TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthai an Aontais Eorpaigh

Tuarascáil Taistil

Cruinniú Iomlánach an LIX COSAC

Sóifia, an Bhulgáir

17-19 Meitheamh 2018

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

LIX COSAC Plenary Meeting

Sofia, Bulgaria

17-19 June 2018

[32ENUA0028]
REPORT ON ATTENDANCE AT THE LIX COSAC PLENARY MEETING

Sofia, Bulgaria, 17-19 June 2018

COSAC, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs is the principal forum for co-operation between committees of national parliaments dealing with European Union Affairs. COSC Plenary Meetings are held twice yearly and normally take place in the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The LIX COSAC Plenary took place in Sofia, Bulgaria from 17-19 June 2018.

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs was represented Deputy Bernard Durkan (Head of Delegation) and Senator Gerard Craughwell. The delegation was accompanied by Heidi Lougheed, Clerk to the Committee. Càit Hayes, Representative of the Houses of the Oireachtas to the European institutions also attended.

The COSAC Plenary Meeting was chaired by Mr Kristian Vigenin, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds from the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria.

The keynote speakers included:

- Tsveta Karayancheva, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Rumen Radev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Mairead McGuinness MEP, First Vice-President of the European Parliament
- Boyko Borissov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
- Lilyana Pavlova, Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018
- Professor Dr Ingrid Shikova, Sofia University
- Ekaterina Zaharieva, Deputy Prime Minister for Judicial Reform and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria
- Nikola Dimitrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Elmar Brok, Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament (AFET)
- Domagoj Milošević, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament
Sunday 17 June 2018
An Official Dinner was hosted by Mr Kristian Vigenin, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds for the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria for all of the delegations.

Monday 18 November 2018
The meeting was opened by Tsveta Karayancheva, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria who welcomed delegates to Bulgaria and to the COSAC Plenary Meeting.

The President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, gave the opening address, noting that the debate and conference was taking place at a very important time for the European Union, as it
faced an unpredictable environment, including the challenges of Brexit, terrorism, migration pressure, cyberattacks, economic divergence between regions and growing inequality. The President noted the important role of national parliaments in these debates, as parliaments provide a bridge between European policies, national institutions and societies.

In the second of the opening statements, the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mairead McGuinness MEP, noted that cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments and suggested that that could be increased. The First Vice-President referenced the priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency, and commended the Presidency on its programme of events, in particular the recent EU-Western Balkan Summit. Ms McGuinness spoke of the importance of encouraging citizens to participate in the upcoming European elections in order to take ownership of the politics of the European Union. Referring to the European Parliament’s position on the European social model, and how to develop it, Ms McGuinness expressed interest in the results of COSAC’s Bi-Annual Report and the section that looked at that.

**Procedural Issues**

- The draft Agenda was adopted without amendment.

- The Presidency informed the Conference of the results of the Troika meeting held the previous day.

- The 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC was presented to the Conference, it had focused on the Future of the EU, the next Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

- The Presidency presented the details of the letters that it had received and responses given.

- The Chair informed the COSAC Plenary that the Troika meeting had agreed amendments to the draft texts of the Contribution
Session 1: Achievements of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU

In his address, the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Boyko Borissov, spoke in some detail about a few of the more sensitive policy files that the Bulgarian Presidency were trying to progress, leaving the overview to Minister Pavlova. The Prime Minister spoke at length about the significant steps taken in the Western Balkans, including the recent agreement between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. On the topic of migration, the Prime Minister spoke of the challenges faced by countries at the front line of the crisis, notably Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain and the support that they needed from other Member States. Both of these challenges were ones which he felt needed to be addressed sooner rather than later.

The Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018, Lilyana Pavlova, underlined the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency. She explained that holding the Presidency in the year before the European Parliament elections brought its own challenges in terms of preparing for those elections. The Minister detailed the work that the Presidency had undertaken and the main ‘files’ that had been worked on and progressed, including the Western Balkans, security and migration, social issues (including the reform of the Posting of Workers Directive), supporting citizens’ dialogue initiatives and the Digital Single Market (especially cybersecurity and intellectual property rights).

In the debate that followed a number of issues were raised, including the alleged illegal actions of Turkey in the Mediterranean, the delicate economic environment as a result of Brexit, the choice of priorities of the Presidency, the support many of the participants held for the revitalisation of relations with the Western Balkans, the issue of gas supply in Europe and its pricing differences across the EU, posting of workers directive, initiatives to tackle youth unemployment, digital services and combatting fraud, and the EU’s relations with Russia, Turkey and the Western Balkans.

Session 2: Integration and connectivity of the Western Balkans – a new impetus to the EU enlargement policy

The Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria with responsibility for Judicial Reform and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ekaterina Zaharieva, congratulated the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for coming to an historic agreement the day before
the conference on the dispute over the name of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Macedonia. The Minister explained the levels of connectivity between the European Union and the Balkans across different areas and expressed the hope that the European Parliament and national parliaments would support the aspirations of countries in the Balkans to join the EU.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Nikola Dimitrov, spoke of the recent agreement on the name of his country and the historic moment that this represented for his country. He also discussed the plans that his country had to progress their applications to join NATO and the EU.

The Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament, Domagoj Ivan Milošević, suggested that the levels of connectivity between the EU and the Balkans should be increased, but that it wouldn't replace the ambition to join the European Union that was important for many of the countries of the Balkans. The Chairman outlined that enlargement was a slow process, with important considerations for both parties, and suggested that Member States needed to continue to support pre-accession and enlargement processes. He suggested that the types of connectivity that should be prioritised in the first instance were transport, infrastructure, digital and social/economic connectivity.

In the discussion that followed, many speakers congratulated the Bulgarian Presidency on bringing attention to the enlargement processes. Some speakers acknowledged the importance of security issues of the Balkans region, the challenges that the countries of the Balkans face, the transformative power of becoming a member of the European Union, and the work that remained for those countries in order to progress.

Deputy Bernard Durkan suggested to the Conference that the European project was the biggest and most successful peace project in the world and that it should be continued. He explained that he strongly supported the aspirations of the countries of the Balkans to accede to the European Union and believed that it is important that countries knew they were supported by the European Union in this.
Session 3: European Pillar of Social Rights – building a more inclusive and fairer Europe

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Luca Jahier, argued the benefits of close cooperation between COSAC and the EESC, noting that the role of national parliaments in considering and implementing the Social Pillar was paramount. He explained that he believed that the EU had to deliver on a social dimension, and that this aspect of EU policy had not been a primary focus for quite a while. The President detailed for the conference the various actions and work that the EESC has undertaken in this area. He suggested that the implementation of the Social Pillar could be linked to the next Multi-annual Financial Framework or the EU's strategy on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The European Commission's Director with responsibility for this area of work, Marcel Haag, explained for the Conference the 20 key principles on which the Pillar of Social Rights rests, structured around three main 'pillars': (i) equal opportunities and access to the labour market, (ii) fair working conditions and (iii) social protection and inclusion. As the Pillar of Social Rights had made no changes in terms of competencies of the European Union, it was for all of the different actors in the field to work together to implement their respective parts. The European Commission, was playing its part by making proposals, notably in the areas of work-life balance, access to social protection, and on transparent and predictable working conditions. The European Commission also considered these relevant issues through the European Semester process and by focusing on a 'cluster' of funds which would be dedicated to investing in people, social cohesion and values.

The Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Luboš Blaha, argued that the Social Pillar was important for the survival of unity in the European Union and social peace by providing a counter-weight to the rise of extremism and frustration as a result of globalisation, liberalisation and deregulation; all of which had compromised the European social model. The European Union, he believed, needed to return to having a strong social emphasis.

