

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC

Berlin, Germany, 13 July 2020

(held through videoconference)

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

CHAIR: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs, German *Bundestag*; Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*.

Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*; Mr Luis CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*; Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President, European Parliament.

(Mr Antonio TAJANI, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, was unable to attend.)

AGENDA

- 1. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**
- 2. Convocation of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC via videoconference and approval of the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons on 14 September 2020**
- 3. Approval of the Draft Outline of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC**
- 4. Letters received by the Presidency**
- 5. Any other business**

PROCEEDINGS

1. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs, German *Bundestag*, welcomed the delegations of the Presidential Troika of COSAC (hereinafter referred to as "the Troika") and referred to the agenda of the meeting of the Troika, which was adopted without amendment.

2. Convocation of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC via videoconference and approval of the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons on 14 September 2020

Mr KRICHBAUM referred to the challenges ahead, including the pandemic and the resulting economic shrinkage experienced by Member States. Assistance and support had to be provided to countries in need.

Another issue was Brexit, and Mr KRICHBAUM assured colleagues that the German Presidency was in touch with Mr Michel BARNIER, Head of the Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom, and the latter was ready to keep national Parliaments updated.

Finally, Mr KRICHBAUM referred to the Conference on the Future of Europe (the Conference), and stressed that as Treaty changes could not be excluded, national Parliaments needed to be involved at the same level as the European Parliament.

He invited colleagues to get in touch with any feedback they had, and encouraged cooperation as there was a major interest in strengthening confidence in the European Union.

Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*, agreed with Mr KRICHBAUM and hoped that efforts through virtual communication would prove successful and would still lead to productive outcomes. He stressed that the Presidency aimed at maintaining the date of 14 September for the meeting of the Chairpersons, as finding another date would be virtually impossible. He thanked Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President, European Parliament, for her confirmation of participation, despite the fact that the European Parliament is expected to hold its first sitting in Strasbourg in the week of 14 September after the break due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He further explained that the way to hold this meeting would be by starting with the usual procedural issues, and following that up with two sessions.

The first session would see the Federal Foreign Minister, Mr Heiko MAAS, reporting on the priorities of the German Presidency, which include relations with the UK. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic would then be dealt with during the second session, addressing both the impact and the lessons learned from the pandemic. Both debates would be opened by the First Vice-President of the European Parliament.

Mr KRICHBAUM thanked Mr WOLF for his explanation of the running order to be adopted at the Chairperson's meeting and opened the floor for any comments.

Ms McGUINNESS wished the German Presidency every success in dealing with crucial and difficult challenges and thanked the Croatian Presidency for its work in unprecedented circumstances.

Ms McGUINNESS referred to the European Commission's recovery plan, and expressed her hope for a positive outcome and a compromise if necessary. She agreed that there was a need to look at both the economic and social impact of the pandemic and she outlined the need for the cohesion of Europe, both with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. She welcomed the Presidency agenda with regard to the former, and agreed that having a good look at the way the Member States tackled the issue was important.

As for Brexit, she stressed that regardless of the outcome of the negotiations on the future relationship, significant change for all sectors and industries was on the way, and this demanded a discussion on the societal consequences of the UK's withdrawal.

It was important not to weaken the Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF) in order to ensure the recovery plan proposed by the European Commission. The latter should not come at the expense of the former or be seen as a trade-off.

Mr Luis CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, congratulated the German Presidency for its programme. He also referred to the challenging times being faced, but reminded colleagues that these could lead to opportunities, which the Union needed to take advantage of. He thanked Mr WOLF for the proposed programme of the meeting, and expressed his agreement with it.

With regard to Brexit, Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS stated that Portugal had very good relations with the UK, and he informed colleagues that Mr BARNIER would be in a videoconference hearing with the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*.

He urged colleagues to be pragmatic in finding a good solution for all and reach consensus with regard to the French-German proposals.

Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVI , Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, wished the German Presidency success and welcomed the proposed agenda. A clear vision and leadership was needed during this time.

Mr KRICHBAUM acknowledged the concerns raised by Ms McGUINNESS, especially given the link between the MFF and the recovery plan. He pointed out the need to react quickly.

Mr KRICHBAUM also referred to health infrastructure around Europe and addressed the pooling of resources in this respect, in particular with respect to cross-border use, for example looking into the role of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

Mr WOLF was confident that with the support of other national Parliaments and Member States, Germany would succeed in the Council.

