

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LX COSAC
Vienna, 19-20 November 2018

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Reinhold 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*

AGENDA:

1. Opening of the meeting of the LX COSAC

- Welcome address by Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*
- Welcome address by Ms Inge POSCH-GRUSKA, President of the Austrian *Bundesrat*
- Introductory remarks by Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*
- Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the LX COSAC

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
- Presentation of the 30th Bi-annual Report of COSAC
- Letters received by the Presidency
- Procedural issues

3. Session I - 'State of Play of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU'

Speakers: Ms Karoline EDTSTADLER, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of the Interior

Chairs: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

4. Session II - 'Brexit - current state'

Speakers: Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament; Sir William CASH, Chair of European Scrutiny Committee, UK *House of Commons*; Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO, Chair of the EU Select Committee, UK *House of Lords*

Chair: Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

5. Session III - 'Climate Policy and Energy Union'

Speakers: Mr Maroš ŠEF OVI, Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union; Ms Monika LANGTHALER, R20 Regions of Climate Action, Director R20 Austrian World Summit

Chair: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

- Debate on the draft Contribution and draft Conclusions of the LX COSAC

7. Session IV: 'A transparent European Union closer to its Citizens in light of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament'

Speakers: Mr Josef MOSER, Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice; Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament

Chairs: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

8. Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LX COSAC

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting of the LX COSAC

Welcome address by Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; welcome address by Ms Inge POSCH-GRUSKA, President of the Austrian *Bundesrat*; and introductory remarks by Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Standing Sub-Committee on European Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*, welcomed participants to the LX COSAC plenary meeting, especially the new Chairs participating at a COSAC meeting for the first time: Ms Åsa WESTLUND, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Swedish *Riksdag*; Mr Arto SARTONEN, Chair of the Grand Committee, Finnish *Eduskunta*; Mr Darij KRAJ I , Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*; and Mr Foort VAN OOSTEN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*.

Mr Wolfgang SOBOTKA, President of the Austrian *Nationalrat*, started his address by welcoming the delegates to Vienna and pointing out the increasing importance of the parliamentary dimension of international politics, especially with regard to the topics of the meeting.

The President highlighted the significant role of the European Union in supporting the Western Balkans on their way towards accession and also mentioned that he would put his focus on the region not only during the Austrian Presidency but also in the future, as it was crucial to provide a clear orientation towards Europe. Mr SOBOTKA stated that the EU had brought Europe 70 years of peace, and a clear prospect for accession was not only in the interest of the region, but also in the interest of a peaceful Europe. Parliament had a strong role when it came to establishing legal certainty and rule of law in order to enforce democratization at a wide level. He further mentioned the scholarship program of the Austrian Parliament, offering an exchange of administrative staff with the Parliaments of the Western Balkan partners as well as the democracy workshop project with Montenegro and Kosovo* to familiarise citizens with the democratic process. Mr SOBOTKA invited other Parliaments/Chambers to join those programs in order to prevent certain third countries from gaining influence over the region.

Mr SOBOTKA thanked the EU Chief Negotiator for Brexit, Mr Michel BARNIER, for the agreement now on the table, which should make it possible to find a solution to the sensitive issue of the relation between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom and to prevent a “hard” Brexit. The President pointed out that the negotiations had shown that the otherwise often divided European Union was able to find a united approach and solution, a fact that would be necessary in the final stages. He further wished for Prime Minister Theresa MAY to overcome any challenges and to find support in the European Council and the UK *House of Commons*. The difficult negotiations had further shown that something that had grown together for 40 years could not easily be separated, and that united solutions should be achieved for the other big challenges such as demography, digitalisation, security and climate change.

On the latter, Mr SOBOTKA underlined that climate policy had been a major issue in the last years as climate change had become more visible in many incidents all around the world, making it nearly impossible to deny anymore. He emphasised that even though progress in CO2 reduction had been achieved, it was also true that the electric car was not the exclusive solution; establishing adaptation strategies on how countries and regions should deal with the new circumstances and involving the local communities were just as important. Mr SOBOTKA stressed the need for awareness, as every citizen could make an effective contribution to the climate policy.

Mr SOBOTKA concluded his keynote speech by accentuating the importance of being close to the citizens and thereby mentioning the Conference on Subsidiarity that was held the days before in Bregenz as well as the significance of elections in bringing Parliaments closer to the citizens. With the last US elections in mind, the issue of cyber security should be prioritised. Furthermore, citizens must know who their representatives are and who to contact in their constituency.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council and to the opinion of the ICJ on the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

Ms Inge POSCH-GRUSKA, President of the Austrian *Bundesrat*, welcomed participants to the LX COSAC and stressed that exchange of information was essential for good and constructive cooperation, noting the importance of dialogue between delegates of different Parliaments/Chambers in order to fulfil their responsibility and to make the right decisions on important EU issues for citizens. She further underlined that the Austrian *Bundesrat*, as the Chamber representing the *Länder*, was the interface of the European Union and the Austrian citizens. Concerning the principle of subsidiarity, she noted that the *Bundesrat* was strongly committed and exercised its right to participation, being one of the most active chambers when it came to subsidiarity checks, and described it as the “Chamber of Europe”.

However, the President of the *Bundesrat* also pointed out that the trust of citizens in the EU had suffered in the last years due to various crises, which had made it possible for EU critical voices to gain ground in all of Europe. Therefore, the Austrian Presidency had made it its mission to bring the EU closer to its citizens via a stronger capacity to act, crisis-resilience, more transparency, and enforcement of the principle of subsidiarity. Ms POSCH-GRUSKA declared that many challenges could be met in a better way in the Member States or regions. Yet, she also professed that even if subsidiarity was an important principle, it should not be abused to encourage nationalistic thinking. Ms POSCH-GRUSKA concluded her address by pointing out that the Austrian Government had placed the Presidency of the Council under the motto “A Europe that protects” and that included social protection and the safeguarding of prosperity, in order to re-establish the EU as a reliable and stabilizing force.

