



35th

Bi-annual Report

**Developments in
European Union
Procedures and Practices
Relevant to
Parliamentary Scrutiny**

Prepared by the COSAC Secretariat and presented to:

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for Union Affairs of Parliaments
of the European Union**

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Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union

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BACKGROUND

This is the Thirty-fifth Bi-annual Report from the COSAC Secretariat.

COSAC Bi-annual Reports

The XXX COSAC decided that the COSAC Secretariat should produce factual Bi-annual Reports, to be published ahead of each ordinary meeting of the Conference. The purpose of the Reports is to give an overview of the developments in procedures and practices in the European Union that are relevant to parliamentary scrutiny.

All the Bi-annual Reports are available on the IPEX website by navigating to the respective meeting.

The four chapters of this Bi-annual Report are based on information provided by the national Parliaments of the European Union Member States and the European Parliament. The deadline for submitting replies to the questionnaire for the 35th Bi-annual Report was 9 March 2021.

The outline of this Report was adopted by the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, held on 11 January 2021 in Lisbon, via videoconference.

As a general rule, the Report does not refer to all Parliaments or Chambers that have responded to a given question. Instead, illustrative examples are used.

Note that, in some cases, respondents are able to provide more than one answer to multiple choice questions. Any perceived disparity in the total number of answers to a question and the total number of respondents can thus be accounted.

Complete replies, received from 38 out of 39 national Parliaments/Chambers of 27 Member States and the European Parliament, can be found in the Annex on the COSAC website. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* informed the Secretariat that it would not be able to submit a reply to the questionnaire due to the timing of elections.

Note on Numbers

Of the 27 Member States of the European Union, 15 have a unicameral Parliament and 12 have a bicameral Parliament. Due to this combination of unicameral and bicameral systems, there are 39 national parliamentary Chambers in the 27 Member States of the European Union.

Although they have bicameral systems, the national Parliaments of Austria, Ireland and Spain each submit a single set of replies to the questionnaire, therefore the maximum number of respondents per question is 37, including the European Parliament. There were 36 responses to the questionnaire.

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1: ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

The first chapter of the 35th Bi-annual Report of COSAC seeks to analyse the measures taken by national Parliaments/Chambers to scrutinize and monitor the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers did not participate in or contribute to the consultation launched by the European Commission on the future actions needed for the Pillar's implementation.

According to the report, most Parliaments/Chambers regarded "Education, training and lifelong learning" as the main area of the Action Plan to Implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, followed by "Active support to employment" and "Social protection".

The vast majority of respondents had not adopted any report or resolution on the European Semester that addressed priority areas for reforms and investment to be included in their recovery and resilience plans.

Asked which areas should be the main ones covered by the Agenda relating to the Social Summit to be held in May 2021, most Parliaments/Chambers identified the two areas relating to the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union as well as The Future of Work – Remote Work, Challenges, Risks and Opportunities, followed by Strengthening the Youth Guarantee and Promoting the Rights and Well-being of Children: The Child Guarantee Recommendation.

CHAPTER 2: EU-AFRICA STRATEGY

The second chapter of the 35th Bi-annual Report of COSAC sheds light on the EU-Africa Strategy.

From a select number of strategies and agreements, the Joint Africa EU Strategy was the one most discussed by Parliaments/Chambers.

The report showed a notable convergence when it came to ranking the five key global trends to develop between the EU and Africa (Partnership for the Green Transition and Energy Access; Partnership for Digital Transformation; Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Jobs; Partnership for Peace, Security and Governance; Partnership on Migration and Mobility), with most Parliaments/Chambers deeming each one to be either very important or important. On the other hand, different ideas were floated when it came to deciding which other formal or informal formats could be further developed to discuss the partnership and deepen the EU and Africa relationship.

CHAPTER 3: NEXT GENERATION EU: SCRUTINY OF NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLANS - IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The third chapter of the 35th Bi-annual Report of COSAC analyses the involvement of the national Parliaments in the scrutiny of the recovery and resilience plans.

The majority of the Parliaments/Chambers had scrutinized the three documents related to this topic, namely the proposals on the Next Generation EU; the proposal relating to the Recovery and Resilience Facility; and the amendment to the Own Resources. Although most of the Parliaments/Chambers had not been involved in the drafting of the national plans, in most of these

cases the draft plan had been discussed at some point at different parliamentary levels. The green transition and the digital transformation were identified by the majority of the respondents as the main priority areas in the national plans. Most Parliaments/Chambers also highlighted that they would be monitoring the implementation of these national plans through the parliamentary committees.

CHAPTER 4: CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

The fourth chapter of the 35th Bi-annual Report of COSAC seeks to follow up on the issues relating to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE).

The large majority of Parliaments/Chambers reported that they had not recently adopted any opinion on the Conference on the Future of Europe, nor had they drafted or adopted any plans of activities to give shape to the debates at the national level. Moreover, the majority of respondents reported having no previous experience of engagement with civil society through remote participation.

When Parliaments/Chambers were asked to place four different activities in the order of their preference, debates with civil society were considered the first priority by most respondents, followed by consultation of citizens and civil society; plenary high-level discussions between institutions; and pro-active reach out to stakeholders asking for contribution on specific policy fields, in that order.

When asked to choose amongst eight given policy fields to be addressed by the Conference, the European green deal was chosen by more than half of respondents.

As for the institutional issues deemed relevant to be addressed by CoFE, protocols on the role of national Parliaments and on Subsidiarity/Proportionality and other Treaty Provisions on national Parliaments proved to be the most relevant, followed by qualified majority voting in new policy areas, electoral systems for the European Parliament (e.g. transnational lists), and provisions on the designation of the President of the European Commission.

Less than half of respondents were in favour of organizing thematic working groups around specific policy/institutional issues during the CoFE.

The majority of respondents foresaw the possibly of the CoFE being extended to 2023.

A large majority of Parliaments/Chambers identified the role of COSAC in CoFE as an opportunity to debate on the work of the CoFE as it unfolds, and to adopt common positions where appropriate.

CHAPTER 1

ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE 35th BI-ANNUAL REPORT seeks to analyse the measures taken by national Parliaments/Chambers to scrutinize and monitor the European Pillar of Social Rights.

1 When asked whether their respective Parliament/Chamber had contributed or taken part in the consultation launched by the European Commission on the future action needed for the Pillar's implementation (A Strong Social Europe for Just Transitions (COM (2020)14 final)), 30 out of 35 respondents answered in the negative. Five Parliaments/Chambers replied positively.

2 Invited to elaborate on the main findings/conclusions, the Lithuanian *Seimas* said that it welcomed the Commission's objective to make quality jobs available to Europeans, ensure all social guarantees and maintain high health and safety standards, stressing the need to adjust the European economy and industry in view of climate change. The Lithuanian *Seimas* considered the European Pillar of Social Rights and its integration in the European Semester to be instrumental in maintaining, adapting and improving measures that had already been introduced, while also implementing the necessary significant changes.

The Romanian *Senat* considered the establishment of the Child Guarantee as necessary and welcome, and called for the promotion of the Strategy on Gender Equality to be followed by concrete measures and for the draft strategic framework on Roma inclusion to be truly undertaken by the Council and translated into action plans. The Romanian *Senat* further considered the system of reinsurance for unemployment benefits to be appropriate in a single market and considered the European minimum wage as an essential means of reducing income inequalities and constrained labour mobility while also increasing confidence in the European project. The Romanian *Senat* recommended that - in the context of the single market - part of the costs of implementing these measures should be borne by the European Union.

