TITHE AN OIREACHTAIS

An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthai an Aontais Eorpaigh

Tuarascáil Taistil

LXI COSAC

Búcairist, an Rómáin

23-25 Meitheamh 2019

HOUSES OF THE OIREACHTAS

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

Travel Report

LXI COSAC

Bucharest, Romania

23-25 June 2019

[32ENUA0030]
REPORT ON ATTENDANCE AT COSAC PLENARY MEETING

Bucharest, Romania, 23-25 June 2019

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 Meetings are held twice yearly and normally take place in the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The LXI COSAC Plenary took place Bucharest, Romania, 23-25 June 2019.

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs was represented by Senator Terry Leyden, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee (Head of Delegation), Deputy Bernard Durkan and Senator Gerard Craughwell. The delegation was accompanied by Heidi Lougheed, Clerk to the Committee. Cait Hayes, the Houses of the Oireachtas Permanent Representative in Brussels as well as Paul Conway, the incoming Houses of the Oireachtas Permanent Representative also attended.

The COSAC Plenary Meeting was chaired by Mr Angel Tilvăr, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies and Ms Gabriela Crețu, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Senate.

The keynote speakers included:

- Şerban-Constantin Valeca, Vice-President of the Senate
- Florin Iordache, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies
- Vasilica-Viorica Dăncilă, Prime Minister of Romania
- George Ciamba, Minister-delegate for European Affairs, Romanian Government
- Rt Hon. the Lord Whitty, Chair of the EU Internal Market Sub-Committee, House of Lords, United Kingdom
- Luca Jahier, President, European Economic and Social Committee
- Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, Head of Unit responsible for Higher Education, European Commission
- Ioan Dumitrache, Secretary General, Romanian Academy
- Elżbieta Bieńkowska, European Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (via Video Message)
• Ştefan-Radu Oprea, Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, Romanian Government
• Remus Pricopie, Rector, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, SNSPA

PROCEEDINGS OF THE COSAC MEETING

Sunday 23 June 2019

An official dinner was hosted by Mr Ion Marcel Ciolacu, President of the Chamber of Deputies at the Stirbei Palace for all of the delegations.

Monday 24 June 2019

The Conference was opened by the Vice-President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, Florin Iordache who detailed the parliamentary dimension of the Romanian Presidency. Mr Iordache stressed the positive role that COSAC has played in improving inter-parliamentary cooperation and the need for national parliaments to continue to engage in the European Union’s decision-making process. He touched upon the policy priorities of the Romanian Presidency: external action and security, cohesion, macro-regional strategies, agriculture, economic growth, as well as the debate on the future of the European Union.

Procedural Issues

• The draft Agenda was adopted without amendment

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

• The 31st Bi-annual Report of COSAC was presented to the Conference; it had focused on (1) prospects of international trade relations of the EU, including the future of relations between the EU and the UK in the context of Brexit; (2) the European Education Area as a Driving Factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market;
and (3) economy based on innovation, technological progress and social impact, the role of parliaments in fostering the 'new economy' of the EU.

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

**Session 1: Achievements of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

The Prime Minister of Romania, Ms Viorica Dăncilă, highlighted the volume of meetings organised during the six-month Presidency: over 1,750 overall, 60 of which were at ministerial level. Concrete progress had been made in a number of priority files including initiatives to combat disinformation, improve access to information, enhance data protection and increase security of identity cards, protect external borders and fight terrorism, defend consumers, ensure adequate work-life balance and ensure energy security.

The Romanian Minister-delegate for EU Affairs, George Ciamba, noted the challenging context in which the Romanian Presidency operated with Brexit negotiations ongoing, European Parliament elections preparations and the future of the Multi-annual Financial Framework being considered. A common approach for a long-term climate action strategy was developed by the Presidency, which includes ambitious environmental goals and plans for sustainable economic growth and transformation of the European economy. The Presidency also ensured that significant steps were made in the fields of the Digital Single Market and the establishment of the European Labour Authority.