In the discussion that followed, delegates raised concerns around the need to tackle inequality and poverty levels, how to turn support for a 'Social Europe' into action, the challenge of taking individual countries' specific situations and context into account and how to try to adjust budgets to match aspirations. Many speakers gave examples of initiatives in their countries which might be relevant for others to consider.
Deputy Bernard Durkan detailed for the conference Ireland’s actions in tackling the economic and financial recession. He suggested that greater attention should be paid to social policy and the provision of social housing. Senator Craughwell argued for the need for strong trade unions to support workers while regretting that in many cases contracts of indefinite duration were becoming zero-hour contracts in the labour force. He suggested that the European Union should take action in the fields of health and education.

Meeting of COSAC Chairpersons

The COSAC Chairpersons considered and debated the draft Conclusions and Contributions, voting on amendments tabled. The final text of the draft Conclusions and Contributions to be presented to the full Conference the following day was agreed.

An official dinner was hosted by the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Tsveta Karayancheva at the Sofia Tech Park.

Tuesday 19 June 2018

Session 4: A strong and effective Cohesion Policy post 2020

The Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Tomislav Donchev, suggested to the Conference that it was challenging to explain to citizens the role of the EU’s Cohesion policy and how it works. He believed that there was a need to simplify processes and procedures in order to make applying for grants for entrepreneurs under Cohesion schemes as easy as applying for bank loans. Finally, the Deputy Prime Minister suggested that spending under the Cohesion funds should be linked to sectoral reforms.

The European Commission’s Director responsible for Budget, Communication and General Affairs in DG REGIO, Dana Spinant, outlined for the Conference the European Commission’s proposal for the next Cohesion policy for the period after 2020. The potential impact on the budget available for the policy, resulting from the UK’s withdrawal from the UK, was highlighted. The proposal was for all EU regions to be targeted, with the largest funds being allocated to transition regions and least-developed regions. The new policy also aimed to be better aligned with the political priorities
of the European Union as well as being flexible, include simplified processes and a greater use of national-level controls and audits. In order to increase the sense of national ownership of projects and programmes, the European Commission was considering increasing the levels of national co-financing.

The European Parliament's Chair of the Committee on Regional Development, Iskra Mihaylova, detailed the European Parliament's two resolutions on the future MFF and 'own resources'. Ms Mihaylova's analysis of the European Commission's proposal was that it would increase the complementarity between financial instruments and create the possibility of combining cohesion funds with other financial instruments. It also included increased support for collaboration between regions.

The Regional Minister of the Province of Flevoland, Michiel Rijsberman, explained to the COSAC Plenary the views of the European Committee of the Regions on the budget proposals. Overall, he believed that Cohesion Policies were an effective tool to influence citizens' understanding of the role of the European Union and was an important policy of the EU. While the Committee of the Regions was pleased to see the proposals, it was concerned by the decrease in funding by up to 15% for the policy overall, the detachment of the rural development section from the Common Provisions Regulation, the gradual separation of the ESF from Cohesion Policy and the deletion of the INTERREG Europe programme. He also regretted not taking the opportunity to reinforce the rules on partnerships.

In the debate that followed a number of speakers raised concerns over the need to ensure sufficient funding for Cohesion Policy. Other speakers insisted on the need to reduce the overall Cohesion budget. Some speakers indicated their support for an increase in national contributions, while others underlined their support for linking structural funding to adherence to the rule of law.

In his contribution, Deputy Bernard Durkan, responded to the suggestion that the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) funding be decreased in order to increase Cohesion funding. He warned delegates that the CAP had supported a system that gave food to 500 million European citizens and that European farmers should be sustained. Senator Craughwell, suggested that Cohesion Policy needed to be kept at existing levels. He expressed his support the European Commission proposal to continue to support the peace process in Northern Ireland through these Cohesion funds.
Session 5: EU interparliamentary cooperation in the context of the debate on subsidiarity and proportionality

The First Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, gave assurances to the conference that the work of the Task Force on subsidiarity, proportionality and ‘doing more with less’, and the work on considering subsidiarity and proportionality would not end on the 15 July with the publication of its Report. Rather, the work would move on to the next stage. He stressed that further suggestions from national parliaments in particular would be very welcome.

