



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC

MADRID, SPAIN, 17-18 SEPTEMBER 2023

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PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Member of the Spanish *Senado*, and Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Member of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Opening remarks by Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Member of the Spanish Senado

Mr LANDALUCE CALLEJA welcomed the guests to Madrid and to one of the very first initiatives of the parliamentary dimension of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), after the organisation of the Global Conference on the Commemoration of the International Day of Parliamentarism, held in León, on June 30 – July 1. He also recalled the fact that the idea of establishing COSAC as a forum for interparliamentary cooperation was first conceived in Madrid, during the Conference of Speakers of the EU Parliaments held in this city in May 1989, with the aim of strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU. This had triggered the institutional developments that later led to the enshrining of this Conference in the Treaties of the European Union.

Mr LANDALUCE CALLEJA considered that the EU was living in a challenging and historic time which could not be dealt with lightly, and that therefore the EU should strengthen its values.

He then expressed the wish that the COSAC proceedings during the current semester could help foster the spirit of solidarity and cooperation amongst Member States and Parliaments, so that the EU could remain united and strive for peace and prosperity.

Welcome speech by Ms Francina ARMENGOL SOCÍAS, Speaker of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*

The Speaker of the *Congreso de los Diputados* started by recalling that 2023 marked Spain's fifth presidency of the Council of the European Union, the first having taken place in 1989 and the last in 2010. She then recalled that the past ten years had seen numerous changes, such as the economic crisis, the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, a war on European soil and the climate emergency. She noted that, despite these changes, the Union had been seen as an unshakable organisation, although many challenges were still present.

Ms ARMENGOL SOCÍAS then listed the priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, the first being the reindustrialisation of Europe to guarantee open strategic autonomy of the Union; secondly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine; thirdly, the economic recovery based on ecological transition; and fourthly, the consolidation of European values based on the guarantee of social and economic justice for citizens.

Finally, she referred to the initiative taken by the the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS, to develop a “Charter on the role of parliamentarism in a functioning liberal democracy” , which was expected to be approved during the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments due to be held in April 2024, under Spanish Presidency.

Welcome speech by Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA, Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*

The Speaker of the Spanish *Senado* welcomed the participants to this Chamber, which ensured the territorial representation of the *Cortes Generales* of the Kingdom of Spain. He also reiterated that it was in Madrid that COSAC was conceived in 1989, when Spain was still a new member of what was then called the European Communities.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA noted that Europe had come a long way in its process of political construction since then, following a path which had never been easy, but which had been worthy. In that context, he recalled that great progress had been made in terms of the active participation of the national Parliaments and of the European Parliament in defining the main lines of the Union's various policies. Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA considered that parliamentary democracy was the identifying feature that best defined all the countries of the Union, since it was at the very heart of its origin and was also key to its future.

He further considered that, back in 1989, the birth of COSAC was a milestone for the deployment of interparliamentary cooperation and that, since then, the mechanisms of exchange between the national Parliaments of the EU had expanded in scope, complexity and effectiveness. He noted that COSAC had maintained its pre-eminence in this field by virtue of its cross-cutting nature, which had always facilitated its participation in the debate on the main political and institutional issues on the EU agenda.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA then mentioned that Europe was currently facing enormous challenges, uncertainties and tensions, considering that the parliamentary perspective should play a role in defining the direction Europe should take in defence of its shared values and interests.

Therefore, he underlined the importance of the meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons and the preparatory work in relation to the next COSAC Plenary, scheduled for November, in order to fulfil the expectations from all the citizens of the EU towards their political representatives.

2. PROCEDURAL AND OTHER GENERAL MATTERS

Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Member of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, began by welcoming delegates attending the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC for the first time: Ms Judit VARGA, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS First Vice President of the Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* and Chair of the EU Affairs Committee, Mr Calogero PISANO, Chair of the EU Policies Committee of the Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Mr Heikki AUTTO, Chair of the Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta* and Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*.

Presentation of the results of the COSAC Presidential Troika Meeting

After the adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN informed the delegations about the results of the Meeting of the COSAC Presidential Troika, noting the approval of the agenda of the Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, the approval of the outline of the 40th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, and the approval of the draft agenda of the LXX COSAC.

