

Plenary Meeting of the LX COSAC

18-20 November 2018, Vienna

Contribution of the LX COSAC

1. SECURITY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL MIGRATION

1.1. COSAC recalls the need for a comprehensive and unified EU approach to migration, which ensures coherence between internal and external policies, encompasses all migration routes and is based on the principles and values on which the EU is built. Thus, it is necessary to focus on a legal, safe and orderly migration policy, with due respect for asylum rights and the non-refoulement principle. A long-term and effective response to the human, social and political challenges of irregular migration and forced displacement demands enhanced cooperation with the countries of origin and transit and third countries hosting refugees, beneficiaries of international protection or asylum seekers as part of a broader partnership in order to tackle the root causes of these phenomena, and break the business model of smugglers and traffickers. COSAC also stresses the need for a reformed Common European Asylum System, including a fully-fledged EU Asylum Agency, that is based on a fair balance between responsibility and solidarity and encourages the implementation of paragraphs 5 and 6 of 28 June 2018 European Council conclusions.

1.2. COSAC considers that greater efforts must be made to protect the EU's external borders, with the goal of preventing irregular entry into the EU, tackling human trafficking and smuggling and preventing loss of life at sea. COSAC recognises the importance of Schengen and its reform, including advancement of the Schengen enlargement process provided that all criteria are met, in protection of the EU's external borders. It also underlines the necessity to significantly step up the effective return of irregular migrants in line with fundamental principles of international and EU law. In line with the October European Council Conclusions, COSAC holds that existing readmission agreements should be fully implemented, in a non-discriminatory way towards all EU Member States, and new formal readmission agreements

concluded, while creating and applying the necessary leverage by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools. Additional efforts are needed to fully implement the EU-Turkey Statement vis-à-vis all EU member states.

1.3 COSAC welcomes the Commission's proposals on the Return Directive, the Asylum Agency and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency¹, ensuring the most efficient use of resources and developing common minimum standards of external border surveillance, with due respect for the responsibility and the competences of the Member States and ensuring an effective parliamentary control. At the same time COSAC invites all concerned parties to take forward the discussions with a view to reaching an agreement on the reform of the Dublin Regulation that will ensure a fairer approach with more effective burden-sharing. COSAC underlines the need to find a speedy solution for the Common European Asylum System and invites the Council to continue work with a view to concluding as soon as possible.

1.4. COSAC recalls that the EU heads of state or government gathered at an informal meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018 to discuss important matters of internal security, took stock of progress achieved, and agreed, inter alia, to step up the fight against all forms of cyber-crime, manipulation and disinformation. In this regard, COSAC calls for measures to combat cyber and cyber-enabled illegal and malicious activities and build strong cybersecurity with respect for fundamental rights particularly concerning the protection of privacy. Work on all recent Commission proposals should be concluded before the end of the legislative cycle.

1.5. COSAC stresses the importance of measures aimed at strengthening the capacity to prevent and respond effectively to radicalisation and terrorism. It supports recent steps to improve the interoperability of information systems and databases as well as to strengthen the Union's crisis management capacity and the coherence and effectiveness of the EU and national crisis response mechanisms.

2. SECURING PROSPERITY AND COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH DIGITALISATION

2.1. COSAC emphasises that, in order to sustainably secure its the EU's prosperity and competitiveness, its regulatory framework should develop in accordance with fast technological advancements. It is essential that the EU consistently avoid overregulation and make progress in the fields of innovation and digitalisation.

¹ COM(2018) 634 final, COM(2018) 633 final et COM(2018) 631 final.

2.2. COSAC invites the co-legislators to take work swiftly forward on the proposals on digital taxation and on the latest data package, published by the Commission in April 2018, as well as to deliver on the remaining legislative proposals concerning the Digital Single Market, including the e-privacy proposal, which is the last instrument necessary to achieve the update of the EU data protection legal framework before the end of the current legislative cycle. In line with the position of the European Council, COSAC welcomes the ongoing work of the European Institutions and Member States on a coordinated plan on artificial intelligence.

2.3. COSAC welcomes that the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe continues well-established funding instruments but will also provide new impetus, be it with respect to the European Innovation Council or developments towards a stronger mission orientation of research and innovation. COSAC supports the development of key capacities of the Digital Europe Programme such as high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills as well as ensuring their wide use and accessibility across the economy and society by businesses and the public sector alike. Moreover, respect of fundamental rights, and particular the rights of private life and the protection of personal data shall be ensured and duly embedded in the development of these initiatives.

