

XXXI COSAC – 20 May 2004

Role of Regional Legislative Assemblies within COSAC.

Chairman: Welcome to the second session of the 31st COSAC. The draft contributions have been circulated and we will come to them later. The fifth item on the agenda is the discussion on proposals regarding the role of regional legislative assemblies within COSAC. In anticipation of this discussion today, and as directed by the Chairpersons in February, the COSAC secretariat surveyed the views of the participating parliaments on the question of whether representatives of regional assemblies of members states should be included in the make up of parliamentary delegations.

We have examined the results of the survey and have 20 replies from 15 different parliaments. In nine of the 20 replies, it was stated that there should be some involvement of regional legislative assemblies in COSAC, either as observers or participants in the relevant national delegation. Five supported the idea of having a number of observers appointed, while four delegations suggested that it should be left to the discretion of each national parliament to decide whether it wishes to cede one of its places to a representative from a regional legislative assembly. In ten of the 11 remaining replies, the idea was rejected. Spain responded that it was not in a position to reply.

The results of the survey so far indicate that there is clearly no consensus on the best approach to this problem. A minority of members seem to be of the view that representatives of regional assemblies should be accommodated as observers. The only conclusion the Presidency can draw from the survey on this question is that as there is clearly no consensus, it is not possible at this time to amend the rules and facilitate the attendance of regional assembly members. However, as this does not solve the problem that gave rise to the discussion in the first place, I would like to propose that the working

group of chairmen should reconvene under the Dutch Presidency to consider this matter further and to present a compromise proposal to the next COSAC if they can reach one, by which time there may be a complete set of responses to the questionnaire.

The first speaker is Mr. Jansson from Finland, followed by Mr. De Croo from Belgium.

Mr. Roger Jansson: From Finland's point of view, there is in this matter a problem to be solved that perhaps differs from member state to member state and does not exist at all in some member states. It is a problem of constitutional significance in some and of legitimacy of the European Union in others.

In Finland we have one self-government area, which has complete legislative powers within many of the Union's political sectors. In practice our constitution does not in those sectors give our Parliament, the Eduskunta, any power whatsoever over the self-government of the Aland Islands. Thus we have to involve the self-government authorities in any way possible in the processes of legislation within the Union.

One of the ways to make it possible for the regional assembly is to take part in the COSAC co-operation. Other ways also have to be used. We suggest and support, therefore, that our Parliament shall be given free choice to give, when needed, one seat in our delegation to the regional assembly to the autonomous Aland Islands.

I cannot see any reason for member states which do not have this problem or similar constitutions to obstruct a logical solution from those countries with more decentralised legislative systems. We support the Presidency's proposal of the working group.

Mr. Herman De Croo: I express my pleasure at being here. I have been in Strasbourg at another speakers' conference and I am pleased to express my gratification about what Ireland is doing.

With regard to the proposal, I share the Chairman's opinion. Let us urge that those responses which are still missing should be sent to ensure we have a clear survey of the points of view so that the working group could make a proposal in six months.

With regard to the content, of the 25 countries about one third of them have the same difficulties because regional assemblies often still have powers so there has to be a means of associating them with the process. We proposed the broadest approach. We thought that among the national delegates each country could follow its own procedures when this situation pertains and could invite a representative of the regional authorities to attend. We should not have too many rules though, because if we do there could be challenges to appointments or representatives here and there. We should be as flexible as possible.

Maximum flexibility is our position and I thank my Finnish colleague for having realised other countries are in a different situation. Some countries in Europe have a federal organisation and so it is a good idea to find a way for regional assemblies to participate in COSAC's work. That will only enhance the positive role of COSAC and I fully agree with that viewpoint.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi: I do not think that we should pass up the opportunity this morning of looking at change in regard to a position which has hitherto prevented the participation of representatives of regional legislative assemblies in our work. Such regional assemblies have a key role to play in some EU member states. In Italy, they are becoming more prominent following recent constitutional amendments giving them enhanced powers. We have come up with a proposed amendment to allow for the possibility of inviting the representatives of regional legislative assemblies as observers but, having heard my Finnish colleague, the best solution might be to leave to it to the discretion, the free choice, of each national delegation to bring in a representative of their

own regional legislative assemblies as one of the six persons on the national delegation. That would be fair recognition of the important role of such assemblies. I recognise that in certain countries, which do not have such structures, people might tend to overlook the importance of such assemblies where they exist but, on the basis of the subsidiarity principle, which has come out of the Convention, this is the appropriate line to follow.

Mr. Jerzy Czepulkowski: There are two main issues to examine in the context of including representatives of regional legislative assemblies within COSAC. First, their role will be determined by the constitutional make up of the member state in question and, second, we should note also the existence of COSAC is the result of the protocol to the Amsterdam treaty on the role of national parliaments in the Union.

There is a clear reference to national parliaments. The draft constitutional treaty prepared by the Convention includes a protocol on the role of national parliaments within the EU and does not make reference to other legislative assemblies. Chapter 2.1 on international co-operation states the European Parliament and national parliaments will jointly determine how one can effectively develop co-operation among parliaments within the Union. It can be concluded from this that if there is such a need, national parliaments and the European Parliament can jointly decide to open their doors to representatives of regional legislative assemblies as well so one could envisage some form of participation of representatives of such assemblies in debates that are concern their spheres of competence.

However, to have them represented on a permanent basis within COSAC is a more dubious question. One could envisage an obligation on member states to consult regional legislative assemblies and put forward their positions in the case of certain debates but COSAC cannot impose such an obligation on national parliaments. If we were to make it possible for representatives of regional legislative assemblies to participate in the work of

COSAC, then they should be invited by the corresponding national delegation in accordance with the rules of procedure and without the delegation being larger as a result.

Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol: I will make use of the English language as the Dutch delegation is in favour of a new language regime for COSAC meetings, a subject that will be debated shortly.

We thank the COSAC secretariat for its report of 6 May on the involvement of regional legislative assemblies, RLAs, in COSAC. What does the report tell us? After sending a reminder, 15 parliaments answered the questionnaire and 20 replies were received due to the bicameral system pertaining in some countries. Ten national parliaments did not reply. Of the 20 replies, ten gave a negative answer to the question of whether RLAs should be involved in COSAC. Five said RLAs should be involved but added that the RLAs should have observer status. Four responded positively to the suggestion that RLAs should participate in national delegations. Ten did not reply and one can well imagine that was because this is not a problem that arises in those countries.

The Dutch delegation feels that the outcome means one can conclude that support for RLA involvement in COSAC is very weak and the delegation therefore recommends against their involvement in COSAC. RLAs have their own body, the Committee of the Regions, while COSAC, as mentioned in the protocol to the Amsterdam treaty, is for national parliaments. If national delegations decide to incorporate RLAs in their delegations they can do so. COSAC has much work to do on the role of national parliaments in a European context. Let us, therefore, proceed and dedicate our time and efforts to those tasks.

Mr. Christian Philip: We are not in favour of having representation within COSAC for regional legislative assemblies. COSAC is a forum where national parliaments meet the European Parliament. If we enlarge COSAC we would change its very nature. We are not talking about stopping countries from considering their constitutional make-up, but we can find other mechanisms to meet those concerns. As was highlighted by our Dutch colleagues, we have the Committee of the Regions, which is one instrument. Many of our national parliaments are bicameral, with the second Chamber representing regional assemblies. Therefore, RLA members are present and are representing those interests on COSAC.

Co-operation and dialogue between our national parliaments are perfectly legitimate. If we turn COSAC into a mixed meeting or forum we would lose that. Also, it would not be in conformity with the protocols to the Amsterdam treaty, as a previous speaker pointed out, nor would it be in conformity with a protocol which will soon be added to the constitutional treaty. Therefore, if COSAC is to move ahead we would also have to change the treaty along the same lines, which is unlikely.

Subsidiarity is an issue within the remit of each member state. We should not mix up different issues and this matter should not delay our work too much. We have had questions answered but notwithstanding that, if we continue like this we may end up answering questions which are of secondary importance. It is important to close this debate. National parliaments can find their own solutions, taking into account their constitutions or make-up. This is not something that belongs within COSAC.

Mr. Carlos Rodrigues: We have been debating RLAs in COSAC, an issue which is very important to a country like Portugal. We have two autonomous regions which are also peripheral, the Azores and Madeira. Their autonomy is constantly being improved and

modernised. A month ago our constitution was revised in such a way as to substantially boost the legislative powers of those two regions. The only things outside their powers are issues of national sovereignty such as defence, foreign affairs, justice and internal security. As they can adopt European directives, which brings them closer to the European Union, this is a Europe of the regions also.

There are different ways to organise structures that have been successful and have produced positive results. For example, if we exacerbate regionalism we can counteract that with the examples of the Azores and Madeira, which have been able to fulfil their functions successfully. Over 20 years the regions have moved from 30% of community GDP to 80%, so the EU has been beneficial to the regions, which are capable of developing.