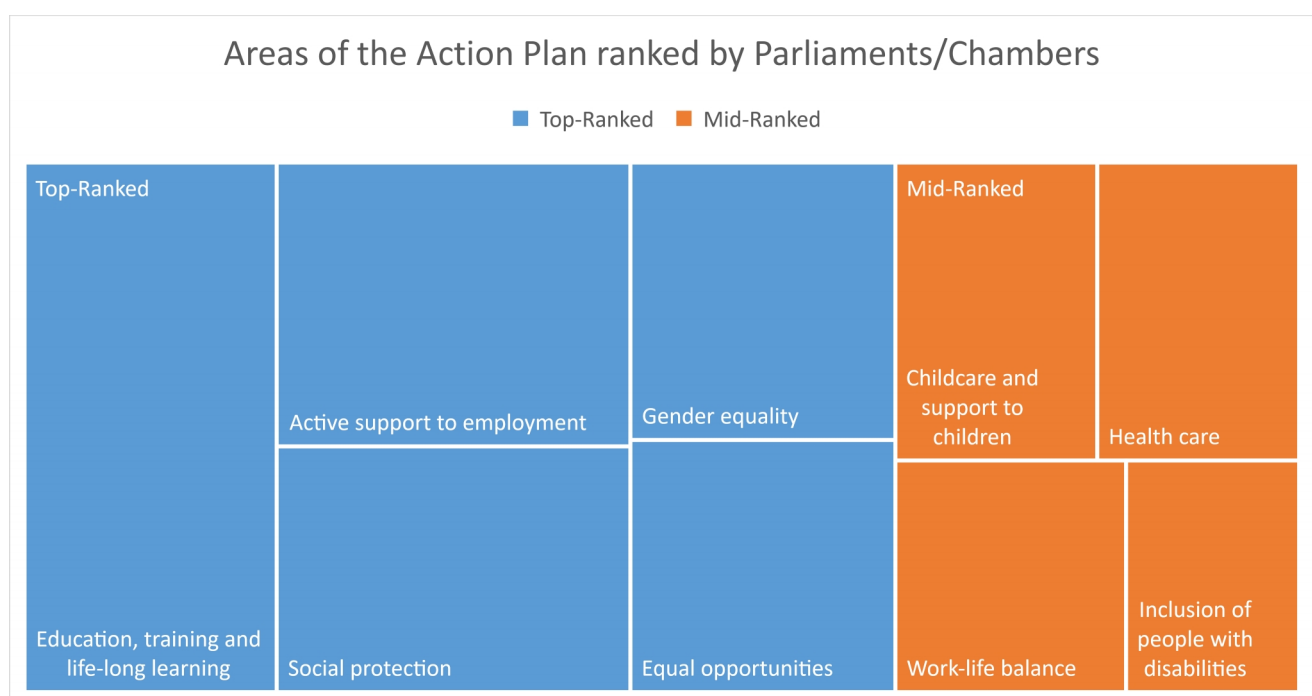
In its relevant resolution of 17 December 2020, the European Parliament affirmed that social sustainability was a prerequisite for fair and inclusive green, digital and demographic transitions. The European Parliament called on the European Commission and Member States to work towards: legally enforceable social rights; concrete social objectives by 2030; affordable housing; eliminating energy poverty; strengthening youth guarantee; 90% collective bargaining coverage by 2030; revising the public procurement and temporary work agency Directives; a post-2020 European Disability Strategy; and a European framework for national homeless strategies.

The Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* specified that its Foreign and European Affairs Committee agreed with the Government position, which supported the principles of fairness, equality and social justice. The Polish *Senat's* EU Committee had also decided to support the Communication after acknowledging views from the Government as well as having taken into account replies provided by the related Ministry.

The Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* had adopted a resolution stating that the Committee on European Affairs took note of the Communication and of the Government position on the document.

The Swedish *Riksdag* and the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* did not participate in the consultation on the Communication. However, the Committee on the Labour Market of the Swedish *Riksdag* had held deliberations with the Government on the Communication. The Committee had also commented on the Commission’s work programmes for 2020 and 2021, focusing on the Commission’s plans to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Joint Committee on Children, Disability, Equality and Integration of the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* had built the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights into its Work Programme and had begun engaging with stakeholders on how best to meet these rights, while the Joint Committee on Education and Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science was keenly focused on the key areas of Education and Training, Research, Innovation and Science at European level with a particular interest in the new Horizon Programme.

3 Asked which should be the main areas of the Action Plan to Implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, “Education, training and life-long learning” was regarded as relevant by most Parliaments/Chambers (20 out of 28), followed by “Active support to employment” (15 respondents) and “Social protection” (13 respondents). “Gender equality” was perceived relevant by 11 Parliaments/Chambers, while 10 regarded “Equal opportunities” as a main area of the Action Plan to implement. Nine Parliaments/Chambers regarded “Childcare and support to children” and “Health care” as important. Eight Parliaments/Chambers indicated that “Work-life balance” was important to them, whereas six Parliaments/Chambers considered “Inclusion of people with disabilities” as relevant. “Wages”, “Unemployment benefits” and “Old age income and pensions” were regarded as main areas by five Parliaments/Chambers. Four Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that “Minimum income” and “Social dialogue and involvement of workers” were important. “Health, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection” was ranked as a main area by three Parliaments/Chambers. Two Parliaments/Chambers indicated that “Long-term care” was important to them, and another two identified “Secure and adaptable employment”, whereas “Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals”, “Housing and assistance for the homeless” and “Access to essential services” was considered a main area by one Parliament/Chamber in each case.



4 When asked whether their respective Parliament/Chamber had adopted any report or resolution on the European Semester that addressed priority areas for reforms and investment to be included in their recovery and resilience plans, 32 out of 35 respondents answered in the negative. Three Parliaments/Chambers replied positively.

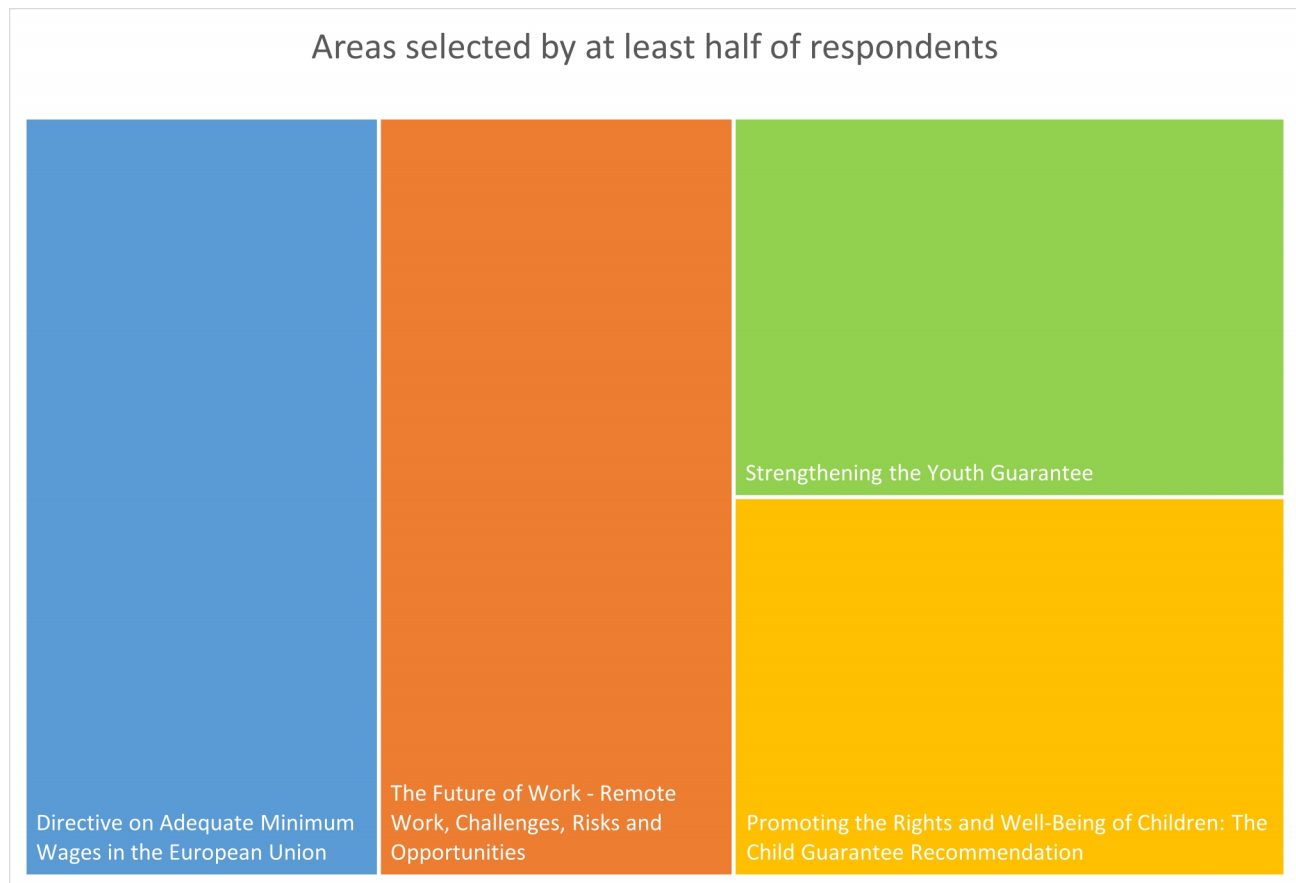
5 Invited to elaborate, the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the Italian *Camera dei deputati* specified that they had adopted a resolution on the national guidelines for the redaction of the National Recovery and Resilience, indicating necessary reforms and investments in the areas of employment and social rights, in particular gender inequality in the labour market, the specific situation of youth employment as well as territorial differences in terms of income, employment and education. In this resolution, the *Senato della Repubblica* suggested an ex-ante gender impact assessment on all measures of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, and recommended that social inclusion be fostered in the context of such health and social policies which favoured home care plans and investments in family and work-life balance.