2.4. COSAC is concerned that the persistent digital gender gap throughout the EU is jeopardising progress in this area. Women are under-represented at all levels in the digital sector in Europe. Although this sector is rapidly growing, creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs every year, the share of women in this sector is decreasing. To counteract this development, COSAC supports Commission initiatives aimed at combating stereotypes, investing and enhancing digital competences, and facilitating women's participation in digital entrepreneurship and innovation.

3. WESTERN BALKANS / SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND EU NEIGHBOURHOOD

3.1. Together with the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU, COSAC reconfirms its support and strengthened engagement for developing a concrete EU perspective with measurable results for the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners according to their individual performance and based on shared values and principles, such as democracy, rule of law, good governance, freedom of expression and independence of the media, respect for human rights, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, along with the fight against corruption and organised crime.

3.2. COSAC welcomes the Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, the Joint Declaration on Missing Persons and the Joint Declaration on War Crimes

signed at the Western Balkans Summit in London on 10 July 2018 in the framework of the Berlin Process, and the Sofia Priority Agenda adopted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, in Sofia, on 17 May 2018. COSAC supports the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU in advancing the agenda.

3.3. COSAC stresses the need to provide appropriate funds for the potential new Member states of the EU in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

3.4. While acknowledging the progress made by the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners, COSAC reiterates that more efforts are needed to accelerate domestic reform processes, including strengthening democratic institutions and public administration reform, and achieve irreversible and sustainable results. COSAC underlines that continued steady efforts are also needed to tackle outstanding bilateral disputes in the region, including border disputes, increasing in this way stability and prosperity in the region. COSAC welcomes positive developments in the region, especially the historic agreement between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece in the long-standing name dispute.

3.5. COSAC calls on the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners to strengthen their resilience to destabilising foreign interferences and disinformation and to lock in their strategic choices by fully aligning with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

3.6. To underline the importance of all neighbouring countries COSAC recognises the importance of the Eastern Partnership and emphasizes the fact that the success of the Eastern Partnership could only be achieved by joint efforts of all EU institutions, EU Member states and the Eastern Partner states themselves. COSAC reiterates the need to uphold the sanctions against Russia until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented.

3.7. PESCO as an integral part of the Common Security and Defence Policy aims at contributing to stability and security in the geographical Context of the European Union. COSAC values this cooperation as an instrument to strengthen the European defence.

4. BREXIT – CURRENT STATE

4.1. COSAC acknowledges that the EU27 leaders reaffirmed at the European Council (Art. 50) meeting on 17 October 2018 their full confidence in Michel Barnier as the Union Chief Negotiator and their determination to stay united. COSAC stresses that the integrity of the internal market and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union on internal market principles has to be preserved.

4.2. COSAC stresses that the Good Friday Agreement must be protected unconditionally by any negotiation result to provide citizens with a sustainable solution. COSAC emphasizes the need for solidarity towards Ireland.

4.3. COSAC welcomes the draft Withdrawal Agreement and encourages the Union Chief Negotiator to continue his efforts to reach an agreement on the Political Declaration on the future relationship.

4.4. COSAC stresses the importance of cooperation at interparliamentary level with the United Kingdom after Brexit, and will examine the possible modalities for its own continued cooperation with the UK once the Withdrawal Agreement is concluded and the framework for future UK EU relations is known.

5. CLIMATE POLICY AND ENERGY UNION

5.1. COSAC reaffirms the commitment of the European Union and its Member States to swiftly and fully implement the Paris Agreement and to continue to lead in the fight against climate change, including through the adoption of pending legislative proposals at EU level. The Agreement remains a cornerstone of global efforts to effectively tackle climate change on a global level. In the light of the recent report from the IPCC, COSAC underlines the need of limiting the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.

5.2. COSAC welcomes the project of the Energy Union and all efforts aiming at a more secure and sustainable energy policy. COSAC supports the comprehensive approach putting the European Union at the forefront of the fight against climate change and increasing the production of renewable energy. With a view to COP24 that will be held in Poland from 3 until 14 December 2018, COSAC hopes for the adoption of ambitious and comprehensive implementing rules of the Paris Agreement.

5.3. COSAC considers that the project of the Energy Union can make a substantial contribution to achieve the Paris Agreement's goals. In particular, COSAC underlines that the promotion of renewable energies contributes to reaching the goals set out in the Paris agreement. At the same time the use of renewable energy diminishes the European Union's dependency on energy imports.

5.4. COSAC endorses measures that lead to a swift and comprehensive adoption of the Clean Energy Package, especially all steps taken to create an internal market for electricity and to improve the risk-preparedness of the European Union. Furthermore, COSAC welcomes the

creation of a system for the governance of the Energy Union which integrates climate and energy planning into a single framework as this would create a cooperation mechanism to oversee the implementation of the 2030 EU climate and energy policy objectives.