Adoption of the agenda

Mr LOPATKA informed the participants that due to the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) held on the same day, Mr BARNIER had to cancel his participation at the LX COSAC. Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, had agreed to give a keynote speech in his stead.

The Chair further presented the draft agenda of the LX COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

The Chair informed participants of the results of the Troika meeting held the day before, during which the Troika had agreed on a compromised text for the Draft Contribution and Draft Conclusions. This had been circulated to delegations the previous evening.

- Presentation of the 30th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Mr LOPATKA invited the Permanent Member of the COSAC secretariat, Mr Kenneth CURMI, to present the 30th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which was based on Parliaments' replies to the related questionnaire circulated to delegations on 27 July 2018 with a deadline of 18 September 2018 for submitting replies.

Mr CURMI briefly referred to the three chapters of the Report: the first one concentrated on the involvement of citizens in parliamentary proceedings; the second one dealt with Climate Policy and the Energy Union and the third one was dedicated to the state of play of Brexit as well as implications for the future of the EU.

- Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received by the Presidency:

- Letters from Mr Carles ENSENAT, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, *Consell General* of Andorra; Ms Tamar KHULORDAVA, Chair of the Committee on European Integration,

Parliament of Georgia; Mr Guillaume ROSE, Chair of the Monitoring Committee on Negotiations with the European Union, and Mr Stéphane VALERI, Speaker, *Conseil National* of the Principality of Monaco; Ms Mariia IONOVA, Deputy Chair of the Committee on European Integration, *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine; and from Ms Blerta DELIU-KODRA, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, Assembly of Kosovo, regarding participation in COSAC. Following consultation with the Troika, letters of invitation had been sent out. Due to elections, Georgia was not able to attend the COSAC plenary.

- Special attention was drawn to the request from Kosovo. The Chair added that in order to comply with international regulations, written documents would feature “Kosovo^{*}” with the asterisk and footnote.
- Letter from Mr Angel TÎLV R, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*, and Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*, on the participation of Kosovo at COSAC meetings.
- Letters from Mr André ANTOINE, President of the *Parlement de Wallonie*, on the composition of the Belgian delegation within COSAC. The Presidency had already answered in a letter on 20 July 2018, explaining that it was not the role of COSAC to enter into discussions on constitutional or representational arrangements of a Member State.
- Letter from Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs and Oversight of the European Funds, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, submitting a proposal for the revision of the COSAC Rules of Procedure including a new paragraph 3.2a by which two members of the Parliaments of each EU potential candidate country, EFTA country and Eastern Partnership country should be invited as observers. The Presidency had also received two reactions to this proposal from Mr Yiorgos LILLIKAS, Chairman of the House Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*; and a common letter from Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, German *Bundestag* and Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, French *Assemblée nationale*, declaring their reservations.
- Letter from Mr Toomas VITSUT, Chair of the European Union Affairs committee, Estonian *Riigikogu*, providing suggestions for the Draft Contribution.
- Letter from Mr Václav HAMPL, Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Czech *Senát*, informing participants about the meeting of the Visegrad countries that had taken place on 8 October 2018 and sharing the conclusions adopted there.
- Letter from Mr Foort VAN OOSTEN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*; Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*; and Mr Erik CHRISTENSEN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Danish *Folketing*, providing an update on transparency in Council.

Concerning his proposal to change the COSAC Rules of Procedure, Mr VIGENIN pointed out that, just before the LIX COSAC, the Bulgarian Presidency had received a letter from the parliaments of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, asking to allow them to participate at COSAC meetings on a permanent basis. As it had been too late to initiate the process to change the Rules of Procedure then, he had not proposed the modification that time. He nevertheless supported the request, as Member States should not treat potential membership countries as well as EFTA countries that had a long tradition in participating in the meetings unfavourably. Despite having submitted the proposal to change the Rules of Procedure, he had decided to withdraw the proposal, as already mentioned during the Troika meeting the day before, given that unanimity had not been reached. Mr VIGENIN ended his statement by asking the next presidencies to address the issue.

Mr LOPATKA said the Presidency took note of the withdrawal.

With regard to the letter from Mr VITSUT, the Chair noted that the Presidency had not been able to consider the suggestions at that stage.

- Procedural issues

The draft text of the Contribution and the Conclusions was circulated to delegations on Wednesday 7 November 2018. Amendments received from delegations by the stipulated deadline were, together with the initial text and a number of compromise proposals elaborated by the Presidency, included in a table and submitted to the Troika.

Following a detailed examination of each amendment proposed, the Troika, on the basis of the Presidency's compromise proposals, drafted a modified text of the Contributions and distributed it among the delegations.

The Chair also informed the delegations that they could submit additional amendments to the Troika compromise text by noon of Monday, 19 November. The compromise text and any new amendments would be discussed during the meeting of the Chairpersons in the afternoon.