The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* indicated that, while it had not yet adopted any specific report or resolution on the European Semester, several measures were already in place: The “job initiative” included measures for professional reorientation or further education for unemployed people, with a focus on youth unemployment and people with disabilities. Financial support to people participating in the “job initiative” was granted via “the education initiative”, whereas the “restart bonus” was targeted at people who began a new job at a lower salary than what they used to receive prior to their unemployment. Finally, the “COVID-19 investment premium” supported companies who invested in the digital and green transformation, as well as in health and life sciences, and/or which had had to adopt short-time work.

The European Parliament stated that the adoption of two resolutions on the European Semester was foreseen for 10 March 2021: One on the Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021, based on a report by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), and one on Employment and Social Aspects in the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021, based on a report by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL). To this end, the European Parliament further referred to its legislative resolution of 4 April 2019 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) as well as to its resolution of 10 February 2021 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility.

6 Out of the fifteen areas covered by the Agenda, the two areas relating to “Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union” as well as “The Future of Work – Remote Work, Challenges, Risks and Opportunities” were regarded as relevant by most Parliaments/Chambers (18 out of 28), followed by “Strengthening the youth guarantee” and “Promoting the rights and well-being of children: The Child Guarantee Recommendation” (14 respondents each). “Decent working conditions and rights in the digital economy, and on minimum standards and conditions for fair telework” and “Protecting older people: Mainstreaming ageing in public policies” were perceived as relevant by 10 Parliaments/Chambers. Nine Parliaments/Chambers deemed “Health and Safety at Work: Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive EU Strategic Framework on Occupational Health and Safety” relevant, followed by the area “Empowering people with disabilities to exercise their rights and participation: A New European Disability Strategy”, which was regarded as relevant by eight Parliaments/Chambers. Seven Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that the two respective

areas “Policy Debate on New Challenges for social dialogue and collective bargaining” and “Tackling the gender pay gap: pay transparency measures” were relevant. Five Parliaments/Chambers regarded “Promoting gender equality: Council Conclusions on the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality” and “Fostering Roma people’s inclusion: Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation” as important. Two Parliaments/Chambers indicated that “Fostering the inclusion of homeless people: Launch of the European Platform on Homelessness” was important to them, whereas both “Addressing the glass ceiling: gender balance on company boards” and “Promoting LGBTIQ equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025” were each deemed relevant by one Parliament/Chamber.



7 Nine Parliaments/Chambers offered additional views on the first chapter of the Bi-annual Report. The German *Bundestag* emphasized that all mentioned areas in questions 3 and 6 of the first chapter were equally relevant. The selection merely reflected results from legislative initiatives in the Committee on Labour and Social Affairs (the responsible Committee for the areas in question) as well as the priorities set during the German EU Council Presidency.

The Finnish *Eduskunta* explained that it was unable to reply to questions 1-4 of the first chapter, because even though its Grand Committee had had debates on the dossiers in question, no formal statement had been issued yet. Since the topic was addressed in a recent EU policy dossier by the government, it was likely that the topic was going to be debated further in the *Eduskunta*.

The Lithuanian *Seimas* stated that, having considered the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021 on 20 January 2021, its Committee on European Affairs had decided to propose that the government should engage in the European Commission consultations regarding measures contributing to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The focus of its work was to reduce the

number of people who were at the risk of poverty or socially excluded, as well as the number of children under official care, and minimize income inequality and social and regional exclusion in the long term.

The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* specified that it was engaged in written consultation with the government on the areas of “Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union”, “Strengthening the youth guarantee”, “Promoting LGBTIQ equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025” and “Fostering Roma people’s inclusion: Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation”. The *Eerste Kamer* added that it had not pointed out any areas that should be covered by this Agenda relating to the Political Declaration to be adopted in the Social Summit to be held in May.

The Danish *Folketing*, the Spanish *Cortes Generales* and the Swedish *Riksdag* explained that certain questions were left unanswered because no position had been adopted on the matter in a committee, nor had any decision been taken in the respective Parliament.

CHAPTER 2

EU-AFRICA STRATEGY

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF THE 35th BI-ANNUAL REPORT seeks to assess the EU-Africa Strategy in relation to work done and way forward.

1 Parliaments/Chambers were asked to indicate which strategies and agreements they had discussed from a select number. The Joint Africa EU Strategy proved to be the most discussed among the five strategies/agreements provided, with 16 respondents reporting that they had addressed it. Eleven respondents said they had discussed the Cotonou Agreement, eight had discussed the Regional Strategy to the Sahel, while the Regional Strategy to the Horn of Africa had been discussed by seven responding Parliaments/Chambers. Three had discussed the Regional Strategy to the Gulf of Guinea. Three of the above mentioned Parliaments/Chambers had discussed all of the above strategies and agreements. A substantial number of respondents (15 out of 36) had not discussed any of the strategies and agreements listed.

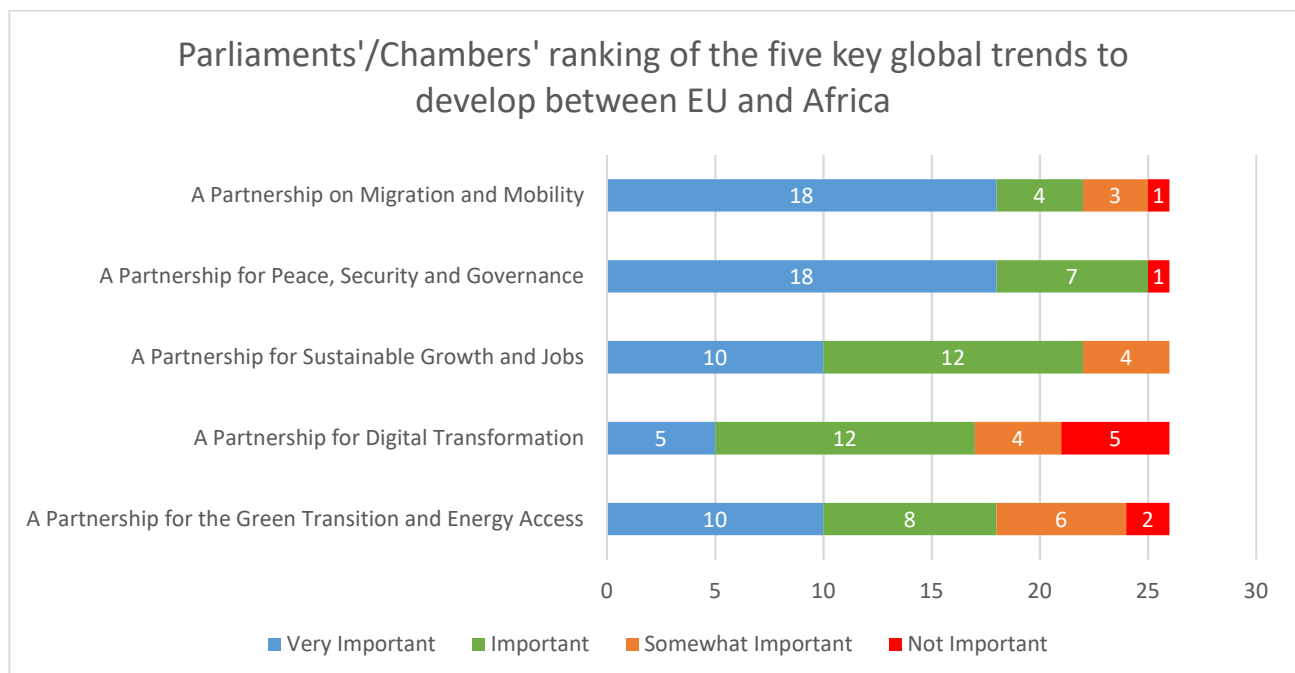
2 Asked whether their Parliament/Chamber had adopted any positions, opinions or resolutions on the above, the vast majority (29 out of 36 respondents) replied negatively, with less than a quarter replying positively. Nevertheless, the results produced varied considerably.