Given the geographical and social necessities, the regions deserve special attention from the European institutions. In that regard we should promote greater participation and keep them closer to European decision-making centres. This is necessary for greater cohesion in Europe despite its diversity. We can create positive synergies in inter-regional relations and lead to the development of competencies. This is particularly important for the peripheral regions which are smaller and further away, though they are also more flexible and have more room for development. For those reasons I conclude the participation of regions in COSAC would have benefits for both sides - it would introduce a new perspective, which would enrich our debate. We are aware that we need to find a functional solution to this problem and we consider that including an RLA delegation as COSAC observers would be the answer. We could guarantee that they participate in that way and would be completely represented.

Mr. Jozef Jerovsek: Thank you. In this room I said that Slovenia does not oppose the inclusion of RLAs in the work of COSAC in principle but this must be done on a reasonable basis, taking account of broad democratic principles. Of course local and regional interests are essentially protected by the second Chamber in Slovenia's Parliament, but there are other areas such as economic, cultural and civil society interests which are not dealt with in sufficient depth in the day-to-day work of the first Chamber of Parliament. Looking at the table of answers, we do not yet have Slovenia's answer.

Mr. Jimmy Hood: I take this opportunity to congratulate the President and his staff on the work involved in the preparation of this meeting. Yesterday's business was as good as I have experienced at a number of COSAC meetings over the years. I congratulate everyone involved. I congratulate in particular the Foreign Minister who was outstanding in reminding us what being members of the European Union means.

It is a difficult subject because we all seek to accommodate each other in the European Union, particularly COSAC. As we do not like to have too much controversy, we always seek the middle road.

I will try to respond to our Finnish colleague who said there is a problem for Finland and a number of other member states, and certainly for the United Kingdom. Prior to 1 May, there were approximately 250 regions in the European Union, and following that date, there will be approximately 400 regions. To talk about involving sub-regional assemblies in the work of COSAC would weaken what COSAC is about. COSAC is about the role of national parliaments. When my colleague from Finland talks about the problems of regional assemblies in member states, it is a problem, but it is an issue that should be resolved within the member state itself. When the UK responded to the President's question, we said we would have no objection to observers. That was our way of trying to meet people mid-way.

Having listened to some of contributions during the conference, I do not know if we should confront the issue and say there will be no solution. I cannot see the United Kingdom delegation agreeing to involve regional assemblies in the work of COSAC. We tried our best in recent years to improve the effectiveness of COSAC and make sure that the role of national parliaments is given priority. We must ensure that this organisation is all about scrutinising what governments are doing in our name within the European Union. I do not know if we can support the recommendation to go for a working party because I cannot see the UK delegation agreeing a settlement in the House of Commons.

I apologise if I appear to have been blunt towards our colleagues, but it is necessary not to take our eye off the ball, particularly at this historic moment when we have enlarged the Union to 25 member states, soon to be 27 or 28 member states. We must concentrate on our main function which is not to exclude the role of national parliaments within the European Union.

Mr. Michel Vandeborne: Mr. Chairman and colleagues, I will be brief because I agree with the argument of my colleague from Portugal. I would insist on the necessity of roles and regions with legislative competencies. I am talking about regions with legislative powers to be involved in the work of COSAC. It does not involve 400 regions, and I would like to see how many regions there are with legislative powers. The reasons for this are as follows. Many powers and rules within the European Union belong to the regions. In Belgium, there is inclusive competence on education and culture for the regions, and partial competence on economic and environmental policies. The regions are expected to implement directives into their own legislation. The European Union needs the regions in order to implement directives in their own legislation. In my view, therefore, it is necessary to involve the regional assemblies in the work of COSAC.

Dr. Werner Fasslabend: Bearing in mind that our country has a federal structure and that regional legislative assemblies would like to be involved in COSAC, we have always stated that the participation of these RLAs should be made possible. Therefore, we would like to thank you for the fact that this issue has been placed on the agenda for discussion. I am pleased we have had a very serious debate on the matter, which is a good thing. As we are democrats, we take note of the fact that a majority does not support the proposal. We see it more as a long-term issue. We would like to thank the delegations who have supported the motion.

Mr. Justinas Karosas: I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and colleagues. Today's discussion shows that the participation of regional parliaments in the work of COSAC is a real, not an imaginary problem. As we are discussing the problem and seeking solutions, we should think about the nature and role of COSAC. We heard a number of times that COSAC is a meeting of national parliaments. Therefore, we understand that MPs from national parliaments are represented in COSAC, irrespective of the structure of a country. In our opinion, if we want to preserve the nature and role of COSAC, we should involve states which have bicameral or regional assemblies. We should allow such countries to include MPs from such regional assemblies as observers among their delegations. This would be a compromise solution. I do not think we should ignore the problem.

Mr. Sotirios Hatzigakis: Participation of representatives of regional legislative assemblies in the work of our assembly could profoundly alter the nature of COSAC and its work. We must consider whether this is acceptable. We are here to demonstrate the difficulties facing national parliaments. We are here to voice the concerns of national parliaments at European level. There is the Committee of the Regions where the regional

assemblies have direct participation. It appears that we must be careful to remain in compliance with the treaties which refer to the representation here of national parliaments and the European Parliament. Of course, concerns are voiced by some countries with a more federalist structure, which may include representatives of regional legislative assemblies within their delegation. I agree that the Dutch Presidency should continue to examine this matter in order that we can take all views on board.

Chairman: The question is whether the Dutch Presidency should continue to examine this matter, or do we agree that we cannot agree? I think the most reasonable thing to do is to allow the Dutch Presidency to continue to examine the matter. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Sitting suspended at 10 a.m. and resumed at 10.25 a.m.

Language Regime in COSAC Meetings.

Chairman: The next item on the agenda is the language regime in COSAC meetings. I wish to correct replies to the questionnaire. The Estonian reply is down as "No" and should be "Yes". That will be changed in the official record. As of Friday, 14 May 2004, the COSAC secretariat had received 17 replies to the questionnaire on possible changes to the interpretation regime of COSAC. Ten parliaments have expressed their willingness to consider a reduced interpretation regime for COSAC meetings, while seven have replied that they wish to maintain the present system that provides interpretation from and into all EU languages. However, there are big differences between the views of the ten parliaments that are willing to consider amending the present interpretation regime. Five of them suggest that it should still be possible for COSAC participants to speak in their own languages, but the access to interpretation could be limited to a reduced number of

languages. The remaining five find it sufficient that interpretation is provided to and from two to five of the languages of the European Union.

The Presidency can draw only one conclusion from the survey of parliaments on this question and that is that there is no consensus. I propose that the working group of Chairmen should again address this matter and inform itself of the conclusions of the July meeting of the conference of speakers, which I understand will also address this issue. The following speakers wish to make contributions on this issue: Mr. Cunha from Portugal and Mr. Hatzigakis from Greece.

Mr. Henrique Campos Cunha: We see that there are a variety of different answers to the questionnaire. Portugal supports maintaining the regime as it stands. As we believe it is difficult to provide documents in all languages sufficiently early, we would like to maintain documents translated into English and French. However, during the meetings it is vital for all delegations to participate actively and we do not feel it is logical to limit participation to only two languages, as not everybody understands English or French. In such circumstances, we would end up with less participation in our meetings. The preamble to the COSAC rules of procedure states that the idea is to facilitate the work of our conferences. We do not think we can improve and facilitate our work if, at the outset, a number of delegations feel excluded because they do not have simultaneous interpretation. There will be problems if such services are limited to English and French.

I have mentioned a practical issue, but other issues are also at stake. We are concerned about the fact that Europe is a group of nations, each of which has its own language and culture. We must not forget that. Difficulties have been evident in most of our meetings so far because people are unable to speak their own languages. The language and culture of our people are fundamental to each of our countries. Portuguese is the third most spoken language in the world. It is spoken at meetings of Mercosur and it is the second language

of southern Africa. Portuguese is very important. It is fine if documents are sent out in just two languages - we do not object to that - but we want everyone to be able to participate in meetings. We do not want our languages to disappear over time. We feel that we must maintain the language regime that is in place at present.

Mr. Sotirios Hatzigakis: The Greek delegation believes that the maintenance of equality between languages in the European Union will help us to preserve national identities and cultures and to safeguard the history of member states. We simultaneously maintain unity and diversity through our languages. It seems that the maintenance of unity and diversity is one of the goals of the European Union. It is very important that members of national parliaments should continue to be able to speak in their mother tongues. Given that we want delegations to have a harmonious composition or membership and to be representative, it is important for us to find solutions to all the technical or organisational problems that might arise if we are to operate efficiently.

The European Parliament, which functions well and has important and efficient meetings, relies on simultaneous interpretation using 20 languages. Why should we not take our lead from the example of the European Parliament? Obstacles such as technical or cost problems relating to translation and interpretation should not prevent us from continuing the *modus operandi* we have used so far. We should continue to work as we have so far.

The principle of equality between all languages is a fundamental one. I would like to make a proposal in respect of costs. Perhaps every country could shoulder the cost of interpretation for its language.

