

**Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of
Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)**

**Contribution adopted by the XXXVI COSAC
Helsinki, 20-21 November 2006**

1. Cooperation with the European Commission and the Council

1.1. COSAC appreciates the early implementation of the commitment by the European Commission to transmit directly all new legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments. This information is important, since it enables national parliaments to strengthen parliamentary scrutiny and to improve the process of policy formulation.

1.2. COSAC also appreciates the European Commission's call for comments on legislative proposals and consultation papers from national parliaments and its commitment to take into account the views expressed, in particular with reference to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. The future influence of national parliaments in EU decision-making will depend on their willingness and their ability to assume their responsibilities in scrutinising the European Commission's proposals.

1.3. To ensure that national parliaments can react in a timely manner, the European Commission is asked to provide more detailed information on its proposals, in order to allow national parliaments better to programme their analyses. This information, together with supporting impact assessments, will allow national parliaments to discuss the substantive policy direction of the European Commission, as envisaged in President Barroso's initiative and endorsed by the European Council.

1.4. COSAC also welcomes the publication of the communication on the European Commission's Legislative and Work Programme for 2007 in all official languages.

1.5. COSAC calls on the Council to respect the six-week period between a new legislative proposal being available in all official languages and its introduction on the Council's agenda.

1.6. COSAC encourages the Council to continue the process of opening its meetings to the public whenever it considers and votes on draft legislation, in order to reduce the gap between citizens and the Union and to make possible more effective scrutiny of Council decisions by national parliaments. COSAC calls on the forthcoming Presidencies and the European Commission also to work actively towards improving public access to documents, since the right of access to documents should be a main principle of the work of the EU's institutions. In this regard, COSAC also emphasises the importance of the Commission's European Transparency Initiative.

2. Future of the European Union

2.1. COSAC calls on the Finnish and German Presidencies to ensure a passage from reflection to action in order to achieve a constitutional settlement. The Joint Parliamentary Meeting on 4-5 December 2006 will once again provide an excellent arena for parliamentarians from national parliaments and the European Parliament to continue discussion on the future of the European Union and to share ideas with the Council and the European Commission. COSAC calls on the German Presidency to ask for the views of national parliaments and the European Parliament and take them into account when preparing the Berlin Declaration for the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

2.2. COSAC welcomes the initiative to be promoted by the Italian Parliament on 22 and 23 March 2007 in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaties. The initiative will enable representatives of national parliaments and the European Parliament both to underline the significance of such an important date for the lives of the peoples that they represent, and to contribute to joint reflection on the best possible ways to push European integration forward.

2.3. In addition to these institutional questions, COSAC considers it essential to revive the Lisbon Process for Growth and Employment. The Annual Policy Strategy should contain concrete measures related to this goal.

2.4. COSAC supports the accession by the EU to the European Convention for Human Rights. All EU Member States have ratified the European Convention for Human Rights and support the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as proclaimed at Nice in 2000.

3. The Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

3.1. COSAC calls on the Council to reinforce its efforts to solve the problem of illegal immigration and at the same time to work towards a coherent strategy on legal immigration. Immigration policy is a vital question for the future of the European Union and it should be based on a more comprehensive policy that is coordinated with development and trade policies. Finding a common solution is essential to all Member States and to the EU as a whole. Such a solution is particularly important, especially in respect of immigration from the African continent, and it will provide a concrete follow-up to the conference held in Rabat in July 2006 which brought together representatives from countries of origin, transit countries and destination countries.

3.2. COSAC emphasises the importance of the enhancement of the area of freedom, security and justice. Citizens expect the Union to be efficient in guaranteeing their security. However, there must be a balance between security and fundamental rights, particularly in the field of data protection. Guaranteeing the free movement of citizens, their security and their access to justice requires more efficient implementation from the Member States. Stronger political commitment, and trust in each other's judicial systems is needed to fulfil the expectations of our citizens.

3.3. COSAC recalls that the Schengen *acquis* is a part of the European *acquis* which is open to all Member States that are willing to join and fulfil the criteria. While acknowledging with

regret the now inevitable delay in its completion, COSAC stresses the importance of developing SIS II according to a new and strict schedule.

3.4. As the timely abolition of the EU's internal border controls is of utmost importance to its citizens, COSAC calls for every effort to be made to enable the expansion of the Schengen area according to the original schedule confirmed by the European Council in June 2006. COSAC therefore welcomes the thorough consideration by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union of the initiative enabling the timely expansion of the Schengen area on the basis of the current SIS I+.

3.5. COSAC notes the efforts made by the Presidency and the European Commission to improve decision making in justice and home affairs, especially in third pillar matters. This question is important to the effectiveness of the EU in safeguarding the security of citizens.

4. Enlargement

4.1. COSAC welcomes the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the Union from 1st January 2007 and encourages fellow parliamentarians in both countries to work efficiently to complete their final preparations for accession. COSAC calls on the European Council to debate openly all aspects of further enlargement, including the Union's integration capacity and the positive experiences accumulated thus far. The benefits of the enlargement process should be adequately explained to the public.

5. EU and Russia

5.1. COSAC supports a comprehensive dialogue with Russia for a new PCA (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement). The EU and Russia have shared interests, and close cooperation should continue. This cooperation should not only concentrate on economic issues but also environmental, energy, health and welfare issues. COSAC stresses that future negotiations on the PCA should also include questions of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, also making full use of existing instruments of the Council of Europe. The importance of these values has been emphasized by recent unacceptable events, notably the murder of Anna Politkovskaya.

5.2. COSAC considers that the PCA should be based on an equal partnership between the EU and its Member States on the one hand and Russia on the other which is founded on common values and mutual interests. Solidarity between European Union and its Member States is a fundamental principle which should also be applied in the EU's common trade policy, particularly in trade disputes with other countries, such as the current Polish dispute with Russia.