TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh

Travel Report

LX COSAC Plenary Meeting

Vienna, Austria

18-20 November 2018

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HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

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[32ENUA0029]
REPORT ON ATTENDANCE AT THE LX COSAC PLENARY MEETING

Vienna, Austria, 18-20 November 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 LX COSAC Plenary took place Vienna, Austria, 18-20 November 2018.

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

The COSAC Plenary Meeting was chaired by Mr Rheinhold Lopatka, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian Nationalrat and Mr Christian Buchmann, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian Bundesrat.

The keynote speakers included:

- Wolfgang Sobotka, President of the National Council
- Inge Posch-Gruska, President of the Federal Council
- Karoline Edtstadler, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of the Interior
- Danuta Hübner, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) of the European Parliament
- Sir William Cash, Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, House of Commons
- Lord Timothy Boswell of Aynho, Chair of the EU Select Committee, House of Lords
- Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union
- Monika Langthaler, R20 Regions of Climate Action, Director R20 Austrian World Summit
- Josef Moser, Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice
- Mairead McGuinness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament
PROCEEDINGS OF THE COSAC MEETING

Sunday 18 November 2018

An Official Dinner was hosted by Mr Reinhold Lopatka, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the National Council and Mr Christian Buchmann, Chair of the EU Committee of the Federal Council at the Wiener Rathauskerrrer for all of the delegations.

Monday 19 November 2018

The meeting was opened by Reinhold Lopatka, who welcomed delegates, in particular new Chairs of Committees.

The President of the Austrian Nationalrat, Wolfgang Sobotka, gave the first of the opening addresses. In his address, President Sobotka drew attention to the growing importance of the parliamentary dimension of international politics, the important role of the European Union in supporting the Western Balkans, the significance of the draft agreement for the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, the increasing visibility of climate change as a policy challenge, and the importance of bringing policy decisions close to citizens. In looking to how to close the gap with citizens, President Sobotka mentioned the recent conference hosted by the Austrian Presidency on subsidiarity.

In the second of the opening statements, the President of the Austrian Bundesrat, Inge Posch-Gruska, welcomed all participants and underlined the importance of exchanging information and of constructive cooperation and dialogue between delegates of different Parliaments. The President made a number of points about the ongoing work of the Austrian Presidency on subsidiarity including drawing reference to the seriousness with which her own Chamber took the principle and how active it was in conducting subsidiarity checks. She emphasized that bringing the EU closer to the citizen meant making the EU more transparent which would give it a greater capacity to act.
Procedural Issues

• The draft Agenda was adopted without amendment.

• The Presidency informed the Conference that the Troika meeting had agreed on a compromised text for the Draft Contribution and Draft Conclusions – which were circulated.

• The 30th Bi-annual Report of COSAC was presented to the Conference. The Report had focused on the role of national parliaments in ensuring transparency and bringing the EU closer to its citizens, climate policy and the energy union, and the state of play of Brexit.

• The Presidency presented the details of the letters that it had received and responses given. The Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds of the Bulgarian Parliament, Kristian Vigenin, formally withdrew his request for the COSAC Rules of Procedure to be revised in order to allow for the invitation to COSAC of two representatives of parliaments from EU potential candidate countries, EFTA countries and Eastern Partnership countries. Chairman Vigenin asked that the next Presidencies consider and address this matter.

Session 1: State of Play of the Austrian Presidency of the Council the EU

The State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Interior of Austria, Ms Karoline Edtstadler, presented the Austrian Presidency priorities. In her presentation, the State Secretary explained how the Presidency was working to reach an agreement on the UK’s withdrawal from the EU in order to prevent a ‘hard Brexit’, and that while Brexit was taking up a lot of the Presidency time, the Presidency was continuing its work on other priorities.