3. Session I: State of Play of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU

Speakers: Ms Karoline EDTSTADLER, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of the Interior of Austria

Chairs: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Standing Sub-Committee on European Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

Ms Karoline EDTSTADLER, State Secretary, Federal Ministry of the Interior of Austria, referred to her participation at the Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons in July and the speech she had given then about the priorities of the Austrian Presidency, and further stated that after four months it was now time to speak about the fruition of those priorities. She emphasised that, at the moment, the Brexit negotiations were at the centre of attention because of the General Affairs Council (Art. 50) meeting being held the same day as well as the extraordinary European Council that would take place the following Sunday. Ms EDTSTADLER added that Austria hoped for a quick and good agreement and the prevention of a “hard” Brexit. The State Secretary further highlighted that it should be in the interest of everyone to maintain the unity of the remaining 27 Member States. Ms EDTSTADLER pointed out that even though Brexit had taken a strong focus, the Austrian Presidency had also continued its work on the other priorities as well as the motto of the Presidency, “A Europe that protects”.

The first priority, security and the fight against illegal migration, had been the topic of the Informal Summit in Salzburg in September as well as of the European Council in October. Despite the progress that had been made in all legislative acts of the Common European Asylum System, the Dublin Regulation remained the most difficult issue to contend with. Ms EDTSTADLER added that the Austrian Presidency had had discussions with all Member States in summer in order to get closer to a consensus but that there was a long way left to cover. She also mentioned that consensus had been reached in the Council on the necessity of common standards for control of the EU’s external borders, among other things through discussions on the strengthening of FRONTEX.

Concerning the external dimension, Ms EDTSTADLER pointed out that at the Salzburg Summit and at the European Council a decision had been made to strengthen the cooperation with Egypt and other Arab countries in the field of migration but also in a broader sense. In meetings in Cairo and New York, Mr Sebastian KURZ, Federal Chancellor of Austria; Mr Donald TUSK, President of the European Council; and Mr Abdel Fattah EL-SISI, President of Egypt; had agreed that the first summit between the European Union and the Arab League should take place in February 2019.

With regard to the internal dimension, the State Secretary mentioned the progress made on dossiers such as legislation for cyber security, interoperability between EU databases, European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS), electronic evidence and the digital taxation. She further pointed out the importance of securing prosperity and the completion of the Digital Single Market in order to strengthen the status and the position of the EU at a global level.

On the matter of the Western Balkans, Ms EDTSTADLER highlighted the significance of bringing the region closer to the European Union to ensure political stability and positive economic development. Furthermore she underlined the willingness of Austria to open and also close new chapters with Serbia and Montenegro and to solve consisting problems and disputes in the region, in order to create more positive developments such as the end of the name dispute between Athens and Skopje.

Ms EDTSTADLER also emphasised the importance of strengthening the principle of subsidiarity and stressed that there was a need for a European Union that was strong on the big questions but held back on issues that could be better resolved at the Member State, regional or local level. The Austrian Presidency had set an impulse during the Subsidiarity Conference in Bregenz the last week for the better implementation of the principle and in line with the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently”. Ms EDTSTADLER stated the securing of more transparency in terms of legislation for the citizens as another significant point of discussion. She concluded her keynote speech by pointing out that with an eye towards the European elections, common work had to continue as citizens expected even more progress and results in those areas.

Thirty-six speakers took the floor during the ensuring debate, which was dominated by the topic of migration.

Indeed, no less than 24 speakers referred to the refugee crisis, the external EU borders, or other migration related subjects.

Mr Georgios GEORGIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, pointed out that the world had become a global village, reminding participants of the hardships people living in the Eastern Mediterranean area were facing, with a considerable number crossing the sea and dying, and adding that, in this context, it was important to have a Europe that protected its citizens, a sentiment echoed by Mr Markus SELIN, Swedish *Riksdag*, who also stressed that the right of asylum had to be safeguarded. Ms Regina BASTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, also called for a Europe that protects, recalling Europe’s history of peace, solidarity, social justice and prosperity, all of which should, in her opinion, be strengthened.

A number of speakers (Ms Tytti TUPPURAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*; Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*; Ms Concepción DE SANTA ANA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*; Ms Maria João RODRIGUES, European Parliament,) expressed disappointment at the news that Austria was not ready to sign the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration at the intergovernmental conference to be held in Marrakech later that year. Ms RODRIGUES said that while the Austrian Presidency had been inspired by the motto “A Europe that protects”, this was not really being properly implemented.

Ms Constança URBANO DE SOUSA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, underlined the need to join the Global Compact, while Ms Soraya RODRIGUEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, explicitly asked countries like Austria and Hungary to reconsider their position.

Others were less critical: Mr Jaak MADISON, Estonian *Riigikogu*, welcomed the fact that Austria was taking decisions independently, and stated that the Estonian government was also planning not to go along with the Global Compact. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, called for a holistic approach when it came to the migration crisis, while also stressing that Hungary could not accept any obligatory relocation mechanism and could not recognise the right to migration as a human right. Mr

Giovanbattista FAZZOLARI, Italian *Senato della repubblica*, appreciated the vision of Austria as far as migration was concerned, and stated that Italy also wanted there to be proper control of the external EU borders, since that would ensure that Schengen could be secured. He also proposed to come up with a policy *vis-à-vis* Northern African countries similar to the one already in place with Turkey. Mr Tibor BANA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, echoed similar sentiments regarding Schengen, stressing that this had to be re-established and internal border controls removed, and this necessitated the strengthening of external borders.

Some speakers called for a common solution to migration (Mr GEORGIU, Ms BASTOS, Mr Johan HULTBERG, Swedish *Riksdag*). Mr Peter LUYX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, on the other hand, said it was clear that Europe did not support the Global Compact on migration with one voice and that the issue therefore needed to be tackled internationally but without ignoring the necessity for a multilateral approach. Mr SELIN called for a sustainable migration system, and stressed the need for burden sharing, a sentiment shared by Mr Jens HOLM, Swedish *Riksdag*, and Mr Piero DE LUCA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, who also noted that resources directed to migration were not sufficient, as had been stated by Commissioner Dimitris AVRAMOPOULOS. Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, expressed concern at the rise of populists in recent years, possibly caused by the fact that countries had been left to their own devices when dealing with migration.

