

Minutes of the Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons Paris, 6-7 July 2008

AGENDA

- 1. Opening of the meeting and the adoption of the agenda**
- 2. COSAC procedural questions and miscellaneous matters**
- 3. Debate with Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET, State Secretary for European Affairs, on the priorities of the French Presidency of the European Union**
- 4. Debate on the Barcelona Process: a Union for the Mediterranean with Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, and Mr Alain LE ROY, Ambassador, appointed by the President of the French Republic, in charge of the project “A Union for the Mediterranean”**

Proceedings of the sitting

IN THE CHAIR: Mr. Pierre LEQUILLER, Assemblée Nationale
 Mr. Hubert HAENEL, Sénat

1. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

Following the official opening of the meeting, Mr Bernard ACCOYER, the President of the French National Assembly, welcomed the participants and expressed his appreciation of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the progress made within the framework of COSAC since its establishment in 1989.

The President of the National Assembly pointed out that this meeting was taking place in the meeting room named after the great French Statesman Jean-Baptiste COLBERT, where the first meeting of COSAC took place on 16-17 November 1989.

2. COSAC procedural questions and miscellaneous matters

Following the approval of the agenda of the Chairpersons' meeting, Mr Pierre LEQUILLER presented the results of the Troika meeting concerning the following agenda items:

a) Draft agenda of the XL COSAC meeting

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER presented the draft agenda of the XL COSAC meeting to be held on 3-4 November 2008 in Paris, as proposed by the Presidency. He explained that there was still some flexibility as far as agenda item *Europe and public opinion or The European policies after 2013* (foreseen to be debated on 3 November) is concerned and that a decision on this item will be taken at a later stage in the light of further political developments.

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER also gave an explanation as to why the Troika had rejected the requests from the Cypriot House of Representatives, the Hellenic Parliament and the BENELUX Parliaments, to include certain items on the agenda of the XL COSAC meeting.

In the discussion on the draft agenda of the XL COSAC meeting which followed, many speakers called for the inclusion of an extensive debate on the Treaty of Lisbon and its ratification as a separate agenda point. This debate should not take place in the margins of the next COSAC meeting.

There was also a general call for more spontaneous debates on topical issues within COSAC, such as the consequences of Irish referendum for the Treaty of Lisbon.

Mr René VAN DER LINDEN (NL, *Eerste Kamer*) called on the COSAC Presidency to reconsider the Dutch proposal on the inclusion of a discussion on the control of EU expenditure in the agenda of the XL COSAC meeting, as a follow up of the Luxembourg COSAC meeting in 2005. He was explicitly supported by Mr Herman DE CROO (BE, *Chambre des Représentants*). Chairman LEQUILLER suggested that this topic should rather be discussed once the Treaty of Lisbon is ratified, since the Treaty contains new provisions with considerable impact on the future EU budgetary control.

Concerning the proposed agenda item *Europe and public opinion or The European policies after 2013* a number of speakers spoke in favour of either of the two proposals. Mr Jo LEINEN (European Parliament) underlined the importance of improving the communication about Europe to the citizens. He felt that communication about the European Union was too complex and too defensive, unable to highlight the advantages of the Union to the citizens. This assessment was shared by several speakers. In view of the European elections 2009 Mr. Jo LEINEN expressed his apprehension of the well-funded and well-organized anti-European movement. He called for a common effort in a comprehensive communication strategy for the next European elections.

Lord Julian GRENFELL (UK, House of Lords) called on national parliaments to consider their own communication strategy about European issues. He felt that communication problems occur at home rather than at the European level. Therefore, he proposed to discuss the ways to improve the communication policies of national parliaments on European issues vis-à-vis the public at the XL COSAC meeting.

In the light of the overall debate Chairman Hubert HAENEL concluded that a debate at the COSAC level about Europe and public opinion was indispensable. He suggested that a well-prepared debate should take place at the XL COSAC meeting drawing on the findings of the 10th Bi-annual Report. Delegations approved this proposal.

b) Outline of the 10th Bi-annual Report

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER presented the outline of the 10th Bi-annual Report. The outline as such was approved by the Chairpersons.

Concerning the Working Group on the application of Protocol 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon, established by the XXXIX COSAC, Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER announced that the European Parliament would be associated to the Working Group at its final meeting in September 2008.

c) Interim update on subsidiarity checks

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER informed the Chairpersons that following the decision of the previous Chairpersons' meeting and the Conclusions of the XXXIX COSAC a subsidiarity check on the Proposal for a *Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation*, which was adopted by the European Commission on 2 July 2008, could go ahead.