The Chair of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO), Danuta Hübner, stressed that the European Parliament and national parliaments both have responsibility for ensuring the democratic legitimacy of the process of considering European legislative initiatives. The Chair detailed a number of the initiatives to respect the principle of subsidiarity from the earliest stages of legislative processes. She believed that increased dialogue and contact between the European Parliament, national parliaments and the European Commission should improve the operation of the Early Warning System.

The Chair of the Standing Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch Senate, Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn, reflected on the principle and operation of subsidiarity. He called for concrete measures to be considered, such as the exclusion of recess periods from the eight weeks deadline to the subsidiarity check. He expressed the view that responses from European institutions to national parliaments that had raised concerns gave the impression that those concerns were not taken seriously, due to the lack of detailed responses and the amount of time it took for national parliaments to receive responses. Mr Van Apeldoorn suggested that greater trust was needed for the process to work well, and that the increase in visits to national parliaments of European Commissioners had gone some way to address this. He suggested that national parliaments could be more effective in influencing European decision-making by taking a more collective approach.

Professor Atanas Semov, Jean Monnet Chair at Sofia University, reminded the conference that one of the principles of the European Union was for decisions to be made as close to citizens as possible. He expressed the opinion that if that principle was well understood by citizens, it would increase trust in the legitimacy of European legislation. The Professor questioned what he perceived as the low levels of reaction from national parliaments to European Commission proposals.
During the debate that followed, many participants suggested that the European Commission should be more reactive to concerns raised by national parliaments. It was also suggested that the deadlines imposed on national parliaments should be lengthened and that consideration should be given to creating a role for regions in the process.

During the debate, Deputy Bernard Durkan, expressed his support for the work of the Taskforce. He suggested that sharing sovereignty remained an important and sensitive issue, and that it should be looked on as an opportunity for European and national levels to be complementary to each other. Senator Craughwell complimented First Vice-President Timmermans on his work with the Taskforce and the level of cooperation with national parliaments. He joined other delegates in suggesting that local level involvement should be increased. He finished by stressing strongly, that any measures considered by the Taskforce, should not require Treaty change.

Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LX COSAC

The texts of both the Contribution and Conclusions of the LX COSAC Plenary Meeting were unanimously adopted, without amendment.

The Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Kristian Vigenin, thanked all of the participants and closed the conference.

On behalf of the Austrian delegation, Mr Buchamann, presented the Parliamentary dimension of the Austrian Presidency and informed the COSAC Conference of the plans for the COSAC Plenary meeting in Vienna on the 18-20 November 2018.

Michael Healy-Rae TD
Chairman
24 September 2019
PLENARY MEETING OF THE LIX COSAC
17-19 June 2018, Sofia

CONCLUSIONS OF THE LIX COSAC

1. 29TH BI-ANNUAL REPORT OF COSAC

1.1. COSAC welcomes the 29th Bi-annual Report of COSAC prepared by the COSAC Secretariat and warmly thanks the Secretariat for its excellent work. The Report provides useful information on the opinion held by national Parliaments on the future of Europe, the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

1.2. COSAC invites all Parliaments to make the outcome of the COSAC work more visible, including by sharing and promoting the results of the 29th Bi-annual Report among the wider public.

2. COSAC WEB-PAGE AND COOPERATION WITH THE IPEX PLATFORM

2.1. COSAC welcomes the letter sent on 28 May 2018 by the Chair of the IPEX Board as well as the accompanying detailed technical analyses on the modalities for the integration of the COSAC website into the IPEX environment.

