

MINUTES OF THE COSAC CHAIRPERSONS' MEETING
Madrid, 5 February 2010

AGENDA:

- 1. Opening session** - addresses: Mr Francisco Javier ROJO GARCÍA, Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*, and Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE, Chairperson of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* Joint Committee for the European Union
- 2. Adoption of the agenda of the Chairpersons' meeting, the draft agenda of the XLIII COSAC and the Outline of the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report**
- 3. COSAC procedural questions and miscellaneous matters**
- 4. The economic crisis** – guest speaker: Mr Carlos OCAÑA PÉREZ DE TUDELA, Secretary of State for Finance and the Budget
- 5. Priorities of the Spanish Presidency** – guest speaker: Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development

PROCEEDINGS:

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE, Chairperson of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* Joint Committee for the European Union.

1. Opening session

Mr Francisco Javier ROJO GARCÍA, Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*, declared opened the meeting with a statement on the importance of the role and responsibility given to all EU parliaments by the Treaty of Lisbon. National Parliaments could now take part in the legislative process at the EU level with all their political weight and, in doing so, significantly reduce the democratic deficit, increase citizens' participation and contribute to the 'parliamentarisation' of the EU. The Speaker also underlined that new cooperation mechanisms between national Parliaments and the European Parliament would have to be set up and that COSAC faced a challenging task in defining its own future role. The Speaker mentioned the following new areas of parliamentary oversight: the area of freedom, security, and justice, the future review of the Treaties, notification of applications for accession to the Union, monitoring and evaluation of the activities of Europol and Eurojust and control of the subsidiarity principle.

In his address, Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE, Chairperson of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* Joint Committee for the European Union, welcomed all participants and in particular those who attended the COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting for the first time.

2. Adoption of the agenda of the Chairpersons' meeting, the draft agenda of the XLIII COSAC and the Outline of the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report

Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE suggested adopting the draft agendas of the COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting and of the XLIII COSAC Meeting together with the Outline of the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report as one single package.

Mr Herman DE CROO, Co-Chairperson of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs of the Belgian Parliament, suggested attaching the article “Evolution of COSAC over the last 20 years” to the COSAC questionnaire for the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report. This was agreed.

Mr Pierre LEQUILLER, Chairperson of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale*, recommended that COSAC did not limit itself to legal matters, such as oversight of the application of the principle of subsidiarity. He therefore suggested that COSAC organize meetings between rapporteurs of national Parliaments and the European Parliament to discuss the substance of a few selected proposals. He considered this as a capital new role for COSAC. Possibly modern mean of communication, such as video-conferences, could be used. Mr LEQUILLER mentioned, as an example, the successful meeting on 26 January 2010 of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale* and the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection of the European Parliament on the proposal of a Directive on Consumer Rights. On the suggestion of Mr ARIAS CAÑETE it was agreed that a few questions relating to this should be included in the questionnaire for the Thirteenth COSAC Bi-annual Report and that Mr LEQUILLER would forward his suggestions to the Presidency in this regard.

During the debate it was put forward that while COSAC should debate its role, it should also be borne in mind that a consultation process had been launched on the IPEX website for the EU Speakers Conference in advance of its meeting 14-15 May 2010. Preparations for the XLIII COSAC should be coordinated with that Conference. During the debate other ideas were put forward, including the improvement of national accountability of EU funds, the use of COSAC for exchanging information and best practices on matters other than draft legislation, such as the involvement of citizens in EU affairs, and monitoring of the area of freedom, security and justice.

Mr ARIAS CAÑETE said that, following an agreement at the Meeting of the Presidential Troika the previous day, he would propose the following modifications to the draft agenda for the XLIII COSAC Meeting:

- 31 May 2010:
 - the Political families’ meetings would start at 8.00 instead of at 8.30
 - Mr Per WESTERBERG, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag* and currently holding the Presidency of the EU Speakers’ Conference, should be invited to address the meeting on the results of that Conference in Stockholm on 14 and 15 May 2010.
- 1 June 2010:
 - the number of guest speakers on the agenda point “The new model for relations between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon” should be extended to include two Members of national Parliaments representing the socialist and liberal political families in order to better reflect the overall political balance of the speakers.

After which the draft agendas of the COSAC Chairpersons’ Meeting and of the XLIII COSAC Meeting and the Outline of the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report were adopted.

3. COSAC Procedural questions and miscellaneous matters

Update on the subsidiarity check on the Report for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition and enforcement of decisions and authentic instruments in matters of succession and the creation of a European Certificate of Succession.

Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE reviewed the Secretariat's note on this subsidiarity check and informed that the full report would be presented to the XLIII COSAC Meeting.

Mr Herman DE CROO, Co-Chairperson of the Belgian Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs of the Belgian Parliament, suggested that it would be of interest to verify how national Parliaments reach their decisions regarding the application of the principle of subsidiarity. On the proposal of Mr ARIAS CAÑETE, it was agreed to add this question to the questionnaire for the Thirteenth Bi-annual Report.

Proposal for academic research cooperation with COSAC

Based on an agreement at the meeting of the Presidential Troika the previous day, Mr ARIAS CAÑETE proposed to suggest cooperation between those academics and the European University Institute in Florence. This proposal was adopted.

Invitation of special guests

Mr ARIAS CAÑETE informed that the Presidential Troika at its meeting the previous day had agreed that the Icelandic *Alþingi* should be invited, given that Iceland would most probably be granted candidate country status before the XLIII COSAC Meeting. On the other hand, the Presidential Troika suggested not to invite COSAP to the XLIII COSAC Meeting given that the agenda for that meeting did not include a point referring to the Balkans. These proposals were adopted.

