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Conferentie van commissies voor Europese aangelegenheden uit de parlementen van de lidstaten van de EU en van een delegatie uit het Europees Parlement

AG/ Nr. 56

VERSLAG

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Van zondag 27 tot en met dinsdag 29 oktober 2013 vond in Vilnius de 50^{ste} plenaire bijeenkomst plaats van de Conferentie van commissies voor Europese aangelegenheden uit de nationale parlementen van de lidstaten van de Europese Unie en van een delegatie uit het Europees Parlement, hierna aangeduid als COSAC. Naast de genoemde delegaties namen ook delegaties van de nationale parlementen van de kandidaat-lidstaten van de Europese Unie deel als waarnemer, evenals delegaties van de Raad van de Europese Unie, van de Europese Commissie en van het Noorse parlement.

De Nederlandse delegatie naar deze conferentie bestond uit mevrouw Strik (GL) en de heer Van Dijk (PVV) van de Eerste Kamer en de heren Leegte (VVD) en Van Bommel (SP) van de Tweede Kamer. De ambtelijke begeleiding bestond uit mevrouw Van den Driessche (Eerste Kamer) en mevrouw Van Keulen (Tweede Kamer).

De delegatie brengt als volgt verslag uit:

Voorafgaand aan de conferentie

Voorafgaand aan de conferentie heeft de heer Spaans, Ambassadeur bij de Nederlandse ambassade te Vilnius, de delegatie een technische briefing aangeboden. Tijdens deze briefing is de wijze waarop Litouwen het halfjaarlijks voorzitterschap van de Raad van de Europese Unie bekleedt besproken. Eveneens is de actuele politieke situatie van Litouwen besproken.

Inleidende toespraken en procedurele zaken

De vergadering werd voorgezeten door de heer Gediminas **Kirkilas**, vicevoorzitter van het Litouwse parlement en voorzitter van de commissie voor Europese Zaken en de heer Petras **Auštrevičius**, tevens vicevoorzitter van de Litouwse parlement en vicevoorzitter van de commissie voor Europese Zaken.

De voorzitter van het Litouwse parlement, mevrouw Loreta **Grauzinienė**, opende de vergadering. Zij verwelkomde de delegaties op deze jubileumzitting van COSAC en bracht in haar inleiding twee grote interparlementaire vergaderingen die de afgelopen maanden waren gehouden onder het Litouwse voorzitterschap in herinnering: de interparlementaire conferentie voor het Gemeenschappelijk Buitenlands-, Veiligheids- en Defensiebeleid (GBVB/GVDB) en de eerste interparlementaire conferentie over het economische en financieel bestuur van de Europese Unie, de zogenaamde artikel 13 Conferentie. De L COSAC zal op zoek gaan naar een actievere rol voor nationale parlementen en een versterkte samenwerking tussen de nationale parlementen en het Europees Parlement opzoeken om zo een constante en efficiënte interinstitutionele dialoog op nationaal en Europees niveau te onderhouden. Zij kondigde ook het COSAC Women's Forum aan. Dit permanente Forum is op 29 oktober 2013 opgericht, met als doelstellingen gendergelijkheid, -kansen en -evenwicht in de maatschappij en het bevorderen van actieve participatie van vrouwen in de politiek bij de Europese politieke partijen onder de aandacht brengen.

De voorzitter van de Europese Commissie, de heer José Manuel **Barroso**, sprak de COSAC-bijeenkomst middels een videoboodschap toe en feliciteerde de delegaties met de 50ste bijeenkomst van COSAC. Hij bracht in herinnering dat reeds bij de eerste bijeenkomst van COSAC in 1989 de gesprekken waren gestart over een hernieuwde inzet voor Europese integratie en over democratische legitimiteit van Europese aangelegenheden.

Procedurele zaken

Op de procedurele agenda stond onder andere de aanbieding van het 20ste halfjaarlijkse COSAC-rapport. Dit rapport bevat de uitkomsten van een questionnaire over de Europese verkiezingen in 2014: platform voor debat met de burgers over de toekomst van de EU, over democratische legitimiteit in de EU en de rol van EU parlementen en over de implementatie van de Europa 2020 Strategie.