She made a few clarifications, alluding to the need of adapting the initial agendas in the wake of the changes in the political situation in Spain, following the holding of early general elections on 23 July. This circumstance had posed an unforeseen obstacle to the parliamentary dimension of the Spanish Presidency of COSAC, since this meeting had to be organised without a full-fledged Joint Committee for European Union Affairs of the Spanish *Cortes Generales*.

In this situation, it was considered appropriate to replace a debate on a specific topic with a topical debate on European Union issues at the meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, as was done under the German Presidency at the virtual COSAC on 30 November 2020. This topical session (Session III of the agenda) would allow more speaking time for parliamentarians to express their views on the topics they considered most relevant to the European Union, both on current issues, as well as a follow-up to the State of the Union address by the President of the European Commission, Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN, delivered on 13 September 2023 in the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg.

She further noted that, in view of the diversity of topics that might be dealt with at this session, and in order to structure the debate, the Troika had agreed to add an introductory remark by the Presidency, as well as a final summary of the debate.

Draft programme for the LXX COSAC Meeting

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN then referred to the draft agenda of the LXX COSAC Plenary scheduled for 26 to 28 November 2023, in Madrid. She further clarified that, once the Joint Committee for European Union Affairs would be established, some adjustments to

the draft programme could occur, which would in any case be communicated in a timely manner.

The draft programme circulated was composed of five thematic sessions which would be covered during the LXX COSAC: the first session would be dedicated to a review of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU; the second session would discuss the Pact on Migration and Asylum of the EU; the third session would cover the energy crisis and the green transition; the fourth session would focus on the situation in Ukraine and relations with the European Union; and the fifth and final session would deal with open strategic autonomy and relations with Latin America.

Outline of the 40th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN presented the outline of the 40th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which would be divided into three parts: the first chapter would be dedicated to the role of Parliaments in relation to the European goal of open strategic autonomy; the second chapter would focus on the role of Parliaments in handling the energy policies: renewable sources of energy; and, finally, the third chapter would look at the role of the Parliaments when confronted with Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The questionnaire would be sent to the delegations on 20 September 2023, with replies expected by 20 October 2023, so that the Bi-annual Report for the scheduled COSAC plenary in November could be drawn up on time, and be presented by the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat at the LXX COSAC.

Appointment of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for the period 2024/25

On the appointment of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, the Chair referred to Rule 9.3 of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC and said that the term of office of the current Permanent Member, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO would expire on 31 December 2023 and that the appointment for the period of 2024/25 would be made by the COSAC Chairpersons at the LXX Meeting, in November.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN informed the Chairpersons that the proposal of the Spanish Presidency and of the Troika would be as follows: having regard to the letter of support for Mr DIAS PINHEIRO sent by the Portuguese *Assembleia da República* to the incoming Spanish Presidency in May 2023, and the current smooth and good functioning of the COSAC Secretariat, the Presidency proposed to support the continuity of the above-mentioned candidate. Simultaneously, and as a matter of transparency, the Presidency would inform all the Chairpersons of this procedure and of this support, giving delegations until 5 November 2023 to convey to the Presidency any comments deemed relevant with this regard, so that the decision could be taken at the LXX COSAC, to be held from 26 to 28 November 2023.

In relation to the co-financing of the cost for seconding the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat and other technical costs, foreseen by Article 9.5 of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC, Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN recalled that under the previous Swedish Presidency, all Parliaments had agreed to continue with the co-financing for the period 2024-25.

Letters received by the Presidency

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN referred to the following letters received by the Presidency requesting invitations to attend the COSAC meetings:

- Ms 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 Peter RICKETTS, Chair of the European Union Committee, UK *House of Lords*;
- Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*;
- Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Chair of the Committee on European Integration of the Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*;
- Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, Kosovo¹ *Kuvendi i Kosovës*.
- Ms Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES, President of the Monaco *Conseil national*, and Mr Régis BERGONZI, National Councillor, President of the Commission for monitoring the negotiations with the European Union.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN informed that, following consultation with the Presidential Troika of COSAC, invitations had been extended to all the above-mentioned Parliaments to take part in the forthcoming Meeting of Chairpersons of COSAC, and they would also be invited to the LXX COSAC in November.