Mr. Michel Vandeborne: I will be brief because I agree with the argument of my colleague from Portugal. I think I need to go to Portugal on holiday because we understand

each other very well. It is no coincidence that as somebody from Flanders, I am keen to use European languages during official meetings.

Dutch, which is the language of six million people in Flanders and 15 million Dutch people, was treated as a Cinderella language in Belgium for a long time. People in Flanders achieved cultural recognition and political rights, such as the right to use our language. Dutch is an official language in Belgium and in Europe. The Flemish community would not understand the suggestion to limit the use of languages in any way.

Every elected politician should be able to participate in EU meetings in his own languages if we are to guarantee the democratic nature and character of European institutions. It guarantees respect for the diversity of cultures in Europe. We experienced that with the Irish people last night. The use of interpreters and translators is a small effort when one considers the added democratic value that is created. I plead for the use of all European languages at European fora, as is common in the institutions of the European Union.

Mr. Justinas Karosas: This is a very sensitive problem for Lithuania because we lost our native tongue at certain periods in our history, along with our statehood and independence. It is an important matter in psychological and political terms. The use of language by the highest institutions of the European Union serves to preserve my nation and its identity. We have made numerous efforts to preserve our language throughout our history. If we face this problem in the EU, I would not understand it if we had to speak about the loss of a national language. It is necessary to use official languages in official forums. We will support this possibility because we would not understand the situation if we did not do so.

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma: This discussion should not be a battle between languages. We should not consider whether a certain language is more important than another. It is strange that one should depend on speaking one's language at a European platform to maintain one's identity and culture. If a country needs to speak its language to maintain its culture, it is in a poor state. A country's culture can be maintained in a number of ways. Europe is very important because of its differences and ancient cultures, which should be maintained. We are not discussing that matter, however. The Dutch delegation has not made a secret of the fact that it would like to change the language regime. We made our feelings known in February. We think that the results of the questionnaire provide good grounds for having a discussion on the matter at a later stage. If representatives of all 25 member states have an equal right to speak their own languages, we will face some serious practical and functional problems.

The interpreters are doing an excellent job today although some of them are hidden in the catacombs of this building. We cannot see them. They are somewhere downstairs as everyone cannot be accommodated in this room. Each participant is entitled to speak in his or her own language. Like my Belgian colleagues, I love my native language, which is Dutch. It should be preserved. However, while the matter should be looked at in terms of principle, considerations of effectiveness and flexibility are also important.

Given the quality of person in this room, all international politicians should speak at least two languages. I propose to the meeting that the language regime should be changed in accordance with the system in use at the Council of Europe. All delegates present have already experienced this system and, at least at the Council, agreed on it. The system is fair and impartial, which is very important given the sensitivity of this matter. Of course, it will always be possible in future to bring one's own interpreter. Those in The Hague who are afraid of getting a Dutch street need not worry as that will not be the case. It will not be

possible today to decide on this proposal. As the Chairman has already suggested, it may be wise to put it to the meeting of the Chairmen which will take place at the Hague. We are very grateful that this meeting will happen. We could try to agree in September to use the Council of Europe system at the COSAC meeting in November at the Hague. This proposal represents a way of making progress in this discussion without changing the rules of procedure, which would remain as they are.

Chairman: I take this opportunity to thank Colin Cameron of the WEU assembly who facilitated us by helping us to recruit interpreters. We did not receive the same assistance from other EU institutions. We would not have interpreters if it were not for the assistance we received. I wish the Dutch Presidency well with its translation services.

Mrs. Christina Axelsson: To speak so that other people listen is difficult enough but to speak to ensure that other people not only listen but understand what one says is an even taller order. Unlike the representative from the Netherlands, I argue that it is very important for an assembly such as ours to ensure that everyone has the right to speak and listen to their own language. We should not limit our discussions because of limited linguistic knowledge. It is important to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to express his or her point of view in his or her mother tongue. If we were to reduce the number of languages, we would limit the political representatives who could take part in COSAC meetings. Whoever comes here should have the opportunity to speak in his or her language and to have it translated to allow everyone else to listen and understand.

President McAleese said at our reception yesterday evening that together we are composing a symphony and do not want a wrong note to be struck due to linguistic

problems. That would not be appropriate. We want a symphony. Sweden wishes to maintain the language regime we are currently using for all COSAC meetings.

Mr. Pavel Svoboda: It is the recognised EU rule that agendas are always translated into all official languages and the Czech delegation is of the opinion that COSAC should abide by it. Debates and agendas should be translated into each delegate's mother tongue. While the countries which wish to give up that right may do so, the Czech Republic is prepared to participate in the funding of simultaneous interpretation into all languages. Different approaches are possible. Each country could take responsibility for its own simultaneous interpretation facilities while the COSAC host country provided the technical facilities. Another option is for COSAC to provide the technical facilities and interpreters with the cost being borne by all delegations calling for interpretation facilities. We prefer the second solution which would prove less costly for each member state.

Mr. Jasa Zlobec Lukic: Slovenia would prefer the continued use of the current regime. We would like to be able to use the official languages of the European Union. However, if the majority of member states were to decide to change the system, we would be willing to live with two or three working languages, albeit somewhat against our will. Each delegation should be able to bring along its own interpreters. A long time ago, George Orwell wrote in *Animal Farm* that all animals are equal, though some are more equal than others. The same can be said about languages. A good example is our Italian friends. If Italians do not know any foreign languages it is sad, but there are 70 million of them. If Slovenians do not know a foreign language, it is a national disaster as there are only two million of us. Representatives of small nations at COSAC and other European institutions

should master foreign languages to ensure that while the physical geography of their countries may remain the same, their influence will grow.

Chairman: We experienced some difficulty with interpretation in a number of languages just now. I apologise to Mr. Lukic.

Mr. Michael Kretschmer: As delegates can see from contributions thus far, this is a difficult topic. This is not a matter of ranking one language or culture as more valuable than another. The European Union is changing and growing and we are trying to find ways of making our work as efficient as possible. To achieve that goal, we must consider management of the Union and its bodies, including COSAC. The institutions must move on, develop and adapt. The proposal which has been submitted is a good one. It is based on the Italian compromise and has been developed by the Presidency. It would allow us to ensure that we have a good linguistic regime. What we are suggesting is that we use the kind of language system that is used by the OSCE.

Allow me to come back to the Czech proposal made earlier. Of course every country should have the possibility to bring along its own interpreters to translate into their own language. That is a good compromise and it would help us all.

Dr. Hannes Bauer: We all appreciate the highly sensitive nature of this subject, as evidenced by the debate. It demonstrates the diversity of Europe and the need to respect the cultures and languages. That is one side of the argument. On the other side, there are other factors to be taken into account. We should draw a distinction between active mastery of languages and passive understanding of languages. Each delegation must be entitled to put questions and make contributions in their own national language. It

is clear that we are representatives of national bodies. It then becomes quite apparent when we make free use of our mother tongue that this is not an international institution after all.

Then we come to the issue of costs and the whole business of the language regime. As regards documents, my German colleague mentioned that he has found an arrangement whereby it is possible to encompass language diversity but at the same time preserve efficiency and effectiveness in practical working arrangements. That ought to be our target.

However, I have sympathy for national Members of Parliament wishing to make contributions in their mother tongue. Much of what we wish to express would be lost if we were obliged to attempt to make these points in another language and people may well feel intimidated into silence because they are unable to convey their message in another language. The rule could be welcomed as an arrangement here but, on the other hand, we do not want to silence national languages in COSAC.

Mr. Denis Badré: Chairman, I compliment you on the excellent interpretation system you have arranged for this meeting. I realise we had a bit of a difficulty a moment ago but this system is very good indeed, if not perfect. I am full of admiration for the way you have organised this meeting. It is quite sophisticated. The person responsible told me that you have only got 11 booths but you are translating from 17 languages. I pay tribute to you for having organised the meeting in this way.

We are reaching the limits from a technical point of view before reaching the limits from the cost point of view. I would be grateful if it were possible to tell us how much it cost to arrange these interpretation arrangements for the meeting.

Of course COSAC needs to develop its role and do useful work on fundamental European issues. That is what mobilises our national parliaments. Moreover, we would like to continue meeting at least twice a year and we do not want the problem of costs to

become insurmountable for some host countries. Therefore, we think it is reasonable to look at what the European Parliament has done. Its arrangements are excellent but I am not sure all of our national Parliaments have the same resources available to them.

We have an open mind as to what solution could be found to this problem and this is why this discussion is both important and useful. We are not the first to ask people such questions. I suggest, as have others, that we look at how other interparliamentary assemblies operate when they bring together Members of national parliaments, who, rightly, are attached to their national identity and language.

Our Dutch colleague referred to the Council of Europe and I have personal experience with the OSCE, which was mentioned by our Austrian colleague. These experiences confirm that there are situations which make it possible for these assemblies to operate effectively and efficiently in good conditions, but also respecting differences and remaining congenial for everyone while containing costs.