De heer Kirkilas deelde mee dat de trojka op 27 oktober 2013, na interviews van vier kandidaten, mevrouw Christiana **Fryda** heeft voorgedragen voor het permanente lidmaatschap van het COSAC-secretariaat. Mevrouw Fryda, medewerker van het Cypriotische parlement, volgt mevrouw Libby Kurien, op die het lidmaatschap in 2012–2013 heeft bekleed. Onder de kandidaten voor het permanente lidmaatschap was ook een kandidaat vanuit de staf van de Tweede Kamer, de heer Jos **van de Wiel**.

Mevrouw **Strik** merkte op dat de volgende COSAC-voorzittersbijeenkomst op 26-27 januari 2014 zal overlappen met de vergadering van de Parlementaire Assemblée van de Raad van Europa en verzocht toekomstige voorzitterschappen om dergelijke overlap in de planning te vermijden.

De heer **Leegte** kondigde aan dat een door de Tweede Kamer vastgestelde position paper over democratische legitimiteit zou worden verspreid onder de delegaties. Alle delegaties worden uitgenodigd om te reageren op de paper.

Beleidsdebatten

Ter ere van het 25-jarige bestaan van de COSAC sprak de heer Laurent Fabius, de Franse Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken, de leden van COSAC toe. In november 1989 organiseerde de heer Fabius, in zijn toenmalige

functie als voorzitter van de Franse Nationale Assemblée, in Parijs de eerste COSAC-bijeenkomst. Het doel van de bijeenkomst was tweezijdig: enerzijds het participeren van nationale parlementen in wat nu de Europese Unie is en anderzijds het bevorderen van samenwerking tussen nationale parlementen onderling en tussen nationale parlementen en het Europese Parlement. Deze doelstellingen zijn nog steeds zeer actueel, aldus de heer Fabius.

Daarna zijn verschillende onderwerpen plenair behandeld, waaronder de stand van zaken van het Litouwse Voorzitterschap, de parlementaire diplomatie van het Europese Parlement ten aanzien van Oekraïne, de implementatie van de Europa 2020-Strategie, de democratische legitimiteit in de EU en de rol van de parlementen hierin en de digitale agenda. Deze debatten werden ingeleid door een (of meerdere) hoofdsprekers, waarna er de mogelijkheid voor reacties uit de delegaties was. Op de website van de COSAC kunt u de spreekteksten van de hoofdsprekers vinden.¹ Tevens treft u op de COSAC-website de notulen van de vergadering, waarin de inbrengen van alle sprekers zijn terug te vinden.

Bij het agendapunt over de Europese verkiezingen van 2014 gaf mevrouw **Strik** aan dat nationale parlementen en het Europese Parlement elkaar moeten aanvullen en dat de bevordering van de opkomst van kiezers bij de Europese verkiezingen in ieders belang is. Zij verzocht de inleiders bij dit agendapunt, de heer Andrew Duff en de heer Pat Cox, toe te lichten of zij een concrete rol zagen voor nationale parlementen bij de Europese verkiezingen. De heer Duff stelde in antwoord hierop voor dat de lijsttrekkers voor de verkiezingen van het Europees Parlement in de nationale parlementen zouden kunnen worden ondervraagd over hun politieke programma. Hij gaf eveneens als voorbeeld de goede praktijk van de Tweede Kamer om de Nederlandse leden van het Europees Parlement geregeld uit te nodigen in de Kamer om hun standpunten te bespreken.

Naar aanleiding van de bespreking van de implementatie van de Europa 2020 strategie, ingeleid door de heer Maroš Šefčovič, Eurocommissaris voor Interinstitutionele relaties en Administratie, en mevrouw Berès, voorzitter van de commissie voor Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid van het Europees Parlement, beargumenteerde de heer **Leegte** dat de COSAC-bijeenkomsten vooral een forum moeten zijn voor de uitwisseling van informatie en goede praktijken. Hij verwees daarbij nogmaals naar de position paper van de Tweede Kamer. Hij stelde in dat kader ook het belang van de tweede gele kaart aan de orde, die naar aanleiding van het Verordeningvoorstel inzake de oprichting van een Europees Openbaar Ministerie is gerezen. Zowel de heer Šefčovič als mevrouw Berès bevestigden het belang van de uitwisseling van goede praktijken tussen de parlementen. De heer Šefčovič noemde in dat licht de actieve samenwerking tussen de parlementen en Europese Commissie tijdens de informele zijbijeenkomsten die sinds kort tijdens de COSAC-bijeenkomsten worden georganiseerd. Hij pleitte ervoor in kleine groepen te debatteren ten behoeve van de dynamiek van de gesprekken. Mevrouw Berès toonde zich onder andere ook voorstander om naast de gele en oranje kaart-procedures ook een zogenaamde groene kaart voor parlementen te introduceren.