Letters received by the Presidency

Mr Michael CONNARTY, Chairperson of the European Scrutiny Committee of the UK *House of Commons*, presented his letter, saying that his intention was to make colleagues aware of the possible interpretation of some provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon that could limit the scope of the new powers granted to national Parliaments by the Treaty. This interpretation could be changed only if most EU parliaments were to form a joint position on the matter. On the proposal of Mr ARIAS CAÑETE it was agreed to include a question on this in the COSAC questionnaire, with a view to following it up at the next meeting of COSAC.

4. The economic crisis – guest speaker: Mr Carlos OCAÑA PÉREZ DE TUDELA, Secretary of State for Finance and the Budget

The guest speaker, Mr OCAÑA PÉREZ DE TUDELA, addressed the COSAC Chairpersons by underlining the importance of the immediate tasks for the Spanish Presidency, with regard to the current economic situation in Europe and to the implementation of the Treaty of

Lisbon. The Secretary of State underlined that these circumstances create not only major challenges for the Presidency, but also opportunities. The Secretary of State highlighted the causes of the current economic crises, which he said was caused by circumstances outside Europe, but had an immediate impact on our part of the world. The Secretary of State stated that we should see some improvement in 2010. However, it would take a long time for Europe to recover, regardless of the sizeable efforts at the EU level to prevent the worsening of the crisis, both within the EU and the G20. He underlined that the recovery was still very weak; therefore the so-called exit strategies for withdrawal of fiscal stimuli must be put in place at the right time. The governments should not forget about the economic situation in the long term; both actions on short and long terms being necessary, and all Member States must be aware of the requisite structural reforms.

The Secretary of the State continued his speech by underlining the importance of achieving sizeable results in the area of employment. He stated that the EU had not achieved its goals with regard to the Lisbon Strategy and underlined the value of a new EU2020 strategy. He referred to the speech given by the Spanish President of the Government Mr José Luis RODRÍGUEZ ZAPATERO at the European Parliament on 20 January 2010, in which the President of the Government presented the Spanish position on the EU2020 strategy, including binding goals.

In the ensuing debate the importance of reinforced financial supervision, promotion of European companies' competitiveness, reform of the labour market and reinforced social protection measures were highlighted. In view of the current economic downturn, the participants called for fiscal consolidation, reduction of public debt and ensuring compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact by 2013. Fiscal austerity was a difficult task, but according to the participants, it was absolutely essential if Europe was to rise to the challenges of the day.

The debate also highlighted the importance of the new EU post-Lisbon strategy, which should be created around innovation, research and education. Also, a strong cohesion policy needed to be maintained, closing the enduring gap between Member States and striving for their real convergence. According to participants, the common goal was economic stability and economic growth.

5. Priorities of the Spanish Presidency – guest speaker: Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development

Mr Miguel Ángel MORATINOS CUYAUBÉ, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development, presented the priorities of the Spanish Presidency. He underlined that one of the main concerns during this semester would be the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon, especially regarding the new EU institutions and the role of national Parliaments. While on the institutional level, he referred to the future creation of the European External Action Service; on the legislative level he mentioned matters such as the citizens' legislative initiative and the legal personality of the EU. Even if the priority for the Spanish Presidency will be dealing with the economic crisis, he focused on the external policies of the European Union. In this matter, he distinguished three areas of interest. Firstly, concerning the enlargement of the EU, negotiations were being held, at different paces, with Croatia, Turkey and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; while in the case of Iceland, the opinion of the Commission was needed in order to start negotiations. Secondly, he referred to the issue

of neighbourhood, where the Presidency's priority lays with the Mediterranean countries. Thirdly, The Minister referred to the role of Europe as a global actor. He stressed the significantly good relationship between the EU and the United States, which was being translated into a reinforced cooperation on several key issues. A privileged relationship will also be fostered during the Spanish Presidency with Latin America and the Caribbean. He also pointed out the main areas of negotiation with other areas of interest such as Russia and Africa.

The Minister affirmed that the main characteristic of this Spanish Presidency was the fact that it raises high expectations, while at the same time it was expected to act modestly, in order to respect the role of the new President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The Minister's intervention was followed by a debate divided into two parts. The first set of questions referred to such issues as the approach of the European Union's external policy in the present pessimistic atmosphere; the Spanish Presidency's position on the issue of climate change in the aftermath of the Copenhagen Summit; the Minister's opinion on FRONTEX and the Palestinian conflict; the inclusion of European citizens in the EU policies and the project of a single energy market. In his answers to these questions, the Minister defined the relationship with the United States as very positive, and at the same time insisted on the need for a single and independent European voice on the international scene. The Minister also considered FRONTEX as a significant issue and announced that the Spanish Presidency would promote a pilot project where all Member States would support Malta regarding immigration issues, given the difficult conditions this particular country had to endure in this respect. He insisted on the crucial role that the EU could play in the Palestinian conflict, where an important solidarity effort was needed. Finally, he agreed with the views expressed on citizens' inclusion in EU affairs and pointed out the progress he expected to be achieved within the Union for the Mediterranean, despite the complications that this area entailed.

In the second set of questions, the Minister was asked about the Turkish-Cypriot conflict; the European aid policy in Africa; the proposal of body scans at airport security controls; Turkey's accession to the EU; the prospect of Moldova's accession to the EU; the criteria of absorption as a condition for any further enlargement of the EU and the conflict in the Middle East. In his answers to those questions, the Minister emphasized the relevance of the Eastern neighbourhood policy; he agreed on the need to reformulate cooperation policy in Africa, focusing on development; he also shared the opinion on the need for a balanced solution to the issue of body scans. He recommended that the absorption criteria for new accessions to the EU to be interpreted in a flexible manner and, finally, he expected the EU to continue to play a key role in the resolution of the conflict in the Middle East.