3 The Estonian *Riigikogu* noted that, whereas no specific resolutions had been issued, government positions had been approved by the Foreign Affairs Committee for the Foreign Affairs Council. Similarly, the Finnish *Eduskunta* reported that it had been presented with government memoranda on the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint Africa EU Strategy, with the former being agreed to by the Grand Committee following assessment by the Foreign Affairs Committee, and the latter debated albeit with no formal settlement. The Swedish *Riksdag* noted that it had issued a statement on the Cotonou Agreement, showing that its Committee on Foreign Affairs looked upon the establishment of a broader political partnership between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries favourably, with the Committee suggesting that such a partnership be based on the implementation of the global sustainable development goals set out in the Agenda 2030, and that respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance continue to form the basis after 2020. The *Riksdag* further noted that the Committee on Foreign Affairs was monitoring work relating to the EU's relations with the ACP countries after the Cotonou Agreement, as well as the Africa-EU Strategy, through information from the Government. The Committee also followed-up on the regional strategies on an ongoing basis. The Romanian *Camera Deputaților* noted its support for a comprehensive strategy with Africa which would consider the latter as an equal partner, underlining that further efforts were needed in the development of EU-Africa collaboration in the field of disaster resilience and education. It also favoured the extension of cooperation in important fields, such as renewable energy, the creative industries or the protection of the environment and natural resources. The Latvian *Saeima* also supported the EU's comprehensive approach in strengthening good governance and capacity in Africa by making effective use of the instruments at the EU's disposal. It also underlined the need for such cooperation to be based on equal cooperation involving active participation of African countries, and, like the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, stressed the importance of including business-oriented economic development, while also adding the need to address climate change and tackle the root causes of migration.

Several Parliaments/Chambers had also issued resolutions. The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* referred to a resolution adopted in 2013 whereby the government was called on to argue that the foreseen revision of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2015 would give the ACP countries and economic regions more time to work towards a level playing field with the rest of the world economy. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* recalled its Parliamentary Resolutions 58/2007 and 123/2012 which approved the 2000 Cotonou Agreement and its amendment in 2005; parliamentary debates in 2001, 2007, 2008 on the EU-Africa Strategy addressing the deepening of EU-Africa cooperation relations, as well as the Parliamentary Resolution 141/2017 which adopted, as priority, the European initiatives regarding "the new impetus for the EU-Africa partnership".

The European Parliament recalled the European Parliament Resolution of 16 September 2020 on 'EU-African security cooperation in the Sahel region, West Africa and the Horn of Africa', and stressed the need for a strong nexus between security, development, and humanitarian intervention in these regions. It also pointed out the report issued by its Committee on Development (DEVE) on 'A new EU-Africa Strategy - a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development' (the Committee on International Trade (INTA), and the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) were associated committees), which was adopted on 27 January 2021 and was scheduled for plenary vote by the end of March 2021. Amongst other recommendations, the report emphasised the importance of placing human development at the core of the Strategy.

4 When it came to ranking the five key global trends to develop between the EU and Africa, there was a notable convergence. Most Parliaments/Chambers thought the Partnership for Green Transition and Energy Access; the Partnership for Peace, Security and Governance; and the Partnership on Migration and Mobility as very important, and the Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Jobs as important (with almost as many considering it very important). The Partnership for Digital Transformation was mostly deemed important.



5 Parliaments/Chambers offered different views as to which other formal or informal formats could be further developed to discuss the partnership and deepen the EU and Africa relationship.

The Maltese *Kamra tad-deputati* suggested an informal meeting between the Commission and the COSAC Chairs, while the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* called for regular meetings or sessions that could be held under the umbrella of COSAC. The Belgian *Sénat*, on the other hand, suggested that a high-level conference be held between the EU and the African Union, while the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and the French *Sénat* pointed to international parliamentary fora such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

The Polish *Senat* recalled the current restrictions in place due to the pandemic, and stressed that any current formats should take the form of a videoconference. Otherwise, it suggested round table discussions as an example of a more formal format, addressing particular topics, such as the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration; objectives to ensure political stability and effective governance, sustainable and inclusive growth, as well as a peaceful and secure environment in Africa; and an assessment of investment in areas with a positive impact on socio-economic development, including transportation, communication, water, and energy infrastructure, agriculture, and small-to-medium enterprises. On the informal level, and following the lifting of restrictions, it proposed the launching of an initiative of staff exchanges between the African and EU Parliaments/Chambers, a suggestion echoed by the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*.

The German Bundesrat also suggested virtual exchanges and visits by parliamentarians to African states, as well as consulting assistance.

The French *Assemblée nationale* called for the strengthening of the role of the Parliamentary Assembly established in the Cotonou Agreement in a future EU-ACP deal.

While the German *Bundestag* also welcomed the involvement of existing conferences like COSAC and the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it also suggested possible cooperation through the delegations responsible for the relationship with African countries in each respective parliament. Other possibilities to discuss joint challenges could also be provided by the new High-level Conference on Migration and Asylum as well as the Parliamentary Assemblies foreseen in the Post-Cotonou Agreement.

The Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* suggested that, since the topic had been discussed during the CFSP/CSDP Conference and a relevant conference was on the agenda of the Portuguese Presidency in June, it should be included in the agenda of the forthcoming Plenary of COSAC.

The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* also suggested inter-parliamentary meetings dedicated to the subject and involving relevant sectoral committees.

The Polish *Sejm* suggested that while intergovernmental dialogue should continue to play a key role, it was important to involve think-tanks and the academic community, as well as local governments and authorities, through exchange of views. The Romanian *Camera Deputaților* specifically mentioned seminars and the use of online platforms to go along with discussions within the parliamentary friendship groups and inter-parliamentary working groups.

The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* suggested expert discussions, business fora and dialogue with African regional organisations and civil society, while the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* was less specific, suggesting any formats which included the African Union.

The European Parliament referred to events already planned by its committees, which included exchange of views and missions to the Sahel region.

The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* suggested to replicate the Conference on the role of Parliaments in deepening the EU-Africa relations yearly and promote both bilateral parliamentary cooperation as well as inter-parliamentary dialogue, while also holding visits and meetings with committees in African Parliaments and having multilateral friendship group with the African Union.

The Latvian *Saeima* did not see the need for the introduction of any new formats, suggesting instead to make full use of already existing formats. The Lithuanian *Seimas* also considered the use of the existing formats to be the best way to discuss the partnership between the EU and Africa. At the same time, the latter also appreciated the attention afforded to EU cooperation with Africa and the African Union by the parliamentary dimension of the Portuguese Presidency, namely by organising the Conference on the role of Parliaments in deepening the EU-Africa relations and including the African topic on the agenda of other meetings, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for CFSP/CSDP.

The Estonian *Riigikogu* also welcomed the initiative of the Portuguese Presidency to discuss and deepen the EU and African relationship.

6 Provided with the opportunity to comment on the chapter, a number of Parliaments/Chambers shared their views.

The Italian *Senato della Repubblica* stated that the EU should focus on investments in Africa, to boost growth and jobs in the Continent, with a view to enhance economic partnership with Europe and at the same time reduce economic migrations to the continent.

The Czech *Senát* had addressed the EU-Africa relations as part of an ex-ante scrutiny of the European Council. It supported the European Council's determination to focus the negotiations with African countries on the issues of position of women, education, social, environmental and economic sustainability, as well as the quality of governance. It also supported the decision to approach COVID-19 vaccines as a global public good. The *Senát* had also called on the government to actively participate in the task of reducing the African debt and to contribute to the deepening of cooperation with African countries for the purpose of reforming multilateral mechanisms such as World Trade Organization (WTO) or World Health Organization (WHO).

The Swedish *Riksdag* noted that it had left some questions unanswered as no position had been adopted in the relevant committee, and no decision had been taken in the Chamber. Nevertheless, it noted that during 2020 the government had held written consultations with the Committee on EU Affairs regarding the Council decision on transitional measures for Cotonou, the Council conclusions on Africa, and the negotiations on a final document for the Ministerial meeting between the African Union and the European Union, as well as on the relations between the EU and Africa ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 September 2020.

Whereas the Lithuanian *Seimas* had not discussed Africa-related matters separately, its Committee on Foreign Affairs had considered and mandated positions of the Republic of Lithuania to be presented at the meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council, after which it was presented with a report, thus following-up on EU-African Union relations and other matters related to Africa.

The German *Bundestag* clarified that the situations in all the regions in Africa had been subject to parliamentary scrutiny and noted that a prioritisation with regard to question 4 could not be made.

The Finnish *Eduskunta* noted that issues regarding the EU-Africa Strategy were likely to be debated given a recent EU policy dossier provided by the government.

The Danish *Folketing* pointed out that the Joint EU-Africa strategy had been discussed in the Foreign Affairs Committee during a meeting with the EU ambassador to the African Union.

The European Parliament explained how a number of its committees were directly involved with African related dossiers. Its DEVE committee, which was responsible for the Cotonou Agreement with the ACP States, had prepared three resolutions on the Post-Cotonou negotiations adopted by the European Parliament in October 2016, June 2018 and November 2019, respectively. The Joint EU-Africa Strategy was one of the political priorities of the DEVE Committee for the first half of the legislature, and had also been discussed by the INTA Committee. The relations between the EU and Africa also remained high on the agenda of its AFET Committee. The latter had also exchanged views with the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the situation in the Sahel region with a focus on Mali, a subject also discussed by the DEVE Committee. The European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), on the other hand, monitored the human rights situations in the countries of the African Union, as well as human rights issues that were relevant to the EU-Africa Strategy. The Regional Strategy to the Horn of Africa was discussed by the INTA Committee, whereas the Regional Security in the Horn of Africa and the role of the CSDP had been jointly discussed by the AFET Committee and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE).