The other priorities of the Presidency included the work on security and the fight against illegal migration. This had involved considering the apparent necessity for common standards at the EU’s external borders, strengthening cooperation with Egypt and other Arab countries, continuing to consider the legislation on cyber security and working with the countries of the Western Balkans. Finally, the State Secretary stressed the importance of strengthening the principle of subsidiarity, an issue that the Presidency continued to prioritise.
Session 2: Brexit – current state

The Chair of the European Parliament’s Constitutional Affairs Committee (AFCO), Ms Danuta Hübner made the first presentation, and repeated her regret that the UK would be leaving the European Union, but that she respected the process. She explained to the Conference her view that the negotiation process, which had involved all of the main EU institutions, would culminate in an agreement, that the whole process had been unprecedented, and that the EU needed to remain unified in its approach. She welcomed the recently published draft withdrawal agreement which covered what she considered to be the key elements: citizens’ rights, financial settlement, governance and a proposed solution for the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Ms Hübner expressed the hope that the draft withdrawal agreement would minimise disruption and highlighted the importance of adequate implementation of its provisions. Ms Hübner reiterated the common commitment in the European Parliament to protecting the Good Friday Agreement. Finally, she explained that she expected a ‘meaningful’ vote to take place in the British House of Commons in advance of the Christmas recess period and described the process she expected to be followed by the European Parliament.

The Chair of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee, Sir William Cash, detailed his own impressions of the draft Withdrawal Agreement and its consideration by the British Houses of Parliament; namely that he personally did not believe that it would pass the House of Commons. Speaking in a personal capacity, he also explained that he did not support the agreement, did not support an extension period, and did not support holding a second referendum. Sir Cash also was clear that he believed that there should be, and he hoped for, good relations between the UK and the EU.

The Chair of the House of Lords EU Select Committee on EU Affairs, Lord Timothy Boswell of Aynho, emphasized the conflicting views that were still held on the UK’s relationship with the EU. He perceived difficulty in finding a way forward for politicians and others, trying to agree solutions. He reminded the Conference that a ‘no deal’ exit would be the worst possible outcome for all, and he recommended that it was essential to keep talking.

In the lengthy discussion that followed, a number of points were made by the various parliaments around the process of the negotiations. The unity of position of the EU27 Member States, issues surrounding citizens’ rights, the protection of the four freedoms of the Single Market and the need to avoid a hard border on the Island of Ireland were also discussed.
In his intervention, **Deputy Durkan** warned the participants of the danger for the EU if the unity during the negotiations was not maintained, emphasizing that unity was the EU’s strength. **Senator Craughwell** drew the Conference’s attention to the situation in Northern Ireland, where the majority had voted to remain within the EU.

**Session 3: Climate policy and Energy Union**

The Vice-President of the European Commission, with responsibility for Energy Union, **Maroš Šefčovič**, began his presentation by detailing the European Union’s strategy and deliverables over the last four years with regards to energy and climate policy. He suggested that the volume of actions taken in the fields of increased energy security, creation of a true internal energy market and sustainable technologies meant that the Energy Union was fast on its way to become a reality. He also emphasized that work needed to continue on the development and manufacture of electronic car technologies and green batteries.

Responding to the first presentation, **Monika Langthaler**, the Director of the R20 World Summit for the non-profit organisation R20 Regions of Climate Action, described the global risks linked to climate change and contrasted that with the fact that, the levels of access to electricity in the developing world are increasing dramatically. She explained that while being beneficial, this development has an impact and results in ever-growing energy demands. She argued that some of that increased demand should be focused on renewable energy. She outlined actions to be taken to urgently address climate change, including improving communication with citizens.

In the discussion that followed, the visibility of climate change, the economic impact of recent extreme climate phenomena, the need for Europe to lead efforts to address climate change alongside working with other global regions, what those possible solutions could be, were all discussed.

In their interventions, both **Deputy Durkan** and **Senator Craughwell** stressed the importance of communication with citizens, which could focus on actions open to them as individuals and **Deputy Durkan** supported a switch to increased use of wind energy.
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 Austrian National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka at the Kursalon Wien.

Tuesday 20 November 2018

Session 4: A transparent European Union Closer to its citizens in light of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament

The Austrian Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice, Mr Josef Moser, presented the Austrian Presidency priorities in this area, notably strengthening the rule of law, improving the internal market and bringing greater security to the ‘neighbourhood’; specifically though increased cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans.

The Minister discussed his own views on the importance of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the respect for the rule of law as well as concerns on overregulation. Minister Moser explained that he felt that citizens’ concerns in this area could be addressed by bringing the citizen closer to political decisions. He felt this could be partly addressed by increased deregulation and considering improvements to the application of subsidiarity.

