TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthai an Aontais Eorpaigh

Tuarascáil Taistil

Cruinniú Iomlánach an LVIII COSAC

Taillinn, an Eastóin

26-28 Samhain 2017

Houses of the Oireachtas

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

LVIII COSAC Plenary Meeting

Tallinn, Estonia

26-28 November 2017

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REPORT ON ATTENDANCE AT THE LVIII COSAC PLENARY MEETING

Tallinn, Estonia, 26-28 November 2017

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 LVIII COSAC Plenary took place Tallinn, Estonia, 26-28 November 2017.

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs was represented by Senator Gerard Craughwell. The delegation was accompanied by Heidi Lougheed, Clerk to the Committee. Cáit Hayes, the Houses of the Oireachtas Permanent Representative in Brussels also attended.

The COSAC Plenary Meeting was chaired by Mr Toomas Vitsut, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Estonian Riigikogu (Parliament).

The keynote speakers included:

- Eiki Nestor, President of the Riigikogu
- HE Mrs Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia
- Michel Barnier, EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit
- Danuta Hübner, Chairperson of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu
- Katrin Auel, Associate Professor, Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies
- Pieter Omtzigt, Member, House of Representatives of the Netherlands
- Kristian Vigenin, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, National Assembly of Bulgaria
- Siim Sikkut, Deputy Secretary General, Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications
- Gunther Krichbaum, most recent Chairman of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, German Bundestag
- Jean Bizet, President of the European Affairs Committee, French Senate
- Julian King, European Commissioner for the Security Union
• Simon Mordue, Deputy Director General, DG Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission
• Edward Zammit Lewis, Chairman of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee, House of Representatives of Malta
• Anne-Mari Virolainen, Chair of the Grand Committee, Parliament of Finland

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COSAC MEETING

Sunday 26 November 2017

An Official Dinner was hosted by Mr Toomas Vitsut, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, for all of the delegations.

Monday 27 November 2017

The meeting was opened by Toomas Vitsut, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, who welcomed all of the delegations to Estonia.

Procedural Issues

• The draft Agenda was adopted without amendment.

• The Chairman briefed the Conference on the structure that would be used; based around discussions on five topics, each of which would be moderated by a different member of the Estonian delegation.

• Christiana Fryda, the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, presented the 28th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which focused on the future of the European Union, bringing the EU closer to its citizens, and the Digital Single Market.

• The Chairman explained to the COSAC Plenary that Christiana Fryda’s term as the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat was coming to an end, and he thanked her for her hard work. He explained the process which had been undertaken in order to
replace Ms Fryda and the interview of the only candidate put forward by a Chamber (Mr Kenneth Curmi was the candidate nominated by the Maltese Kamra tad-Deputati). He explained that that candidate would be proposed to the Chairpersons of COSAC the following day, for appointment on the unanimous proposal of the Troika.

- The Chairman briefly outlined the discussion at the meeting of the Troika the previous day, and the revised draft Contribution and Conclusions. In his presentation, the Chairman paid particular attention to the proposal on how to consider the request from the European Commission to nominate three members of national parliaments to the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing Less More Efficiently'. The Presidency would present the detail of the suggested response the following day, while exploring other options.

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

Session 1: The Future of the European Union

The President of the Republic of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, suggested that it was a good time for the European Union to be bold and look to the future; in doing so the focus needed to be on creating jobs and enhancing growth, while embracing technological innovation. At the same time, the President suggested that ambitions for the future may need to be cut back slightly in order to agree the next Multiannual Financial Framework, post-Brexit. She noted that the role of national parliaments was particularly important in increasing transparency and accountability.

The European Union’s Chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier, underlined the key role that national parliaments play in European society. He suggested that the dialogue between the European Parliament and national parliaments should be deeper. Mr Barnier presented the latest developments of the Brexit negotiating process. Mr Barnier explained that while he regretted the choice of the United Kingdom, that choice must be respected and what was important was to come up with a solid basis for a partnership between the EU and the UK. In order to do that, an agreement for an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU was necessary which agreed the rights of those UK citizens living in other parts of the EU, and EU citizens living in the UK; found a solution to the sensitive challenge of the border between Ireland and
Northern Ireland; and found an agreed financial settlement. Mr Barnier insisted that the integrity of the Single Market was not up for discussion. A solid partnership in the future would need to find an agreed way in which to consider future regulations, and divergence to the regulatory framework.