With regard to the partnerships treated under question 4, the European Parliament had not expressed a clear position on their ranking, adding that all were important for the future EU-Africa relations.

The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* pointed out it had not taken a position on questions 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 3

NEXT GENERATION EU: SCRUTINY OF NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLANS- IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

THE THIRD CHAPTER OF THE 35th BI-ANNUAL REPORT aims at scrutinizing the national recovery and resilience plans in place and the role of national Parliaments.

1 With respect to the proposals presented, namely the Communication on the Next Generation EU, the Regulation establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Amended proposal for a Council Decision on the system of Own Resources of the European Union (COM (2020) 445 final), 26 out of 28 responding Parliaments/Chambers have scrutinized and adopted positions on the Own Resources proposal. Twenty-one Parliaments/Chambers have scrutinized the Recovery and Resilience Facility proposal and 20 have scrutinized the Next Generation EU proposal. All in all, 17 Parliaments/Chambers have scrutinized the three documents.

2 A number of the responding Parliaments/Chambers welcomed the European Commission proposals and, following discussions, considered them in compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*). Some of the Parliaments/Chambers had no formal position on the matter, while in others no resolutions were adopted, or the matter had not been examined, or the discussion was still an ongoing process (Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Czech *Poslanecká snemovna*, Irish *House of Oireachtas*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*).

On the main findings, the Czech *Senát* emphasized the urgency of adopting measures for stabilization and recovery, and supported a swift adoption of the Multiannual Financial Framework, the Recovery instrument and the system of Own Resources. The Danish *Folketing* and the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* stressed that the plans should effectively address the challenges identified in the European Semester and contribute to the four dimensions outlined in the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* had conducted a debate on the Next Generation EU and adopted a Resolution recommending the government to promote an interinstitutional debate and hold broad public consultation on its implementation.

On the Own Resources, the French *Assemblée Nationale* regretted that rebates had been kept and supported the introduction of ambitious own resources. The Lithuanian *Seimas* maintained that the completion of the sectoral negotiations on the CEF Regulation and the transposing of the European Council conclusions of July 2020 to the Regulation, which were of relevance to the Baltic States, would encourage the smooth ratification of the Decision on Own Resources. The Slovenian *Državni svet* stressed that the temporary increase in the own resources should be conservative in order to ensure confidence in the financial market. A reasoned opinion on the Own Resources proposal was submitted by the Swedish *Riksdag*, arguing that the proposal conflicted with the principle of subsidiarity because it could not be considered that the borrowing would primarily be used to deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and that there was no clear justification as to why

this type of borrowing would better be dealt with at Union rather than at national level. Support should be based on existing instruments and forms of financing and not on new own resources.

In addition, on the financing system, some Parliaments/Chambers noted their preference for maintaining the current system for financing the EU budget and future payments of the debt. The Estonian *Riigikogu* suggested that tax matters continue to be decided unanimously in the EU. The Finnish *Eduskunta* stressed the need to continue the discussion on the solutions for improving European debt sustainability. The Lithuanian *Seimas* highlighted the importance of having resources available on time for the implementation of the Next Generation EU.

The Estonian *Riigikogu*, the Finnish *Eduskunta*, the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* and the Swedish *Riksdag* supported the idea of temporary, well-targeted and exceptional measures. Along with the Estonian *Riigikogu*, the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* focused on the importance of digital and green investment. The Latvian *Saeima*, stressed the importance of ensuring that the new policy objectives did not undermine the cohesion and agriculture policy objectives or the related attributed financial resources to reach them. Echoing the Lithuanian *Seimas*, the Latvian *Saeima* further argued that the final version of the amended proposal on the system of own resources should respect the conclusions reached at the summit of the European Council held in July 2020.

Concerns on the reduced allocation of the new MFF to cohesion and the creation of new instruments mainly oriented towards competitiveness, in stark contrast to the previous MFF, were voiced by the Romanian *Senat*, arguing that this posed the risk of widening the development gap between Member States. The Romanian *Senat* also called for clarification on the funding resources of the financial legislative package and for cohesion and CAP allocations to be maintained in the long term to limit economic disparities. It further noted that the mere creation of favorable conditions for loans was no guarantee that such loans would actually be made use of, given that this relied on actual demand for the goods and services that any given firm would offer.

Different positions were presented on the rule of law. The importance of solidarity and respect for fundamental rights and rule of law was emphasized by the German *Bundesrat*. Similarly, the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* adopted a resolution on the rule of law mechanism in the coming MFF highlighting that it should at least include the protection of independent judiciary and democracy, fair elections and free press, a decision-making procedure that offers sufficient guarantee for actual use of the mechanism and ensuring the application of the inactivity clause. On the other hand, the Hungarian *Országgyűlés* adopted a resolution according to which Member States in comparable positions must be afforded comparable treatment. The resolution also considered it unacceptable to tie the EU grants to political and ideological conditions under the guise of the rule of law.

3 On the presentation of the draft plans by the respective governments, out of 33 respondents, five Parliaments/Chambers reported that the plan was presented by the government before the adoption of its draft, while another five Parliaments/Chambers reported that the draft plan was presented after the submission to the EU institutions. Four Parliaments/Chambers said it was presented after its adoption by the government but before the submission to the EU institutions.

Some Parliaments/Chambers reported that the draft plan would be presented at a later stage, along with the National Reform Programme (Austrian *Nationalrat and Bundesrat*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and Swedish *Riksdag*).

Nine Parliaments/Chambers stated that the draft plan had not yet been presented or that it was still being drafted (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, French *Assemblée nationale*, French *Sénat*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Polish *Sejm*, Slovakian *Národná rada*). Nevertheless, a couple of respondents predicted that the draft plan would be presented after the adoption by the government, but before the submission to the EU institutions (Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, French *Assemblée nationale*, French *Sénat*).

Both the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* and the Irish *House of the Oireachtas* explained that there was an ongoing public consultation but, in both cases, the presentation of the draft plan after the consultation phase would occur before the submission to the European institutions.

The Belgian *Sénat* stated they were not the competent authority on this matter. The Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon* stated that, due to the organization of the political system and the separation of powers, they were not involved in the preparation of the draft plan, while the Estonian *Riigikogu* stated that the plan was approved by the Government. However, in the latter two cases, the draft plans were presented at the committees' level and this was also the case of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, where it was discussed in the meetings of the Committee on European Affairs.

The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* had received general information on the draft plan. In the case of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, the document on which the draft plan was based (Strategic Vision for the Economic Recovery Plan for Portugal 2020-2030) was presented and discussed by the government at the plenary session and in the Committee on Economics, Innovation, Public Works and Housing, with the respective ministers.

4 The involvement of the Parliaments/Chambers in the drafting of the plans was sparse, with 31 out of 34 Parliaments/Chambers stating that they had not been involved. Three Parliaments/Chambers had been involved in the drafting of the Plan.

5 The Italian *Camera dei deputati* and the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* both approved a resolution on the draft guidelines of the plan in October 2020. The Government then presented the draft of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which took into account the referred resolution, and which is now undergoing Parliamentary scrutiny in both Chambers. As for the case of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, the government had disclosed the document in February for public discussion, so autonomous regions, municipalities, social partners and civil society could actively participate in the consultation and presentation of contributions.

6 Even though the Plan had not been submitted at any stage, 16 out of 28 responding Parliaments/Chambers reported that they had scrutinized the document. Furthermore, the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* and the French *Sénat* stated that they had conducted a political scrutiny during a debate held either at plenary level or at a committee meeting.

7 The vast majority of Parliaments/Chambers (27 out of 33 respondents) had not adopted any resolution/opinion on the Plan. Only six Parliaments/Chambers had adopted a resolution/opinion.

8 The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* and the Italian *Camera dei deputati* noted the need for the involvement of their respective Parliaments in the process. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* and the Slovenian *Državni zbor* referred to the discussions that took place in their Parliament/Chamber on the topic.