Due to the fact that the adoption of the *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and Council on the applicable law, jurisdiction, recognition of decisions and administrative measures in the area of successions and wills (2008/JLS/122)* has been postponed until the 1st quarter 2009, Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER made the following suggestion to the COSAC Chairpersons: to substitute this proposal with the *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on standards of quality and safety for the donations, procurement, testing, preservation, transport and characterisation of human organs* (to be adopted by the European Commission in the 4th quarter 2008). This suggestion was accepted by the Chairpersons.

The *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the applicable law, jurisdiction, recognition of decisions and administrative measures in the area of successions and wills* should be kept as a reserve. Mr Luděk SEFZIG (CZ, *Senát*) underlined the strong interest of the upcoming Czech COSAC Presidency in conducting a test on this proposal once it is adopted by the European Commission. The subsidiarity check could be conducted during the 1st semester 2009.

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER also explained that the proposal of Mr Matyás EÖRSI, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian National Assembly, to carry out a subsidiarity check on the *Proposal for Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the European Electronic Communication Market Authority (COM (2007) 699; 2007/0249/COD)* was not accepted by the Troika due to the fact that the eight-week period for submitting reasoned opinions by national parliaments has already elapsed.

d) Ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER presented the current state of play of ratification in the Member States. He pointed out that the French Presidency is currently looking into the different possibilities to overcome the impasse and that the October European Council is likely to present further suggestions.

Several speakers underlined that the consequences of the Irish referendum for the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon are not an isolated Irish problem but rather a problem for the entire European Union.

During the debate a number of speakers informed the Chairpersons about the situation of the Treaty's ratification in their Member State and/or national parliament (Spain, Sweden, Czech Republic, and Germany). Mr Jan BAUER (CZ, *Poslanecká Sněmovna*) expressed his satisfaction about the fact that no pressure is being exerted on Ireland and asked for the same approach towards the Czech Republic.

e) AOB

Chairman Pierre LEQUILLER also informed the Chairpersons about the decision of the Troika to decline the request of the Ukrainian Parliament to be invited as a special guest to the XL COSAC meeting, following the practice, that the parliaments other than the ones of the Member States, the European Parliament and the candidate countries are invited only if there is a relevant point on the agenda that directly concerns them.

3. Debate with Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET, State Secretary for European Affairs, on the priorities of the French presidency of the European Union

The State Secretary for European Affairs, Mr Jean-Pierre JOUYET, gave a speech on the priorities of the French Presidency of the European Union.

He drew attention to the four main points of the French Presidency of the European Union:

- the energy and climate change package, on which an agreement has to be found before the end of the French Presidency;
- migration issues: national policies have to be coordinated at the European level, and the adoption of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum is expected during the next European Council in October;
- a European security and defence strategy, which has to be defined as a complement to NATO;
- the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Several points, concerning the three current crisis that Europe faces - institutional, economic and financial, as well as international - were made by the Chairpersons in the debate following the address by the State Secretary for European Affairs.

First, the institutional issues about the way Europe has to react to the Irish "no" gave the opportunity to stress the need for increased and better communication between the European Institutions and the citizens. The challenge of restoring confidence between the two was underlined as the only means of organizing political response to euro-scepticism and euro-indifference. It was underlined that a positive attitude towards the European process in pursuing concrete and visible results could be useful.

Attention was also drawn to the economic impact of rising oil prices. The gap between rich people, enjoying the prosperity of Europe, and the poor, suffering a loss of purchasing power, is becoming more and more problematic. A reflection on new energy sources (nuclear, bio fuels, renewable energies, off-shore energy) and distribution means (investments in better interconnections) appeared a necessity. The impact of this crisis on the monetary policy of the ECB and on the tools of a better control of financial markets was also highlighted.

Migration issues, enlargement of the EU and the project of the "Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean" require the strengthening of a concerted dialogue between all partners.