Any other business

There was no other business.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

3. FIRST SESSION - PRESENTATION OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

Keynote intervention: Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO

This session was chaired by the Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*, Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA, and moderated by Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN. The keynote intervention was presented by the acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain, Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO. The Minister began by recalling the special meaning COSAC had for Madrid, the city where this Conference was established back in 1989. Thirty-four years later, COSAC came back to Madrid in exceptional times, during the Spanish Presidency and with national Parliaments playing an essential role in building Europe. First and foremost, he underlined the importance which the Spanish Presidency would give to the unjust invasion of Ukraine, adding that more than 400 meetings would be organised during this semester, at all levels of the Council.

As a first priority, Minister ALBARES BUENO mentioned the reindustrialisation of the EU, as means to achieve the open strategic autonomy of Europe. In this context, he referred to the Critical Raw Materials Act, the legislation on the regulation of artificial intelligence or the meetings of the European Political Community. He emphasised the importance of the EU's relation with Latin America, as put forward during the EU-CELAC summit, that took place in Madrid in July 2023, stressing the need to hold this summit on a biannual basis.

The second priority mentioned by the Minister was the green transition, and the need to curb the effects of climate change, which could be seen as an opportunity to create jobs, namely through the pending legislative files of the Fit for 55-package.

The third priority would be social and economic justice, as Europe's future was linked to the prosperity of all its citizens. In order to achieve this goal, files such as the Multiannual Financial Framework and the reform of the economic governance rules would be needed. Equal treatment, between men and women, but also the protection of citizens with disabilities and the achievement of a common space for mobility in Europe, should also be deemed essential.

The fourth priority would be upholding European unity, as a prerequisite to enable all other policies. European unity was threatened by increased geopolitical tensions that affected the European identifying traits, as European values were attacked from the outside. In this line, a true European horizon should be offered to candidate countries, and a more efficient management of migration should be achieved. All efforts would be made during the Spanish Presidency in order to achieve those objectives.

First intervention: Mr Othmar KARAS, First Vice-president of the European Parliament

Mr KARAS recalled the critical moment Europe was living in, facing multiple crises, less than 200 days before the European elections in June 2024. He urged the Spanish Presidency to finalise as many open files as possible, e.g. the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the regulation of artificial intelligence, the economic governance review and the Fit for 55-package. A special mention was devoted to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the need for Europe to stand united in the world, especially in the face of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Mr KARAS briefly mentioned his proposal of a “Charter on the role of parliamentarism in a functioning liberal democracy”, presented during the Conference on Parliamentarism, held in León on 30 June 2023, and likely to be approved at the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments of the EU to be held in Spain in April 2024.

During the ensuing debate, 30 speakers asked for the floor, and there was a general support for the priorities of the Spanish Presidency, with different files being mentioned by a number of speakers.

The 30th anniversary of the **single market** in 2023 was highlighted by Mr Hans WALLMARK, Swedish *Riksdag*, who stressed the need of adapting the single market to the current challenges, after the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, considered that the priorities of the Presidency were aligned with the challenges Europe was facing. However, he noted that they did not address the establishment of a permanent financial mechanism to deal with crises and the creation of new own resources for the EU, proposals which Portugal has been advocating for.

In relation to the **enlargement of the EU**, which was mentioned by a large number of speakers, specific proposals were made, like the need to avoid creating two categories of candidate countries, as mentioned by Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*, or to avoid applying fast-track procedures to specific candidate countries, as referred to by Ms Judit VARGA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*.

The **Pact on Migration and Asylum** was another topic that was mentioned by a large number of speakers, who called for EU cooperation as the only way to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean, as done by Mr Pieyre Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée nationale*. The need to avoid the use of migration policies as leverage in negotiations that aim to achieve greater political influence was also mentioned by Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*. Three key principles were referred to by Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, who considered that solidarity, responsibility and cohesiveness must be fully implemented in the migration policies, offering concrete measures to deal with this emergency, specifically in relation to Lampedusa and its critical situation in the days before the COSAC Chairs meeting.

