

# **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC**

## **Budapest, 10 February 2011**

PRESENT AT THE MEETING:

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK (*Országgyűlés*, Hungary)

Mr Lajos MILE (*Országgyűlés*, Hungary); Mr Philippe MAHOUX (*Sénat*, Belgium); Andrzej GAŁAŻEWSKI (*Sejm*, Poland); Edmund WITTBRODT (*Senat*, Poland), Mr Miguel Ángel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ (European Parliament); Mr Carlo CASINI (European Parliament)

### **AGENDA:**

1. Adoption of the agenda for the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
2. Approval of the draft agenda for the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC
3. Debate on the draft agenda for the XLV COSAC meeting
4. Approval of the outline of the Fifteenth Bi-annual Report
5. Letters received by the Presidency
6. Any other business

### **PROCEEDINGS:**

#### **1. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**

The meeting was chaired by Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, who welcomed the Members of the Presidential Troika and expressed the hope that the meeting would be fruitful. He presented the draft agenda of the COSAC Presidential Troika meeting, which was adopted unanimously.

#### **2. Approval of the draft agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK presented the draft agenda for the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC. The agenda was unanimously approved as proposed.

#### **3. Debate on the draft agenda for the XLV COSAC meeting**

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK outlined the draft agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting to be held in Budapest on 29-31 May 2011. He informed that the first point of the agenda would be dedicated to the priorities and the preliminary results of the Hungarian Presidency. He added that the Prime Minister Mr Viktor ORBÁN had been asked to give a presentation on this point.

The second point of the agenda would be devoted to the EU economic governance, the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK notified the participants that the Speaker of the Hungarian *Országgyűlés* had been informed in a letter that the President of the

European Commission – Mr José Manuel BARROSO, unfortunately, would not be able to attend the XLV COSAC meeting. The European Commission will be represented by its Vice-President Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ.

As regards the point on the Rules of Procedure of COSAC, Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK underlined that the Rules of Procedure had to be updated and that those amendments should be confined to technical rather than substantive issues. Therefore the Presidency did not expect a principal discussion on this topic. Mr HÖRCSIK added that before the XLV COSAC meeting the Hungarian Presidency would submit to national Parliaments and the European Parliament its suggested technical amendments. He also said that the Presidency could not rule out further amendments of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC, as for example changing the language regime of the ordinary meetings of COSAC or the tenure of the permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat. Finally, Mr HÖRCSIK stated that if there were questions or remarks concerning this point, they would be dealt with.

Mr MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ agreed with the points made by Mr HÖRCSIK, but wondered what Mr HÖRCSIK meant by “points of technical nature” and how he would define the meaning of the word “technical”. He noted that if such discussions were open up, then some parliaments might be willing to make more substantial changes. He thought it was possible, on condition that everybody behaved in a responsible way. He went on to say that another way of updating the Rules of Procedure was to send a questionnaire to national Parliaments and the European Parliament, as any major changes in the Rules of Procedure of COSAC required a thorough discussion.

The fourth point of the agenda would be dedicated to the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments to be held on 4-5 April 2011 in Brussels. The Belgian Presidency of the Conference will present its outcome, especially concerning the parliamentary scrutiny of common foreign and security policy, including common security and defence policy.

Mr Philippe MAHOUX advised caution in placing on the draft agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting a discussion on the results of the Conference of Speakers in the area of common foreign and security policy, including common security and defence policy, as this might be premature. Instead Mr MAHOUX suggested amending the title of this point of the agenda to “Report on the proceedings of the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments”.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK agreed with the suggestion of Mr MAHOUX as it might be too early to speak about the results.

Mr Andrzej GAŁAŻEWSKI noted that at the COSAC meetings in Madrid and Brussels it had been agreed that COSAC debates should focus more on political issues. Therefore he suggested including a discussion on the situation in the Mediterranean in the debate on the State of the Union during the XLV COSAC meeting in May 2011.

Mr Carlo CASINI, referring to the debate on the State of the Union, proposed to invite a highly regarded personality as a keynote speaker who would present an overview of the situation. He suggested inviting Mr Giorgio NAPOLITANO, President of the Italian Republic and a former Chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK agreed that the keynote speaker should give an overview of the current political situation in Egypt and Tunisia, although he hoped that those problems would have been

settled by then. He said that COSAC meetings should focus on current issues and not only take a retrospective look at various events. For his part, he said that the presence of Mr Jacques DELORS would be a great honour for the Hungarian Presidency. Taking into account the incoming Polish Presidency, he proposed to invite the Polish Prime Minister Mr Donald TUSK in order to provide continuity.

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT supported the idea of inviting the Polish Prime Minister Mr TUSK. He also suggested including in the General Policy Debate such issues as enlargement policy, concerns over the division of Europe into eurozone and non-eurozone states, the situation in the Mediterranean, the economic crisis and the post-crisis situation.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK said that current affairs would be discussed in a debate on the State of the Union during the XLV COSAC meeting in May 2011 as well.

Mr Carlo CASINI suggested introducing a new point concerning the European electoral procedure in the agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting. He said that the issue of establishing a uniform procedure for elections to the European Parliament would have to be dealt with by every Member State. He added that there was a need to advance on this path. He reminded that the Treaty of Lisbon provided a legal basis for the adoption of a uniform procedure, requiring the consent of the European Parliament and therefore it might be necessary to also involve national Parliaments and find out their positions with regard to this issue.