Informele zijbijeenkomst

De genoemde uitwisseling van informatie en goede praktijken vond plaats in een informele bijeenkomst, naast de plenaire besprekingen, enkel

¹ <http://www.cosac.eu/50-lithuania-2013/plenary-meeting-of-the-l-cosac-27-29-october-2013/>.

gericht op het uitwisselen van praktische informatie en het bespreken van uitdagingen voor nationale parlementen, zoals de beïnvloeding en controle van EU-besluitvorming. Deze informele bijeenkomsten naast het hoofdprogramma worden door de COSAC-delegaties als zeer zinvol beschouwd. Lord Boswell van het Britse House of Lords zat deze informele bijeenkomst voor over de rol van nationale parlementen in het vormen en controleren van EU-besluiten.

De heer **Leegte** wierp de vraag op welke effecten het behalen van de gele kaart-procedure heeft voor het Europees Parlement en of het Europees Parlement ook gemotiveerde adviezen meeneemt in zijn overwegingen. Daarnaast riep hij de Europese Commissie op om een politiek engagement te tonen ten aanzien van het verlengen van de 8 weken-termijn voor subsidiariteitsbezwaren en ten aanzien van het verlagen van de drempel voor het herzien van Commissievoorstellen naar aanleiding van gemotiveerde adviezen van nationale parlementen.

Mevrouw **Strik** noemde, als voorbeeld van een succesvol resultaat van COSAC, de facilitering door de Nederlandse regering van de toegang van de Kamers van de Staten-Generaal tot EU-Raadsdocumenten met een beperkte verspreiding (limité). Deze toegang is in Nederland in belangrijke mate tot stand gekomen nadat, naar aanleiding van de antwoorden op een COSAC-questionnaire, bleek dat een meerderheid van de nationale parlementen toegang tot deze documenten heeft.

Vaststellen van de bijdragen en conclusies

Onderaan het verslag zijn de vastgestelde bijdragen en conclusies van deze COSAC opgenomen. Naar de mening van de delegatie bevatten de conceptbijdragen van de COSAC ook ditmaal een (te) hoge mate van standpuntbepaling over verschillende beleidsterreinen. Vanuit de delegatie is tijdens de plenaire vergadering, zowel door mevrouw Strik als door de heer Leegte, bij herhaling aangegeven dat het innemen van politieke standpunten in de COSAC-bijdragen achterwege zou moeten blijven en dat, verwijzend naar artikel 10 van het Protocol over de rol van nationale parlementen in de EU, de bijdragen van COSAC de nationale parlementen niet binden en hun standpunt onverlet laten. De bijeenkomsten van COSAC zouden met name gericht moeten zijn op het versterken van de positie van nationale parlementen door uitwisseling van informatie en goede praktijken.

De bijdragen en conclusies zijn aangenomen met consensus. De Tweede Kamerdelegatie heeft om de hierboven genoemde reden kenbaar gemaakt zich uitdrukkelijk te willen onthouden van stemming.

Namens de delegatie,

De voorzitter van de vaste commissie voor Europese Zaken van de Eerste Kamer,
Strik

De vicevoorzitter van de vaste commissie voor Europese Zaken van de Tweede Kamer,
Leegte

CONCLUSIONS OF THE L COSAC

Vilnius, 27–29 October 2013

1. 20th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

- 1.1. COSAC welcomes the 20th Bi-annual Report prepared by the COSAC Secretariat and sincerely thanks the Secretariat for the excellent work. The Report provides useful information on the means that could be used to ensure more active citizens' engagement in debating the EU future and participation in the 2014 European elections. It also discusses the effectiveness of ensuring and enhancing democratic legitimacy and accountability, and fruitful interparliamentary cooperation.
- 1.2. COSAC notes the challenge facing the COSAC Secretariat of many delayed replies to the questionnaire. It calls on Parliaments to try to ensure more timely responses are provided to aid the work of the Secretariat in preparing Bi-annual Reports and the work of the Presidency Parliament in preparing for COSAC plenary meetings.
- 1.3. COSAC appreciates the practice introduced by the Irish Presidency to organise informal sessions during the plenary meetings of COSAC. It recognises such sessions as a useful means of exchanging views on procedures and practices relevant to parliamentary scrutiny and on topical EU matters. COSAC thanks those involved in the sessions held in Vilnius and calls on future Presidencies to continue working to that end by putting forward topics for focused informal discussions.

2. Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat

- 2.1. COSAC recalls that the co-financing of the current Permanent Member and the office of the COSAC Secretariat and website maintenance costs ends on 31 December 2013. The Irish Presidency, in the first half of 2013, invited Parliaments to renew their commitment to the co-financing agreement for the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2015. So far 40 Chambers of 27 national Parliaments have signed and sent their letters of intent indicating that they are willing to participate in the co-financing for the above stated period. COSAC welcomes the fact that this number is above the minimum threshold, therefore the co-financing of the Permanent Member and the office of the COSAC Secretariat and the costs of website maintenance will continue. COSAC invites the remaining few Parliaments/Chambers to submit letters of intent as soon as possible.
- 2.2. COSAC thanks the European Parliament for hosting the COSAC Secretariat in Brussels.
- 2.3. COSAC expresses its gratitude to the UK House of Commons for seconding Mrs Libby KURIEN for the post of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat. COSAC warmly thanks Mrs Libby KURIEN, whose term of office expires on 31 December 2013, for her devoted and productive work.
- 2.4. COSAC welcomes the decision of the Chairpersons of COSAC of 28 October 2013 to elect Ms Christiana FRYDA seconded by the House of Representatives of Cyprus as Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2014–2015. COSAC is convinced that the newly elected Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat will smoothly continue to manage the work of COSAC Secretariat and contribute to the successful development of the COSAC activities, in accordance with Rule 9.3 of the COSAC Rules of Procedure.

3. Democratic Legitimacy and the Role of Parliaments

- 3.1. COSAC supports closer and more constructive interparliamentary cooperation and active participation of Parliaments in EU policy shaping. COSAC encourages Parliaments to actively share best practices and information and to discuss EU's political matters of common interest.
- 3.2. COSAC notes the responses of Parliaments to the Bi-annual Report that call for the ongoing evolution of parliamentary democracy in the EU, as closer European integration should foresee greater parliamentary involvement. COSAC welcomes the call for strengthening of existing mechanisms including the interparliamentary dialogue and better use of the political dialogue by national Parliaments.
- 3.3. COSAC calls on Parliaments to initiate more parliamentary clusters of interest to examine specific issues of EU policy making and sincerely thanks the Danish Folketing for starting this initiative.
- 3.4. COSAC expresses its hope that there will soon be a full debate on the strengthening of democratic legitimacy of the Union and the fundamental role of national Parliaments for the good functioning of the Union as well as on how this role could be further enhanced. COSAC calls on future Presidencies to consider this topic to be put on the agenda of the forthcoming meetings of COSAC.

4. Macro-regional Cooperation

- 4.1. COSAC welcomes the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, as the Presidency Parliament, to convene parliamentarians of the EU Member States from the Baltic Sea region for an informal discussion about the prospects of the macro-regional EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.
- 4.2. COSAC welcomes the European Commission's report on the added value of macro-regional strategies² and the idea that macro-regional strategies provide regional building blocks for EU-wide policy, marshalling national approaches towards a more coherent implementation at the EU level. COSAC supports the strengthening of the parliamentary dimension in the implementation of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and other 3 macro-regional strategies of the EU, which contributes to and promotes comprehensive regional cooperation.

5. COSAC Women's Forum

- 5.1. COSAC welcomes the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania to convene the COSAC Women's Forum to encourage greater involvement of women parliamentarians in COSAC activities and underlines the need for urging the political parties of the EU Member States to give more focus to gender equality, equal opportunities policy, creation of gender balance in society, and wider inclusion of women in politics. COSAC calls on Parliaments to take gender balance into consideration when forming parliamentary delegations and on national political parties to promote better representation of women on the lists of candidates to the 2014 European elections.
- 5.2. COSAC welcomes the good participation in the COSAC Women's Forum in Vilnius and encourages women politicians both to exploit existing formats of interparliamentary co-operation and to become more involved in COSAC activities by participating in the COSAC

² COM/2013/468 final.