During the interaction that followed, delegates discussed the intensification of cooperation between the European Parliament and national parliaments, the Multi-annual Financial Framework, social and economic developments, migration, need to support democratisation of the Western Balkans,

In his intervention, Deputy Durkan discussed how climate change is a challenge for the future, the importance of addressing cybersecurity concerns and his support for an orderly withdrawal of the UK from the EU.
Senator Craughwell mentioned the protection of intellectual property rights, the cyber space war and asked the conference to consider a common European approach in security and military defence technology.

Senator Leyden praised the work of the Romanian Ambassador to Ireland and highlighted Ireland’s support for enlargement of the European Union to the Western Balkans, as enlargement generally brings prosperity to all of those concerned.

Session 2: Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; the future of relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of ‘Brexit’

The Chair of the House of Lords’ EU Internal Market Sub-Committee, the Rt Hon Lord Whitty, noted his regret that the UK’s final position on Brexit still remained unclear, including what type of relationship it wanted to have with the European Union. In coming to that position, Lord Whitty stressed the importance of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland and the need for an open border to support the peace process. He did note that finding a solution that allowed for an open border, while remaining within the rules of the Single Market, global international trade rules and the UK’s own aspirations was not easy. He stressed the need for continued diplomacy on both sides as he believed that a disorderly withdrawal would damage all sides and should be avoided.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Luca Jahier, reminded the Conference of the EU’s role and place in the international trade system and the international trade agreements in place with nearly 70 countries. Mr Jahier commented that he believed that the EU could promote better social and environmental standards across the world, though its trade agreements. Mr Jahier reflected that reinforcing connections between civil society groups could assist in improving relations around the Brexit process.

In the debate that followed, many delegations commented on the need for close relations between the UK and the EU and many delegations called on any solutions to support the peace process in Northern Ireland, which did not jeopardise the Single Market. The value for the EU in promoting social, environmental and climate standards within trade agreements was also discussed.
All members of the Irish delegation spoke, noting that an extension period until the end of October for the negotiations for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU may not be long enough to complete the process, and could cause further economic uncertainty.

### Session 3: The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

The Head of Unit responsible for Higher Education within the European Commission, Vanessa Debiais-Sainton, explained to the Conference the European Commission's ambition to build a 'European Education Area' by 2025. A number of elements underpinned that ambition, including promoting time spent abroad to study so that it becomes standard, improving the recognition of school and higher education diplomas across the EU and ensuring that knowledge of two languages in addition to a student’s ‘mother tongue’ becomes the norm.

More immediately, the importance that the European Commission was assigned to education could be seen by its proposal to double the funding available for Erasmus-style programmes in the 2021-2027 EU budget.

The Secretary General of the Romanian Academy, Ioan Dumitrache, discussed the paradigm shift that he believed has taken place in the education system and in education policy in many countries. He detailed the changes that he believes are needed to face the ‘new industrial revolution’ and in creating the digital society; digital literacy and smart education need to be prioritised.

In the discussion that followed, members underlined the need to invest in education, to improve cooperation between Member States on education matters, the impact that education policies can have on society, the importance of genuine lifelong learning systems, and that consideration needed to be given to the provision of adequate student accommodation.

Many members voiced their support for successful Erasmus and Horizon 2020 programmes.

**Senator Craughwell** expressed his full support to the European Education Area as presented, and in particular to the programmes envisaged for apprentices, language learning support and microcredit systems.
Meeting of COSAC Chairpersons

The COSAC Chairpersons considered and debated the draft Conclusions and Contributions and voted on one of the 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 Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, Angel Tilvâr and the Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Senate, Gabriela Creţu for all delegations.