Ms TUPPURAINEN and Mr HOLM stressed that “no human is illegal” and there were never illegal asylum seekers, the latter calling for a legal entry system in the EU and for an end to the deal with Turkey.

A number of participants stressed the need to tackle the root causes when addressing migration (Mr HULTBERG, Ms DE SANTA ANA).

Both Mr Darij KRAJ I , Slovenian *Državni zbor*, and Mr Özkan YALIM, Turkish *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, reflected on the heavy burden that their respective countries were shouldering when it came to migration. Both Mr KRAJ I and Ms DE SANTA ANA pointed out the internal dimension of migration policy.

Another recurrent topic during the debate related to EU accession, especially *vis-à-vis* the Balkans, with many welcoming the importance that integration of the Balkans into the European family had been given and stressing that progress and support in this area was essential and to the benefit of all Europe (Mr HÖRCSIK, Mr Slaven RADUNOVIC, Montenegrin *Skupština*; Mr Elvira KOVACS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*; Ms Elisa SPIROPALI, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, Mr Jaroslaw OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*, Ms Shpresa HADRI, from the *Sobranie* of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Mr Fatmir VELAJ, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*). At the same time, some speakers underlined that rule of law was a *sine qua non* when it came to EU accession (Mr Genc POLLO, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*; Mr RADUNOVIC).

Digitalisation also featured repeatedly during the debate, with Mr Peter POZUN, Slovenian *Državni svet*, expressing his support for this priority, and calling for more money to be made available in connection with the digitalisation of health systems. Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, on the other hand, talked about competitiveness through digitalisation, and urged the EU not to be simply a consumer, but an actor, by taking charge and developing an industrial strategy. Baroness Lucy NEVILLE-ROLFE, UK *House of Lords*, said digitalisation was critical to European competitiveness especially with Asia growing stronger.

With regard to the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), diverging views arose. Whereas Mr HÖRCSIK did not find any reason to close the debate ahead of the European Parliamentary elections, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, insisted that it was crucial to conclude the MFF until then.

Ms Renske LEIJTEN, Dutch *Tweede kamer*, was of the opinion that perhaps it would be best to wait for citizens to make their choice before coming to the end of negotiations.

Mr HULTBERG said that Sweden was against a proposal for a digital tax, as this would bring with it a number of inherent risks: small countries with a lot of exports would be negatively affected, he stated, and so would innovation, while small start-up companies would find it difficult to operate.

As for environmental issues, Baroness NEVILLE-ROLFE welcomed the work done on Climate Policy, while also welcoming the reference in the Draft Contribution to pollution by plastics. While welcoming the possibility to discuss transparency, Mr Foort VAN OOSTEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer* also invited participants to attend the United Nations Climate Conference to be held in Katowice on 2-14 December 2018.

Brexit featured only sporadically during this debate, with Sir William CASH, UK *House of Commons*, pointing out that Britain could not accept the way it was being governed by the EU, a state of affairs which led it to its decision to leave.

Mr Angel TÎLV R, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, said Romania had been closely following the Austrian Presidency and was ready to take on the coming Presidency. It would set priorities that were in tune with the European agenda, especially when it came to migration, social security, mobility, cohesion and subsidiarity.

In her replies, Ms EDTSTADLER said that there was no other choice but to find a solution to migration. Nevertheless, she noted how different rules applied within one country, and this made progress difficult. She therefore welcomed the fact that consensus was now deemed necessary on these issues. With regard to the Global Compact on Migration mentioned by a number of speakers, Ms EDTSTADLER reminded participants that Austria had taken this decision as a sovereign country, not as the Presidency.

Concerning the MFF, concrete steps had to be taken to fix the aims for the next few years and the decision should be taken as soon as possible, especially since the UK was leaving the Union. It would probably not be possible to come to a conclusion during the Austrian Presidency, she added, but the aim was to smoothen the path for the incoming Romanian Presidency.

Ms EDTSTADLER said digitalisation brought enormous progress and advantages, but also risks and dangers. She further stressed the importance of fairness in this sphere.

With regard to EU accession, Ms EDTSTADLER stressed that the project of Europe would not be complete as long as the states from the Western Balkans were not yet members.

Ms EDTSTADLER assured participants that it was in everybody's interest to avoid a "hard" Brexit.

Finally, on Subsidiarity, Ms EDTSTADLER said that the Austrian Presidency would try to push for a 12 week time limit for EU national Parliaments to conduct their relevant scrutiny.

4. Session II: Brexit – current state

Speakers: Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament; Sir William CASH, Chair of European Scrutiny Committee, UK *House of Commons*; Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO, Chair of the EU Select Committee, UK *House of Lords*.

Chair: Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

The Chair, Mr BUCHMANN, opened the debate and introduced the three panellists.

Ms Danuta HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, started her address by highlighting that, although regrettable, she respected the UK decision to withdraw from the Union in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union.

Ms HÜBNER explained that this process would lead to the finalisation of an agreement with the UK, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal and taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. All main EU institutions were involved in this process: the Commission, which led the negotiations in the name of the EU; the Council, which would conclude the agreement on behalf of the Union, acting by a qualified majority; and the European Parliament, which needed to give consent by simple majority voting.

Ms HÜBNER underlined the EU's unity on Brexit, both among institutions and among Member States, and welcomed the openness and transparency on the EU side during the negotiation process. She indicated that she participated, as Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament, in over 350 meetings related to Brexit.