Danuta Hübner, Chair of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO), suggested that Brexit would leave the EU smaller, but perhaps small and more determined. She suggested that the Brexit process had improved public understanding of the fundamental role of the EU. She warned the Conference that the European Union should not be consumed only by immediate challenges, but had to look through the eyes of the generations still to come and proactively create its own positive agenda.

In the discussion that followed, speakers raised what they perceived as negative tendencies across the EU (in particular populism), the risk of alienating European citizens, and the prospects of a future enlargement of the European Union. Many speakers suggested improving the involvement of citizens in the European policy-making processes and giving a more enhanced role to national parliaments. Finally, a large number of delegates reflected on the status of the Brexit negotiations.

Session 2: Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens – what are the best practices of the national parliaments?

Katrin Auel, Associate Professor with the Vienna Institute for Advanced Studies, suggested that one of the most important functions of national parliaments in the European Union was to provide citizens with some ownership over EU affairs. Professor Auel had pragmatic suggestions for parliaments including tailoring information to a general audience and presenting that information in as accessible a way as possible; while making a clear distinction between transparency and publicity. The value of social media in trying to reach a broader audience was mentioned, but Professor Auel advised that most citizens still accessed news through traditional outlets. The Professor mentioned the value of having plenary parliamentary debates on EU policy issues, perhaps focused around European Council meetings, as this allowed different voices to be heard on the issue, making the engagement more a ‘Congress of opinions’ than a forum for advertising EU policies."
Pieter Omtzigt, Member of the European Affairs Committee of the Tweede Kamer of the Netherlands, suggested that democratic deficiency was one of the main factors driving mistrust in European institutions. He suggested that improving transparency in the EU’s political decision-making could partly address that mistrust. He detailed some of his own concerns with regards to the access to documents and voting records that is granted to members of national parliaments, including, in his view, the excessive use of 'limité' documents. He briefly presented the main points in his parliament’s position paper on EU transparency, which included recommendations on how to make the EU’s legislative process more accessible. He invited national parliaments to sign a joint letter on transparency of the EU political decision-making process.

Mr Kristian Vigenin, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds of the Bulgarian Parliament, suggested that effective scrutiny by national parliament of their government’s actions on EU matters was essential and national parliaments could learn from each other on methods that work best, through exchanges at the COSAC Plenary meeting. Mr Vigenin suggested that greater responsiveness by the European Commission was required to concerns raised by national parliaments, whether those concerns because of subsidiarity concerns, proportionality concerns or for other reasons.

In the debate that followed a large number of issues were mentioned and raised by the delegations including how to improve understanding of EU values, how to support increased participation of citizens in EU policy development, the value and usefulness of transparency in EU policy-making and the role of national parliaments in these matters. Senator Craughwell detailed for the conference the actions taken by the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs and the Houses of the Oireachtas more generally, to ensure citizens’ access to information on the Houses’ activities in European Union policy-development and in encouraging engagement in those activities.

Session 3: Digital Single Market – Current Developments of e-services

The Deputy Secretary General of the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication, Siim Sikkut, detailed for the conference the use being made by the Estonian Government and Estonian citizens of digital services including the use of digital signatures,
digital public services to the extent that now a great deal of public life can be undertaken through a digital ‘architecture’. He discussed Estonia’s experience of redesigning public services to incorporate digital technology, and take advantage of the latest developments.

The most recent Chairman of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union of the German Bundestag, Gunther Krichbaum, discussed the differences in approach taken to digital public services in Germany as compared to Estonia. He wondered whether some of those differences could be attributed to mistrust and hesitancy in Germany to sharing personal data as well as differences of scale. He explained the importance, as he saw it, of ensuring that any advances of in digital services are accompanied by advances in data protection.

Jean Bizet, President of the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, explained to the conference developments in digital public services in France, including the example of a public administration portal that has been established to allow citizens to access public documents. Senator Bizet suggested that a European digital strategy needed to take on board the consequences of digital transformation, and ensure the efficient taxation of revenues generated by digital activities.

In the debate that followed, speakers raised security concerns (as a result of using digital services), the need to consider appropriate regulation governing the ‘internet of things’, appropriate data protection rules, modernised delivery of appropriate education and training, appropriate taxation and labour market rules. Several delegation gave examples of initiatives undertake in their countries.