Mr. Kristian Thulesen Dahl: As the group of Chairmen continues this debate, it is important to underline that this is not just a debate about the COSAC. It should be the speakers of parliament who continue the discussion.

Our starting point is that everybody should have access to their own language. It should be possible to participate in the political debate without having particular language knowledge. It is striking that all the delegations which wanted to change this arrangement believe that one should reduce the number of languages used apart from their own. That applies to the large countries. It is difficult to change the language regime.

I wish to comment on our Dutch friend's proposal for change at the September meeting. We would warn against that. We should keep the present regime until we have agreed a different solution.

Dr. István Szent-Iványi: The Hungarian delegation may be the only one without interpretation here. We have a good reason to accept your request, Chairman. You requested, for technical reasons, to renounce using our mother tongue and I presume you asked all other delegations. Our delegation is the only one who complied. It is not fair and not good.

In that sense, we would like to make a proposal. We basically agree and are in favour of the current regime, but we accept some modification. The modification should target reducing the cost. We can accept that the organiser provides only two or, at most, three interpretations, but the organiser should provide technical facilities for all delegations to use their own mother tongues and bring their own interpreters. In that sense, I want to support the Czech and German position. It is reasonable. Everyone can consider whether he or she needs an interpreter and if they so need, they can bring one. The organiser would have an easier task to provide for two or, at most, three languages. We cannot accept four, five or six. That is unacceptable for us. What is important is the principle, to which I want to keep, that everyone has the right to use their own mother tongue. Who will give the final interpretation is another question, but the principle should be maintained that everyone can use their own language.

Chairman: Hungary, Malta and the Netherlands decided they would not insist on having interpretations and Ireland did not insist on Irish being used as an official language.

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis: I want to make a few short comments. As a member of the Convention and a person who worked for the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe and other international organisations, I have to say that to speak one's own language is not a sensitive issue, it is a fundamental principle. Technical and

financial issues are quite understandable and should be discussed further and we should agree on them. We should speak about costs relating to interpretation and reach agreement on that. We are ready to discuss it but the fundamental principle of equality and solidarity should remain in place. There should not be a divergence of opinion on this matter.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi: It is a very interesting discussion. I am sure COSAC's language regime is a subject to which we will return. There are two factors we have to bring together; one is the technical and practical arrangements for looking at costs, cost containment and the cost of interpretation. We know that our citizens closely scrutinise the expenditure of our institutions. We need to have a properly co-ordinated interpretation service but there is also the political angle which calls for equal dignity to be accorded to all national languages. These factors need to be borne in mind. We are not calling into question the translation of legislation into all official languages of the EU, we are looking at the language arrangements in regard to COSAC. Currently at the meeting of Chairpersons, French, English and the language of the host is used. Others may call for interpretation if they so wish. We either do that or we follow the Council of Europe pattern. These are means of resolving the problems we have identified today and are currently discussing. Having said that, if one's own language is not one of those normally used in the working sessions, that is by no means a value judgment on that language as compared with others. All EU members and their national languages enjoy parity.

Chairman: A question was asked about costs. They are high. They would probably be in the region of €350,000 and €500,000. We do not know all the costs because the

Office of Public Works has borne many of the technical costs. It was necessary to carry out a great deal of technical work to facilitate so many languages.

The Presidency can only draw one conclusion. There is no consensus. We propose that the working group of chairmen should address this matter again and inform itself of the conclusions of the July meeting of the Conference of Speakers. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Proposed Amendments to Rules of Procedure.

Chairman: Item No. 7 is the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure. On the question of the publication of the Troika minutes, the UK Parliament has tabled an amendment to Rule 2.5, which is aimed at making the proceedings of the Troika more transparent and accessible. The amendment states:

In rule 2.5, at the end, to add "Agendas for Troika meetings shall be circulated to all the national Parliaments and to the European Parliament not less than two weeks before such meetings, and minutes of Troika meetings shall be circulated to all the national Parliaments and to the European Parliament not more than two weeks after such meetings".

I propose this be agreed, unless there are objections.

It is also proposed to amend Rule 15 to take account of the new members of COSAC. The amendment simply provides that the rules will henceforth be drafted in all 20 languages. The draft amendment was agreed at the meeting of chairpersons in February. The proposed new text reads states: "The text of these rules of procedure shall, for the authentication thereof, be drawn up in Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Slovenian, Slovak, Spanish and Swedish...".

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis: The Lithuanian delegation supports both proposals.

Mr. Herman De Croo: There is a misunderstanding. I wished to speak on the previous item on the agenda, not this one.

Chairman: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Draft Constitution Contributions.

Chairman: Item No. 8 relates to the final contributions, which have been circulated. The chairpersons met yesterday and agreed a redrafting of Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4. We did not get as far as Nos. 5 and 6. We also have a new proposal on No. 7, which has been circulated. I propose to start with No. 5 because the Presidency was asked to redraft-----

Mr. Herman De Croo: I wish to raise a point of order. Are we now debating the three page text on the draft Constitution? Are we discussing No. 5?

Chairman: No. Point 5 should read, "Scrutiny of EU business in accordance with the protocol on the role of national parliaments in the EU in the Amsterdam Treaty". Having listened to the discussion yesterday, we circulated a new point 5. There were a number of different proposals. We should consider the issues relating to this matter.

Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen: Yesterday when we discussed it we suggested a working group on point 5 which some saw as having standardised rules in all parliaments without

using the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. That was not the idea. We thought it might be a good idea to teach each other how we set things up in individual parliaments and also to make sure that the way we co-ordinate ensures that we can comply with the six week rule and the yellow cards in connection with the new constitutional treaty. We should ask the speakers to prepare COSAC for such a discussion at the next meeting. Only time will tell whether we can conclude but we should have the best possible starting point for discussing the inputs of the national parliaments. I request the Presidents to ensure that the text becomes clearer for the next COSAC meeting in order that we know how to act in common.

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis: Let us consider item 3 of point 5. I support my Danish colleagues in this regard. The introduction of further clarification is necessary and perhaps we should insert: "of COSAC with political representatives". The present wording of point 5 as a whole is acceptable to us.

Mr. Herman de Croo: Regarding the last paragraph of point 5, I was active in Strasbourg and we had at least two additional meetings of the ten signing members. Twenty-five delegations and the Chairmen were present. We had a very important exchange of opinion, which we discussed yesterday at the speakers' meeting. We considered how we could work towards co-operation and how we could inform each other of our points of view on subsidiarity. We had various points of view and these should not be forced. First, we must approve the convention and if we come up with too many new points it may delay the process.

Second, there are also people who say COSAC should have a reduced role. I do not believe this is correct. Our institution is becoming more important within the European consultation structures of the national parliaments. COSAC has a quiet room in respect of

the treaties. It is essential, therefore, that we consider our future. There could be a working group of Chairmen, but it should have a more specific programme. The English text refers to the common implication for national parliaments on early warning. I would like a broader view to be taken on this.

Early warning cannot only be a list of information. What will happen in practice? A national parliament, as part of subsidiarity, may decide to evoke the rule of subsidiarity.

Automatically, if only because the official will contact other parliaments to hear their reaction and ask what they are going to do, we will not wait until five minutes to midnight on the 59th day to find out whether another national parliament will invoke subsidiarity. Therefore, we need a practical solution. It does not have to be institutionalised. We could spell out the mission of the working group a bit more, as envisaged in point 5.5.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig: I am somewhat surprised that a proposal was produced yesterday evening which is just being presented to us now. When one is involved in a procedure designed to achieve consensus, this is not the best possible way of going about it. Parts 2 and 5 of yesterday's proposal were to be deleted. We now find they are back a new variant. I refer to Rule 10.5 and move that we take a vote during plenary session on each of these paragraphs. Will the Chairman go ahead with this?

We should not overburden COSAC. It is an instrument for national parliaments. We should not end up with a plethora of working groups and subgroups to try thrash out European policy without linking back to our national parliaments. COSAC should be restricted to the activity for which it was created and we should think long and hard about whether we wish to keep paragraphs 2 and 5.

I continue to regret that we deal with the entry and arrival of our ten new member states with a very lapidary mention while we have an extensive point 4. This point should be taken again in plenary session.

Chairman: The conclusions must be reached by this body as a whole. They say a camel is a horse designed by a committee. The Chair has to put these proposals. The meeting of Chairpersons did not conclude on them yesterday. We received four different proposals and I said we would put together a composite redraft of point 5 for consideration today, and that is all we can do. If COSAC wishes to vote on them individually, it is quite entitled to do so. That is what it is for. However, it requires three quarters of the delegates present to vote in favour. It must be at least half of all those present. This is not a simple process of reducing everybody's views to one or two paragraphs.

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma: We have serious problems with items 2 and 5 of point 5. It is not necessary to repeat the arguments made by my German colleague. For us, it is not a good idea to give the secretariat more work than is necessary. I really cannot understand why this matter is on this agenda.