On 15 November 2018, following decisive progress in the Brexit negotiations, the EU Chief Negotiator Michel BARNIER handed the draft text of the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the future relationship between the UK and the EU to the European Council President Donald TUSK, who proposed to finalise and formalise the agreement and approve the political declaration on future EU-UK relations at the extraordinary European Council on Sunday 25 November 2018.

According to Ms HÜBNER, the Withdrawal Agreement was necessary to minimise disruptions and ensure an orderly exit. It was also a precondition for a subsequent transition period (called implementation period in the UK) and a prerequisite for a confident future relationship between the UK and the EU.

Ms HÜBNER also referred to the main elements of the agreement: the rights of EU citizens living in the UK and of UK citizens living in the EU; the financial settlement; the governance issue and the role of the European Court of Justice; the proposed solution for no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; the Irish border backstop proposal to be used as a last resort to avoid a hard border; and the possibility to extend the transition period further.

A 'meaningful vote' on the withdrawal agreement was expected in the UK *House of Commons*, following the European Council on 25 November and prior to the Christmas/New Year recess.

Sir William CASH, Chair of European Scrutiny Committee in the UK *House of Commons*, referred to the UK referendum on 23 June 2016, and the subsequent UK Parliament vote on the bill triggering Article 50, as historic votes, representing the will of the UK people.

Sir CASH was of the opinion that the Withdrawal Agreement would not pass a vote in the House of Commons, and stated that he himself could not support the agreement. Sir CASH also stated that he was against an extension of the transition period and that the UK would not hold a second referendum. Concerning the fate of UK Prime Minister Theresa MAY, Sir CASH stated that this was a UK domestic matter. In his concluding remarks, Sir CASH hoped for good relations to be maintained in the European arena.

Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO, Chair of the EU Select Committee in the UK *House of Lords*, stated that the UK was more divided than ever, and that it was difficult to see a way forward. He pleaded:

- for understanding: The referendum was a culmination of 40 years of conflicting views and divisions in the UK over the EU. There were no quick fixes for these divisions and holding another referendum would be difficult;

- for patience: Despite the fixed deadlines, the debate on UK relationship with the EU would remain. Time and space were needed for UK politicians. The UK could possibly request further flexibility;
- to not burn bridges: A “no deal” would be the worst outcome for the island of Ireland and for citizen’s rights. A future relationship should be as close as possible, which is why the vague terms of the Political Declaration were regrettable, and keeping the lines of communication open was essential.

During the debate that followed, 37 speakers took the floor and there was general appraisal for the excellence of the good offices of Mr BARNIER as EU Chief Negotiator, for the EU 27’s unity along the negotiation process, the crucial importance of citizens’ rights and of avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland, and for keeping the four freedoms of the single market without any cherry picking.

Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, lamented the fact that the UK was leaving, but agreed that some issues raised were relevant, especially with regard to transparency. He stated that the Netherlands was prepared to all eventualities but regretted the costs this implied for his country. Mr Bernard DURKAN from the Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas* referred to the words of Lord BOSWELL as a warning to all and underlined the importance of the meaning of an Irish saying “*Ní neart go cur le chéile* – There’s no strength without unity”.

Mr Markus TÖNS, German *Bundestag*, underlined the importance of an agreed deal for an orderly exit. Mr Kalle PALLING from the Estonian *Riigikogu* and Mr Anne MULDER, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, regretted the state of UK political turmoil and offered EU national Parliaments help if necessary. Mr Franc TR EK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, regretted that Brexiteers did not enquire about the consequences of the UK-EU divorce and the role of certain media on misleading public opinion.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, stated that we were in a “damage control” situation and called for the EU to once more be comprised of 28 or more Member States by accepting the EU candidates from Western Balkans. Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, said that leaving was always worse than staying in and that it was better to reform the Union from inside. Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, asked Sir CASH to provide an alternative to the agreement that the latter had found unacceptable, expressed solidarity with the Republic of Ireland.

Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, hoped for the best but stated that we should also prepare for the worst. Mr Gerard P. CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, underlined the pro-EU nature of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland and wondered why the UK was walking away from the EU. Mr Titus CORL ȚEAN, Romanian *Senat*, asked about a plan B in case of a no deal scenario. Ms Imren MEHMEDOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, referred to the issue of EU workers living in the UK, while Ms Soraya RODRIGUEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, said that the UK could not limit immigration and discriminate against EU citizens, while at the same time promote the free movement of goods and services.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, European Parliament, referring to Lord BOSWELL’s words, underlined the importance not to burn bridges, a sentiment echoed by Ms Margarida MARQUES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, but to build them, and highlighted the meaning of compromise, a word too often disregarded and disrespected. Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, stated that the perfect agreement did not exist for anyone: not for the UK, nor for the EU.

In his replies, Lord BOSWELL made three concluding points: (a) to maintain the bridges among ourselves; (b) the importance of understanding now more than before; and (c) an appeal for sympathy in grasping the debate in UK.

Sir CASH wondered why countries would not want to govern themselves and instead have laws imposed by qualified majority, and asked who was calling the shots in this scenario. He was of the view that an unelected European Commission should not impose laws at Councils held behind closed doors, ending in greater centralisation and less national Parliaments. He said that the UK was looking forward to an independent trade policy, as 90 % of growth lay outside the EU.

Ms HÜBNER concluded by underlining the difference between the Withdrawal Agreement and the agreement of the future UK-EU relationship:

The UK Withdrawal Agreement (including transition), under Article 50, was to be concluded by the Council by a qualified majority voting after obtaining the European Parliament's consent. This agreement, to be adopted before 29 March 2019, did not need ratification by EU National Parliaments (with the exception of UK Parliament). The agreement should include as annex a Political Declaration on the future UK-EU relationship.