2.2. Following the Conclusions of the LVII COSAC in Tallinn and after carefully examining the information provided by the IPEX Board, COSAC expresses its support for the merging of the two environments, with the IPEX platform hosting the COSAC website.

2.3. COSAC invites the COSAC Secretariat and the IPEX Board to work closely in order to ensure a smooth and timely transition. For a transitional period the domain cosac.eu shall be preserved.

2.4. In addition, COSAC invites the COSAC Secretariat and the IPEX Board to present a report on the state of play of the transition by the next Plenary meeting.
Annex II – Contribution of the LIX COSAC

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LIX COSAC
17-19 June 2018, Sofia
CONTRIBUTION OF THE LIX COSAC

1. EU PARLIAMENTS AND CITIZENS

1.1. COSAC underlines the essential role of national Parliaments in the functioning of the European Union and places great importance on their good cooperation with the European Parliament. As representatives of the European citizens, they have a crucial role in bringing the European agenda closer to the people and ensuring the efficiency of the decision-making process.

1.2. COSAC underlines the importance of political education and active engagement of the citizens in political life, in particular through elections at regional, national and European level. National Parliaments and the European Parliament encourage all European citizens to use their democratic rights at all levels, including the need to use their right to vote in the upcoming European Elections on 23-26 May 2019.

2. SUBSIDIARITY AND PROPORPTIONALITY

2.1. COSAC welcomes the work of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently" and calls on all stakeholders to continue the efforts to improve the application of subsidiarity and proportionality in the Union. Following the active participation of the national Parliaments in the COSAC Working Group meeting on the 26th March 2018, as well as their written contributions throughout the Bulgarian Presidency, COSAC encourages the parliamentary delegations to continue their involvement in the future debates on the topic.

2.2. COSAC calls for an early consultation with the national Parliaments at the very beginning of the EU decision making process, so that the European peoples become more involved and acquire better understanding of the Union’s strategies and future regulations.

2.3. While in general the Subsidiarity Early Warning System provides a good opportunity for national Parliaments to make their voice heard, there are still aspects that could and should be improved without changing the treaties, as noted in the contributions of the LIV and LV COSAC.
2.4. More specifically, COSAC reiterates its invitation to the European Commission to consider excluding certain periods from the 8-week deadline provided by the treaties for a subsidiarity check, in the same manner as the current arrangement regarding the month of August. Such a period could be the mid-December to New Year break, as suggested by the Contribution of LIV and LV COSAC, as well as other recess periods that might be further discussed. In addition, possible modalities for an extension of the 8 weeks deadline should be further explored with a view to extending the deadline to 12 weeks.

2.5. While recognizing the right of each Parliament/Chamber to come up with their own process of subsidiarity scrutiny, COSAC calls for a strengthened cooperation and coordination between national Parliaments in order to maximize the results of their efforts.

2.6. COSAC underlines the importance of improving the way national Parliaments scrutinise their Governments as well as reinforcing the democratic rights of EU citizens and notes the need to increase transparency of the Council decision-making. COSAC encourages national parliamentary delegations to address the issue of EU transparency, especially of the Council, with their respective governments, in accordance with their national constitutional framework and practices.

2.7. With reference to paragraph 2.8 of the contribution of the LVIII Plenary COSAC on the issue of transparency, COSAC invites the Council and related bodies to further reflect via a point by point answer on the proposals that were sent to the EU Institutions by 26 national parliaments/chambers enhancing the openness of legislative deliberations at EU-level.

2.8. COSAC invites the European Commission to improve the quality of its responses to national Parliaments' contributions, by providing clear and timely answers to their objections. COSAC reiterates its invitation to the European Commission to respond to national Parliaments' reasoned opinions no later than 8 weeks after the subsidiarity-check deadline. Periods referred to in Article 2.3 of this Contribution should be taken into consideration.