The First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Ms Mairead McGuinness MEP echoed the Minister’s view on the importance of trust and transparency, although she noted that this was often a challenge for all politicians and not just European level politicians. Adding to the suggestions already made, the First Vice-President suggested that citizens also needed to see concrete results emerge. In her opinion, different policy areas required different levels of action. One of the challenges that she noted, for European level policy-making when compared to national level, was that national level policy challenges often focused on ‘here and now issues’, whereas European level challenges were often longer-term issues where the immediate impact
was not as visible. Concluding her remarks, the First Vice-President discussed the upcoming European Parliament elections.

In the discussion that followed the Dutch Parliamentary transparency initiative, the role of national parliaments in the exercise of subsidiarity, levels of coordination between national parliaments, levels of trust in politicians, the role of European regions in policy-making, policy areas that needed to be addressed to improve citizens’ trust, the infringements procedures being considered against both Poland and Hungary with regards to the application of the rule of law were all mentioned.

In this debate, Senator Craughwell highlighted the need to complete the single market for medicines and drugs and that price differentials for the same products needed to be addressed. Deputy Durkan suggested that national parliamentarians needed to take ownership of the European project as well as recognise that globalisation was not necessarily the enemy of small countries.

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 Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Senate, Ms Gabriela Crețu presented plans for the next meeting of the COSAC Plenary in Romania in June 2019. Mr Lopatka thanked all of the participants and closed the conference.

Michael Healy-Rae TD
Chairman
24 September 2019
Annex I – Conclusions of the LX COSAC

Plenary Meeting of the LX COSAC
18-20 November 2018, Vienna
Conclusions of the LX COSAC

1. 30th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

1.1. COSAC welcomes the 30th 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 opinions held by national Parliaments on their role in ensuring transparency and bringing the EU closer to its citizens, also in light of the European elections in 2019. It further explores Parliaments’ opinions on the future of climate policy and the project of the Energy Union as well as on the state of play of Brexit and its implications for the future of the EU.

1.2. COSAC invites all Parliaments to make the outcome of COSAC work more visible, by encouraging them to share and support best practices emphasized in the Report within their Parliament and among the wider public.

2. Integration of the COSAC web-page into the IPEX platform

2.1. COSAC welcomes the Conclusions of the LX COSAC in Sofia and the decision to transfer the information from the COSAC website to IPEX.

2.2. COSAC takes positive note of the progress achieved so far by the COSAC Secretariat in uploading the available COSAC documents on IPEX. COSAC calls on the Secretariat to finalise the process as soon as possible and to submit a schedule of the transfer operations at the next meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, in order to ensure that the COSAC website is fully integrated into IPEX by the COSAC Plenary in Bucharest.

2.3. COSAC invites the incoming Romanian Presidency to monitor closely the transfer of information and to ensure the completion of the process by the LXI COSAC plenary meeting.
1. SECURITY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL MIGRATION

1.1. COSAC recalls the need for a comprehensive and unified EU approach to migration, which ensures coherence between internal and external policies, encompasses all migration routes and is based on the principles and values on which the EU is built. Thus, it is necessary to focus on a legal, safe and orderly migration policy, with due respect for asylum rights and the non-refoulement principle. A long-term and effective response to the human, social and political challenges of irregular migration and forced displacement demands enhanced cooperation with the countries of origin and transit and third countries hosting refugees, beneficiaries of international protection or asylum seekers as part of a broader partnership in order to tackle the root causes of these phenomena, and break the business model of smugglers and traffickers. COSAC also stresses the need for a reformed Common European Asylum System, including a fully-fledged EU Asylum Agency, that is based on a fair balance between responsibility and solidarity and encourages the implementation of paragraphs 5 and 6 of 28 June 2016 European Council conclusions.

1.2. COSAC considers that greater efforts must be made to protect the EU's external borders, with the goal of preventing irregular entry into the EU, tackling human trafficking and smuggling and preventing loss of life at sea. COSAC recognises the importance of Schengen and its reform, including advancement of the Schengen enlargement process provided that all criteria are met, in protection of the EU's external borders. It also underlines the necessity to significantly step up the effective return of irregular migrants in line with fundamental principles of international and EU law. In line with the October European Council Conclusions, COSAC holds that existing readmission agreements should be fully implemented, in a non-discriminatory way towards all EU Member States, and new formal readmission agreements
concluded, while creating and applying the necessary leverage by using all relevant EU policies, instruments and tools. Additional efforts are needed to fully implement the EU-Turkey Statement vis-à-vis all EU member states.

