criminal networks of migrant traffickers, in order to prevent

them from earning money by placing lives at risk; COSAC calls on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) and the European Commission as a whole to work together with relevant EU and UN agencies and international organisations to increase cooperation with the countries of origin and transit.

5.5. COSAC looks forward to the European Commission's Communication on the European Agenda for Migration that will enable developing a more systemic and geographically comprehensive approach to migration. Following the latest humanitarian tragedies in the Mediterranean, COSAC expects the Commission to show the strongest possible ambition and come up with common European solutions in the spirit of solidarity and sharing of responsibility among Member States.²

5.6. COSAC strongly condemns the barbaric killings of innocent civilians by terrorists in Libya, Tunisia, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the MENA region. COSAC calls for renewed efforts towards close cooperation with the Muslim countries in the region to defeat the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (*Da'esh*) and various Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist organisations. COSAC emphasises that the expansion of *Da'esh* close to the borders of Europe is a major pan-European challenge that calls for immediate engagement of the whole European Union.

5.7. COSAC welcomes the efforts of the HR/VP in supporting the UN-led negotiations aimed at establishing a government authority in Libya and permanent peace in the region.

5.8. By highlighting the importance of the MENA region and considering that migration is a global and complex phenomenon, COSAC calls for a holistic approach towards tackling the roots of security challenges in the region, such as poverty and youth unemployment. COSAC urges the EU, its Member States and the international community to contribute to social and democratic development in the countries of origin and to provide *ad hoc* humanitarian assistance, relief and protection for people in these countries.

6. Eastern Partnership Summit: challenges and outcomes

To be drafted after the Riga Summit

² To be adjusted after the publication of the Commission's Communication