2.9. The co-legislators are expected to take better notice of the opinions expressed by the national Parliaments, given that they contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union, as stated by Art. 12 of the Treaty on the European Union.

2.10. COSAC calls on the European Commission to provide better impact assessments within the explanatory memoranda of its legislative proposals in order to justify them.
properly. COSAC also invites the Commission, in addition to its analysis on principle of subsidiarity, to better elaborate its choice of legal base and its view on the principle of proportionality.

2.11. COSAC recalls its suggestions included in previous contributions regarding the introduction of a ‘green card’ mechanism as part of an enhanced dialogue that could submit to the European Commission proposals to initiate legislation, as well as amending and repealing existing EU legislation and encourages national Parliaments to continue exploring future possibilities of using ‘green card’ initiatives.

2.12. COSAC calls for a better use of the existing political dialogue mechanisms between national Parliaments and the EU institutions.

3. INTEGRATION AND CONNECTIVITY OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

3.1. COSAC welcomes the European perspective of the Western Balkans with a strong focus on connectivity of the region and improvement of its links with the EU Single market as a strategic central priority of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

3.2. COSAC regards the Communication from the Commission of 6 February 2018 for ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’, as an investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values and on the full respect for the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

3.3. COSAC takes positive note of the reports on the Western Balkans partners and Turkey from 17th of April 2018 and of the conclusions and recommendations therein. COSAC underlines the importance of support and guidance to the partners from the region to pursue the necessary reforms.

3.4. COSAC stresses that progress towards EU accession is based on the respect for the EU values and on the merit-based individual performance of the partners from the region to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process; emphasises the importance of the full alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU.

3.5. While acknowledging the progress made by the Western Balkans, COSAC underlines that more efforts are needed to accelerate domestic reform processes and achieve irreversible and sustainable results, notably in the areas of rule of law, fight against
corruption and organized crime, human rights, freedom of expression and independence of media, strengthening the democratic institutions and public administration reform, economic development and competitiveness, as well as good neighbourly relations, thereby increasing stability and ensuring prosperity in the region.

3.6. COSAC notes that continued steady efforts are needed to tackle outstanding bilateral disputes in the region, including border disputes, in order to ensure that they do not have a detrimental effect on the accession process. COSAC stresses that the outstanding disputes and issues should be solved in line with international law and established principles, including through implementation of legally binding agreements.

3.7. In line with the respective Council Conclusions on 22 March, COSAC welcomes the EU's unequivocal commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkans reaffirmed with the Sofia Declaration from 17th of May 2018. The EU parliaments expressed their support in this regard at the Interparliamentary Conference for CFSP/CSDP in Sofia, 15-17 February 2018.

3.8. COSAC expresses its support for the goals, commitments and outcomes of the EU - Western Balkans Summit in Sofia and its intense agenda for better and efficient infrastructure and digital connectivity, as well as contacts between people and learning opportunities, making the European perspective for the region more tangible, delivering direct impact and substantial benefits to the people and business from the region and EU. Implementation of the adopted Sofia Priority Agenda should remain in the focus of the next Presidencies of the Council.

3.9. COSAC stresses that the threat posed by radicalisation, terrorism and violent extremism requires EU and partners from the Western Balkans to develop strengthened mutual cooperation and increased exchange of information and best practices in the areas of shaping common values, preventing radicalization and responding to terrorist activities. COSAC also underlines that joined actions are needed in the field of migration, asylum and border management, the fight against irregular migration flows and trafficking of human beings.

3.10. COSAC notes that parliamentary oversight of the pre-accession and negotiation process bestows on them greater democratic legitimacy, increasing the transparency of the process and improving the strategic communication with the public on all EU matters. In light of this, COSAC declares its general support for increased and stronger
Involvement of the Western Balkans Parliaments in COSAC work and activities in the future.