We propose that subsidiarity be a significant issue at the COSAC meeting in November. However, why is it necessary to discuss it further in a working group, maybe even for one hour, as it is already possible to put in on the agenda in November and have a good discussion thereon? We have the Danish proposal, our own proposal and perhaps proposals by other countries. The European Parliament report is also available. I propose that we delete items 2 and 5 of point 5.

Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen: When we changed the rules for COSAC's work, we placed a great deal of emphasis on the need to hold Chairmen's meetings before the

COSAC meetings to ensure that things were prepared properly. As we have more and better discussions than previously, it is very important for the Chairmen to meet before the full COSAC meeting to ensure that everybody has been asked beforehand to bring their contributions from national parliaments to provide a starting point for discussions. We must ensure that agreed rules of procedure are applied.

Chairman: This is not something the Presidency invented. Yesterday at the meeting of Chairmen, we had draft contributions. Some members present suggested a number of alternative proposals. As it was impossible to get agreement on those proposals, the Presidency undertook to develop a draft which we could debate here today. That is what the Chairmen agreed and we are simply implementing it. I wish it to be very clear where that came from.

Ms Maria Eduarda Azevedo: While I am not sure I should contribute further to this lively debate, the Portuguese delegation suggests that another paragraph should be added to the Presidency's contribution. As delegates know, COSAC carried out a serious examination of a whole range of important issues relating to the Lisbon strategy. We are now at the final contributions, yet when it comes to the strategy there is total silence. The silence could be misinterpreted. It does not provide an accurate impression. If we fail to say something about the strategy, it will imply that we feel it is not important. Obviously, that is not the case on the basis of the discussion of the Lisbon strategy yesterday.

It is very important for the citizens of Europe to be made aware of the second phase of the Lisbon strategy on which we are now embarking. We have all agreed its objectives and would like to fulfil them. It is therefore important for COSAC to express its views on the strategy.

While we had an active and lively discussion of the subject, there should be a further paragraph in the contribution to explain what we discussed. This addition will ensure that we fulfil our task. We have prepared a proposed text which is quite simple and I am sure will meet with the approval of delegates. It reads to the effect that COSAC welcomes the document presented by the Presidency and reaffirms its commitment to the Lisbon strategy during the implementation of its second phase in the European Union.

Chairman: If the Portuguese delegation provides us with a copy of the proposed text, we will include it as point 8.

Mr. Michael Roth: There is some uncertainty in this room. We are not absolutely clear about the purpose of a conclusion. It is a document to be presented to the public to inform it of what COSAC has been doing. Perhaps it has not been possible for the Presidency to ensure that everything which was said yesterday is reflected in this document, even after yesterday evening's discussions with the Chairmen.

I agree with our Portuguese colleague. Reference should be made to the central topic of the Lisbon Agenda. While I am grateful the Chairman placed it on the agenda, it has unfortunately not been included in the conclusion despite the fact that national parliaments have been dealing with the matter very intensively.

I cannot understand why it has been left out. It is a key topic for the European Union, as is the debate on the draft constitutional treaty. The European Parliament and national parliaments have achieved extraordinary success in drawing up the treaty, yet in the text of the conclusion it is the subject of only one sentence. We have practically reached the end of the Intergovernmental Conference and the governments are acting rather self-interestedly. They are not necessarily referring to the opinions expressed by national

parliaments, which is a great shame and pity. I am very disappointed by what is happening there.

Parliamentary scrutiny of budgetary and auditing matters was also dealt with in great depth by COSAC, but this is referred to in a very summary fashion in the conclusion. I understand a proposal on the rules of procedure has been submitted by one of the delegations. Why is this simply glossed over? I do not understand and I am not satisfied. My hope is that at the eleventh hour we will be able to resolve all these problems.

Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen: The Chairman has made quite a good summary of the meeting of Chairmen. I agree in principle on the text. Point 5.5 refers to the proposal to establish a working group to investigate how to organise scrutiny of the early warning system on subsidiarity. The working group is necessary to prepare our debate for the plenary session to be organised later.

I agree with the Danish, Lithuanian and, in particular, Danish representatives' argument that the working group should not only investigate what we must do domestically in terms of the early warning system, but what we should do together. It is a joint process. I would like to add to the text which proposes that the group should "consider the common implications for national parliaments" the words "and for their co-operation on the early warning system etc." This clearly indicates the importance of sharing opinions on how to organise co-operation among national parliaments on the system.

Lord Grenfell: We could usefully drop the last sentence of point 2 which reads, "The secretariat should submit an outline structure of this report at the next chairpersons' meeting for approval." The secretariat has already shown in the preparation of its first report that it is

quite capable of producing a useful document. I am not sure that we need to discuss an outline of it in COSAC before the full report has been produced.

It would be better if the sentence in point 3 which reads, "Given the importance of these actions for scrutiny, to invite future Presidencies in office to place on their COSAC agendas an exchange of views on these documents with political representatives of the Commission" were to stop there. The dates of publication of these documents will not necessarily coincide closely with COSAC meetings. It would be better not to refer to the occasion of the publication of both documents. Otherwise there will be a proliferation of the number of meetings we are obliged to have.

On No. 5, I sympathise with our Danish colleagues in their intentions, but since the Dutch have indicated that during their Presidency they intend to place this for discussion in the plenary session, if the secretariat could provide a factual document to inform that debate, the matter could be dealt with in that manner and the establishment of a special working group might not be necessary.

Mr. Carl B. Hamilton: I will try to focus on point 5.5. Along the lines of the Danish and Finnish proposals, I suggest that instead of saying that COSAC "proposes" we should say that COSAC "agrees" or "decides". Otherwise the question arises of to whom we propose this. It is more clear and precise to say that COSAC "agrees".

On the second line from the end, after "for national parliaments" we should insert "for their co-operation" in order that it states: "implications for national parliaments and for their co-operation in implementing the early warning provision". That is in line with the Finnish suggestion.

Mr. Andrea Manzella: We agree with what has been put forward by our Dutch and German colleagues concerning the deletion of points 2 and 5. We suggest the deletion of point 2 because ascribing a further task to the secretariat would be tantamount to creating a superstructure which seems to us to be redundant. The impact of European legislation and the need for better and more effective legislation is already the subject of constant dialogue between the Commission, the European Parliament and national parliaments. We perceive no need for the secretariat to be further tasked with this activity. Acting as an intermediary by way of creating a superstructure is something we do not think is necessary.

As regards point 5.5, what is being sought? The point of a treaty is to constitutionalise the principle of subsidiarity. Of course each national parliament is autonomous and may denounce any breaches of the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore, what is the role of the secretariat therein? Would it be collating information? Would it be overarching above the national parliaments? For these reasons, point 5 is also redundant.

As I do not wish to take the floor again, I will make one more point. Picking up on what was said by my Portuguese colleague, Ms Azevedo, about point 8 of the Lisbon strategy, as we said yesterday, we must do away with the idea that national parliaments only act on the defensive. We would like national parliaments to enjoy powers of proposal and active participation. That may be pursued adequately if the national parliaments are able to join up with the Lisbon strategy.

Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen: I am sorry I must take the floor again. This is a rather strange discussion about point 5.5. The Dutch are saying that they wish, at the next COSAC meeting under the Dutch Presidency, to discuss how to handle the subsidiarity principle. What we are proposing under point 5 is that when the Chairpersons, under the rules of procedure, meet beforehand, it would be a good idea to prepare the COSAC meeting

on which this discussion is to be led. Should we call a meeting of Chairpersons or not? According to Rule 2.3 of the rules of procedure, the Chairpersons of European affairs committees and the representative of the European Parliament have a preparatory meeting before the COSAC meeting after they have agreed this with the Troika. This meeting should be held.

I propose that we insert under point 5 an amendment to the effect that at the next COSAC meeting during the Dutch Presidency we will discuss the question of subsidiarity and that the meeting of Chairpersons prepare the discussion. Then we can solve the problem because we will be preparing it in the right form. This way we can overcome the difficulties and misunderstandings.

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis: I support the proposal of Portugal concerning point 5.8 of the Lisbon strategy. As far as the work of the secretariat is concerned, we agree to delete this point, although its wording is quite good. As far as point 5.5 is concerned, I support my Danish colleagues. I understand that this is normal for a statute. Perhaps somebody is concerned by the name of a working group, but in principle we need preparatory meetings. Therefore point 5, as a statute, should remain in place.

Mr. Herman De Croo: Perhaps for point 5 we could say "note with interest the intention at the next COSAC meeting in the Netherlands to take up the question of subsidiarity and asks a working party to prepare for this discussion." This is very close to the suggestion of our Dutch friends, who want to discuss this. I thank them for their suggestion. In order for this discussion to be as effective as possible, it must be well prepared and it will be.

There are two elements. Our Dutch friends have offered to discuss the principle of subsidiarity at the plenary session of the next COSAC meeting. Our Finnish friends also

made a very interesting proposal, together with our Danish and Swedish friends, that we should prepare properly. There is no technical difficulty at all.