5.5. COSAC notes that a number of Member States rely on a single energy supplier challenging the European Union - the world's biggest importer of energy. COSAC supports all efforts to maximise the European Union's use of indigenous sources of energy in full compliance with the climate targets and to secure energy supply and promotes the diversification of energy sources. COSAC points out that measures taken to protect the environment and increase the production of renewable energy are also contributing to the European Union's competitiveness. In this context, COSAC highlights the importance of research and development. Furthermore, COSAC supports the promotion of new energy technologies and innovative solutions.

5.6. Energy must remain affordable for citizens and businesses. While advocating plans leading to the protection of the climate and the environment COSAC underlines that a sustainable future for industry and business and fair competition must be ensured. Affordability of energy and the competitiveness of European industry need to be kept in mind. The specific needs of energy-intensive industries must be taken into account.

5.7. COSAC reiterates that the fight against climate change must remain one of the key endeavours in the European Union's environmental policy. At the same time, other causes of pollution of the environment must not be neglected. In this context, COSAC notes that plastics and especially microplastics contribute considerably to pollution, in particular of inland waters and oceans. COSAC attaches importance to stepping up activities against plastic pollution and to stopping the use of microplastics in various product groups. COSAC endorses measures aimed at reducing plastic waste, especially single-use plastics.

5.8. COSAC welcomes the activities of the European Union's LIFE programme which supports climate action and environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU. COSAC underlines the importance of such projects.

6. A TRANSPARENT EUROPEAN UNION CLOSER TO ITS CITIZENS IN LIGHT OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

6.1. COSAC underlines the key role of the principle of subsidiarity in bringing the European Union closer to its citizens. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely to the citizens as possible.

6.2. COSAC welcomes the Report of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently” and the recent Communication from the European Commission “The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking” and the included recommendations to make subsidiarity more active and visible.

6.3. COSAC emphasises that the due involvement of national Parliaments in policymaking and legislative processes at European level is of major importance for ensuring a high degree of transparency, efficiency and public acceptance. COSAC encourages the EU's institutions and national and regional Parliaments, regional and local authorities, and civil society to work together in order to improve the exchange of ideas between Parliaments, authorities and citizens across the European Union.

6.4. COSAC welcomes the European Commission's proposals to enhance the communication with regional and local authorities and to take into account their specificities in general consultations. COSAC invites regional and local authorities to intensify their interaction with the European Commission.

6.5. COSAC considers the Report of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently” and the Communication from the European Commission “The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking” a good basis for further discussions. Having in mind the view expressed by COSAC in the Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC regarding the procedure for setting up the Task Force, COSAC stresses the importance that the national Parliaments and the European Parliament are invited to actively take part in these discussions. These discussions should cover, inter alia, the extension of the eight week deadline for the submission of reasoned opinions within the framework of the subsidiarity control mechanism by excluding recess periods from the counting and exploring the introduction of a twelve week deadline, as well as the question of providing national Parliaments with the additional opportunity to express their views about proportionality and the legal basis of a proposed legislation in reasoned opinions, taking into account that certain modifications can be achieved without Treaty changes. COSAC reiterates that it appreciates the so called “green card” mechanism as an extension of the political dialogue between the European Commission and the national Parliaments.

6.6. COSAC welcomes the efforts of the EU institutions towards more transparency. In this context, COSAC acknowledges the Council's pending efforts to review its legislative transparency standards, and welcomes the calls for greater transparency from the European Ombudsman and national Parliaments. COSAC will carefully follow the Council discussions, invites the Council to report on any progress on these reflections in due time and reiterates the conclusions as stated in paragraph 2.8. of the Contribution of the LVIII Plenary COSAC

(Estonia) and in paragraph 2.6./2.7. of the Contribution of the LIX Plenary COSAC (Bulgaria). With regard to the European Commission's proposal for a mandatory transparency register, COSAC calls on all stakeholders to address the issue in a constructive way.

6.7. COSAC stresses that the representation of the European Union's citizens in the European Parliament is based on free and fair elections. Political parties at European level serve as a direct link between citizens and the political system, contributing to transparency and a better understanding of the European Union's decision-making processes.

6.8. In view of the upcoming European elections on 23–26 May 2019, COSAC appreciates the EU Institutions' efforts to reinforce democratic resilience in Europe. Securing transparency in online political advertising, fighting disinformation campaigns, improving the rules on European political party funding and boosting cybersecurity are important measures to effectively counter new types of threats to free and fair elections.

6.9. COSAC encourages all European citizens to actively participate in the upcoming European elections. Furthermore, COSAC recalls that every citizen of the European Union has the right to directly participate in the Union's democratic life, among others, through the European Citizens' Initiative.