The draft programme of the Meeting of the Chairpersons was thus approved with no amendments.

3. Approval of the Draft Outline of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Mr WOLF presented the outline of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which would be split in two parts: the Conference on the Future of Europe and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire would be circulated on 24 July 2020. Mr WOLF expressed his expectation that national Parliaments would be granted equal opportunity in shaping the Conference with regard to the number of delegates to the Conference as well as their participation in the steering committee.

Mr MILOŠEVI said that the experience gained thus far could prove useful when preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Ms McGUINNESS noted the desire of national Parliaments to have an active role in the Conference, and referred to the Council position stating that the steering group would be composed of representatives of each institution “as well as the current and incoming COSAC rotating presidencies” and suggested to look more into that. She supported Mr KRICHBAUM’s points regarding health infrastructure in the European Union. Finally, Ms McGUINNESS noted how the pandemic affected all occupations and aspects of life, including politicians and democracy itself.

Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS welcomed the outline of the Bi-annual Report and stressed that the Conference was more important than ever. He noted that there were signals showing difficult times ahead with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, and stressed that it was therefore important to adapt work and life to the situation.

Mr KRICHBAUM thanked colleagues for their input. With regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, he stressed that national Parliaments wanted to be seen as equal to the European Parliament. Especially possible Treaty changes needed to be communicated by national Parliamentarians in their respective constituencies.

The outline of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC was thus approved.

4. Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received by the Presidency:

- Letters requesting invitation to attend the COSAC meetings were received from Ms Sigríður Ásthildur ANDERSEN, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Icelandic *Althingi*; Mr Eric NUSSBAUMER, President of the Swiss EFTA-EU delegation, Swiss

Assemblée fédérale; Mr Tone Wilhelmsen TRØEN, President of the Norwegian *Stortinget*. Mr KRICHBAUM said invitations would be sent to all three Parliaments if colleagues had no objection.

Mr KRICHBAUM suggested that COSAC should adhere to the Rules of Procedure and the interpretation of the provisions agreed to in 2005 by inviting candidate countries and, in the case of non-EU Member States, only those delegations affected by the discussion and subjects of the meeting. In view of the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, countries of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) which had requested an invitation, should be invited this time, as well as the United Kingdom given that it had made a contribution until the end of this year. Mr KRICHBAUM said he deemed these measures necessary in order to ensure a lively debate and in view of limited speaking time, and invited colleagues to discuss the matter.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ agreed with Mr KRICHBAUM, especially given the need for deeper discussions on the pandemic. He enquired whether Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Northern Macedonia would be invited.

Mr KRICHBAUM replied that in accordance with paragraph 3.2 of the Rules of Procedure candidate countries would be invited as observers, but that an invitation did not involve a right to take the floor automatically.

He added that, during these challenging times, organizing Parliaments/Chamber had also to respect social distancing and ensure proper spacing was maintained between delegations, which further strengthened the need to be restrictive in inviting delegations from third countries.

Ms McGUINNESS noted that she did not recall a time when the countries that wanted to participate were not invited but understood the point raised by Mr KRICHBAUM. With regard to the UK, she asked whether an allowance should be made, or whether a different mechanism could be established to deal with their issue, given the interest expressed by the *House of Lords* to maintain good working relations with COSAC. Nevertheless, she reiterated that she saw the logic behind Mr KRICHBAUM's reasoning and appreciated the political realities it alluded to. She stressed that any decision taken should be held consistently throughout successive meetings.

Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS agreed with Mr KRICHBAUM's position.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ reiterated his support to Albania and Northern Macedonia, and Mr KRICHBAUM agreed that these candidate countries should be invited.

5. Any other business

Mr WOLF gave the floor to Mr MILOŠEVIĆ who updated colleagues on the results of the recent parliamentary election held in Croatia.

Ms McGUINNESS supported any initiative to have more informal COSAC contact or, rather, more ways to establish contact between Members.

Mr KRICHBAUM thanked once again the Croatian Presidency for its work during challenging times, and looked forward to work with colleagues during the German Presidency.

Mr WOLF concluded the meeting by thanking colleagues and stressing that the German Presidency was open to feedback from and collaboration with the Troika. He hoped that there would be the possibility to meet in person for the plenary COSAC.