Women's Forum and debating topical issues on the EU's political agenda.

- 5.3. Considering the fact that democratic policy-making in the EU may rest on both formal and informal structures, COSAC encourages future Presidency parliaments, to take over and further develop the initiative of promoting women parliamentarians' involvement in COSAC activities.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE L COSAC

27–29 October 2013, Vilnius

1. COSAC's Contribution to the Strengthening of Interparliamentary Cooperation in the European Union

- 1.1. On the occasion of its jubilee 50th plenary meeting in Vilnius, COSAC welcomes its founder Mr Laurent FABIUS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of France, former Speaker of the French *Assemblée nationale*, and wishes to express its profound gratitude to Mr FABIUS for his 1989 initiative and subsequent efforts in bringing about the establishment of the Interparliamentary Conference of Bodies Specialised in European Affairs, known as COSAC.
- 1.2. As the oldest interparliamentary conference recognised in the Treaties of the European Union (EU), COSAC remains committed to the strengthening of democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU, promoting the pro-active role of national Parliaments in the EU decision-making process and cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament.
- 1.3. COSAC calls on the EU institutions to start a discussion with Parliaments on how to exploit to full extent the possibilities provided in Article 10 of Protocol 1 of the Treaty of Lisbon.

2. State of Play of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

- 2.1. COSAC takes note of the political agreement reached on 27 June 2013 at the highest political level between the European Parliament, the Presidency of the Council and the Commission on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 and looks forward to the swift conclusion of the complementary legal acts that will be decisive for making the new financial framework operational, consistent, transparent and better adapted to the needs of the citizens of the Union. COSAC is of the opinion that the EU budget should play a significant role in stimulating growth, providing the needed investments in research and innovation, as well as helping to address the problem of intra-EU macroeconomic imbalances. COSAC stresses that the prime goal now is to ensure that the financial funds for the period 2014–2020 would reach the European citizens and businesses in time.
- 2.2. COSAC welcomes the agreement reached by the European Council in June 2013 on a € 6 billion youth jobless fund, known as the «youth guarantee», to implement the youth employment package, yet stresses that further concrete steps are urgently needed. COSAC emphasises that efforts to combat youth unemployment must rely on a comprehensive strategy, including measures to support small and medium enterprises, foster entrepreneurship among young people and reduce failure at school.
- 2.3. COSAC is of the opinion that the completion of a fully functional internal energy market as well as the completion of the work on the Directive concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services, which besides the energy market and digital technology and in accordance with the national laws relating to wages and social protection, would complete the creation of the Single Market, are among the major EU objectives which in turn would stimulate the development of a more stable and competitive European economy, thus leading to a greater role for the EU internationally. Therefore it urges the EU institutions to do everything possible to achieve tangible progress in these fields, including

providing policy certainty that will incentivise medium and long-term investments.

- 2.4. COSAC recognizes the EU's interest to have safe, stable, economically strong and pro-European Eastern Neighbours and emphasises that the success of the Eastern Partnership could only be achieved upon joint efforts of the EU institutions, EU Member States and the Eastern Partners themselves.
- 2.5. COSAC welcomes Croatia as the 28th Member State of the EU. COSAC emphasises the importance of the implementation of the «fundamentals first» principle reflected by the recent European Commission progress reports, and recognises the accession process as the right tool to continue the reunification of Europe also with the Western Balkans region.
- 2.6. COSAC welcomes the start of historic negotiations between the EU and the United States on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment partnership and considers that, if concluded in a way that fully respects the legitimate interests of the European enterprises, the TTIP could provide the much needed boost to EU economy, possibly adding, according to the Commission's estimates, up to 400,000 new jobs and 0.5% of additional GDP growth per year. However, COSAC denounces unauthorised cyber interceptions directed at institutions and individuals.
- 2.7. COSAC expresses its deep sadness and regret at the tragic loss of life in the Mediterranean and calls on the EU and the Member States to take determined action in order to avoid that such human tragedies happen again. COSAC notes the measures discussed in this regard by the European Council on 24–25 October, in particular the newly established Task Force on the Mediterranean, and calls for a coordinated approach to migration flows guided by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility as laid down in Article 80 of the TFEU.