The **accession of both Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen** area was strongly advocated by representatives of the national Parliaments of both countries, Mr Kiril PETKOV, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and Mr Stefan MUŞOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*.

The opportunity and possible outcome of **the relations of the EU with Türkiye** were mentioned, from opposite perspectives, by the national parliamentarians of Cyprus, Mr Harris GEORGIADES, Cypriot *Vouli ton Antiproposon* and of Türkiye, Mr Burhan KAYATÜRK, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*.

In his replies, Minister ALBARES BUENO expressed his appreciation for the vitality of COSAC debates, and focused on those topics that had been repeatedly mentioned during the discussion. In relation to enlargement, he confirmed that the Spanish Presidency was ready to advance as much as possible, and stressed the merit-based procedure that should be applied in all cases, as well as the heroic situation in which Ukraine had undertaken this path. As to the migration policies, the Minister underlined the need for a European and solidarity-based solution to the crisis. Regarding Ukraine, he recalled that the abolition of war in Europe was at the heart of the European project since its conception, and that its core principles had been utterly challenged by the Russian aggression. In relation to the ecological transition, he defended the promotion of renewable sources of energy, and expressed his hope that the Iberian solution could become a European solution as well. Not without mentioning other files that were to be dealt with during the Spanish Presidency, the Minister closed his intervention referring to the 30th anniversary of the single market, and the idea that competitiveness should not be incompatible with social progress, as aimed by the Spanish Presidency of the Council.

4. SECOND SESSION - THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE IN EUROPE

Chaired by Mr José Ignacio Landaluce Calleja, Member of the Spanish *Senado*.

Intervention by the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union, Ukraine *Verkhovna Rada*, Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE

In her introduction, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE expressed her gratitude to the Parliamentary Dimension of the Spanish Presidency for putting Ukraine's future in Europe and the European Union on the agenda. She also thanked all the parliamentarians for the humanitarian, financial, and military support their countries had provided since the beginning of the war.

She then referred to reports in international media on the ongoing war in Ukraine, noting the fact that many media outlets used the date of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as a starting point to count the days of the war gave a false image. In reality, she claimed that the war had started more than nine years ago with

Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014. She argued that it was important to keep in mind that the Ukrainian people had already been fighting for their territorial integrity, independence, and for the right to define their own future for many years.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE recalled that the previous night was another terrible one in Kyiv with heavy Russian air strikes. In total 18 kamikaze drones and 17 cruise missiles were shot down by the Ukrainian defence forces with the help of advanced military equipment provided by international partners. Despite these successful examples of Ukrainian defence, she argued that many things were still worrying for the future, regretting that the seemingly endless Russian military attacks did not reach the front pages of the newspapers as frequently as before. She shared that many Ukrainians also felt that the sense of urgency among international partners had faded. She warned that this was not the time to rest on our laurels, and that everyone should instead ask themselves if they have done everything in their power to help Ukraine win the war. She emphasised that Ukraine had chosen freedom, democracy, and to return to the family of European nations, but was currently in need of further support.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE asked for enhanced dedication and increased support from partners in order to achieve three different things. First, to win the war; second to rebuild the country; and third, to reach the goal of becoming both an EU and NATO member. This would be possible to achieve if Ukraine and the EU could stay united and work together in this common cause, she said. The approach for stepping up help to Ukraine should not be out of pity, but instead out of belief in common values such as the rule of law and territorial integrity and with the conviction that dictatorship should never be able to thrive in Europe.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE said that while the barbaric war was taking place, Ukraine was still working hard to become an EU member. She argued that the EU's decision of granting Ukraine candidate status, along with Moldova, had been a historic one, which had also created a new internal dynamic within the EU, as it revitalised the magnetic appeal of the success of the European project and refreshed the basic ideas behind the EU. Moreover, it had given new energy to the Ukrainian people, she said. Well aware of the magnitude of the task and the difficult circumstances, Ukraine had been putting a great effort in meeting the seven criteria the EU had set up when candidate status was granted.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE hoped that Ukraine's efforts to transform would be duly recognised, and asked for political boldness from the EU and its Member States to take the next step and open formal negotiations with Ukraine already in 2023. This would allow Ukraine to access additional knowledge, instruments, and understanding in order to faster transform and at the same time fight the war for its freedom and survival. She further underlined that Ukraine's future accession would be mutually beneficial for the EU and its Member States, because it would make the Union stronger in many respects.