1.3 COSAC welcomes the Commission's proposals on the Return Directive, the Asylum Agency and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency⁵, ensuring the most efficient use of resources and developing common minimum standards of external border surveillance, with due respect for the responsibility and the competences of the Member States and ensuring an effective parliamentary control. At the same time COSAC invites all concerned parties to take forward the discussions with a view to reaching an agreement on the reform of the Dublin Regulation that will ensure a fairer approach with more effective burden-sharing. COSAC underlines the need to find a speedy solution for the Common European Asylum System and invites the Council to continue work with a view to concluding as soon as possible.

1.4. COSAC recalls that the EU heads of state or government gathered at an informal meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018 to discuss important matters of internal security, took stock of progress achieved, and agreed, inter alia, to step up the fight against all forms of cyber-crime, manipulation and disinformation. In this regard, COSAC calls for measures to combat cyber and cyber-enabled illegal and malicious activities and build strong cybersecurity with respect for fundamental rights particularly concerning the protection of privacy. Work on all recent Commission proposals should be concluded before the end of the legislative cycle.

1.5. COSAC stresses the importance of measures aimed at strengthening the capacity to prevent and respond effectively to radicalisation and terrorism. It supports recent steps to improve the interoperability of information systems and databases as well as to strengthen the Union’s crisis management capacity and the coherence and effectiveness of the EU and national crisis response mechanisms.

2. SECURING PROSPERITY AND COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH DIGITALISATION

2.1. COSAC emphasises that, in order to sustainably secure its the EU’s prosperity and competitiveness, its regulatory framework should develop in accordance with fast technological advancements. It is essential that the EU consistently avoid overregulation and make progress in the fields of innovation and digitalisation.

2.2. COSAC invites the co-legislators to take work swiftly forward on the proposals on digital taxation and on the latest data package, published by the Commission in April 2018, as well as to deliver on the remaining legislative proposals concerning the Digital Single Market, including the e-privacy proposal, which is the last instrument necessary to achieve the update of the EU data protection legal framework before the end of the current legislative cycle. In line with the position of the European Council, COSAC welcomes the ongoing work of the European Institutions and Member States on a coordinated plan on artificial intelligence.

2.3. COSAC welcomes that the Commission's proposal for Horizon Europe continues well-established funding instruments but will also provide new impetus, be it with respect to the European Innovation Council or developments towards a stronger mission orientation of research and innovation. COSAC supports the development of key capacities of the Digital Europe Programme such as high-performance computing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills as well as ensuring their wide use and accessibility across the economy and society by businesses and the public sector alike. Moreover, respect of fundamental rights, and particular the rights of private life and the protection of personal data shall be ensured and duly embedded in the development of these initiatives.

2.4. COSAC is concerned that the persistent digital gender gap throughout the EU is jeopardising progress in this area. Women are under-represented at all levels in the digital sector in Europe. Although this sector is rapidly growing, creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs every year, the share of women in this sector is decreasing. To counteract this development, COSAC supports Commission initiatives aimed at combating stereotypes, investing and enhancing digital competences, and facilitating women's participation in digital entrepreneurship and innovation.

3. WESTERN BALKANS / SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE AND EU NEIGHBOURHOOD

3.1. Together with the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU, COSAC reconfirms its support and strengthened engagement for developing a concrete EU perspective with measurable results for the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners according to their individual performance and based on shared values and principles, such as democracy, rule of law, good governance, freedom of expression and independence of the media, respect for human rights, reconciliation and good neighbourly relations, along with the fight against corruption and organised crime.

3.2. COSAC welcomes the Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, the Joint Declaration on Missing Persons and the Joint Declaration on War Crimes
signed at the Western Balkans Summit in London on 10 July 2018 in the framework of the Berlin Process, and the Sofia Priority Agenda adopted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit, in Sofia, on 17 May 2018. COSAC supports the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU in advancing the agenda.

