

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LVI COSAC

13 – 15 November 2016, Bratislava

Draft Contribution of the LVI COSAC

1. Strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU

1.1 COSAC appreciates the progress of the current European Commission (2014 -) in improving the relations with national Parliaments, as documented in the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, notably through the increased number of visits of Commissioners to national Parliaments/Chambers, and encourages the European Commission to further pursue this effort to create a form of lasting dialogue with national Parliaments.

1.2 In the field of political dialogue between the European Commission and national Parliaments, COSAC sees potential for improvement of responses to national Parliaments' reasoned opinions and therefore suggests that the European Commission better addresses national Parliaments' specific concerns and analyse all possible points of views when preparing its responses, especially the responses when the so-called "yellow card" mechanism is triggered.

1.3 COSAC considers the „green card" mechanism an important tool to improve the role of national Parliaments and therefore encourages national Parliaments to continue exploring future possibilities of using the initiatives under the „green card".

1.4 COSAC notes that communicating the EU issues effectively in current circumstances proves to be one of the crucial elements in bridging the gap between the European Union and its citizens and recognises the role of national Parliaments in engaging citizens, providing them with impartial information and raising general awareness of EU related issues. In the context of the outcome of the UK referendum, COSAC recognises the crucial role of national Parliaments in contributing to the functioning and the future of the unique project of the European Union.

1.5 COSAC invites all Parliaments to play a more vocal role in communicating the EU issues and to achieve this, encourages national Parliaments as well as the European Parliament to share their experience and best practices in the field of communication. Furthermore, COSAC notes that targeting and adapting the content of communication of EU issues may prove useful when engaging with specific groups, such as universities, schools, etc.

1.6 To make full use of available technologies, COSAC invites Parliaments to fully explore possibilities arising from using social media channels, which may increase awareness about EU issues and about Parliaments as the most relevant centres of debate, especially in relation to the European youth.

2. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks)

2.1 COSAC considers fairly negotiated trade deals with third countries to be the optimal tools that are capable of reacting to EU's decreasing share of global trade, to the shift of the centre of wealth creation to the Asia-Pacific region, to demographic changes, and to other negative circumstances that the European Union is currently facing.

2.2 COSAC views balanced trade agreements as a chance to strengthen sustainable development, enforcing human rights, labour and social standards, and environmental sustainability on a global scale.

2.3 COSAC therefore expresses concern at the loss of trust from the European public that hinders the negotiation process of transatlantic trade agreements with strategic trade partners of the European Union.

2.4 COSAC welcomes the Commission's improved transparency measures of the TTIP negotiation process, however, it stresses the need to achieve such a level of transparency that would counter the concerns of European citizens.

2.5 COSAC is convinced that the negotiation process must fully respect the principles of freedom, democracy and social cohesion, on which the project of the European Union stands, thus providing a solid guarantee that there will be a strengthening, rather than weakening of European regulations and standards, in case of the conclusion and signing of TTIP.

2.6 COSAC emphasises that the national Parliaments, as well as the European Parliament, must be an integral part of the TTIP negotiation process. COSAC therefore urges the Commission and the governments of Member States to continue the process of intensified communication with national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

3. 2016: Energy Union's „year of delivery”

3.1 COSAC welcomes the project of the Energy Union and its ambitions to lead the EU towards a more secure and sustainable energy policy, putting it at the forefront of renewable energy production and the fight against climate change. This cannot be achieved on purely intergovernmental level, therefore common European solutions are needed.

3.2 COSAC notes that the EU is the biggest importer of energy in the world, whereby reliance of a number of its Member States on a single supplier makes the EU extremely vulnerable. COSAC sees the high energy prices in the EU compared to competitors with

concern. COSAC therefore recalls that the goal of the Energy Union is to provide European consumers with not only secure, sustainable and ecological energy, but also with energy which is competitive and more affordable. In attaining this objective, sovereign decisions of the Member States must be respected, while supporting solutions, which are better achieved at the EU level.

3.3 COSAC stresses the importance of the Member States' solidarity and trust to achieve energy security in the EU and underlines the importance of their common approach with regard to third countries. In this context, COSAC expresses concern at projects, which are perceived as technically, economically and geopolitically ungrounded and counter-productive from the energy security point of view. On the contrary, in regards to the strengthening of the Single Market and energy security, COSAC supports efforts to maximise the EU's use of indigenous sources of energy and optimal diversification of energy routes, while underlining the importance of closer regional cooperation.

3.4 COSAC welcomes the Paris Agreement and considers it as a milestone in the fight against climate change and as a strong commitment to the environment and next generations. COSAC also welcomes the swift ratification of this agreement by the EU and calls for its unconditional implementation. COSAC considers that the project of Energy Union can make a substantial contribution to achieve the Paris Agreement's goals and, in the longer term, help meet energy and climate targets set by the EU for 2020, 2030 and 2050. COSAC is in favour of strengthening consumer rights that can, *inter alia*, effectively help in the fight against energy poverty.

3.5 COSAC underlines the importance of research and development investment for the Energy Union and stresses their potential in constructing a secure, effective, and ecological Energy Union and in reducing generation costs.

3.6 COSAC believes that efforts in developing innovative low-emission technologies and solutions as well as progress in cost-effective innovations play an irreplaceable role in strengthening EU's competitiveness.

3.7 In order to achieve as large energy savings as possible, COSAC supports measures at the local level focused on building reconstruction and increasing the share of the public transport usage.

4. Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration

4.1 COSAC recognizes all humanitarian aspects of solving the migration crisis. COSAC appreciates the EU's cooperation with countries of transit and origin of migration flows, and stresses that protection of human rights of asylum seekers and war refugees must be at the centre of EU's solution of the migration crisis. COSAC considers securing the EU's external borders as a matter of immediate priority for the successful management of current and future irregular migratory flows.

4.2 COSAC reaffirms the importance of solidarity based on the need for a solution to irregular migration in accordance with Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) while respecting human rights and all international treaties and conventions. COSAC encourages the European Union to address and eliminate the root causes of migration. COSAC invites the Slovak Presidency, but also future Presidencies, to submit proposals and to actively contribute in finding effective solutions on migration issues.

4.3 COSAC highlights that the European Union, as an area of freedom of movement and opened borders, needs to pursue a joint European migration policy with emphasis on both the protection of EU's citizens and external borders, and safety of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Therefore, COSAC welcomes the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard. COSAC underlines the importance of prompt implementation of the regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard and solving the problem of insufficiently quick returns. In this context, COSAC recalls the need for personnel and material supply for the effective functioning of the European Border and Coast Guard.

4.4 COSAC welcomes ongoing work on the project of linked SIS (Schengen Information System) – AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) for identification of missing persons based on fingerprints, as well as on the EU Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) which will help secure EU borders and determine if the person did not exceed the permitted time of stay in the EU.