Senator Craughwell asked the conference whether there was a willingness to amend the legislation governing the Single Market to the extent that everything across borders could be done online.

Meeting of COSAC Chairpersons

The COSAC Chairpersons considered the recommendation from the Troika for Mr Kenneth Curmi to be appointed as Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2018-2019. There being no objections, Mr Kurmi’s appointment was confirmed. The Chair thanked the outgoing Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Ms Christiana Fryda, for her work.
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 Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, Toomas Vitsut at the Estonia Concern Hall.

Tuesday 28 November 2017

Session 4: State of play – building an effective and sustainable Security Union

The European Commissioner for Security Union, Julian King, considered in his address how the EU could support national efforts to prevent, protect and respond to security threats. The Commissioner considered the evolution and the current nature of threats and risks. Some of the initiatives that the European Commission proposed to address challenges to cybersecurity, terrorism, money laundering, radicalisation and foreign fighters, were detailed. The Commissioner reminded national parliaments of the importance of the timely transposition of European legislation.

During the debate a number of issues were raised including the need to foster integration, address radicalisation, consider cyberthreats seriously, legislate appropriately against cyber financing of terrorism, security at external borders and continued high levels of migratory flows, and how to improve information exchange. The impact of Brexit on current and future information exchange systems was discussed.

In his intervention, Senator Craughwell discussed the need to adequately address cybersecurity, how to consider undocumented migrants and Irish concerns around discussion on anything that sounded like the creation of an ‘EU military army’.
Session 5: The external dimension of migration – preventing and combating irregular migration

The Deputy Director General for Migration in the European Commission, Simon Mordue detailed EU actions including cooperation within third countries, actions taken within EU Member States, the creation of the European border and coast guard agency (Frontex), and the improvement of the Schengen Information System. Mr Mordue hoped that the European Commission’s proposals to create a common asylum system would be approved.

The Chairman of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives of Malta, Edward Zammit Lewis, explained the central role that the return and readmission agreements were playing. He provided the conference with a number of details on current migration flows and resettlement schemes. He concluded by detailing his vision of what was needed for a sustainable solution to the challenge of irregular migration.

The Chair of the Grand Committee from the Parliament of Finland, Anne-Mari Virolainen, stressed to the conference how much more needed to be done to create an effective, comprehensive approach to migration. She stressed the need to support legal and safe paths into Europe and the need to cooperate with relevant agencies in the field.

In the discussion that followed, a number of issues were raised, including: the migration flows from Africa and the Middle East to the European Union, the protection of human rights, the situation of migrants stranded in transitory countries, the effectiveness and weaknesses of the current return policies, and the role of Frontex.

In his comments, Senator Craughwell, expressed solidarity with those countries facing disproportionately high levels of inward migratory flows, and reminded colleagues of some of the evidence seen at the recent visit to Pollazzo and the need to discern between ‘genuine’ refugees and economic migrants.

Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC

The texts of both the Contribution and Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC Plenary Meeting were unanimously adopted, without amendment.
The Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, Toomas Vitsut, thanked the organisers and participants and Mr Vigenin presented plans for the next meeting of the COSAC Plenary in Bulgaria in June 2018.

Michael Healy-Rae TD
Chairman
24 September 2019
Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC

1. 28th Bi-annual Report of COSAC
   1.1. COSAC welcomes the 28th 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 future of the European Union and on bringing the EU closer to its citizens. It also explores ways to enhance the Digital Single Market and examines the digitalisation of parliamentary procedures and the Digital Single Market Strategy initiatives.
   1.2. COSAC, inviting all Parliaments to make the outcome of the COSAC work more visible, encourages all Parliaments to actively share examples of best practices highlighted by the Report within the Parliament and to the wider public if possible.

2. Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat
   2.1. COSAC notes that the term of office of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat will end on 31 December 2017.
   2.2. COSAC welcomes the decision taken by the Chairpersons of COSAC held in Tallinn on 26 November to appoint Mr Kenneth CURMI as Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2018-2019. COSAC is certain that the newly elected Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat will successfully continue to manage the work of the COSAC Secretariat and contribute to the effective development of the COSAC activities.
   2.3. COSAC expresses its gratitude to the Maltese House of Representatives for seconding Mr Kenneth CURMI as Permanent Member for 2018-2019.
   2.4. COSAC warmly thanks Ms Christiana FRYDA, whose term of office as Permanent Member expires on 31 December 2017, for her committed and productive work.
   2.5. COSAC extends its gratitude to the European Parliament for hosting the COSAC Secretariat in Brussels.