Intervention by the Chairperson of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*, Mr Hans WALLMARK

In his introduction Mr WALLMARK pointed out two central aspects of the current state of affairs in Europe. First, a full-scale war had been taking place in Europe for 18 months, which should have consequences. Second, in the foreseeable time ahead, probably decades, the EU would have to deal with a nationalistic, imperialistic, and well-armed Russia.

He recalled the fact that the war had been going on since 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and attacked the eastern parts of Ukraine. Mr WALLMARK further acknowledged the enormous human suffering in Ukraine caused by the Russian aggression. This brutal war was something which undermined not just stability in Europe, but also the European project and the values it represented. He argued that Russia's aggression was a serious attack on the rules-based international order, and therefore was a common concern. By its brutal invasion, he noted that Russia had denied Ukraine's right to exist and its right to be free. The EU must therefore keep putting pressure on Russia and Belarus, including through sanctions. He argued that the EU should continue to stand united and support Ukraine's economy, society, armed forces, and future reconstruction.

Mr WALLMARK expanded on how the EU had been providing comprehensive support to Ukraine in many different ways. He underlined the need for the EU to be persistent in its support until Ukraine had won the war and regained full control of its territory within its internationally recognised borders. He referred to decisions taken by the Swedish *Riksdag* on 13 separate arms packages amounting to more than two billion euros. These decisions had been taken with support from all parties represented in the *Riksdag*, which was a great strength.

Mr WALLMARK further stated that Ukraine's future should be within the EU, and acknowledged the progress Ukraine had made in implementing reforms related to the judicial system and the media sector; and the hard work that had been done in order to fight corruption. He further argued that the EU should continue to support Ukraine as long as needed, and also had a responsibility to do so. With the support from the EU, Ukraine should win the war, regain its freedom and be able to rebuild its country. He said that long-term support and investments would pave the way for Ukraine's future inside the Union, and that the EU would stand with Ukraine and continue to provide help, not only to tackle urgent needs but also with long-term support on its path to EU membership. This was not just a collective responsibility Mr WALLMARK argued, but also a way to assure that justice, human rights, and international law prevailed.

On a more personal note, Mr WALLMARK said in his conclusion that both Sweden and Ukraine supported an open-door policy to NATO, and expressed his hope that the military alliance in the near future would have more members than the current 31 member states.

In the debate which followed, 33 speakers took the floor. There was overwhelming solidarity with Ukraine and consensus among speakers for the need to show continuous support in these difficult times.

Several representatives of national Parliaments, including amongst others, Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Glenn BEDINGFIELD, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, and Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonia, *Sobranie*, reiterated their **support for granting Ukraine candidate status** and underlined that the country's future was within the EU. This was also highlighted by Mr Othmar KARAS, *European Parliament*.

The **new dynamics to EU enlargement**, as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the new geopolitical reality in Europe, were highlighted by many representatives of national Parliaments. Among others this was discussed by Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbia *Narodna skupština*.

The **need for the EU to reform** in order to successfully incorporate new Member States was discussed by Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Mr BEDINGFIELD, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Mr Alain CADEC, French *Sénat* and Mr Bolesław PIECHA, Polish *Sejm*.

The **conditions for peace** were debated by some representatives of national Parliaments. Ms Judit VARGA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, argued that only immediate ceasefire and peace talks as soon as possible could stop further bloodshed. Several other representatives of national Parliaments claimed that peace could only be achieved when Ukraine had won the war, regained control of its territory and when all Russian troops were withdrawn. This was highlighted by, amongst others, Ms Radvilė ŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Ms SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Ms Zita PLEŠTINSKÁ, Slovak *Národná rada*, and Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*. Mr Hans-Peter PORTMANN, Switzerland *Assemblée fédérale* suggested Geneva as suitable place for possible future peace negotiations.