4. Debate on the Barcelona Process: a Union for the Mediterranean with Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER, European Commissioner for External Relations and

European Neighbourhood Policy, and Mr Alain LE ROY, Ambassador, appointed by the President of the French Republic, in charge of the project “A Union for the Mediterranean”

Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER opened her speech by mentioning the positive evolution of the political situation in the Mediterranean region in the last months, but warned that there are problems that need to be solved which require the active participation of the EU. After presenting the main themes of the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, to be organised on 13 July 2008 in Paris, she emphasised the importance of the cultural dialogue among the countries of the region and the EU Member States. She noted the four objectives of the planned Paris Summit:

1. To enhance the political relations of the EU with the Mediterranean partners.
2. To share the responsibility of the multilateral relations. There are already three concrete proposals: to set down the Co-Presidency of the Euro-Mediterranean Union (one southern and one northern country), to create a Joint Permanent Committee placed in Brussels that will be in charge of the cooperation, and to create the Secretariat that would promote the projects.
3. To promote big regional and sub-regional projects that will make the mentioned cooperation more visible to the public. There are 6 proposed projects at the moment (e.g. on the promotion of solar energy, on better cooperation in the area of civil protection, the Euro-Mediterranean University in Piran).
4. To involve the private sector.

As far as the Barcelona process is concerned, Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER presented an overview of its developments during the last four years. The network of the association agreements and action plans in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in 2004, Euromed platform of the civil society based in Paris, or the financial support of the Anna Lindh Foundation by the Commission all formed part of this development. The importance of the Euromed projects was stressed as well as its indispensability for the progress in the strategic areas, such as transport, energy, industry, environment etc, where it established a framework of the cooperation. In conclusion Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER noted that the Commission has already invested more than 7 billion Euros in the period 2000-2007 and the European Investment Bank is investing about 2 billion Euros a year in the region.

During the general debate a number of delegations expressed concern that the “Union for the Mediterranean” project did not support the strengthening of democracy and promotion of human rights. Many speakers stressed the disappointing achievements of the Barcelona Process, including the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), and asked Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER about the reasons for such shortcomings and difficulties. Other speakers wondered about the funding sources of the projects, especially the participation of the EU funds, and also the governance and institutional organization of the Union for the Mediterranean. The Chairpersons were also interested in the details on the participation of the countries of the Mediterranean region in the upcoming Paris Summit.

Mrs Elsa PAPADEMETRIUOS (EL, *Vouli Ton Ellinon*) argued that the involvement of all 27 Member States in the “Union for the Mediterranean” was a mistake and gave preference to a regional cooperation between States bordering the Mediterranean.

Reacting to the questions and issues raised by the different speakers, Mr Alain LE ROY at first reminded the Chairpersons of the different stages of the project “Union for the Mediterranean” from the proposal presented by President Nicolas Sarkozy when he was campaigning for the Presidency of the French Republic to the agreement of the European Council of 13-14 March 2008. He pointed out that 42 countries (including the 27 Member States) out of 45, that received the invitation, have already confirmed their participation in the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean. He considered that this participation rate was a success. While informing the Chairpersons that Turkey had not replied yet, he clearly stated that the project “Union for the Mediterranean” was not a substitute for the accession process of this country to the EU.

Mr Alain LE ROY highlighted that the Barcelona Process laid the foundations for the project “Union for the Mediterranean”. In this respect, the project aimed to build up on the achievements of the Barcelona Process and was in line with its principles in terms of democracy and promotion of human rights.

Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER agreed that the Barcelona Process encountered difficulties and acknowledged the fact that the original ambition had been tempered by regional problems among which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the most prominent.

Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER and Mr LE ROY recalled the different sources of funding for the projects and activities of the “Union for the Mediterranean”: EU funds (*from some instruments of the European Neighbourhood Policy*), private sector participation, bilateral cooperation of the EU Member States, international financial institutions and regional banks, and contributions from the Mediterranean partners. Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER added that, as far as the EU funds were concerned, the existing rules for controlling their use would be applicable.

On governance and organizational issues, the two speakers confirmed that, from the EU side, the co-presidency would change when the Treaty of Lisbon comes into force, shifting from the rotating EU Presidency to the President of the European Council and the President of the Commission. They were also of the opinion that the future secretariat should be a light structure.

Finally, Mrs Benita FERRERO-WALDNER answered to Mrs Elsa PAPADEMETRIUOS' comments by stating that there was an obvious risk of undermining the EU with the creation of separate “regional unions” and the adoption of a “concentric circles” scheme within the EU. The Commissioner stressed a necessity to maintain the involvement of the EU as a whole in this project. Mr Alain LE ROY added that “variable geometry” would be a concept applied within the framework of the regional and sub-regional projects of the “Union for the Mediterranean”.