3.3. COSAC stresses the need to provide appropriate funds for the potential new Member states of the EU in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

3.4. While acknowledging the progress made by the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners, COSAC reiterates that more efforts are needed to accelerate domestic reform processes, including strengthening democratic institutions and public administration reform, and achieve irreversible and sustainable results. COSAC underlines that continued steady efforts are also needed to tackle outstanding bilateral disputes in the region, including border disputes, increasing in this way stability and prosperity in the region. COSAC welcomes positive developments in the region, especially the historic agreement between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece in the long-standing name dispute.

3.5. COSAC calls on the Western Balkan / South Eastern European partners to strengthen their resilience to destabilising foreign interferences and disinformation and to lock in their strategic choices by fully aligning with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy.

3.6. To underline the importance of all neighbouring countries COSAC recognises the importance of the Eastern Partnership and emphasizes the fact that the success of the Eastern Partnership could only be achieved by joint efforts of all EU institutions, EU Member states and the Eastern Partner states themselves. COSAC reiterates the need to uphold the sanctions against Russia until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented.

3.7. PESCO as an integral part of the Common Security and Defence Policy aims at contributing to stability and security in the geographical Context of the European Union. COSAC values this cooperation as an instrument to strengthen the European defence.

4. BREXIT – CURRENT STATE

4.1. COSAC acknowledges that the EU27 leaders reaffirmed at the European Council (Art. 50) meeting on 17 October 2018 their full confidence in Michel Barnier as the Union Chief Negotiator and their determination to stay united. COSAC stresses that the integrity of the internal market and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union on internal market principles has to be preserved.
4.2. COSAC stresses that the Good Friday Agreement must be protected unconditionally by any negotiation result to provide citizens with a sustainable solution. COSAC emphasizes the need for solidarity towards Ireland.

4.3. COSAC welcomes the draft Withdrawal Agreement and encourages the Union Chief Negotiator to continue his efforts to reach an agreement on the Political Declaration on the future relationship.

4.4. COSAC stresses the importance of cooperation at interparliamentary level with the United Kingdom after Brexit, and will examine the possible modalities for its own continued cooperation with the UK once the Withdrawal Agreement is concluded and the framework for future UK EU relations is known.

5. CLIMATE POLICY AND ENERGY UNION

5.1. COSAC reaffirms the commitment of the European Union and its Member States to swiftly and fully implement the Paris Agreement and to continue to lead in the fight against climate change, including through the adoption of pending legislative proposals at EU level. The Agreement remains a cornerstone of global efforts to effectively tackle climate change on a global level. In the light of the recent report from the IPCC, COSAC underlines the need of limiting the global average temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.

5.2. COSAC welcomes the project of the Energy Union and all efforts aiming at a more secure and sustainable energy policy. COSAC supports the comprehensive approach putting the European Union at the forefront of the fight against climate change and increasing the production of renewable energy. With a view to COP24 that will be held in Poland from 3 until 14 December 2018, COSAC hopes for the adoption of ambitious and comprehensive implementing rules of the Paris Agreement.

5.3. COSAC considers that the project of the Energy Union can make a substantial contribution to achieve the Paris Agreement’s goals. In particular, COSAC underlines that the promotion of renewable energies contributes to reaching the goals set out in the Paris agreement. At the same time the use of renewable energy diminishes the European Union’s dependency on energy imports.

5.4. COSAC endorses measures that lead to a swift and comprehensive adoption of the Clean Energy Package, especially all steps taken to create an internal market for electricity and to improve the risk-preparedness of the European Union. Furthermore, COSAC welcomes the
creation of a system for the governance of the Energy Union which integrates climate and energy planning into a single framework as this would create a cooperation mechanism to oversee the implementation of the 2030 EU climate and energy policy objectives.

5.5. COSAC notes that a number of Member States rely on a single energy supplier challenging the European Union - the world's biggest importer of energy. COSAC supports all efforts to maximise the European Union's use of indigenous sources of energy in full compliance with the climate targets and to secure energy supply and promotes the diversification of energy sources. COSAC points out that measures taken to protect the environment and increase the production of renewable energy are also contributing to the European Union's competitiveness. In this context, COSAC highlights the importance of research and development. Furthermore, COSAC supports the promotion of new energy technologies and innovative solutions.