3. COSAC web-page and cooperation with the IPEX platform
   3.1. COSAC takes note of the letter sent on 24 October 2017 by the Chair of the IPEX Board, as a response to the letter sent on 3 October 2017 by the Estonian Presidency, which proposes interconnecting the COSAC web-page and the IPEX platform. COSAC acknowledges that the IPEX platform is offering the possibility to host information from the COSAC website forthwith and all the information provided by the COSAC website after an in-depth analysis.
   3.2. COSAC encourages the COSAC Secretariat and the IPEX Board to cooperate towards increasing the interconnection between the COSAC website and the IPEX platform.
   3.3. COSAC invites the IPEX Board to present, in close cooperation with the COSAC Secretariat, to the COSAC Presidency an analysis of the possibilities and technicalities pertaining to the integration of the COSAC website into the IPEX platform at its earliest convenience.
3.4. In addition, and in order to determine the best and most cost-efficient way forward, COSAC invites the COSAC Secretariat to analyse and propose ways and related costs for renewing the COSAC website at its earliest convenience.

4. **Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently”**

4.1. COSAC takes note of the letter sent on 14 November by the President of the European Commission, which informs COSAC about the establishment of a Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently”. COSAC acknowledges the request of the Commission to nominate three candidates representing national Parliaments in this Task Force by the end of 2017.

4.2. COSAC regrets that the letter in question was sent at such a late stage in the preparations for the COSAC plenary, giving national Parliaments limited time to process the request. COSAC expresses its surprise at the size of the Task Force and the limited timeframe to present its work. National Parliaments do not constitute a singular institution and the proposed number of representatives does not reflect proportionality. Additionally, the Rules of Procedure of COSAC include no applicable provisions for the appointment of a representative for an external forum.

4.3. Nevertheless, COSAC acknowledges the value of this exercise and seeing as there exists in COSAC an established practice of consulting the Presidential Troika, COSAC therefore proposes for the national Parliaments in the Presidential Troika to represent national Parliaments in the Task Force. In order to have the necessary input, the Presidential Troika will take its cue from and report to the COSAC Chairpersons.

4.4. COSAC invites the next Presidency to set up a working group under point 2.6 of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC in order to facilitate regular and comprehensive discussions related to the work of the Task Force.

4.5. Furthermore, COSAC believes that the Task Force should be complemented by three additional members of national Parliaments, which are elected in an open selection process, provided that the Commission agrees to increase the number of representatives. COSAC also believes that the timeframe is insufficient and should be extended until the end of 2018. COSAC asks the Presidential Troika to approach the President of the European Commission on both matters.
Annex II – Contribution of the LVIII COSAC

PLENARY MEETING OF THE LVIII COSAC
26–28 November 2017, Tallinn

Contribution of the LVIII COSAC

1. Future of the European Union

1.1. COSAC acknowledges that the last 60 years have been the most peaceful and prosperous times in the history of Western Europe, in which the European Union has had an essential role. The EU was founded on values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, which are as valid now as they were 60 years ago.

1.2. COSAC recognises that the EU needs strength and determination to maintain unity and integrity to better respond to the expectations of its citizens. COSAC acknowledges that challenges such as Brexit, the migration crisis, global competitiveness, different security threats and growing economic and social inequalities should be treated as windows of opportunity to make the necessary reforms and improve the work of the EU. In this process, the chances of future generations need to be considered.

1.3. COSAC supports the goals and commitments of the Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap, the Declaration of Rome and the Leaders’ Agenda and welcomes the efforts of the European Commission to provide a framework for debate on a new and effective EU, whilst emphasising that decisions concerning the future course of European integration should be taken with highest possible level of engagement of all Member States and European citizens.

1.4. COSAC believes that a well-functioning Single Market and the maintenance of its four freedoms should remain at the very core of the EU. The EU must find ways to use the full potential of the Single Market, including the services sector, whilst ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach all parts of society. COSAC supports the efforts made towards continuing to increase the physical and digital connectivity between the Member States.

1.5. COSAC underlines that the EU is built to be a better place for its citizens, no matter where they live, and will continue to work for enhanced convergence of all European regions and for cohesion at large.