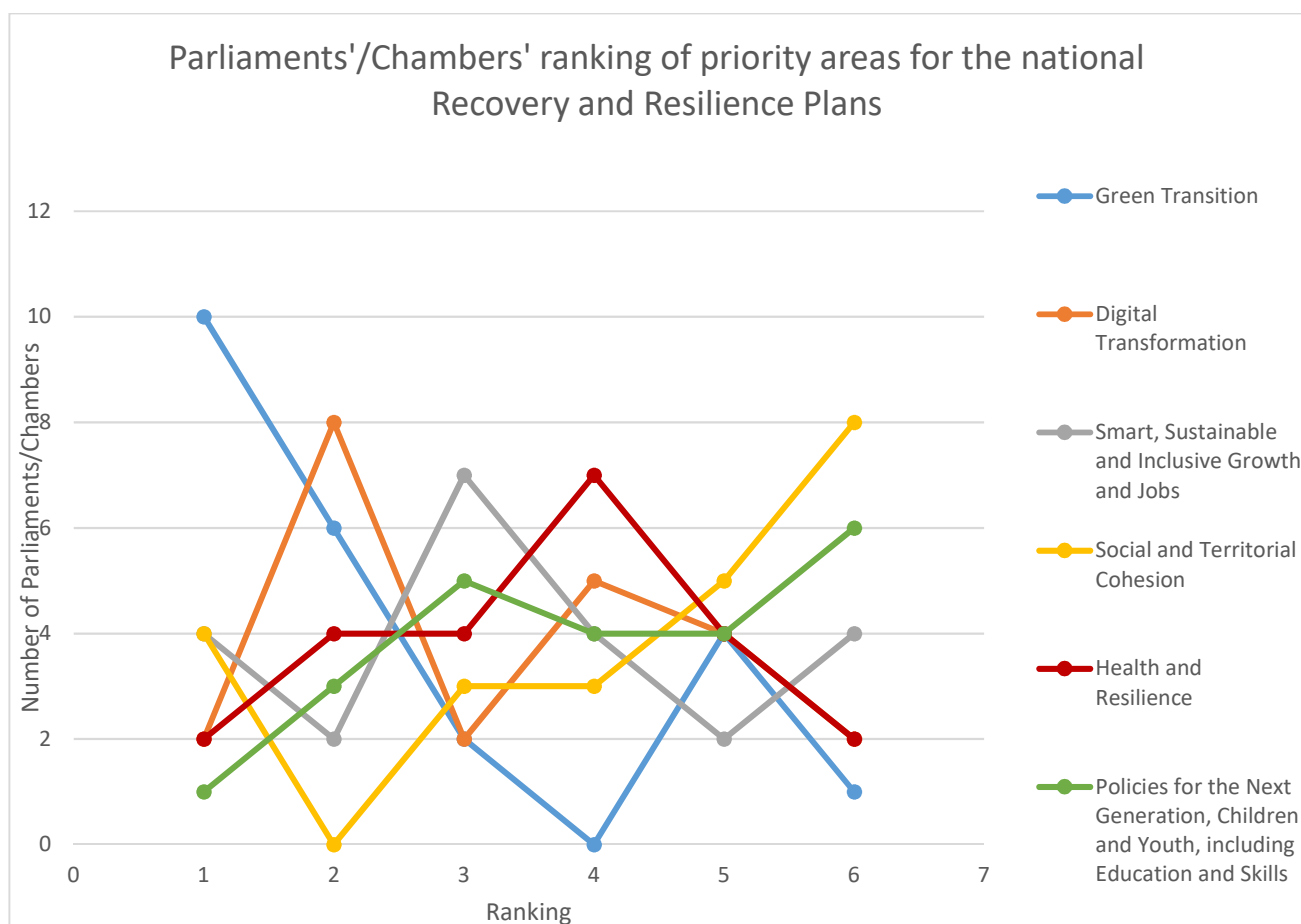
A Resolution was adopted by the Belgian *Chambre des représentants* calling on the government to ensure that the European Parliament was involved to the maximum extent possible. The resolution also stressed that the application of objective parameters for the distribution of resources on the procedure for releasing funds was necessary, leaving it up to experts to grant concrete aid to specific projects or public authorities in accordance with the criteria in force.

The Finnish *Eduskunta* noted that its Finance Committee had stressed the importance of leverage and cost-effectiveness in choosing targets for investment and reform.

The German *Bundesrat* highlighted the importance of strengthening the incentives to work, sustainable financing of social security and securing the debt sustainability, along with the requirement that the RRF funds not only refinance existing projects and programs but also generate additional innovative impetus. It welcomed the fact that the plan reflected the combat to climate change and digital transformation.

The Italian *Senato della Repubblica* focused on the six priority areas and stressed the need to address others - such as gender gap and territorial cohesion - and to foresee reforms in public administration, justice and fiscal system.

9 When it came to ranking the priorities for the national Recovery and Resilience Plans, the green transition and the digital transformation were the ones identified as first and second priority by most of the 23 responding Parliaments/Chambers. Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs and health and resilience were the next two areas to be prioritized, according to the responding Parliaments/Chambers. While for some Parliaments/Chambers the social and territorial cohesion should be the number one priority, the majority placed it as fifth or sixth priority, along with the area of policies for the next generation, children and youth, including education and skills. For the European Parliament, the recovery and resilience plans should comprise reforms and investment projects that represent a balanced response to the economic and social situation of each Member State, contributing to all the six pillars appropriately.



10 In order to monitor the implementation of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans, the majority of Parliaments/Chambers (26 out of 31 respondents) responded that a scrutiny exercise would be carried out through the existing standing committees. No Parliament/Chamber reported that they would be setting up an ad-hoc Parliamentary Committee specifically for this purpose, or that they would be setting up a technical unit with access to statistical data on the implementation. No Parliament/Chamber would be implementing/introducing changes in the Rules of Procedure to accommodate the new framework of the European Semester, either.

11 For the majority of Parliaments/Chambers (23 out of 27 respondents), this scrutiny would be carried out by the Committees on EU Affairs and/or Budget and Finance, without prejudice to the participation of other committees in the process to monitor topics related to health, economy, labour, social security, energy, environment, public administration or regional planning.

An ad-hoc committee for monitoring the implementation of the response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic and the process of economic and social recovery was set up in the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*.

For the European Parliament, the joint Committee of the Committee on Budgets and of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs was the competent committee for this matter, and although the practicalities of the European Parliament's scrutiny of RRF were yet to be elaborated, the committee could invite the Commission for a dialogue on the subject every two months.

Since the process of development of the Plans was still in the beginning or on going, some Parliaments were not able to deliver answers to all of the questions raised in this chapter.

12 With regard to question 9, the Finnish *Eduskunta* presented their six focal points, without ranking them, although these did not correspond to the ones enumerated on the questionnaire: education, research and innovation, green transition, international competitiveness, sustainable infrastructure and digitalization, labour market, services directed at the unemployed and the development of work life, access to social and health services and cost-effectiveness. The Lithuanian *Seimas* has also presented the seven flagship areas for RRF - green transition, digital transformation, health, social affairs, science and innovation, education and public finance.

The Swedish *Riksdag* pointed out that certain questions had been left unanswered as no position had yet been adopted on the matter.

CHAPTER 4

CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF THE 35th BI-ANNUAL REPORT seeks to examine the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE).

1 Asked whether Parliaments/Chambers had recently adopted an opinion on the CoFE, the vast majority (30 out of 36) replied that none had been adopted, and only six replied positively.

2 The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* adopted a relevant opinion in July 2020 advocating for the involvement of national Parliaments and for the wide-ranging participation of citizens, also noting that Treaty changes should not be excluded from the program of the CoFE. The Dutch *Eerste Kamer* mentioned its resolution of November 2020 calling the government to commit to a relevant public discussion, to allocate additional resources and to make detailed proposals to both Dutch Chambers before July 2021. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* indicated that the Joint Committee on EU Affairs had published a report in December 2020, adopting seven recommendations on the CoFE, including, amongst others, recommending a strong role for national Parliaments, maximising the existing provisions before moving to Treaty changes and organising events in a bottom up approach while also reaching out to minority groups. The European Parliament recalled its resolution of June 2020 recalling its January position regarding the scope, structure and objectives of the CoFE, and also underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic “had made the need to reform the European Union even more apparent” and that “direct engagement of citizens, civil society organisations, social partners and elected representatives” should remain a priority. The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag* noted in December 2020 the possibility in the framework of the CoFE to debate the division of competencies between Member States and the Union, among other things with respect to the way of handling the pandemic, while the focus of the CoFE should be to promote the participation of citizens. The Swedish government had in several cases consulted or informed the Committee on EU Affairs on the approval of the draft Joint Declaration. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* referred to the draft Resolution of February 2021 calling for appropriate participation of national Parliaments through the COSAC Troika at the Executive Board, with a view to take part in the debates and make proposals.

The Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati* recalled in this context two letters on the CoFE initiated by the German and Portuguese COSAC Presidencies, in November 2020 and in February 2021 respectively, that its Foreign and European Affairs Committee had co-signed.