Tuesday 25 June 2019

Session 4: Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social European Union impact; the role of national parliaments in fostering the ‘New Economy’ of the EU

The European Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Elżbieta Bieńkowska (via a video link), described the changes in the economy of today and the need for Member States to remain agile in order to remain competitive. In her short presentation she emphasized three challenges:

1. The need to create jobs to replace those types of jobs that are lost;
2. The need to adopt and lead the technological change through cooperation between governments and industrial partners, particular those in 'strategic value chains'; and
3. The need move to a low carbon economy, in order to combat climate change.

The Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Remus Pricopie, highlighted the different angles from which innovation and competitiveness could be approached and the need to include digitalisation in this process. He underlined the value of engagement between Member States through programmes like Erasmus+ for improving competitiveness and quality of national education systems. He explained that he believed that the European University project had had a promising beginning and hoped that it was a sign of the European Commission placing education policy higher up on its agenda.
The Romanian Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, Ştefan-Radu Oprea, updated the conference on the achievements of the Romanian Presidency on trade policy, including the signing of the Free Trade Agreement and Investment Protection Agreement between the EU and Vietnam. The Minister discussed specific initiatives of the Presidency that were important to this area of work: the proposal to revise the Small Business Act, supports for innovation through Invest EU funding and support for networks of incubators.

In the debate that followed, the conference discussed the factors behind supporting a thriving innovative economy, how to modernise education systems, the importance of the green economy and technological innovation and how to support research and innovation through investment.

Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

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

The Chair of the Grand Committee of the Parliament of Finland, Satu Hassi, presented plans for the next meeting of the COSAC Plenary to be held in Helsinki in December 2019.

Chairman Tillvär thanked all of the participants and closed the conference.

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

Parliamentary Dimension

Plenary Meeting of the LXI COSAC
23-25 June 2019, Bucharest

Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

1. 31st Bi-annual Report of COSAC

1.1 COSAC welcomes the 31st Bi-annual Report and warmly thanks the Secretariat for its excellent work in preparing it. The Report provides useful information about Parliaments' outlook on the EU trade policy, on European cooperation in the field of education, and on the law-making process in the digital era. It further explores the efficiency of the parliamentary scrutiny mechanism to face the challenges of new technologies.

2. Integration of the COSAC webpage into the IPEX platform

2.1 COSAC welcomes the progress made in transferring the content from the COSAC website to IPEX, and notes that all the files pertaining to past COSAC meetings have successfully been uploaded on IPEX.

2.2 COSAC thanks IPEX for the assistance extended during the transfer phase of the COSAC website and for setting up the framework for a true one-stop-shop for interparliamentary cooperation in the EU.

3. Cooperation on EU affairs

3.1 While supporting the improvement of parliamentary cooperation on IPEX, as an important channel for communication and systematic sharing of information, COSAC invites national Parliaments to proactively upload any useful information regarding their subsidiarity and proportionality checks, and their contributions adopted in the framework of the political dialogue.
Annex II – Contributions of the LXI COSAC

Plenary Meeting of the LXI COSAC
23-25 June 2019, Bucharest
Contribution of the LXI COSAC

1. European Elections

1.1 COSAC welcomes the successful delivery of the ninth European elections, held from 23 to 26 May 2019. COSAC acknowledges the overall turnout in the elections, which for the first time in 25 years, was higher than 50% at the European level.

1.2 COSAC also acknowledges that further collective effort is required to bring citizens closer to the EU decision-making process, thereby achieving an even higher turnout in future elections. To this end, COSAC promotes the deepening of relations between national Parliaments and the newly elected European Parliament, so that the European agenda takes more into account the expectations of the citizens of the EU.

2. Cohesion, a common European value

2.1 COSAC recognizes Cohesion Policy as an important pillar of the European project, and acknowledges its results in terms of investments, economic growth, job creation, social and territorial convergence. COSAC considers that the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework should reflect the EU’s long-term development strategy.

2.2 COSAC recalls that Cohesion Policy represents an essential European added value; it is an expression of solidarity, which is based on the regions, puts the citizen at the centre, both as a source of inspiration and beneficiary of European action, and requires adequate and sustainable financing.