3. Ensuring the Success of the Eastern Partnership

- 3.1. COSAC emphasises the strategic importance of the Eastern Partnership to the long-term security, democratic development and economic prosperity of its Eastern neighbours. COSAC expects that the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius will deliver concrete results and open the door to closer political association and deeper economic integration for those Eastern Partnership countries that meet the necessary commitments and requirements. COSAC welcomes the progress that has been achieved in the negotiations on the bilateral Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the Eastern partners and expects that agreements with Georgia and Moldova will be successfully initialled during the Vilnius Summit.
- 3.2. Bearing in mind that the economic and political situation in the countries of the Eastern Partnership varies, COSAC stresses the particular importance of Ukraine for the success of the Eastern Partnership. COSAC commends the results of the European Parliament Monitoring mission to Ukraine and wishes to thank Mr Pat COX, former President of the European Parliament and Mr Alexander KWASNIEWSKI, former President of the Republic of Poland, for their relentless commitment and dedication for resolving selective justice problems and facilitating the necessary judiciary reforms in Ukraine. COSAC hopes that Ukraine will continue with reforms in order to fulfil the required conditions, as formally defined by the 10 December 2012 Foreign Affairs Council and supported by the European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2012, and that the Association Agreement with Ukraine will be signed during the Vilnius Summit. COSAC

supports the provisional application of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement upon signature and expresses its intent to proceed swiftly with the full ratification of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in respective national parliaments, once all the necessary requirements are met. COSAC would like to stress the importance of solidarity in all ways with the Ukraine both during and after the process of Association.

4. Democratic Legitimacy in the EU and the Role of EU Parliaments

- 4.1. COSAC notes that the democratic deficit persists within the political and institutional architecture of the EU decision-making process. COSAC recalls that 2013 is the European Year of Citizens and therefore believes that it is necessary to take measures ensuring that the EU governance, in particular economic governance, and the functioning of its institutions are democratic and transparent, with the aim of reducing the gap between the European citizens and the EU institutions.
- 4.2. COSAC notes that the institutional architecture of the EU is based on a dual legitimacy resting on both national and European levels, and that the right balance has to be found between parliamentary control exercised by national Parliaments and by the European Parliament. COSAC, aiming at reinforcing the parliamentary dimension of the Union, urges national Parliaments to exercise full parliamentary scrutiny of decisions taken at the Union level and to engage in a thorough discussion on how to use the powers provided by the Treaty of Lisbon to their full extent in their efforts to build a more accountable and legitimate system of governance in the EU.
- 4.3. COSAC notes that a sufficient number of national Parliaments or Chambers have submitted a Reasoned Opinion triggering the «yellow card» mechanism, this time on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office³.
- 4.4. COSAC calls upon the European Commission to learn lessons from the experience of the first «yellow card» in response to the «Monti II» proposal, as highlighted in the Contribution of the XLIX COSAC. COSAC welcomes the Commission's undertaking to pay particular attention to subsidiarity issues and for reaffirming the procedures as laid out in the Annex to President BARROSO'S letter of 1 December 2009 and its firm commitment to communicating directly with national Parliaments.
- 4.5. COSAC reaffirms its commitment to enhancing the democratic legitimacy in the EU and therefore suggests the following:
 - COSAC calls on the EU institutions to demonstrate the impact of reasoned opinions and political dialogue contributions made by national Parliaments
 - COSAC calls on the European Commission, again, to ensure better quality and more timely responses to reasoned opinions and political dialogue contributions made by national Parliaments
 - COSAC underlines the important role played by national Parliaments in the national decisionmaking process on EU affairs. EU affairs need to be integrated into the daily life and work of national Parliaments. Respecting each Member State's national procedural legislation and established practices, COSAC calls on Ministers, gathered in the Council of Ministers, to safeguard the involvement of national Parliaments in forming the positions represented by Member States in the Council.

³ COM(2013) 0534 final.