Mr Carlo CASINI also proposed to discuss the freedom of religion during the debate on the State of the Union on 31 May.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK suggested putting the issue of the European electoral procedure on a stand-by list. He admitted, though, that this was a very important topic which could not be put off. He noticed that the debate on the freedom of religion, an issue close to him as well, would fuel a lot of discussion which required much time, and therefore it should also be put on a stand-by list. Finally, he said that if there was any time left – one of the proposed topics would be added to the agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting but it would be unrealistic to add both.

Mr Philippe MAHOUX said that discussing the European electoral procedure required some preparative work, but it might be interesting to raise the issue in the future. Referring to the proposed debate on the freedom of religion, he said that another debate on the separation of church and state should also be held.

Mr MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ underlined that the issue of European electoral procedure was of key importance and that the European Parliament had the responsibility to take the initiative on it. Moreover, he noted that both the European Parliament and national Parliaments had to work together on this issue as it was a matter of urgency. He suggested that it might be useful to organise Joint Parliamentary Meeting or Joint Committee Meeting during the Polish Presidency, dedicated to this topic. He stressed that such discussion could not be postponed until 2013.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK agreed that such a meeting was necessary and that it should be passed on to the Polish Presidency.

The draft agenda was approved as amended.

#### **4. Approval of the outline of the Fifteenth Bi-annual Report**

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK presented the draft outline of the Fifteenth Bi-annual Report prepared by the Hungarian Presidency and the COSAC Secretariat.

The delegation of the European Parliament suggested adding the following sentence to the end of the first paragraph: "In addition, both national Parliaments and the European Parliament are working together to develop an effective and regular inter-parliamentary cooperation"

The amended draft outline of the Fifteenth Bi-annual report was approved.

#### **5. Letters received by the Presidency**

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK informed that the Presidency received two letters: one from the Danish *Folketing* and another from the Portuguese *Assembleia de República*.

In their letter, the Chairwoman, Ms Anne-Marie MELDGAARD, and the Vice-Chairwoman, Ms Eva KJER HANSEN, of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish *Folketing* suggested that the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC include a point on the freedom of the media in the agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting in May 2011.

Mr HÖRCSIK informed that during the meeting of the Extended Presidential Trio of the European Affairs Committees held in Copenhagen on 24-25 January 2011 he had explained the details of the Hungarian Media Law. Currently, the European Commission is scrutinizing whether the Hungarian Media Law is in compliance with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, while the Commissioner Ms Neelie KROES has sent a letter to the Hungarian Justice Minister Mr Tibor NAVRACSICS concerning the issue.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK said the Hungarian Government was committed, with the help of the European Commission, to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Prime Minister Mr Viktor ORBÁN had declared to President BARROSO that if the European Commission found that the Hungarian law violated any stipulation of the EU law, Hungary would amend it.

Mr MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ agreed that a discussion on the Hungarian Media Law should be avoided during the XLV COSAC meeting because any discussion meant opening of a debate on this issue. He said that it should be avoided that the COSAC meeting became "a meeting on the media law" and therefore a short statement by the Presidency should be enough. Mr Carlo CASINI agreed with this opinion and said that COSAC had more substantial issues to discuss. Mr Philip MAHOUX said that it was necessary to provide information on how the situation with the Hungarian Media Law was developing, as doing otherwise would be a mistake. He agreed, though, that the Presidency should not open a debate on this topic. Mr Edmund WITTBRODT noted that the explanations made in Copenhagen were satisfactory and agreed that no debate on that matter was needed.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK informed that during the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC he would, as it was agreed in Copenhagen, make a short briefing on the state of play, but there would be no debate on the issue.

In his letter, the Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese *Assembleia de República*, Mr Vitalino CANAS, drew attention to the proposed amendment of Article 136 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. He suggested that COSAC should be a forum to debate this issue.

Mr MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ said that the European Parliament had to give an opinion on this and national Parliaments had to ratify amendments to the Treaty.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK stated that the letter was received too late to be included in the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC. Besides, the European Council in March was expected to amend Article 136, so the debate at the XLV COSAC in May would lose its relevance. Consequently, it would fall within the remit of national Parliaments, and not of COSAC. Therefore he concluded that it was a "homework" to be done by national Parliaments and a debate on this should not be opened at the COSAC meeting.

## **6. Any other business**

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT suggested including in the agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting an exchange of views on EU delegated acts which are not subject to scrutiny by national Parliaments. He explained that some "essential" elements that should be contained in the legislative acts were instead passed by delegated acts and therefore could not be subject to subsidiarity check. Mr WITTBRODT wished to discuss the experience and practice of national Parliaments with regard to this issue.

Mr Miguel Ángel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ stressed that it was an important issue and supported the idea. He said that there was a tendency to avoid parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK stated that agenda of the meeting was already heavy, and the issue should be put on a stand-by list.

Furthermore, Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK informed that the Hungarian Presidency would send a letter to the Chairpersons of the European Affairs Committees of national Parliaments, asking whether they wished to maintain the current co-financing mechanism of the COSAC Secretariat for the period starting on 1 January 2012. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK expected the issues to be resolved during the upcoming Polish Presidency. He also said that the procedures concerning this issue should be transparent.

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT said that both the Polish *Sejm* and the *Senat* were of the opinion that the term of office of the permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat should be extended from 2 to 4 years.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK said that the proposals from national Parliaments would be summarized and discussed under point 3 of the agenda of the XLV COSAC meeting.