Chairman: Have you given us something in writing on that?

Mr. Herman De Croo: I could give something in writing if the Chairman wishes.

Chairman: It is difficult to keep up with all these proposals.

Mr. Herman De Croo: I will try to formulate it in English: "note with interest the Dutch proposal to discuss at the next COSAC meeting the problems of subsidiarity and ask a working group to prepare for this effectively." It is a short sentence. We can write it down.

Chairman: I have so many proposed amendments that I will need to see something in writing.

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma: Perhaps, since we are to arrange this meeting, I can say something about it. We will gladly organise a COSAC plenary meeting at which subsidiarity is high on the agenda. Of course, it would also be good to have a chairpersons' meeting. We are already intending to discuss the regional parliaments and we will also discuss the language issue. We are also willing to discuss with the Chairpersons - not a working group - the agenda for the plenary session and to organise that with them together. I do not know what the problem is and I hope people trust us to do that. I hope my Danish colleague has heard my last words.

Chairman: Not only do we trust you, we wish you well.

I have a number of proposals. I need the attention of the members for this - it is difficult because there are many proposals and paragraphs. We have various proposals before us to do with item No. 5, including the deletion of paragraphs 2 and 5 and the amendment of paragraphs 3 and 5. There is also a proposal from Mr. Larsen Jensen to replace all of this with a shorter wording:

At the COSAC meeting in the second half of 2004, COSAC will discuss the models of subsidiarity. The Chairpersons will prepare for this debate.

If we were to accept that, we could leave the rest of No. 5 aside. That is agreed by acclamation.

Item No. 6 is straightforward.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig: I assume that point 2 has gone because the whole thing has now been replaced. Is that the case?

Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig: That is fine.

Chairman: The whole of item No. 5 has been replaced by this wording.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig: What about No. 5.2?

Chairman: Perhaps Mr. Larsen-Jensen might assist us. Was it his suggestion that we should replace the whole of item No. 5 with the new wording?

Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen: No, just point 5.5.

Chairman: All right. We must now go through the paragraphs individually. We have proposals to amend No. 5.3 also. I will put the proposals individually. There does not appear to be any difficulty with No. 5.1. Is it agreed to? Agreed. It is proposed to delete No. 5.2. Is that agreed? Agreed. It has been proposed by Lord Grenfell that we change the wording of No. 5.3 in order that the second paragraph reads: "Given the importance of these actions for scrutiny it invites future Presidencies in Office to arrange to place on the COSAC agenda an exchange of views of political representatives of the Commission." Is the amendment agreed to? Agreed. There seems to be agreement on No. 5.4. Is that agreed? Agreed? Is the new wording for No. 5.5 agreed to? Agreed.

We now move on to item No. 6, the European Parliament.

Mr. Claude Estier: I hope the discussion on No. 6 will be simpler and more straightforward than that on No. 5. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to make two comments, one of substance and one of form. We all agree that the upcoming elections to the European Parliament, which are happening just after enlargement, will be of paramount importance. Therefore, it stands to reason that COSAC should appeal to European voters to go out and vote. Having said that, the text of the proposal - just four or five lines - seems weak to us. There is no good argument advanced here. If we want to encourage European citizens to go out and vote we must explain why this is important.

Therefore, we suggest something on the basis of the proposal of our German colleague, an appeal to vote for the European Parliament at these elections. We should refer to that because that document advances reasons - it tells us why we should turn out for the vote.

Instead of the four or five lines we have at present, I would like to see instead the text of the German proposal that was distributed yesterday.

If there are to be paragraphs 7 and 8, we would like the appeal concerning the European Parliament elections to come right at the end, because we would like to see it as a conclusion to all our comments and proposals. If it is situated somewhere in the middle of the text it will not have the same kind of impact. Whatever the form and whatever we might decide on the text itself, we should make sure this point is the last point mentioned in the document.

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis: Lithuania supports the view of our French colleagues. We could leave a brief point 6 in our contribution but also adopt a separate appeal as suggested by our colleagues from the Bundestag. This would be significant. It would be our appeal to European voters to take part in the election. The text should be somewhat longer. Perhaps the Chairman, as a representative of the Presidency, could consider the wording of the appeal in order that we can proclaim it among the nations of Europe.

Chairman: There is agreement on amending point 6 to include the additional wording, which is as follows:

Twenty-five years have passed since the first direct elections to the European Parliament. As the only directly elected EU body, the European Parliament contributes to strengthening democratic decision making in the enlarged European Union, which, since 1 May 2004, encompasses 25 member states and 450 million citizens. All those who call for more democracy, more transparency and greater closeness to the citizens of the European Union are urged to cast their vote in the 2004 European election.

Is that wording agreed to? Agreed. It is also agreed that it will be the last point.

Mr. Yasar Yakis: The beginning of paragraph 6 differs from the wording of the others. In all other articles we refer to COSAC simply as COSAC, while in this paragraph it is written in different words. We may wish to change the words "the XXXI Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments in the European Union" to say simply "COSAC".

Chairman: The wording as it is may mean more to the voters, and I propose to stick to this wording. Is that agreed? Agreed. That becomes the last point, not No. 6. For item No. 7, we have two people offering.

Mr. Jimmy Hood: Item No. 7 is a major issue and COSAC has not had a chance to go into the implications of it. We are very surprised to see this appended to the end of the conclusion, because I am assured it was not discussed yesterday. I am particularly worried about it because on the table during the coffee break I noticed a four page document, unattributed to anyone, which referred to strengthening provisions concerning the role of national parliaments, the draft constitutional treaty and protocols etc. I suspect that this is something on which we do not wish to embark in COSAC.

There are those who think that COSAC should be seen as a process of empire building. That has worried us for some time. I reiterate my point that COSAC should concentrate on the roles of national parliaments. That is what it is good and successful at doing, rather than building large empires to satisfy some person's political ambition, regardless of the status of the institution concerned.

Chairman: Our Belgian colleagues circulated this at the meeting of the Chairpersons yesterday and we were to introduce a point 7. Our Belgian colleague might like to explain this.

Mr. Herman De Croo: There is an important reason for this proposal. It is true that there are degrees of subsidiarity and, on a scale of one to ten, foreign policy, defence and security are considered by all parliaments as falling within the remit of national sovereignty, to be resolved by a bilateral or multilateral approach. Clearly, as the treaty is not burdened with those issues and points they are the property of the national parliaments, which decide the budgets for their defence and regulate security. The only thing we do at European level is come together for multilateral sovereign decisions.

At a certain point consultation must happen between those national sovereign competencies and the idea was to see whether it would be possible to use COSAC for such an exchange of views. Would it be sacrilege for this existing, unstructured consultation group, which is nevertheless important to consider such matters. Recalling what was said yesterday evening, there are many European committees in the national parliaments comprising Members of Parliament who often also sit on the foreign affairs or defence committees and sometimes on home affairs committees. If one took a straw poll in this room and asked which of us, in addition to sitting on a European affairs committee also sits on home or foreign affairs or defence committees in our own parliaments one might find that half would answer yes.

In response to Mr. Hood, we are not going to build a new pyramid, or change COSAC. If I have something available and in my hand I try to use it better. If I have a pen I will not use it to rewrite a constitution but will use it in a pragmatic way and it is in a spirit of

pragmatism that I make these points. I am not trying to introduce a new structure by the back door. If that was misunderstood I wish to set the record straight.

Mr. Carl B. Hamilton: If I understood correctly this issue or proposal was also raised within the Convention and was dismissed at the time so it seems to me that we can now lay it to rest and perhaps do not need to have this discussion. Perhaps it is no longer topical. It would be unfortunate to suggest that COSAC must be given certain topics and themes to address, perhaps once a year, relying on different rules. It is more appropriate for us to choose topical themes that preoccupy our Members of Parliament and discuss those. Why is CFSP or CDSP or any specific area selected in this way? After all, we are interested in general politics, some of us are members of foreign affairs committees or defence committees but not everyone is. Therefore, it does not have to be the rule. Perhaps behind all this one would find some hidden agenda or purpose. In view of this, it would not be appropriate for us to go along with it at this stage and in this way.

Finally, what do we mean by "executive bodies"? Again, to sum up, I suggest that we simply delete paragraph 7.

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma: Mr. De Croo is right in that there is a problem with the security policy of the European Union and the parliamentary control on it. The question is whether COSAC is the right organisation to solve this problem. I agree with those who say that we should delete this paragraph because we did not discuss it during the plenary session yesterday. Therefore, it would be very strange to have this new paragraph come out of the hat when we have not discussed it.

Chairman: I apologise to Mr. Kiljunen, I passed over him.

Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen: It does not matter because my point follows the same line as previous speakers. I understand the Belgian argument. It is very important to consider how we organise the interparliamentary co-operation and debates on common foreign and security policy, as well as ESDP. Practically, however, it is rather premature to put these issues on our agenda now and commit COSAC to the format that our Belgian colleagues have presented.