2.3 COSAC calls for further efforts at all levels, to reduce disparities across the EU, including the outermost regions, to ensure social development and high living standards, to promote connectivity and digitization, to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, to strengthen industrial strategy and to provide a safer and greener environment.
3. Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; future relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit

3.1 COSAC recalls that the EU is currently the largest trading partner with more than 80 countries worldwide and considers that trade is essential to generate wealth as long as it is conducted in open and fair terms.

3.2 COSAC supports the World Trade Organisation's reform in terms of efficiency, transparency and resilience to the challenges of the 21st century; it advocates for multilateralism in relations between States, including in the field of commerce; it denounces unilateral trade measures, which have a negative effect on economic growth and on relations of trust between States.

3.3 COSAC welcomes the EU's efforts to seize new economic opportunities and encourages the European Commission to assess, pursue and negotiate free trade relations with countries and regions of Africa, Asia, North and South America, as well as with Australia and New Zealand.

3.4 COSAC stresses the need for a balanced EU trade policy, which takes into account not only the opening of the Single Market to key world partners, but also the necessity of establishing reciprocity rules, in particular for access to public procurement, of preserving EU social and environmental standards, and of maintaining the competitiveness of European companies in all sectors, including agricultural. Protecting the Single Market is essential and requires to develop tools against dumped and subsidized imports from non-EU countries.

3.5 COSAC also calls to promote, respect and defend European fundamental values, such as democracy and rule of law, human and social rights, and furthermore standards in environment and action against climate change provided by the Paris Agreement on Climate, geographical indications, health, food safety or animal welfare, when negotiating and implementing new trade agreements. In particular, COSAC stresses the need to fight against xenophobia, racism and antisemitism.

3.6 COSAC recalls that the European Commission's competence on trade gives the EU a very strong negotiating stance vis-à-vis third countries and pleads, at the same time, for a more inclusive trade agenda that takes into account the views expressed by Member States and their national Parliaments.

3.7 COSAC takes note of the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and Switzerland on the Institutional Framework Agreement and, considering the importance of bilateral relations, invites the Parties to a consensual approach.

3.8 COSAC stresses the importance of transatlantic trade relations and the need to further improve them. In this respect, COSAC takes note of the EU Council's decision stating that the EU should negotiate free trade agreements only with Parties to the Paris Agreement on Climate, declaring obsolete the negotiating directives for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), but authorizing the European Commission to open negotiations with the United States for an agreement on the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods.
3.9 COSAC denounces the systematic practice of unilateral economic and trade sanctions with extraterritorial effects. For this reason, COSAC supports the EU efforts to counter the effects of such sanctions, which affect its unity and competences.

3.10 Inasmuch as the United Kingdom decides to leave the EU, COSAC pleads for privileged post-Brexit trade relations, in the framework of the Withdrawal Agreement and a Declaration on future UK-EU relations, while stressing the need to maintain the Single Market's integrity, the four freedoms' inseparability and the fulfilling, by the United Kingdom, of its financial obligations towards the EU.

4. The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

4.1 COSAC recalls the need for all education and training systems in the EU to keep up with technological progress, to meet the labour market's expectations whilst preserving the intrinsic value of a holistic education, and to prepare younger generations for the highly qualified jobs of the future and for innovation-based entrepreneurship. At the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education and training are essential to enhance prosperity and competitiveness of the European economy and to transform the Single Market into a place where the most innovative companies meet the best-qualified workforce.

4.2 Given the legal framework of the Treaties, COSAC acknowledges the national and regional competences in terms of education and training, and recommends enhanced coordination between the EU, its Member States and all relevant federated entities in order to build an inclusive, flexible, comprehensive and high-quality education environment, in line with the requirements of the digital era and new technologies.

4.3 COSAC considers that a high and comparable level of education and digital skills, across the EU, as well as a common framework to facilitate recognition of the digital certifications, are fundamental for strengthening and deepening the Single Market.