3 A significant majority of respondents (29 out of 35) replied that no plan of activities to give shape to the debates at the national level had been drafted or adopted at the time of completing the survey. Nevertheless, the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* indicated that, although no work programme had been approved, the recommendations adopted (see previous question) underlined the importance for national Parliaments to link the debates held at European and national level, and referred to the Citizens Assembly and previous Citizen Dialogues on the Future of Europe that should form the model for participating in the CoFE. The Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, the Danish *Folketing* and the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* stated that consultations or deliberations on this were in progress. Similarly, the Finnish *Eduskunta* clarified that this question could not be answered as scrutiny was ongoing. The

French *Sénat* pointed out that events would fall within the framework of events organised on the occasion of the French EU Council Presidency.

This question was not applicable to the European Parliament.

Six Parliaments/Chambers stated that plans of activities had been drafted or approved. The French *Assemblée nationale* pointed out that a colloquium, bringing together researchers, experts and parliamentarians around a general reflection on the future of the Union, had taken place in March. The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* stated that, in light of the 40th anniversary of Greece's accession to the EU, it would hold a series of joint activities with the government and the European Commission, including public debates on stocktaking of the past and citizens' input on their expectations for the CoFE. Committees of the Italian *Camera dei deputati* were considering to set up a fact-finding inquiry about the scope of the CoFE, while the EU Affairs Committee of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica* had initiated a procedure involving hearings of institutional and civil society entities, a procedure to be resumed when the CoFE would start its work. The Hungarian *Országgyűlés* noted that while it had already organised a first conference on the future of Europe together with the Ministry of Justice in September 2020, it would also organise relevant events following the official opening of the conference. The Joint Committee for the EU of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* decided in October 2020 to create a subcommittee on the CoFE, which would also prepare the position of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* throughout the process of the CoFE. The subcommittee would also prepare a report that, together with the amendments and individual votes, would then be debated and voted on by the Joint Committee for the European Union.

4 Parliaments/Chambers were also asked to prioritise, in the order of their preference, the following four different activities:

- plenary high-level discussions between the institutions;
- debates with the civil society;
- consultation of citizens/civil society;
- pro-active reach out from the Parliament to stakeholders, asking for contribution on specific policy fields deemed relevant for the Future of Europe.

Out of the twenty-six respondents that answered this question, eleven thought that debates with civil society should be the first priority (Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Estonian *Riigikogu*, French *Assemblée nationale*, German *Bundesrat*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Latvian *Saeima*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Polish *Senat*, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*). Consultation of citizens and civil society was chosen as first priority by six Parliaments/Chambers (Austrian *Bundesrat and Nationalrat*, Belgian *Sénat*, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés* and Polish *Sejm*). Plenary high-level discussions between institutions was identified as the first priority by five respondents (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Romanian *Senat*, Slovak *Národná rada*, Slovenian *Državni zbor*). Three respondents (Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*) ranked the pro-active reach out from the Parliament to stakeholders, asking for contribution on specific policy fields deemed relevant for the Future of Europe, as their first priority.

The remaining ten respondents out of the total of 36 either provided no answer (the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* stated that there was no adopted position at that time) or provided another option or a more general explanation. According to the European Parliament, the CoFE should be an inclusive process, where all stakeholders, institutional bodies, citizens and civil society organisations would equally contribute to its debates and proposals. The German *Bundestag* stated that all four given activities could be suitable for parliamentary deliberation and underlined in any event the importance to include citizens adequately. Similarly, the Committee on EU Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag* stressed that the focus should be on promoting participation and support among citizens. The Joint Committee on EU Affairs of the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* called for the widest possible participation in a bottom up approach, enabling discussion also on youth aspects and the involvement of minority or other groups not historically engaged in EU matters. The French *Sénat* proposed online consultations with civil society, in light of the current pandemic; should the situation improve, physical debates could be organised in different parts of the country to feed in the work of the parliamentarians.

In addition to ranking the given priorities, the Austrian *Bundesrat and Nationalrat* underlined the need for involving national and regional Parliaments and of organizing youth forums. Similarly, the German *Bundesrat* proposed a combination of citizens' forums and meetings with experts.

5 When Parliaments/Chambers were asked if they had any previous experience of such engagement with civil society through remote participation, the majority (21 out of 36) replied negatively, with less than half (15 respondents) reporting a previous experience.

A number of respondents had past experience in organising meetings (mainly at committee level) with remote connection and online streaming: the Czech *Senát* regularly organised public hearings including on major petitions; the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* gave several examples of remote exchanges with stakeholders (many of them academics) that took place at committee level on the topic of the future of Europe and explained that there was also facilitation of stakeholder participation via invitations for written submissions; the Latvian *Saeima* referred to the Saeima and NGO forum organised in March 2021 as well as committee meetings; the European Parliament and its committees had organised hearings with remote connection and petitioners could be heard remotely, and pointed out that the European Youth Event would be held in a hybrid format, making remote participation possible; the Romanian *Senat* had organised hearings and debates in the committees; the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada* had streamed its meetings on social media platforms and involved civil society.

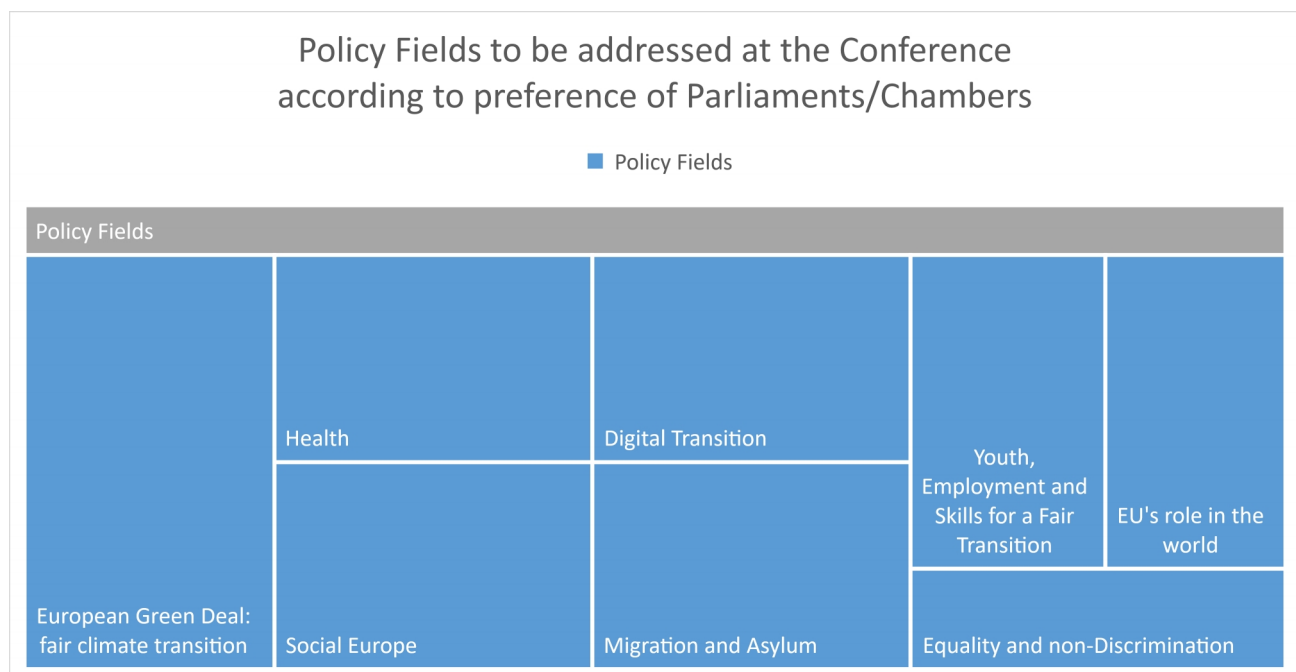
Some respondents, including the Austrian *Nationalrat and Bundesrat* and the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, also stated having some form of provisions or experience in organising consultations. The French *Assemblée nationale* regularly organised citizens' consultations on various themes and a working group on citizen consultations was created in 2017 within the European Affairs Committee. The Portuguese *Assembleia da República* referred to a set of events organised with the European Commission, promoting knowledge of the EU and the democratic participation and exercise of citizenship, in order to better understand citizens' concerns and desires. The initiative involved three types of events: "Meetings with Citizens", "Associated Meetings" on European themes, where consultation was promoted online about the future of Europe and "Europe in Schools" in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. The Austrian *Nationalrat and Bundesrat* also pointed out that citizens could electronically support other citizens' initiatives and petitions. Likewise, the French

Sénat set up a participatory platform for locally elected representatives as well as a petitions platform for citizens.