The **need of finding ways to use frozen and immobilised Russian assets** to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine was discussed by Mr Heiki AUTTO, Finnish *Eduskunta*.

Mr Kim VALENTIN, Danish *Folketing* argued that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a **threat to the European security order** and Mr Peter RICKETTS, United Kingdom *House of Lords* considered the war in Ukraine to be the biggest military crisis in Europe since 1945. Other aspects of the topic were also debated by individual members of national Parliaments, e.g Ms Ine Eriksen SØREIDE, Norwegian *Stortinget* argued that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was about imperialism, and that Russia had not changed any of its strategic goals in Ukraine since the war started.

5. THIRD SESSION - CURRENT ISSUES RELATED TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Spanish *Senado*, opened the session and briefly explained that speakers could intervene on any current issues relevant to the EU. The debate could follow-up the State of the Union address delivered by the President of the European Commission Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN, on 13 September 2023 during the Plenary Session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, but also include any other topics deemed important for the European project.

Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat* highlighted the **resilience shown and the common actions adopted by the EU when faced with unexpected crises** such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, emphasising the need for strategic autonomy. He also stressed the need to advance on the large number of legislative proposals under negotiations before the European Parliament elections in 2024.

Numerous speakers discussed **EU enlargement** against the background of growing geopolitical challenges and divisions. Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, noted that a new iron curtain between autocracies and democracies was dividing the world, and that this made EU enlargement an unavoidable topic, for which the EU should develop a plan and a calendar. He also called for strengthening the role of the Parliaments of candidate countries, and proposed granting them status as permanent observers not only in COSAC but also in the European Parliament. Mr Bogdan KLICH, Polish *Senat*, welcomed the reference in the State of the Union Address to a **merit-based enlargement** process. He further said that enlargement efforts should be accompanied by EU reform and further integration, including implementing the proposals from the Conference for the Future of Europe and strengthening the role of the European Parliament. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, also welcomed the **renewed focus on EU enlargement**, which should include even more countries, and stressed the need to establish partnerships with candidate countries and not to change the criteria during the accession process. Mr İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, welcomed that enlargement was again on top of the EU's agenda, but warned that it would be a big mistake if Türkiye's accession aspirations were left aside, and called for negotiations to be revived. He also stressed the importance of interparliamentary cooperation but noted with regret that the European Parliament was, in his view, becoming a forum for anti-turkish sentiments.

Mr HAJDUKOVIĆ underlined the **growing geopolitical divisions** and the need to **strengthen the EU's cooperation and ties with friendly countries** around the world. He noted the potential of trade agreements with democratic countries such as India, Indonesia, Australia or even with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional grouping. Mr Heikki AUTTO, Finnish *Eduskunta*, echoed the need for a **strategic approach and a strong EU** that could strengthen its multilateral ties with allies. He underlined that this should be accompanied by a deepening of the EU's single

market so that all Member States, and not only big ones, could benefit from this. Mr Stefan MUȘOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, stressed the need to work for a safer and more prosperous EU. He welcomed efforts to boost the EU's reindustrialisation, and to reduce dependencies on foreign countries, and expressed his expectation that the October 2023 European Council meeting on open strategic autonomy could address these challenges.

Mr Vasile DÎNCU, Romanian *Senat*, highlighted the need to address the **EU's democracy crisis**; otherwise he argued, the EU could not overcome any of the other crises the union was facing. He further noted the importance of some of the recommendations included in the European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on "Parliamentarism, European citizenship and democracy". Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, expressed his concern with the **challenge posed by Russian propaganda ahead of the European Parliament elections in 2024**. He called on national Parliaments and the European Commission to do more to counter this threat.

Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, expressed his condolences to the families of the five Greek humanitarian workers who died in Libya when providing assistance in the aftermath of storm Daniel, which also affected Greece. He expressed his concern with the **management of natural disasters** and called for more funds to be made available for the response. Mr Franc BREZNIK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, also noted the growing threat posed by natural disasters, but stated that implementing the Green Deal should be done with "**green realism**", by adopting measures that did not harm economic prospects. Other topics mentioned in the debate included: the challenge posed by growing **illegal migration** in Slovakia, noted by Ms Zita PLEŠTINSKÁ, Slovak *Národná rada*, and the burning of copies of the Coran in countries such as Sweden, which Mr Burhan KAYATÜRK, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, considered to be worrying examples of religious intolerance.

Mr LANDALUCE CALLEJA summarised the debate before closing and listed the central issues discussed: EU enlargement, the strengthening of EU trade relations, the challenges for European democracy, the need to respond to natural disasters, advancing on the green transition with realism, and addressing irregular migration.

6. CLOSING SESSION

Address by Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Member of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN ended the proceedings and thanked all participants for the very interesting and constructive debates. She recalled that COSAC had been established 35 years ago, and that this framework brought more democratic legitimacy to the EU political process. She emphasised the responsibility of parliamentarians to work for better living conditions for EU citizens, while alluding to the key role to be

played by the parliamentary dimension of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council and, in particular, by COSAC.

She noted that the current challenges demand a strengthened interparliamentary cooperation, and that Europe should be a place of certainty, freedom and peace, while thanking the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the European Union, of the Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE for her intervention.

Address by Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA, Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA, Speaker of the *Senado* made the final intervention of the proceedings, noting that the COSAC Chairpersons had discussed several relevant topics such as the priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council, and the main current issues affecting the European Union, with special attention to the war in Ukraine.

He emphasised that the parliamentary dimension was essential to the European political project, since it was based on the fundamental principles of liberal democracy, at the heart of which were the parliaments, as the depositaries of the political representation of citizens. For that reason, he noted that the steps towards a greater political union have always been accompanied by a strengthening of both the European Parliament and the interparliamentary cooperation bodies, namely COSAC.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA regretted that liberal and parliamentary democracy was being challenged by illiberal and anti-parliamentary alternatives which were, in reality, variants of authoritarianism.

He noted that 1989 was the year in which COSAC obtained its birth certificate in Madrid, but it was also the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, a historic event which marked the beginning of a new era in which democracy and freedom spread throughout the European continent.

However, Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA alluded to the old ghosts of the past that had once again emerged from the darkness of history, noting that democracy was the most advanced political system built by human societies, but was also highly vulnerable. In fact, he recalled that Ukraine was forced, in the face of the Russian invasion, to fight in defence of its sovereignty and freedom and that the Russian regime, led by Mr Vladimir PUTIN, was seeking to impose its force on reason, based on a supremacist and aggressive nationalism.

He alluded to the intervention by Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, which was a testimony not rescued from the European history books of the first half of the 20th century, but from the current days.

In this context, he highlighted the firm response given from the outset by the European Union, both through the EU institutions and its Member States, with extensive political, economic, financial and, of course, military support for Ukraine. He emphasised that the commitment should be as firm and lasting as the war itself and that its objective should be the resolution of the conflict in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law. He noted that this was the position of Spain's current acting government, but expressed his confidence that, regardless of the composition of the next government, this position would not vary in substance.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA considered that this was a military aggression that concerned all Europeans, since Russia was challenging the EU's way of understanding the world, and that the EU should not let its guard down in protecting Europe from the risk of autocratic devolution.

He noted that parliamentarians bore a special responsibility with this regard, since they had been entrusted by the citizens with their political representation. Moreover, the principles and values that inspired the European democratic systems and the European political project, such as the rule of law, the separation of powers, with absolute respect for the independence of judges and courts; freedom of information; the effective guarantee of the rights and freedoms of all citizens, must be protected.

Therefore, he advised against the risk of an excessive concentration of uncontrolled power in the executives, emphasising that Parliaments should keep their essential role as the centre of political debate and legislative decision-making, through a transparent and constructive deliberative process.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA concluded by thanking all the participants for their work in preparing this conference and invited them to the next COSAC plenary meeting.