4.4 While welcoming the efforts undertaken to create a European Education Area by 2025, COSAC invites the European Commission to give new impetus to the lifelong-learning framework, notably by promoting communications and by supporting the action plans of European agencies, and stresses the need to finance research in pedagogy.

4.5 Whilst respecting the Member States' responsibility to shape their respective education systems, COSAC calls for action to support vocational training, mobility, youth employment and youth entrepreneurship, notably by addressing the school-to-work challenges, by developing Erasmus for apprentices and by adapting training and education systems to the digital era and emergence of artificial intelligence.

4.6 COSAC advocates for STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), for greater involvement of the business sector in digital education, at all levels, and for fostering the public-private partnerships in the high
technology fields of education, such as air and space sciences and quantum computers.

4.7 COSAC invites national and regional Parliaments to identify and exchange best practices to develop flexible, inclusive and high-quality education and training systems and to adapt the European Education Area to the digital and technological developments, notably by building on the European University project, which encourages the development of bottom-up networks of universities across the EU.

4.8 COSAC invites national and regional Parliaments to follow the EU discussions on education, training and culture, and to encourage their respective Governments to keep these topics high on the agenda.

5. Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social impact; the role of Parliaments in fostering the new economy of the EU

5.1 COSAC stresses the need to ensure legislation that is able to follow and drive innovations throughout the digital and technological era, based on transparent political dialogue and on economic, social, legal and ethical assessments.

5.2 COSAC considers technological progress and artificial intelligence as crucial for the Single Market, providing a significant advantage to the European economy in the global competition context and therefore requiring a common and harmonised legislative approach, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

5.3 COSAC calls on the European Commission to treat technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence as top priorities during its next mandate, to encourage, perform and accelerate all necessary consultations in these fields, and to present adequate proposals that avoid any gaps between the new technologies and the legislative framework.

5.4 COSAC considers that technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence should work for the people, and not against the people; they should be mastered, affordable and trustworthy, and their use should be wise, cohesive and transparent, in full compliance with individual and collective rights and obligations.

5.5 As technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence bring both risks and opportunities, COSAC recalls the need to ensure that they entirely meet the citizens' needs and asks for comprehensive measures to mitigate their impact on the labour market and to diminish their intrusive nature. Special attention should be given to the rights of users, consumers and workers, to the social security contributions, as well as to the new professional qualifications and the new industrial strategies.

5.6 COSAC considers that subsidiarity and proportionality checks are also relevant when regulating new technologies, and calls on Parliaments and the European Commission to encourage and ensure fair financing of value chains across the EU, to foster social and political dialogue, and to boost confidence in new technologies.
6. Subsidiarity and proportionality

6.1 COSAC reaffirms its solid interest in further developing the subsidiarity and proportionality control mechanisms and wishes that the EU institutions continue to improve the application of these two principles, as they confer increased democratic legitimacy on their actions.

6.2 COSAC invites Parliaments to harness the full potential of the subsidiarity and proportionality scrutiny procedures, in accordance with the Treaties, and to support the improvement of political dialogue with the European institutions, thus enhancing transparency of EU policy making and bringing people closer to the EU. In this regard, COSAC expresses the wish that the new Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council make democratic accountability and transparency of EU decision-making a core value of their important work.

6.3 COSAC calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council to swiftly reach an agreement on excluding the Christmas, New Year and Easter breaks from the eight-week period to submit reasoned opinions.

6.4 COSAC welcomes the European Commission’s Communication "The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU’s policymaking", particularly those measures concerning the common understanding of subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as a greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the EU policy-making process. COSAC also welcomes that the topic was discussed at the Subsidiarity Conference held in Bregenz, on 15-16 November 2018, during the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council. COSAC reiterates the importance of inviting national Parliaments and the European Parliament to actively take part in discussions on how to strengthen the role of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the EU’s policymaking.

6.5 COSAC calls for an ambitious approach to strengthen the national Parliaments' role in the EU policy-making process, during the new institutional cycle.