The Lithuanian *Seimas* noted that several sectoral committees had engaged in preliminary discussions on the future of the EU within the framework of the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. The German *Bundestag* referred to a Citizens' Council on Foreign Affairs and to a public presentation on the findings of the Study Commission on Artificial Intelligence with the participation of citizens via videoconference tools.

The Finnish *Eduskunta*'s experience mainly stemmed from the 2011-15 parliamentary term and the engagement through remote participation did not bring added value compared to physical meetings and other more conventional methods of engaging with civil society, adding, however, that the technical solutions available at that time were not as advanced as the ones available today. The Danish *Folketing* reported that the European Affairs Committee organised several debate events on EU-related issues and referred to the so-called citizens' hearings or 'deliberative polls' involving a group of 400 people invited to discuss EU matters with parliamentarians and experts over the weekend. Participating citizens were selected by polling institutes in order to form a representative sample of the Danish population and this has proved fruitful for engaging people not usually attending political debates.

6 When asked to choose amongst eight given policy fields to be addressed by the conference, 22 respondents chose European Green Deal: fair climate transition; while Health; Digital Transition; Social Europe; and Migration and Asylum were all chosen by 14 respondents each. 13 respondents went for Youth, employment and skills for a fair transition, while 12 chose EU's role in the world. Finally, eight respondents opted for Equality and Non-Discrimination.



Some Parliaments/Chambers suggested other policy fields. The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* proposed looking into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and taxation. The Danish *Folketing* suggested the rule of law, transparency and better law making, as well as the role of national Parliaments in EU decisions. In its two 2020 resolutions on the CoFE, the European Parliament noted as policy fields a series of pressing issues relating notably to the environmental challenges, social

justice and equality, economic and employment matters - including taxation, digital transformation, security and the role of the European Union in the world. The Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat* as well as the German Bundestag suggested that the CoFE look into institutional matters.

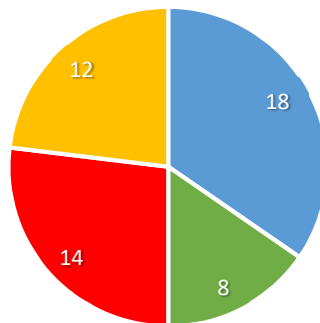
The Lithuanian *Seimas* stated that any policy field could be addressed by the CoFE while according to its Committee on European Affairs it should deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis and concentrate on the implementation of the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. The Latvian *Saeima* did not have priority fields and was ready to engage on all issues relevant to the citizens.

Several other respondents noted that they were not in a position to provide specific replies as scrutiny and relevant decisions were on-going (Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, French *Sénat*, German *Bundesrat*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*).

7 When it came to indicating which of the given four institutional issues, if any, Parliaments/Chambers deemed more relevant to be addressed by the CoFE, 27 out of 36 respondents provided replies choosing one or more of the following:

- Protocols on the role of national Parliaments and on Subsidiarity/Proportionality and other Treaty Provisions on national Parliaments (Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Czech *Senát*, Danish *Folketing*, German *Bundestag*, German *Bundesrat*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Polish *Sejm*, Polish *Senat*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Romanian *Senat* and Slovenian *Državni Zbor*);
- Provisions on the designation of the President of the European Commission (Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, German *Bundestag*, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Polish *Sejm*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Slovenian *Državni zbor* and European Parliament);
- Electoral system for the European Parliament (e.g. transnational lists) (Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Belgian *Sénat*, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, French *Assemblée nationale*, German *Bundestag*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Polish *Senat*, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Romanian *Senat* and European Parliament);
- Qualified majority voting in new policy areas (Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*, French *Assemblée nationale*, French *Sénat*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Polish *Sejm*, Romanian *Senat*, Slovak *Národná rada*, Slovenian *Državni Zbor* and European Parliament). When invited to specify which new policy areas, several Parliaments/Chambers named foreign policy (Austrian *Nationalrat* and *Bundesrat*), Common Foreign and Security Policy (Belgian *Sénat*), fiscal policy, Multiannual Financial Framework (Italian *Camera dei deputati*), EU's own resources (Belgian *Chambre des représentants* and Italian *Camera dei deputati*) and tax harmonisation (Belgian *Chambre des représentants*), as new policy areas where the use of qualified majority voting should be discussed.

Institutional Issues that need to be addressed by the Conference according to Parliaments/Chambers



- Protocols on the role of national Parliaments and on Subsidiarity/Proportionality and other Treaty Provisions on national Parliaments
- Provisions on the designation of the President of the European Commission
- Electoral system for the European Parliament (e.g. transnational list)
- Qualified majority voting in new policy areas

The European Parliament reaffirmed its insistence on having a debate on the lead candidate system and on electoral lists on the basis of a transnational constituency, while also pointing out additional topics it had proposed during the precedent legislature to be discussed during the CoFE, e.g. the electoral law, the European Parliament's right of legislative initiative and the European Parliament's right of inquiry.

The Latvian *Saeima* did not assign a priority to any field and was ready to engage on all issues relevant to the citizens.

The Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Lithuanian *Seimas* and Portuguese *Assembleia da República* expressed the view that the focus of CoFE should predominately be on EU policy issues. For the Lithuanian *Seimas* the scope of the discussions on institutional reforms should be determined by the outcomes of the debates on policy issues. The Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* was of the view that national Parliaments should be afforded a strong role in the Conference and that provisions of existing Treaties be maximised. The Swedish *Riksdag* noted that work of the CoFE should be conducted within the framework of the current Treaties and any Treaty amendments should preferably be avoided (Finnish *Eduskunta*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Swedish *Riksdag*).

The French *Sénat* stated that it had yet to adopt an official position on this issue, but noted that a working group on institutional issues had been established to address, in particular, the issue of the European electoral system and the designation process of the President of the European Commission.

The Swedish *Riksdag* also noted its objections to the designation process of the President of the European Commission and electoral lists on the basis of a transnational constituency being discussed within the framework of the CoFE.

8 When asked whether it would be beneficial to organize thematic working groups around specific policy/institutional issues, similar to the structure in place for the European Convention, 17 out of 36

Parliaments/Chambers responded positively, one responded negatively, while half (18 respondents) had no opinion to express.

The European Parliament referred to its resolution from 15 January 2020, whereby it had proposed the organization of thematic Citizens' agoras reflecting the policy priorities throughout the CoFE process.

9 When asked about the possibility of CoFE being extended until 2023, just over a half (18 out of 35 respondents) foresaw this as a possibility, while only one respondent did not. Sixteen out of 35 respondents had no opinion.

The French *Sénat* argued that the possibility of extending the duration of CoFE should be evaluated on the basis of a progress report on CoFE planned for the next COSAC plenary meeting in the second half of 2021.

10 When it came to identifying the role COSAC should play in the framework of CoFE, 30 out of 36 respondents provided varying replies.

Twenty-three Parliaments/Chambers were of the opinion that COSAC should serve as an opportunity to debate on the work of the CoFE as it unfolds, and to adopt common positions where appropriate. The French *Assemblée nationale* added that COSAC should be represented by the Troika in the Executive Board of the CoFE and that the Troika should regularly report on the progress of the Executive Board to the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs.

Eleven Parliaments/Chambers thought COSAC should be a place to receive information and input from the members of the CoFE, the European Commission and relevant experts.

In addition to these two options, the German *Bundesrat*, German *Bundestag* and Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* also thought COSAC should promote other initiatives during the CoFE. The German *Bundestag* and German *Bundesrat* detailed their answer by suggesting that the Presidential Troika should represent national Parliaments in the executive board of the CoFE, through developing and securing a mandate from COSAC members (German *Bundestag*). Furthermore, the German *Bundestag* proposed establishing a working group to monitor and support the work of the Troika in the CoFE.

Two Parliaments/Chambers expressed the view that COSAC should be solely a platform for members of the CoFE to report on the progress of their work.

Three Parliaments/Chambers (Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Danish *Folketing* and Spanish *Cortes Generales*) stated that at the time of the questionnaire no official position was available on this question, however the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* is expected to deliberate this topic at its next session.

11 As final remarks, three Parliaments/Chambers expressed their view that national Parliaments should play an important role in the CoFE (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Lithuanian *Seimas* Swedish *Riksdag*). The CoFE should be seen as a complement to representative democracy and fully utilize the established dialogue between citizens and its national, regional and local representatives (Swedish *Riksdag*) in order to bridge the gap between the EU institutions and citizens and ensure the widest participation possible (Italian *Senato della Repubblica*). National Parliaments should be represented on an equal footing with the European Parliament and have the same decision rights as

representatives of other attending institutions (Lithuanian *Seimas*). In addition, the CoFE should be based on a gender-balanced participation, including in its leadership (Swedish *Riksdag*).

The Lithuanian *Seimas* also saw the need for CoFE's streamlined managing structure and stressed the importance of a feedback mechanism that would yield concrete action.

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