



**Joint Committee on European Union Affairs**

**Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**

**Malta**

**22-23 January 2017**

**Report of the Delegation**

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# Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

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## Report on attendance at Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

Malta, 22 – 23 January 2017

COSAC, the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union, is the principal forum for co-operation between committees of the national parliaments dealing with European affairs. COSAC meetings are held biannually and normally take place in the country holding the EU-presidency. Each meeting is preceded with a Chairpersons' Meeting, which is intended to consider the agenda for the forthcoming plenary.

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs was represented by **Senator Terry Leyden, Vice-Chairman**, who was accompanied by Ivan Farmer, Policy Advisor to the Committee.

The COSAC meeting was chaired by Mr **Luciano Busuttil**, Chair of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Maltese Chamber of Deputies.

The main keynote speakers at the meeting included:

- **Mr Angelo Farrugia**, Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives
- **Mr Louis Grech**, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for European Affairs and Implementation of the Electoral Manifesto, Malta
- **Mr Edward Zammit Lewis**, Minister for Tourism, Malta
- **Mr Frans Timmermans**, First Vice-President of the European Commission
- **Ms Danuta Maria Hübner**, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament
- **Mr Bastiaan van Apeldoorn**, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch Senate

The minutes of the meeting were circulated to national parliaments on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017. The next meeting, the Plenary Meeting of COSAC is due to take place on 28 – 30 May 2017, the draft programme of which was also circulated to attendees at the Chairpersons' Meeting.

### *Proceedings of the COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting – 23 January 2017*

The proceedings of the COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting are outlined as follows:

#### 1. Welcome

Delegates were welcomed to the conference by **Mr Angelo Farrugia, Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives**, who pointed out that the parliamentary dimension would endeavour to provide additional insights and promote unity, as well as dialogue. He stated that the objective of both the Chairpersons' Meeting and the LVII COSAC would be to maintain a network of partners with a common goal. **Mr Luciano Busuttil, Chairman of the Maltese Committee on Foreign and European Affairs**, echoed Mr Farrugia's comments, calling for peace and unity and emphasising the importance of dialogue and mutual respect.

#### 2. Session I: Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU

Delegates were addressed by **Deputy Prime Minister of Malta, Mr Louis Grech**, on the objectives of the Maltese Presidency. Mr Grech referred to the challenges that the

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EU currently faces, as well as the additional challenges posed, such as extreme nationalism, protectionism, xenophobia, geopolitical tensions, and the threat of terrorism. He further highlighted the need for the EU to deliver on its promises, referring to the need to focus on job development and growth, as well as sustainability, climate change and the development of the maritime industry.

**Mr Edward Zammit Lewis**, the Maltese Minister for Tourism, reiterated Mr Grech's observation that the EU is in very turbulent times. He referred to the need for the EU to watch election results in France and Germany, added that the EU citizen should be kept in perspective and advocated for a more social Europe.

The floor received contributions from 16 parliamentarians. In the debate, **Senator Terry Leyden, Vice Chairman** congratulated the Maltese Presidency for its organisation of the conference and on its objectives for the Presidency. He made further reference to Ireland's historic ties to the United Kingdom and emphasised the need for an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Other contributions on the UK's withdrawal referred to respect for the choice of the British people and that the unity of the 27 Member States had to be preserved.

In addition to the UK's withdrawal, the debate focused heavily on the current migration crisis, the European asylum process and control of the external border of the EU, focusing on the interconnectedness of migration with other issues such as the European Neighbourhood Policy and security. The debate also considered the growing trends of nationalist and populist policies and the need for effective solidarity. The importance of EU enlargement was stressed by delegations from both Montenegro and Serbia.

### 3. Procedural Issues

Procedural elements for the upcoming LVII COSAC Plenary were presented by Mr Busuttil. He briefed delegates on the results of the previous evening's meeting of the presidential troika, and presented the draft agenda for the COSAC Plenary. He also went through the draft outline of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bi-annual Report. Three parliaments contributed on these issues.

**Senator Terry Leyden, Vice Chairman** welcomed the inclusion of the UK's decision to withdraw from the EU in the Bi-annual Report. He highlighted the need for national parliaments to have a role in the negotiations process and that the discussion of Brexit is seen by the Irish Joint Committee on European Union Affairs as being further embedded in a discussion on the future of the European Union.

Further contributions were made by the **Parliament of Georgia**, which referred to Georgia's aspirations for EU membership and the Presidency's focus on the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the **Italian Chamber of Deputies**, which made reference to migration issues.

### 4. Session II: European Commission Work Programme 2017

**Mr Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission**, was the keynote speaker on the debate regarding the European Commission's Work Programme for 2017. He was followed by Ms **Danuta Hübner**, Chairperson of the

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Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament and Mr **Bastiaan van Apeldoorn**, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch Senate.

In his speech, **Frans Timmermans** addressed the issue of institutional cooperation on setting the EU's priorities, the role of national parliaments in the European Commission's Work Programme and the response to the challenges currently facing the EU. On the issue of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, he highlighted the responsibility of all Member States and national parliaments to limit the damage and the need to negotiate with the interest of all engaged parties in mind. He warned delegates of nationalistic answers based on protectionism and exclusion and highlighted the EU's commitment to work for all, protect minorities and ensure that democracy is not the dictatorship of the majority. He encouraged national parliaments to remain engaged in this debate and highlighted that Commissioners may be invited to parliaments for more detailed engagement. He urged national parliaments not to blame Brussels for all wrongs and take responsibility when needed.

**Danuta Maria Hübner** referred to the importance of the interinstitutional framework and the much needed involvement of national parliaments. Ms Hübner referred to the unique position of national parliaments to influence governments and called on them to make use of all the platforms developed by the European Parliament as well as the enhanced dialogue developed by the European Commission. She further insisted that the European Parliament is committed to making the legislative process more transparent, urging national parliaments to insist the same from national governments.

In his speech, **Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn** referred to the early identification of priorities, the procedure used by the Dutch Senate and the potential for cooperation on the Commission Work Programme in enhancing the role of national parliaments. Mr Apeldoorn further elaborated on the benefits of priority proposals for scrutiny and also highlighting that sharing priorities with the government functioned as an incentive for better communication on the positions of governments in the Council.

Among the primary issues raised in the debate focused on migration, unemployment and the proposed pillar on social rights. The pillar of social rights was stressed as a national priority by a number of parliaments, while a number of contributions called for more legislative action on the issue of migration, including the development of a common asylum system. The specific role of national parliaments was also raised, with the organisation of open debates with stakeholders and informal contacts between parliaments also mentioned while some contributions praised the Commission's efforts to simplify its processes and reduce the level of red tape in its work.

Responding to the debate, **Mr Apeldoorn** stressed that the cooperation between Member States on the Commission Work Programme was a work in progress, highlighting that the "green card" may be the first step towards a right of initiative. **Ms Hübner**, in her responses, welcomed the visits of national delegations to the European Parliament and made reference to a number of initiatives by the European Parliament that did not require treaty change. In his concluding remarks, **Mr Timmermans** made reference to the green card process and suggestions of a right of initiative for national parliaments. He suggested that national parliaments should keep to the mechanisms as set out in the Treaty and that if Treaty change is wanted, then to approach national governments on this.

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### 5. Other Points

In concluding the meeting, the Chair referred to the letter from the **Italian Senate** and the outcome of discussions on this matter. It was proposed that this should be a one-day visit in Sicily on 6th May 2017, with the practicalities of the visit handled by the Italian delegation, with further information to be sent by the Presidency on its behalf.



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Michael Healy-Rae TD  
Chairman  
15 February 2017

