



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC

PARIS, FRANCE, 14 JANUARY 2022

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

CHAIR: Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*, Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*;

Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, Mr David SMOLJAK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Senát*;

Mr Nik PREBIL, Deputy Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, Mr Bojan KEKEC, Chair of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs, Slovenian *Državni svet*.

(Ms Roberta METSOLA, First Vice-President, European Parliament, and Mr Antonio TAJANI, Chair of the Committee for Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, were unable to attend.)

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PROCEEDINGS

1. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*, welcomed the delegations of the Presidential Troika of COSAC (hereinafter referred to as "the Troika") and opened the meeting by welcoming Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, and Mr David SMOLJAK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Senát*, who were participating in a formal meeting of the COSAC Troika for the first time.

Mr RAPIN then referred to the agenda of the meeting of the Troika, previously circulated to all delegations, which was adopted without amendment.

2. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT PROGRAMME OF THE COSAC CHAIRPERSONS' MEETING

Mr RAPIN alluded to the programme of the meeting of the Chairpersons, which would be split into three sessions.

The first session would focus on the priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union and would be presented by Mr Clément BEAUNE, Secretary of State to the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, responsible for European Affairs.

The second session would deal with the new working methods within COSAC, a session which would be chaired by Ms THILLAYE, and with an introductory statement by Mr RAPIN.

The third session would be dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the euro (achievements and future of the euro), with opening remarks by Ms THILLAYE, and a keynote speech by Ms Christine LAGARDE, President of the European Central Bank.

The draft programme of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, previously circulated to all delegations, was approved without amendment.

3. DEBATE ON THE DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR THE LXVII COSAC PLENARY MEETING

Mr RAPIN then referred to the draft agenda of the Plenary meeting of the LXVII COSAC, scheduled for 4 and 5 March, at the *Assemblée nationale* in Paris, welcoming the presence of Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the respective European Affairs Committee. Mr RAPIN then introduced the five thematic sessions which would be covered during the meeting:

- the first session would be dedicated to drawing up an initial assessment of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union;

- the second session would discuss the European recovery plan and the exit from the crisis;
- the third session would address the issues of the fight against climate change and the energy transition;
- the fourth session would be dedicated to the Conference on the Future of Europe;
- and the fifth and final session would be a presentation of a progress report on the internal working groups of COSAC, if an agreement on their establishment were to be found later in this meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons.

Since there were no additional remarks on the draft agenda for the LXVII COSAC, Mr RAPIN ended this debate by noting the support of the Troika to the proposed programme.

4. APPROVAL OF THE OUTLINE OF THE 37TH BI-ANNUAL COSAC REPORT

Mr RAPIN presented the outline of the 37th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which would be divided into three parts: the first chapter would explore the role of national Parliaments in the European Union; the second chapter would focus on the rule of law; and the third chapter would address the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is due to hold its final plenary session this spring.

The questionnaire would be sent to the delegations at the latest on 17 January, with replies expected by 31 January, so that the report for the COSAC plenary meeting in early March can be drawn up on time. Mr RAPIN explained that this shortened calendar derived from the constraints imposed on the Presidency by the French national elections, scheduled for spring.

The draft summary of COSAC's 37th Bi-annual Report was approved.

5. LETTERS RECEIVED BY THE PRESIDENCY

Mr RAPIN referred to the following letters received by the Presidency requesting invitation to attend the COSAC meetings:

- Mr Benedikt WÜRTH, President of the Swiss delegation for relations with the European Parliament, *Swiss Assemblée fédérale*;
- Mr Masud GHARAHKHANI, President of the Norwegian *Stortinget*;
- Lord Charles KINNOULL, Chair of the European Union Committee, UK *House of Lords*;
- Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Chair of the Committee on European Integration of the Parliament of Georgia.

Mr RAPIN said that, following consultation with the Presidential Troika, invitations would be sent to all the above Parliaments.

A similar request was received from Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*, but only regarding the COSAC plenary meeting, to which a reply would be provided at a later stage.

Ms THILLAYE suggested that it should be clearly mentioned that these Parliaments would attend COSAC in their capacity as observers, a distinction which was deemed necessary namely with regard to the order of priority to be given in the speaking list for the different debates, which should be attributed to the Parliaments/Chambers of the EU Member States.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr RAPIN started by alluding to the informal exchange held by the Troika on 11 January and to the first discussions on the issue of the working groups that the Presidency proposes to create within COSAC. He thanked the Chairs of the Presidential Troika for the support shown for this proposal on that occasion and appreciated the suggestions made to improve it. Therefore, Mr RAPIN recalled the main points agreed with regard to the establishment of the two working groups proposed, and that would later be presented to the Chairpersons of COSAC:

- i) participation in these working groups will naturally be on a voluntary basis;
- ii) the work of the groups will take place from February until the end of the French Presidency. A progress report could be presented at the COSAC plenary session in early March 2022. However, each working group could then continue its work after the plenary session and produce a final report by the end of the semester;
- iii) the creation of these working groups is in full respect by the independence of each COSAC Presidency in determining its work, and it would be clearly specified that the objective of the French presidency will be to lead the work of the groups in order to reach conclusive reports by the end of June 2022. The incoming Presidencies will decide freely to continue or not the existence of working groups according to their priorities and objectives;
- iv) furthermore, questions have also been raised about the binding or non-binding nature of the working groups' conclusions. On this point, Mr RAPIN reiterated that the work of these groups cannot lead to the adoption of conclusions or recommendations that would be binding on COSAC. The plenary COSAC will be free to take up certain orientations of the reports if it so wishes, by integrating them into the conclusions or contributions that it alone has the competence to adopt;
- v) Finally, and with regard to the concerns raised that these groups could duplicate the working groups of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr RAPIN pointed out that the Conference on the Future of Europe involves parliamentarians who are not necessarily members of COSAC. On the other hand, he highlighted that COSAC, as a collective emanation of the national Parliaments, must be able to conduct its own reflection on any

subject, even if it is partly related to topics covered by the Conference on the Future of Europe. The latter has set up working groups, one of which is on democracy. It is therefore particularly interesting that the national and European parliamentarians can shed light on two subjects that are part of this broad theme: the role of national Parliaments and the values of the Union. The possibility of uploading the reports of these COSAC working groups on the platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe was also discussed.

Ms Sabine THILLAYE referred to the procedure for deliberating on this proposal at the meeting of the COSAC Chairs, recalling that the article 2.6 of the COSAC Rules of Procedure provide for the possibility of establishing working groups through a vote "by an absolute majority of the chairpersons". However, and given that this would be more in line with the spirit of COSAC's work, the Presidency considers it to be highly preferable that this decision could be taken by consensus.

Therefore, Ms THILLAYE informed that the session on the new working methods for COSAC would be conducted with the aim of clarifying any remaining doubts or questions, in order to reach a consensus, asking whether any of the delegations' Chairpersons would be opposed to the creation of the working groups. In the absence of opposition, the Chair would then note that the Chairpersons of COSAC decided by consensus on its establishment.

However, if there were one or more formal objections to this project, Ms THILLAYE considered that the decision would have to be put to the vote. She added that the Presidency was prepared for this eventuality, namely planning to have a roll call of the chairs so that everyone (whether present in the room or connected remotely) can indicate verbally how they will vote: for, against or abstention. Nevertheless, Ms THILLAYE raised two questions to which she would ask the COSAC secretariat to provide answers:

- a) Should the voting rule be "one committee Chairman (or his representative) = one vote" or should the votes be weighted according to the usual rule in COSAC, "one Parliament = two votes"? In the case of a bicameral Parliament, each committee Chairman would then count as one vote. If the Parliament is unicameral, the committee Chairperson would count as two votes. This seems to be more in line with the spirit of COSAC, but again the Rules on Article 2.6 are not clear;
- b) Does the absolute majority required by the Rules of Procedure mean the votes cast or all chairpersons? In other words, should abstentions be considered as votes "against" or not? , adding that this was not the practice in the case of the two French assemblies.

The Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat was given the floor to clarify, having referred to the internal discussion held within the members of the Secretariat on these two specific issues ahead of this meeting. On the first issue, the Permanent Member voiced the interpretation that the voting rules should be the ones specified in the Rules of Procedure for the adoption of Contribution and Conclusions (article 7.6), namely that "each delegation has two votes". Otherwise, bicameral Parliaments would have two votes

(two Chairs voting) and unicameral Parliaments only one (one Chair voting). Concerning the absolute majority, the Permanent Member shared the Secretariat's interpretation that this concept shall refer to all COSAC chairpersons.

Mr RAPIN thanked the Secretariat for this interpretation, namely corroborating what should be then considered as the meaning of the absolute majority of COSAC chairpersons. He also referred to the fact that, even if Mr Antonio TAJANI, Chair of the AFCO Committee of the European Parliament could not be present today, he had expressed his support for the above mentioned proposal to establish the two working groups at the informal Troika meeting held on 11 January.

Mr David SMOLJAK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Senát*, expressed his support for this proposal, as presented in the course of the present meeting.

Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, also voiced support for this proposal, reiterating the condition that it does not impose any obligation on the incoming Presidency to continue with the working groups.

Mr Nik PREBIL, Deputy Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, alluded to the suggestions made at the informal meeting of the Troika on 11 January and informed that he had no further comments to make.

Ms THILLAYE thanked all participants in the meeting for the constructive debate.

Echoing these sentiments, Mr RAPIN closed the meeting.