1.6. COSAC supports the European Pillar of Social Rights, which was proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg.

1.7. COSAC underlines the importance of the stability and prosperity in its immediate neighbourhood to the east and south. COSAC, taking note of the respective conclusions of the European Council that enlargement should remain a key policy of the EU as an investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability of our continent, underlines that EU enlargement should be based on the respect for the values of the EU and the principle of own merit and conditionality.

1.8. COSAC supports the Southern Neighbourhood Policy recognising it as an enabling factor for fostering cooperation and stability in the region. COSAC recognising the importance of the Eastern Partnership, acknowledges that the dialogue and European aspirations for the Eastern Partnership countries are the key motivators for further reforms and in finding peaceful solutions to conflicts. COSAC stresses that Russia has to fully implement the Minsk agreements and to respect international law.
Brexit

1.9. COSAC emphasises the importance of the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the EU and expresses the hope that it will take place in a planned manner. The goal of the EU should be to reach a fair deal with the United Kingdom that would maintain the integrity of the Single Market.

1.10. COSAC supports the Conclusions of the European Council on 20 October 2017 on the assessment of the Brexit negotiations. COSAC highlights that the rights of the EU and the United Kingdom's citizens living in each other's territory and the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland should remain among the first dossiers during the Brexit negotiations. COSAC stresses the need to continue to protect the Good Friday Agreement and to avoid a hard border. The financial consequences of Brexit should not undermine the implementation of the existing multannual financial framework.

1.11. COSAC stresses that on the above mentioned issues, substantial progress is necessary in order to start the negotiations between the EU and the United Kingdom on the framework for the future relationship and on the transition phase.

1.12. COSAC, stressing the importance for the national Parliaments to be directly informed about Brexit negotiations, invites the EU Chief Negotiator to continue informing COSAC about the state of the negotiations on a regular basis.

2. Bringing the European Union closer to its citizens

2.1. COSAC emphasises the need for national Parliaments to be included and integrated in the discussions and policy-making process relating to the future of the EU in order to contribute to the necessary democratic legitimacy of the process.

2.2. COSAC stresses the relevance of citizen participation from the early stages of the decision making process and calls the national Parliaments to provide for the necessary early consultation tools.

2.3. COSAC stresses its pledge to listen to the concerns expressed by citizens on EU matters. One of the tasks national Parliaments and the European Parliament have with regard to EU matters is to improve the communication about the EU and to address citizens' fears, hopes and expectations, having as its ultimate goal the regaining of trust and legitimacy of European citizens.

2.4. COSAC underlines the importance of active participation of the European citizens in the European elections, which provide a platform for a debate on the future of the Union. COSAC invites national authorities to promote the European elections and political parties to engage in political debates on the key issues prior to the European elections in 2019.

2.5. COSAC acknowledges that Parliaments are using different tools and face-to-face actions to encourage citizens to participate in discussions on EU related matters. COSAC encourages Parliaments to find more ways of direct involvement of civil society organisations and citizens by, for example, inviting them to participate at hearings before the committees.

2.6. COSAC recognises that the majority of the EU Affairs Committee meetings in national Parliaments are regularly open to the public and that most national Parliaments have written minutes of these, while most of them share the information about the EU discussions by making the written minutes of the discussions available to the public. COSAC calls on the EU to promote a more effective and transparent decision-making process and encourages national Parliaments to be more open to the public.

2.7. COSAC acknowledges that the majority of national Parliaments debate EU matters at the plenary whether at regular intervals or on an ad hoc basis. COSAC acknowledges that more plenary debates on EU matters raise the visibility of the Union and give citizens the opportunity to learn more about the agenda of the EU and the positions of political parties on these issues.
2.8. COSAC calls on all EU institutions to fully and faithfully apply the transparency regulation to all their documents. It calls on the other informal bodies like the Eurogroup and the EU-27 in Brexit format to do likewise.

2.9. COSAC underlines that digital platforms allow citizens to be more engaged in Union matters and send their opinion on topics being discussed. COSAC takes note that the majority of Parliaments are already using digital platforms such as contact forms on their website, webpages for citizens to express their views, Facebook pages, twitter accounts, Instagram sites, e-petition forms and internet blogs, and encourages others to follow their example.