Any future agreement between the UK and the EU would, in case of a mixed agreement, require ratification by national Parliaments.

5. Session III: Climate Policy and Energy Union

Speakers: Mr Maroš ŠEF OVI , Vice-President for the Energy Union, European Commission, and Ms Monika LANGTHALER, Director of R20 Austrian World Summit

Chairs: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

The third session was chaired by Mr BUCHMANN, who announced the panel before giving the floor to Mr Maroš ŠEF OVI , Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of the Energy Union.

Recalling previous COSAC meetings and welcoming the efforts that had been made to ensure access to clean electricity in Africa, Mr ŠEF OVI went on to underline the major success of the European Union over the last four years: the Energy Union becoming more than a vision and turning into reality, based on increased energy security, a true internal energy market and sustainable technologies. In this respect, the climate change appeared not only as a challenge, but also as a motivation to invest more in research and innovation.

Vice-President ŠEF OVI also highlighted the Clean Energy Package, setting the way to reach the joint climate and energy targets and asked for concrete national strategies, particularly in the fields of renewables and energy efficiency. In this sense, he made positive remarks with regard to the more ambitious targets set by the Member States and the European Parliament and shared his optimism that in 2030 the goals in terms of reducing the greenhouse gas emissions would be over-achieved.

Assuming that a significant reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions also means healthier population and a more liveable planet, Mr ŠEF OVI called for Member States to further develop the manufacturing of electric car technologies and specifically green batteries. To give some figures, he pointed out that, by 2025, the European battery market was expected to be worth €250 billion per year, which was about the size of the Hungarian economy, and stressed the need to capture that market and keep it European. In this respect, he mentioned the EU Battery Alliance, a cooperative platform launched by the European Commission, gathering over 260 companies from all segments of the battery chain, who had already mobilised over €100 billion for investments that might lead to the opening of 10 to 20 factories throughout the European Union. Mr ŠEF OVI called for those companies to comply with the European standards, use raw materials coming from sustainable sources and integrate into the circular economy. Moreover, he expressed confidence that the green batteries of the future would be intelligent,

connected and bring benefits to their owners, notably by being capable to store and even sell the exceeding energy to the grid.

The Vice-President paid special attention to the energy transition and to those who needed protection during that phase. In this respect, Mr ŠEF OVI underlined that no person working in the coal or coal-related industries should be abandoned. He therefore recalled the Platform on Coal Regions in Transition, initiated by the European Commission with the aim to discuss and develop long-term strategies and to finance economically and technologically viable projects.

About the climate change, Mr ŠEF OVI echoed scientists' concerns that much more needed to be done in order to keep the global temperature rise up to 1.5 degrees Celsius. He mentioned a vision paper on how to make Europe carbon neutral by the second half of this century, which the European Commission planned to publish by the end of November and which would affect every single sector, from agriculture to constructions.

Finally, Mr ŠEF OVI recalled the turbulent times the European Union was going through and the challenges it faced from the outside and from within. On that occasion, he stressed the need to take the right decisions, especially during the following ten years, which, in his view, would be decisive for the rest of the century. He advocated for a European century and placed his confidence not only in the public support for the new policies, but also in the European labour force. He pleaded for close cooperation with the emerging countries, making sure they developed relying on clean energy, and thanked the national Parliaments for the role they had played so far in fixing and achieving the climate goals.

Mr BUCHMANN then gave the floor to Ms Monika LANGTHALER, Director of R20 Austrian World Summit, who focussed on the access to energy, the climate change and the pollution of the cities.

Ms LANGTHALER started by citing an annual report made by the World Economic Forum, according to which the global risks faced by humanity over the last years were linked to climate change, extreme weather events and natural disasters. In this sense, she mentioned that the energy-related CO₂ emissions reached a historic high in 2018.

On the other hand, Ms LANGTHALER stated that, for the first time in history, the world population that did not have access to electricity fell below 1 billion people, especially as a result of investments in poor countries and of the Indian government's policies. She pointed out that, in India, over 400 million people had gained access to electricity during the last 15 years, while problems still persisted in Africa, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

The evolution of the energy demand, underlined Ms LANGTHALER, brought good signals for the future, especially for the European Union. In this respect, she highlighted that, by 2040, the European Union would drop to the fifth place in the ranking of the world's energy consumers, after China, USA, India and Africa, which showed a good performance in terms of energy efficiency.

However, Ms LANGTHALER showed concerns as to the ever-growing energy demand of the whole world, which would provoke growing CO₂ emissions and endanger the system's stabilisation.

Talking about the enormous need of investments in the energy supply chain, \$2 trillion according to the International Energy Agency, Ms LANGTHALER underlined that more than 70% of those investments were made by the State and that politicians should drive them towards the renewables.

Ms LANGTHALER then pleaded for a wide participation at the Austrian World Summit – a conference dedicated to optimism, to reaching people and to acting instead of talking. She then described the R20 as a subnational NGO, calling for support from the cities, regions and the states. In this respect, Ms LANGTHALER cited examples of success stories at subnational level, one being in Lower Austria,

where the level of 100% renewable energy was achieved in 2015, other being the city of Vienna and the third one being the state of California, who was about to reach the level of 50% renewable energy much earlier than expected.

Communication being important, Ms LANGTHALER quoted the president of R20, Mr Arnold SCHWARZENEGGER, who said "*you can have the best product in the world; if you can't communicate it, you have nothing*". Therefore, she advised to communicate better on the immediate threats, on "here" and "now", on what could be done now, and not in the coming years. To give examples of such communication, she argued that, at that very moment, nine people out of ten were breathing polluted air and pollution was killing 9 million people per year, a lot more than all the wars in the world and more than some serious diseases like HIV, malaria or tuberculosis combined.