5. Political Dialogue

- 5.1. COSAC invites the EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, to engage with national Parliaments in a closer, more effective and more constructive political dialogue aimed at tangible results on topical EU matters, especially on its flagship initiatives and other. COSAC recalls the Contributions of the last three Presidencies, which contain proposals on how to improve political dialogue between the European Commission and national Parliaments.
- 5.2. COSAC invites the European Commission to take into consideration the comments by national Parliaments expressed in the 20th Bi-annual Report of COSAC on the effectiveness of the political dialogue focusing on the quality rather than the quantity of interactions.

6. European Elections 2014: a Platform for Debate on the EU Future with its Citizens

- 6.1. COSAC expresses its conviction that the success of the European project is impossible without the active engagement of the citizens of the Union. Realising that the powers of the European Parliament are greater than ever before, COSAC underlines the importance of active participation of the citizens of the Union in the 2014 European elections and invites national Parliaments consider and make operational the measures on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, and to engage in political debates on the key issues prior to the elections. The approval of the statute of European political parties could also represent a tool of great importance for raising the interest of the European citizens on the main European topics.
- 6.2. COSAC emphasises that the 2014 European elections will be the first held elections after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which stipulates that the European Council must take into account the elections to the European Parliament and having held the appropriate consultations shall propose a candidate for President of the European Commission to be *elected* by the newly assembled European Parliament. COSAC believes that the establishment of such a link between the European Council, constituted by the heads of state and government, mandated by national Parliaments or through direct elections, and the elections to the European Parliament, as an institution directly elected by the citizens on the one hand, and the selection of the President of the European Commission on the other hand will be a significant step in reducing the democratic deficit in the EU.
- 6.3. COSAC regrets that until now European election campaigns have been focused primarily on issues of national significance, leaving the debate on specific EU matters outside the remit of the campaigns. COSAC therefore calls on national and European political parties to seek that the 2014 European elections should become a platform for a constructive, informative and inclusive debate on the future of Europe with its citizens.
- 6.4. COSAC welcomes the commitment expressed by Mr José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission, in his 2013 State of the Union address to present ideas on the future of the Union and on measures to consolidate and deepen the community method.

7. Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy

- 7.1. COSAC supports the ambitious goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy; however, it considers that in order to achieve these goals, it is crucial

to strengthen the structure of management of the Strategy and to improve the mechanisms of funding of the priorities of the Strategy, in particular by more effective absorption of cohesion funds, by involving such institutions as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as by attracting more private capital.

- 7.2. COSAC notes that progress towards smarter, more sustainable and inclusive, resource efficient and job-creating growth and the promotion of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the EU should be more actively addressed at the national level and that national Parliaments should exercise on-going parliamentary scrutiny of the progress achieved with regard to the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy. COSAC also considers that the implementation of the seven Europe 2020 flagship initiatives should be evaluated with a clear indication of what has been achieved and of the ways to remove the existing remaining obstacles.
- 7.3. COSAC considers that the current level of engagement of national Parliaments in the process and procedures of the European Semester could be developed further based on the experience of the recent interparliamentary meetings on this subject. COSAC calls on the European Commission to follow through on its commitment within the framework of the European Semester, as outlined in the official replies of the Commission to the Contributions of the XLVII COSAC and the XLIX COSAC. COSAC encourages national Parliaments to actively scrutinise the national reform programmes and stability and convergence programmes of their respective governments before they are submitted to the Commission. COSAC stresses the need for national Parliaments to actively engage in accelerating the necessary structural reforms in their respective countries.
- 7.4. COSAC expresses its deep concern about the negative long-term social consequences caused by the recent economic and financial crisis, particularly in terms of increased unemployment, especially among young people, and deepened social exclusion throughout Europe. COSAC, therefore, welcomes the communication of the European Commission on strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), adopted on 2 October 2013⁴, and encourages the EU Parliaments to actively engage in the debate on the development of the social dimension of the EMU.

8. Digital Agenda: Benefits for Business

- 8.1. In the context of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the single market in Europe COSAC expresses its concern that the EU Digital Single Market has not been fully implemented yet. COSAC invites competent EU institutions and national Parliaments to actively contribute to the creation of an effective Digital Single Market in Europe, which would have a significant positive impact on Europe's competitiveness and job creation and would serve as an impetus for the development of digital industry in Europe, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, such as start-ups.
- 8.2. COSAC underlines that e-commerce is becoming an essential part of trade and an important impulse for consumer choice, competitiveness and technological innovation. It therefore considers that further development of e-commerce and other online services would positively contribute to the achievement of the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy. COSAC takes note of the Commission's communication on e-commerce and other online services⁵ and encourages the

⁴ COM(2013) 690 final.