3. Digital Single Market: development of e-services

3.1. COSAC supports the goals and commitments of the Tallinn Digital Summit and Conclusions of the European Council on 19 October 2017 acknowledging the need to bring the government and the public sector into the digital age to improve public services for citizens and businesses.

3.2. COSAC stresses the need to implement the eGovernment Action Plan 2016-2020 and welcomes the Commission's proposal for a single digital gateway.

3.3. COSAC reminds that the digitalisation of public services helps to improve their efficiency and cost effectiveness, contributes to the achievement of the full potential of the Single Market, and improves the quality of life of citizens by promoting social and economic development.

3.4. COSAC stresses that the EU has to introduce principles and measures such as once-only or one-stop government, into the digitalisation of our national administration to facilitate interoperability and cross-border digital public services.

3.5. COSAC acknowledges that the EU’s public sector should encourage the transformation of public services by leading the use of electronic procurement and making all communication between public authorities, businesses and citizens digital.

3.6. COSAC stresses that digital transformation requires digital skills and abilities and highlights the need to prepare the citizens for these new challenges in the business environment, public administration and in everyday life.

3.7. COSAC emphasises that the EU should consolidate the momentum of European investment in the digital field as well as in the other industrial sectors and should, in particular, create a European network of ecosystems that serves innovation, growth and employment.

3.8. COSAC stresses that digital transformation requires high capacity networks, such as 5G, to facilitate modern e-services and support innovation. The EU should work towards removing obstacles for the spread of 5G, including the lack of investments in telecoms infrastructure and standards development.

3.9. COSAC acknowledges that the public sector should encourage the transformation of public services by leading the use of e-signing and implementing eIDAS making all communication between public authorities, businesses and citizens digital.

3.10. COSAC welcomes that most Parliaments consider the digitalisation of public sector very important. COSAC invites Parliaments to fully explore the possibilities to increase the use of e-solutions in parliamentary work.

3.11. COSAC acknowledges that most Parliaments consider data protection concerns to be the main challenge in further developing the digitalisation of public sector and therefore stresses that, in digital transformation, privacy protection rules should be observed.

4. Building an effective and sustainable Security Union

4.1. COSAC encourages Member States to improve the exchange of information and intelligence, and stresses the importance of maximising the benefits of existing information systems, especially the
4. COSAC emphasises that the fight against terrorism demands action both at EU and national level. In that regard, COSAC welcomes related EU legislative proposals and stresses the need to speed up their adoption.

4.1. COSAC, taking into account that recent terrorist attacks have focused on soft targets, recognises the need to strengthen the protection of public spaces and welcomes the Commission’s recent anti-terrorism package.

4.2. COSAC, having in mind that prevention is the most effective counter-terrorism tool, invites all the parties to address the root causes of extremism by tackling the surge of hate speech as well as the dissemination of extremist or terrorist material online.

4.3. COSAC recognises the progress made in order to enhance security at the external borders and encourages all the parties to continue their efforts. In this respect, COSAC welcomes the adoption of the revised Schengen Borders Code and the Entry-Exit System and supports the speedy adoption of European Travel Information and Authorisation System.

5. Preventing and combating irregular migration

5.1. COSAC underlines the need to address the root causes of irregular migration and stresses the importance of development assistance to countries of transit and origin.

5.2. COSAC acknowledges the results that have been achieved in jointly managing migration flows with countries of origin and transit as well as countries of first reception. COSAC urges the Member States to strengthen the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the new External Investment Plan in order to tackle the root causes of irregular migration through growth, job creation and sustainable development.

5.3. COSAC reiterates strong support for the EU’s continued action on preventing and combating criminal activity by smugglers and traffickers along the entire migration route.

5.4. COSAC invites all concerned parties to take forward the discussions with a view to reaching a compromise concerning the legislative framework of the Common European Asylum System.

5.5. COSAC, emphasising the need to strengthen the EU’s return policy mechanism, welcomes the decision of the European Council on 19 October 2017 and strongly supports its initiative to create and apply necessary leverage, by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools, including development, trade and visa, to achieve measurable results in terms of returning irregular migrants, provided that these are compatible with the fundamental principles of international law.

5.6. COSAC reiterates that a full and non-discriminatory implementation of EU Readmission Agreements with third countries vis-à-vis all EU Member States, is necessary.

5.7. COSAC draws attention to legal pathways as alternatives to irregular and dangerous journeys.