Finding investors and sharing ideas between cities, regions and states were other important issues outlined by Ms LANGTHALER. In this respect, she advocated again for the Austrian World Summit, as a tool to facilitate reaching these aims.

As a final remark of her first intervention, Ms LANGTHALER highlighted that we were at a crossroad and it was time to decide on which side of the history we wanted to be.

Twenty-nine speakers took the floor in the following debate. Interventions converged and focussed mainly on the climate change; but remarks and suggestions as to the energy policies repeatedly came back across the different speeches.

Climate change and environment protection were central notions during the debates. Mr Jens HOLM, Swedish *Riksdag*, said that the climate change was happening now and that time had come for us to be ambitious. Ms Elena TESTOR, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, recalled that the climate change effects were very visible and that we should preserve the environment for the future generations. Similarly, Ms Concepción DE SANTA ANA, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados y Senado*, deplored the lack of interest from the United States of America for climate issues and called for Europe to remain a leader in the fight against climate change. Mr Arto SATONEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, asked for a balanced use of biomass and for a reinforced protection of the woods, while Mr Václav HAMPL, Czech *Senát*, said that water supply was becoming a problem even in Europe. Lord Larry WHITTY, UK *House of Lords*, declared that the European Union had to change the course of history and Mr Zafer SIRAKAYA, Turkish *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, shared his conviction that by solving the climate issues many other problems could be solved, including migration.

The extreme climate phenomena raised concerns, too. In this respect, Mr HOLM remembered the recent disasters and Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, recalled the €40 billion damages to the European economy caused by those phenomena. Mr António COSTA DA SILVA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, went even further, deploring the people's lack of interest for the climate change and stating that extreme floods, fires or sea storms would only increase in the future.

As possible solutions to these problems, several participants referred to the Paris Agreement and the global approach. Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, European Parliament, said that the whole world was aware of the climate changes and that politicians needed to provide clear directions on the actions to be taken. Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, pleaded for unity not only between the national and supranational authorities, but also across the different states. Ms Åsa WESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdagen*, urged the European Union to do more and to encourage third countries and other global actors to take measures against the climate change. She asked, in addition, to limit the global temperature rise up to 1.5 degrees Celsius, arguing that the limit of 2 degrees Celsius was not enough. Mr SATONEN also suggested being more ambitious, while Ms Ivelina VASSILEVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, and Ms DE SANTA ANA subscribed to the need to take global measures and to implement the Paris Agreement.

Lord WHITTY supported these ideas arguing that, for climate change, there was no Brexit and Mr Milan BRGLEZ, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, advised to take advantage of the multilateralism, to support the others and not to have a reductive approach. Criticism for the perceived arrogance of the United States of America and their intentions as regards the Paris Agreement came from Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Slovakian *Národná rada*, while Mr Piotr WACH, Polish *Senat*, and Mr Tadeusz CYMAŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, expressed their wish that a global agreement be reached in Katowice during the COP24. Mr HAMPL stressed that the Czech Republic had gone a long way in dealing with the climate change, while Ms THILLAYE mentioned her country's ambition to aim higher and to have a minimum level of carbon prices.

Mr Lukas MANDL, European Parliament, underlined that the fight against climate change was not only a European issue but had to involve other major actors like the United States of America and China. He supported the words of Mr Štefán OVIŠKA, according to which the following ten years would decide whether this century would be European, American or Chinese, and hence touched upon the sensitive economic and social aspects of the energy transition. In this respect, he stated that climate change was not necessarily a threat for the competitiveness, but it could also be an opportunity and a chance to invest and to have a better work force, enhanced security and reformed economies. Ms VASSILEVA called for the European Union to support the countries with a lower GDP during their transition to a low carbon economy, which would be a long and complicated process. Mr Piotr WACH, Polish *Senat*, echoed her ideas, warning that the energy transition would not be easy nor rapid.

As the energy transition was likely to affect many economy sectors, Mr SATONEN asked for a European long-term strategy, based on a circular economy. Mr Zmago JELINC IČ PLEMENITI, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, wondered what would happen to the maritime and aviation transport, Mr HOLM called for people to fly less, while Mr COSTA DA SILVA and Ms Maria Luís ALBUQUERQUE, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stood for finding the right balance between economic competitiveness and the democratisation of the energy consumption. Speaking about competitiveness, Mr Jaroslav PAŠKA, Slovakian *Národná rada*, pointed out the gap between the European Union and China, who was producing technologies a lot cheaper, and Mr BRGLEZ emphasized the sustainable development and the need to find a way for the Member States to work together, even though they were competing against each other. He also stressed the need to remember the social union and to reduce poverty during the transition phase.

The social aspects of the energy transition found their way in many interventions. Ms DE SANTA ANA insisted on jobs and pleaded for the need to inform the citizens and earn their support. This idea was developed by Mr Gerard P. CRAUGHWELL and Mr Bernard DURKAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, who highlighted the need to inform citizens about their responsibilities as well as about ongoing projects. Mr Kelvin HOPKINS, UK *House of Commons*, talked about the social added value of the future projects and Mr CYMAŃSKI asked for a good understanding of the social changes. In addition, Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* mentioned that people should start saving energy, while Ms McGUINNESS referred to the negative twists of some policies as well as to the citizens' habits that needed to change. In this respect, she mentioned some reports according to which the air quality in Dublin had been impacted more by the wood burning stoves, not by the coal.