4. COHESION POLICY AFTER 2020

4.1. COSAC takes note of the European Commission’s proposal of May 2, 2018: “A modern budget for a Union that protects empowers and defends”, i.e. the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. Acknowledging the proposal as a good starting point for negotiation, COSAC finds important that the MFF 2021-2027 should be linked to a comprehensive long-term policy strategy for the development of the European Union and for the revival of public investment both at European and national level. It is important to take Member States’ different positions on the budgetary frame into consideration.

4.2. COSAC supports the continuation of the Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 with a commitment to maintain adequate levels of funding that will allow for the completion of its goals. As the Cohesion Policy is a key solidarity tool for stimulating the convergence between the Member States and their regions, COSAC underlines that, via its instruments, accelerator and multiplier effect of the investments would be achieved and regional disparities tackled. Furthermore, it is important that all regions shall profit from the Cohesion policy, while the most underdeveloped remain its primary target.

4.3. COSAC points out that the real investments in growth, employment and balanced territorial development, must stay in the focus of the Cohesion Policy post 2020, remaining mostly in the form of grants. New tasks and objectives should not be financed to the detriment of the Cohesion Policy.

4.4. COSAC appeals for a result-oriented, effective and efficient Cohesion Policy in the Programming Period 2021-2027, transparently assessing the concrete impact and the sustainability of the projects at local and regional level with regard to the European added value, rather than simply monitoring the costs and productivity.

4.5. COSAC calls for an improvement of the main deficiencies in the Cohesion Policy implementation, such as the long and complex administrative procedures, the lack of flexibility when managing the projects and the procedure of co-financing.
EU Macro-regional strategies

4.6. Taking into account the role of the EU macro-regions in achieving sustainable development, security and prosperity, COSAC underlines that EU macro-regional strategies are an important platform for cooperation with invaluable and innovative contribution and should be further developed.

4.7. COSAC recognizes the need to improve the interrelation between the EU Strategy for the Danube Region and the cross-border cooperation in the Black Sea Region to overcome common challenges in the wider region.

4.8. COSAC underlines the importance of interconnectivity within the EU. Therefore, COSAC emphasises that firm commitment for successful and timely implementation of any trans-border projects to that end are vitally important for the EU and its citizens. A special consideration should be paid to the development of transport infrastructure and the expansion of the EU transport network; in this regard, macro regional strategies provide a good basis for the streamlining of multilateral efforts.

5. EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

5.1. COSAC underlines that a reinforcement of the social dimension of the EU is vital in order to uphold the Treaty social objectives and ensure that European citizens identify with, and see the benefits of, the European project.

5.2. COSAC supports that a strong and solid European Pillar of Social Rights that aims to promote and enhance the existing social standards and principles is a shared responsibility of the EU and the Member States. The initiatives to deliver on the Pillar’s objectives should be based on specific tools, further legislative actions, efficient policy-making mechanisms and financial instruments, subject to the next EU Budget negotiations.

5.3. COSAC emphasises that against the backdrop of an ageing and declining population, the globalisation, technical progress and digitalisation of societies and economies, the ongoing transformation of jobs and tasks as a consequence, it is crucial to invest in human capital to ensure productivity growth, high social standards and job-rich and robust economies, as well as adequate social protection systems.

5.4. COSAC stresses the importance of access to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire the relevant skills needed for full participation in society and in the labour market in transition.
5.5. COSAC highlights that equality of treatment and opportunities, in particular between women and men, should be enhanced in all areas, including participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment, career progression and equal pay for work of equal value, including measures that favour a good work-life balance.

5.6. COSAC recognizes the crucial role of social dialogue and stresses that social partners must be closely involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies according to national and EU provisions.

5.7. COSAC takes note of the 29th Bi-annual Report where according to the National Parliaments/Chambers among the most appropriate tools for implementation and monitoring of the European Pillar of Social Rights are a strengthened European Semester reflecting the Pillar’s principles and EU funding instruments designed to support the reforms on the national level.