We should not make any proposals to the IGC at this point, as we already agreed that we should work on the basis of the proposals already made in the Convention while it is running. Let us not add anything to that. It is more important for us to recognise that security policy issues in Europe are being discussed on the interparliamentary level at the WEU parliamentary assembly and the regular meetings of the Chairmen of foreign affairs committees and defence committees. The question is how in future we can organise that part of the debate in a more co-ordinated way. In order for COSAC to take the initiative in this area, we should have a well prepared debate beforehand. We cannot state it as already accomplished fact. I will not ask the Dutch delegation to include this issue on the agenda for the meeting next autumn but, sooner or later, we should discuss whether we should co-ordinate these matters in the COSAC framework. For now the formulation is premature. I also agree that we should delete paragraph 7.

Mr. Herman De Croo: I would not like our proposal to sink. I would prefer to withdraw paragraph 7 rather than have it defeated by a vote. We can consider it again in the future when we will see what happens.

Chairman: Is everyone happy to withdraw point 7? Agreed. We have a new point 8, which will become point 7, and it is proposed by Portugal. The wording states: "COSAC

welcomes the document presented by and reaffirms its commitment to the Lisbon strategy and the second phase of the implementation of this strategic goal of the European Union".

Lord Grenfell: We need to ensure that the current paragraph 6 on European elections has the maximum impact in this document. It would be best if it came as the final item in the document, and the Lisbon Agenda becomes No. 6.

Chairman: We have agreed on that.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi: I have taken the floor to mention a point which has not yet been put to colleagues, but with which the Chairman is familiar. An amendment was submitted by our delegation yesterday. It covered part of what the Chairman said yesterday. I understand that it might not be appropriate to include in the COSAC final draft a reference to an item that might be included in the agenda for the next COSAC meeting. However, it is appropriate to emphasise that among the various items COSAC must discuss, we should also consider a discussion on cultural issues. Cultural diversity within the European Union should be discussed. This relates to languages. We share common roots and we must safeguard this situation. Each nation has its own individual identity, of which we are proud. This is something which could be safeguarded through COSAC discussions.

Mr. Sotirios Hatzigakis: I, too, would like to indicate my assent to the Portuguese proposal. We should refer to the Lisbon strategy. We must ensure that information is circulated to and within national parliaments who should carry out political scrutiny within the Union. We discussed the issue at length and we believe national parliaments have a key role to perform if we are to be successful. I would like the Lisbon strategy to be covered.

Chairman: It is agreed that will be the second last point, based on the Portuguese wording. It will be a new point and the European Parliament wording will be the second point.

On items 1 to 4, which the Chairpersons agreed yesterday, Mr. Martin has asked that the first sentence in No. 4 should be amended to include the words "and implementation". It would then read, "COSAC calls for a closer co-ordination between the Parliaments concerning scrutiny and implementation of the general budget of the European Union."

That concludes the 31st COSAC meeting. I thank members for their assistance. It has been a privilege to preside over this important meeting, particularly as it was the first meeting of the enlarged COSAC of 25 members. The continued development of COSAC will be essential if national parliaments are to play a serious role in the future of Europe's political administration. I offer my best wishes to our Dutch colleagues who will assume the Presidency of the European Union in July and who will also assume the chairmanship of COSAC. The new Presidency will be particularly important for COSAC as it will be charged with the implementation of the new arrangement for enhanced parliamentary co-operation which we have worked so hard to achieve.

I thank the special guests who contributed to this meeting over the last two days, in particular, Mr. De Vries. Finally, I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Cowen, and all the delegates for their co-operation in our first meeting as a full membership of 25.

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma: On behalf of all the delegations, we are very grateful for the perfect organisation of the 31st COSAC meeting. It has been a difficult task but, given your diplomacy and political understanding, it was a very good meeting. We received a

warm welcome in Dublin with beautiful music and lovely dinners. It will be very difficult to continue this quality of meeting in The Hague. Thank you for everything.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Austria/Autriche

Nationalrat:

Dr. Werner Fasslabend Chairman of Permanent Sub-Committee on EU Affairs

Dr. Stephan Toth Head of International Affairs Department
 Mr. Gerhard Koller Head of European Affairs Division
 Mr. Eduard Mainoni Member of Parliament
 Mr. Hermann Schultes Member of Parliament
 Dr. Hannes Bauer Member of Parliament

Belgium/Belgique

Chambre des représentants:

Mr. Herman De Croo President of the House of Representatives
 Mr. Hugo D'Hollander Adviser European Affairs (House of Representatives)

Sénat:

Mr. Jacques Germeaux Senator
 Mr. Michel Vandeborne Clerk to the Committee (Senate)
 Mr. Lionel Van der Berghe

Bulgaria/Bulgarie

National Assembly:

Mr. Kemal Adil Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration
 Mr. Aleksander Arabadjiev Member of the Committee on European Integration
 Ms Theodora Yakimova Drenska

Cyprus/Chypre

House of Representatives:

Mr. Nicos Cleanthous Chairman of the EU Committee
 Mr. Demetris Syllouris Member of the EU Committee
 Mr. Agis Agapiou Member of the EU Committee
 Ms Vasiliki Anastasiadou Director of Internal Relations
 Ms Hara Parla European Affairs Service

Czech Republic/

République Tchèque

Chamber of Deputies:

Mr. Pavel Svoboda Chairman of the Committee
 Mr. Josef Senfeld Member of the EU Committee
 Mr. Pavel Suchanek Member of the EU Committee

Mr. Ivo Vykydal	Member of the EU Committee
Ms Olga Adamcova	Chief Secretary of the Committee
Ms Lenka Pitrova	Parliamentary Institute Staff Member
Ms Jana Pilarova	Manager, Legislative Department
<i>Senate:</i>	
Mr. Jiri Skalicky	Chairman of European Integration Committee
Mr. Ludek Sefzig	Deputy Chairman of European Integration Committee
Ms Eva Palatova	Head of EU Affairs Department
Denmark/Danemark	
<i>Folketinget:</i>	
Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen	Chairman of the EA Committee
Mr. Henrik Vestergaard	Member of the EA Committee
Mr. Kristian Thulesen Dahl	Member of the EA Committee
Ms Michala Jessen	Representative of the Folketing to the EU
Mr. Peter Juul Larsen	Head of EU Department
Ms Lone Boelt Moeller	Head of Section
Estonia/Estonie	
<i>Riigikogu:</i>	
Mr. Rein Lang	Chairman of EU Affairs Committee
Ms Liina Tõnisson	Vice-Chairman of EU Affairs Committee
Mr. Tunne Kelam	Member of EU Affairs Committee
Ms Katrin Saks	Member of EU Affairs Committee
Ms Tiit Mae	Member of EU Affairs Committee
Mr. Jaanus Rahumägi	Member of EU Affairs Committee
Mr. Olev Aarma	Head of Secretariat
Finland/Finlande	
<i>Eduskunta:</i>	
Mr. Jari Vilén	Member of Parliament
Mr. Kimmo Kiljunen	Vice Chairman of the Grand Committee
Ms Heidi Hautala	Member of Parliament
Ms Outi Ojala	Member of Parliament
Mr. Roger Jansson	Member of Parliament
Mr. Timo Soini	Member of Parliament
Ms Kirsi Pimiä	Counsel to the Grand Committee
Ms Sarita Kaukaoja	Finnish Representative to the EU
France/France	
<i>Assemblée-Nationale:</i>	
Mr. Christian Philip	Vice-President EU Delegation (National Assembly)
Mr. Marc Laffineur	Deputy (National Assembly)
Mr. Jacques Floch	Deputy (National Assembly)
Mr. Jean-Pierre Bloch	Services Director (National Assembly)
Ms Marte-France Herin	Head of Secretariat (National Assembly)
Mr. Francois-Xavier Priolland	Administrator

Le Sénat:

Mr. Denis Badré	Vice-President EU delegation (Senate)
Mr. Claude Estier	Vice-President EU delegation (Senate)
Mr. Robert Del Picchia	Member of Senate
Mr. Jean Laporte	Director of EU Affairs (Senate)
Mr. Francois Sicard	Counsellor EU Affairs (Senate)

Germany/Allemagne

Bundestag:

Mr. Kurt Bodewig	Vice-President of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union of the German Bundestag
Mr. Michael Roth	Member of Parliament
Mr. Peter Altmaier	Member of Parliament
Mr. Michael Kretschmer	Member of Parliament
Ms Margot Heimbach	Head of Committee Secretariat
Ms Sylvia Hartleif	Adviser
Ms Karin Gottschalk	Secretariat staff

Bundesrat:

Mr. Wolfgang G. Gibowski	Secretary of State
Mr. Hans Kaiser	Minister
Mr. Andreas Veit	Adviser
Ms Ute Muller	Head of Committee Secretariat