5.6. Energy must remain affordable for citizens and businesses. While advocating plans leading to the protection of the climate and the environment COSAC underlines that a sustainable future for industry and business and fair competition must be ensured. Affordability of energy and the competitiveness of European industry need to be kept in mind. The specific needs of energy-intensive industries must be taken into account.

5.7. COSAC reiterates that the fight against climate change must remain one of the key endeavours in the European Union's environmental policy. At the same time, other causes of pollution of the environment must not be neglected. In this context, COSAC notes that plastics and especially microplastics contribute considerably to pollution, in particular of inland waters and oceans. COSAC attaches importance to stepping up activities against plastic pollution and to stopping the use of microplastics in various product groups. COSAC endorses measures aimed at reducing plastic waste, especially single-use plastics.

5.8. COSAC welcomes the activities of the European Union's LIFE programme which supports climate action and environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU. COSAC underlines the importance of such projects.

6. A TRANSPARENT EUROPEAN UNION CLOSER TO ITS CITIZENS IN LIGHT OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

6.1. COSAC underlines the key role of the principle of subsidiarity in bringing the European Union closer to its citizens. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely to the citizens as possible.
6.2. COSAC welcomes the Report of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently" and the recent Communication from the European Commission "The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking" and the included recommendations to make subsidiarity more active and visible.

6.3. COSAC emphasises that the due involvement of national Parliaments in policymaking and legislative processes at European level is of major importance for ensuring a high degree of transparency, efficiency and public acceptance. COSAC encourages the EU's institutions and national and regional Parliaments, regional and local authorities, and civil society to work together in order to improve the exchange of ideas between Parliaments, authorities and citizens across the European Union.

6.4. COSAC welcomes the European Commission's proposals to enhance the communication with regional and local authorities and to take into account their specificities in general consultations. COSAC invites regional and local authorities to intensify their interaction with the European Commission.

6.5. COSAC considers the Report of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently" and the Communication from the European Commission "The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking" a good basis for further discussions. Having in mind the view expressed by COSAC in the Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC regarding the procedure for setting up the Task Force, COSAC stresses the importance that the national Parliaments and the European Parliament are invited to actively take part in these discussions. These discussions should cover, inter alia, the extension of the eight week deadline for the submission of reasoned opinions within the framework of the subsidiarity control mechanism by excluding recess periods from the counting and exploring the introduction of a twelve week deadline, as well as the question of providing national Parliaments with the additional opportunity to express their views about proportionality and the legal basis of a proposed legislation in reasoned opinions, taking into account that certain modifications can be achieved without Treaty changes. COSAC reiterates that it appreciates the so called "green card" mechanism as an extension of the political dialogue between the European Commission and the national Parliaments.

6.6. COSAC welcomes the efforts of the EU institutions towards more transparency. In this context, COSAC acknowledges the Council's pending efforts to review its legislative transparency standards, and welcomes the calls for greater transparency from the European Ombudsman and national Parliaments. COSAC will carefully follow the Council discussions, invites the Council to report on any progress on these reflections in due time and reiterates the conclusions as stated in paragraph 2.8. of the Contribution of the LVIII Plenary COSAC
Estonia) and in paragraph 2.6./2.7. of the Contribution of the LIX Plenary COSAC (Bulgaria). With regard to the European Commission’s proposal for a mandatory transparency register, COSAC calls on all stakeholders to address the issue in a constructive way.

6.7. COSAC stresses that the representation of the European Union’s citizens in the European Parliament is based on free and fair elections. Political parties at European level serve as a direct link between citizens and the political system, contributing to transparency and a better understanding of the European Union’s decision-making processes.

6.8. In view of the upcoming European elections on 23–26 May 2019, COSAC appreciates the EU Institutions’ efforts to reinforce democratic resilience in Europe. Securing transparency in online political advertising, fighting disinformation campaigns, improving the rules on European political party funding and boosting cybersecurity are important measures to effectively counter new types of threats to free and fair elections.

6.9. COSAC encourages all European citizens to actively participate in the upcoming European elections. Furthermore, COSAC recalls that every citizen of the European Union has the right to directly participate in the Union’s democratic life, among others, through the European Citizens’ Initiative.