⁵ COM(2013) 627 final.

Commission to continue identifying means to ensure the protection of consumer rights in the digital market. In this context, COSAC wishes to point out that many European citizens are still unable to access the digital market. It is important to counteract the creation of a digital exclusion as a consequence of the increased availability of the Internet.

- 8.2. COSAC considers that in international competition Europe, thanks to its internal market and its tradition geared towards knowledge and learning, is in a perfect position to think of an ambitious digital strategy. A regulatory system that is favourable to digital development should therefore be promoted as a driver for growth and European integration balancing the demands of investment, jobs, business competitiveness, innovation, respect for personal data, consumer protection, spatial planning, and development of use and security of networks.
- 8.3. COSAC welcomes the conclusions of the European Council of 24–25 October 2013 on the guidance towards the completion of the Digital Single Market by 2015. COSAC supports the focus of the European Council on the need to boost investment and encourage innovation in the digital sector. It therefore considers essential that the regulatory framework in the digital sector is streamlined across the EU, that a single copyright regime is established, licensing procedures are facilitated, while a high level of protection of intellectual property rights is ensured taking into account the cultural diversity. COSAC trusts that the funding instruments to encourage innovation in the digital sector, such as COSME, Horizon 2020 and the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility, will be fully made use of and that the European Research Area will be completed by the end of 2014. COSAC supports the insistence of the European Council that pending legislative proposals should be finalised as soon as possible, especially in areas such as e-identification and trust services and e-invoicing and payment services. COSAC shares the concern expressed by the European Council about the mismatch of skills that exists in the labour market in the EU's digital sector and the concrete steps that the European Council is proposing to redress the situation.

9. Digital Agenda: Cyber Security

- 9.1. COSAC welcomes the Cyber Security Strategy of the EU put forward by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy⁶iv. It also welcomes the European Commission's proposal for a Directive concerning measures to ensure a high common level of network and information security across the Union⁷. COSAC is convinced that cyber security is a vital component of the business and security policies of the EU and should be one of the strategic pillars of the security and defence policy in every Member State.
- 9.2. COSAC expresses its concern over fundamental differences that exist in Member States in their preparedness, security, strategic culture and ability to draft and implement national strategies on cyber-security. A number of Member States having not adopted their national strategies on cyber-security also remains a source of concern.

⁶ JOIN(2013) 1 final.

⁷ COM(2013) 48 final.

DECLARATION ON THE FOUNDING OF THE COSAC WOMEN'S FORUM

29 October 2013, Vilnius

We, women parliamentarians,

having been elected to national Parliaments of the European Union Member States and candidate countries and the European Parliament;

taking part in the inaugural Meeting of the COSAC Women's Forum held during the L COSAC Meeting on 27–29 October 2013 in the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in Vilnius and

seeking more effective use of the existing forms of interparliamentary cooperation and more active engagement in the activities of COSAC;

recognising that sometimes women, at the beginning of their political careers and aspiring to implement their ideas and fulfil their expectations, lack self-confidence and support from experienced politicians;

support the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, as the Presidency Parliament, to set up the COSAC Women's Forum aimed at promoting more active involvement of women parliamentarians in the activities of COSAC; **and**

emphasise the necessity to highlight to the European political parties the issues of gender equality, equal opportunities policy, gender balance within society and more active participation of women in politics, thereby urging them to focus more on those matters; **and**

call on:

- 1) politicians to be actively engaged in meetings of the COSAC Women's Forum and to discuss the most relevant matters on the political agenda of the European Union;
- 2) leading women parliamentarians to widely communicate the achievements of women politicians, aiming to encourage women to be more ambitiously and actively engaged in politics and decision-making in the European Union;
- 3) women parliamentarians to contribute more actively to parliamentary scrutiny, which ensures democratic legitimacy and accountability, by focusing more on those areas which lack attention from governments; and
- 4) the upcoming Presidency Parliaments to take over and continue developing the initiative of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania of promoting engagement of women parliamentarians in the activities of COSAC.