Greece/Grèce

Mr. Sotirios Hatzigakis	First Vice-President of the Hellenic Parliament
Mr. Knostantinos Spiliopoulos	Member of Parliament
Mrs. Sofia Voultepsi	Member of Parliament
Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis	Member of Parliament
Mr. Antonios Skyllakos	Member of Parliament
Mr. Athanassios Levendis	Member of Parliament
Mr. Asrterios Pliakos	Adviser to the EA Committee
Ms Anastasia Frangou	Clerk to the EA Committee
Mr. Ioannis Tsangadopoulos	
Mr. Sotiris Leventis	

Hungary/Hongrie

National Assembly:

Dr. István Szent-Iványi	Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
Höröcsik, Richárd	Deputy Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
Dr. Imre Czinege	Deputy Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
Dr. András Kelemen	Deputy Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
Mr. Laszlo Juhasz	Chief Counsellor
Mr. Laszlo Sinka	Counsellor

Ireland/Irlande

The Oireachtas:

Mr. Gay Mitchell	Chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
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Mr. Sean Haughey European Affairs
Vice-Chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
European Affairs

Italy/Italie

Camera dei Deputati:

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi Chairman of the EA Committee
Mr. Francesco Petricone Adviser to the Committee
Mr. Gianfranco Neri Clerk to the Committee
Mr. Antonino Strano Vice-Chairman of the European Affairs Committee

Mr. Mauro Zani Vice-Chairman of the European Affairs Committee

Mr. Antonio Esposito Clerk to the Committee

Senato della Repubblica:

Mr. Mario Greco President of the Committee
Mr. Andrea Manzella Vice-President of the Committee
Mr. Antonio Girfatti Vice-President of the EA Committee
Mr. Luigi Giammiti Head of EU Relations Office
Mr. Luca Briasco EU Relations Office

Latvia/Lettonie

Saeima:

Mr. Guntars Krasts Chairman of the EA Committee
Mr. Ilmars Solims Senior Adviser to EA Committee
Ms Lilija Stelpe Adviser to the Committee

Lithuania/Lithuanie

Seimas:

Mr. Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs
Mr. Alfonsas Macaitis Member of Parliament
Mr. Justinas Karosas Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs

Mr. Klemensas Rimšelis Member of Parliament
Mr. Algirdas Gričius Member of Parliament
Mr. Eimundas Savickas Member of Parliament
Mr. Aurimas Andrulis Adviser
Ms Loretta Raulinaityte Senior Adviser

Luxembourg/Luxembourg

Chamber of Deputies:

Ms Toiny Thommes Gerbec Secretariat
Mr. Carl Yves Secretariat
Ms Isabelle Barra Secretary to the Committee

Malta / Malte

Chamber of Deputies:

Mr. Clyde Puli Member of Parliament
Mr. Evarist Bartolo Member of Parliament

Netherlands/Pays Bas

House of Representatives:

Mrs. Sharon Dijksma	Chairperson, Committee European Affairs
Mr. Frans Timmermanns	Member of Parliament
Mr. Jan Jacob Van Dyk	Member of Parliament
Mr. Leo Van Waasbergen	Delegation Staff
Mr. Frank Mittendorff	Delegation Staff

Senate:

Mr. René van der Linden	Chairman, Committee European Affairs (Senate)
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Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol	Member of the Senate
Ms Hester Menninga	Secretary

Poland/Pologne

The Sejm:

Mr. Jerzy Czepulkowski	Chairman of the European Affairs Committee
Mr. Arkadiusz Kasznia	Member of the European Affairs Committee
Ms Malgorzata Rohde	Member of the European Affairs Committee
Mr. Jacek Protasiewicz	Member of the European Affairs Committee
Ms Magdalena Skrzyńska	Secretary

Senate:

Ms Genowefa Grabowska	Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and European Integration
Mr. Stanislaw Puzyna	Secretary Expert

Portugal/Portugal

Assembleia da Republica:

Ms Maria Santos	Member of Parliament
Mr. Alberto Costa	Member of Parliament
Ms Maria Eduarda Azevedo	President of Delegation
Mr. António Almeida Henriques	Member of Parliament
Mr. Henrique Campos Cunha	Member of Parliament
Mr. Carlos Rodrigues	Member of Parliament
Mr. Antonio Fontes	Adviser
Mr. Fernando d'Oliveira Neves	Ambassador of Portugal in Ireland

Romania/Roumanie

Senat:

Mr. Nicolae Vlad Popa	Member of the Senate
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Chamber of Deputies:

Mr. Dobre Traian	Vice-Chairman of the European Integration Committee
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Mr. Ciprian Matei	Liaison Officer with the European Parliament
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Slovakia/Slovaquie

National Council:

Mr. Boris Zala	Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs
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Slovenia/Slovénie

National Assembly:

Ms Maria Pozsonec

Mr. Jasa Zlobec Lukic

Mr. Janez Kramberger
Food

Mrs. Radica Nusdorfer

Mr. Premoz Vehar

Mr. Jozef Jerovsek

Mr. Vincenc Otonicar

Mr. Duscan Strus

Spain/Espagne

Congress and Senat:

Mr. Jose Manual Bretal

Ms Ana Palacio

Ms Carmen Dominguez

Sweden/Suède

Riksdagen:

Mr. Tommy Waidelich

Mr. Carl B. Hamilton

Mrs. Christina Axelsson

Mrs. Karin Thorborg

Mr. Göran Lennmarker

Mr. Börje Westlund

Mrs. Margareta Hjorth

Mr. Bengt Ohlsson

Mrs. Eva Sterndal

Turkey/Turquie

Grand National Assembly:

Mr. Yasar Yakis

Mr. Aydin Dumanoglu

Mr. Algan Hacaloglu

Mr. Ercan Atak

United Kingdom / Royaume-Uni

House of Commons:

Mr. Jimmy Hood

Mr. Dorian Gerhold

Mr. Nick Walker

Ms Tracy Garraty

House of Lords:

Lord Shutt of Greetland

Deputy Chairman of the Commission for
National Communities

Member of Parliament (National Assembly)

Chairman, Committee for Agriculture, Forestry and

Permanent Representative for Slovenia to the
European Parliament

Adviser to the National Assembly of Slovenia

President of the Commission for European Affairs
(National Council)

Counsellor

Adviser to the National Council of Slovenia

Official

Chairperson of the Committee on European Affairs

Secretary

Chairman

Deputy Chairman

Member of Parliament

Member of Parliament

Member of Parliament

Member of Parliament

Deputy Secretary

Deputy Secretary

Principal Administrative Officer

Chairman of the EU Harmonisation Committee

Co-Chairman

Member of the EU Harmonisation Committee

Adviser on EU Affairs

Chairman of the European Union Scrutiny Committee

Clerk to the EU Committee

Head of the National Parliament Office, Brussels

Delegation Secretary

Member of the European Union Committee

Lord Marlesford Lord Grenfell Mr. Simon Burton	Member of the European Union Committee Chairman of the European Union Committee Clerk to the EU Committee
European Commission Mr. Philippe Godts	Commission Européenne Official
European Parliament Mr. David Martin Mr. Giorgio Napolitano	Parlement Européen Vice-President of European Parliament Chairman of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs
Mr. Elmar Brok Mr. Íñigo Méndez de Vigo Ms Diemut Theato Mr. Proinsias De Rossa Mr. Thomas Grunert Mr. Sten Ramstedt Ms Gwendolyn Rutten Ms Tina Svendstrup Mr. Dionyz Hocheľ Ms Patrizia De Sena Ms Beatrice Scarascia Mugnozza Ms Maria Odilia Henriques Ms Elizabeth Sweeney	Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee Member of Committee of Constitutional Affairs Chairman of Budgetary Control Committee Vice-President of Commission of Petitions Head of Division Administrator Administrator Administrator Administrator Secretary Group Co-ordinator Group Co-ordinator Delegation Staff
Council of European Union Ms Natalie Creste	Principal Administrator - Council General Secretariat
Special Guests Mr. Gijs De Vries	European Union Anti-Terrorism Co-ordinator
Ukraine Mr. Boris Tarasyuk	Chairman of the Committee on European Integration
H.E. Yevhen Perelygin Mr. Sergiy Dvornik	Ambassador of Ukraine to Ireland Delegation Staff
Croatia Mr. Neven Mimica	Chairman of the European Integration Committee of the Croatian Parliament (Head of the Delegation)
Mrs. Lucija Ćikeš Mr. Stjepan Vukas Integration	Member of the European Integration Committee Policy Adviser to the Committee on European Integration
Former Yugoslav/Republic of Macedonia Ms Karolina Ristova	Chairperson to the Committee on European Affairs
Mr. Tome Trombev Mr. Slobodan Casule	Member of Parliament Member of Parliament

Ms Lence Gligorovska
Ms Milans Spiridonovski

Adviser
Macedonian Embassy

WEU
Mr. Colin Cameron (UK)
Michael Hilger (Germany)
Corine Caballero-
Bourdod (France)

Secretary-General of the Assembly
Head of Press and External Relations
Assistant Secretary to the Political Section