Ms VASSILEVA noted that climate and energy were inter-linked and most of the participants referred to the energy policies and pleaded for the development of renewable energies. Mr HOLM stated that switching to renewables was an act of realism and Mr DURKAN called to support the wind energy, as it was cheap and available. Following the same path, Mr PAŠKA stated that Slovakia was in favour of making a change from a coal-based to renewable energy and Mr COSTA DA SILVA confirmed this approach, saying that industry must do more in order to back the renewables. He continued by asking for

more actions and investments in the field of energy networks interconnections and found echoes in the words of some of his colleagues. Hence, Ms ALBUQUERQUE claimed that energy delivery must be trans-national in order to be efficient and Ms Margarida MARQUES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, requested that interconnectivity stayed on the agenda in the future MFF because both Portugal and Spain needed European support in this regard. From the other side of the continent, Mr Virgilijus PODERYS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, explicitly mentioned that the synchronisation of the Baltic system with the European network should be a strategic objective for the European Union and highlighted that the Energy Union cannot exist without an integrated electricity market.

Lord WHITTY questioned the way energy was used and supported the Union's efforts in terms of energy efficiency. Ms TESTOR also referred to the new policies, approving the efforts undertaken at the European level, while Mr HOPKINS put the accent on the long-term big investments in renewable energy that needed to rely on public subsidies. On the other hand, Mr WACH wondered what would be the fate of the last generation coal-fired power plants, which entered into use only recently.

Natural gas and hydrogen were also mentioned among the clean sources of energy. In this respect, Mr Angelos VOTSIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, stated that a predominant use of natural gas would diminish the greenhouse gas emissions. He also pleaded for more intense research in the field of hydrogen capitation. From a more political perspective, Mr BLAHA questioned Nord Stream II and wondered how this project could get along with the sanctions against Russia, while Mr PODERYS recalled that the Baltic States still depended on one external energy supplier.

To give a scale of the importance of energy and energy policies, Mr CYMA SKI mentioned the expensive Polish projects and insisted that Poland remained a reliable partner, while Mr KOURAKIS referred to the his government's intention to make specific references to energy, as a public good, in the Greek Constitution.

Mr HAMPL wondered if the fabrication cycle of green batteries would have pollution impacts in the countries that extract and provide the raw materials.

Vice-President ŠEF OVI , who took the floor for his final intervention, answered some questions and made further remarks concerning the global ambitions and the European competitiveness. In this sense, he expressed his hope that COP24, in Katowice, would bring a single rulebook and advocated for a 90%-reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 in the European Union.

Mr ŠEF OVI also recommended a deeper analytical look at what was required in order to achieve the ambitious goals and offered examples of ways to follow: use of hydrogen, more renewables or amalgamation of technologies. He continued by saying that every analysis should take into account that the electricity demand would increase in Europe between 30% and 150% in the coming years.

Furthermore, and on the path to the Paris Agreement, he indicated that, in 2020, the European Commission would present a long-term roadmap on how to implement it in the different economy sectors. In this respect, he showed optimism pointing out the affordable price of the new technologies and the ever-growing number of European patents. He also based his optimism on the over €100 billion new budget for research and innovation in the next MFF, mentioning that more than 35% of this budget would be dedicated to research in the field of climate change.

However, Mr ŠEF OVI stressed the need to do more in terms of deployment of the new technologies and in terms of project financing. On this occasion, he pleaded for easier access to the EU funds, for higher involvement of the private sector, for better-targeted project selection process and for exploring new technologies, like batteries, hydrogen or even new fuels, especially for the maritime and aviation sectors.

As final remarks, Vice-President ŠEF OVI referred to the national responsibilities and to the proper planning that the Member States should make in order to make the best out of this phase and the invested money.

The session was closed by the second intervention of Ms LANGTHALER, who outlined the leadership of the European Union in fighting the climate change and its crucial role in supporting the Paris Agreement, with many best practices and ambitious sustainable development targets.

Ms LANGTHALER continued by drawing attention to the fact that climate change was not only a matter for the environmental or energy ministers, but also for the health, finance, agriculture or even foreign affairs ministers as well.

As to the fabrication cycles of the batteries, Ms LANGTHALER stressed that technology had been evolving since 2007 and that, if the energy efficiency had developed during the last 40 years as much as the microchips, the world would have been a better place today. She then continued by confirming that transition took time and that social aspects needed particular attention, but she trusted that COP24 in Katowice would finish the rulebook for the Paris Agreement and that every country would start doing something about it.

Ms LANGTHALER closed her address by encouraging the audience to communicate more and better about climate change, about public actions and about citizens' responsibilities.

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

- Debate on the draft Contribution and draft Conclusions of the LX COSAC

Mr LOPATKA informed participants that the draft Conclusions and Contribution had been circulated on Wednesday 7 November 2018. Since then, the Presidency had received amendments from national Parliaments and, following the discussion during the Troika meeting on the day before, delegations had received a modified document, as well as the amendments tabled until the deadline of noon of that day. Referring to the guidance with regard to adopting the Contribution and the Conclusions, he underlined that, in those cases where amendments had not been resubmitted on the Troika text, it was considered that consensus was reached.

Mr LOPATKA explained the voting system, reminding participants that each parliaments had two votes with the vote split for bi-cameral parliaments.

Following an animated debate, including a number of votes, the draft Conclusions and an amended text of the draft Contribution of the LX COSAC were agreed upon.

7. Session IV: ‘A transparent European Union closer to its Citizens in light of the upcoming elections to the European Parliament’

Speakers: Mr Josef MOSER, Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice; Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament

Chairs: Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Chair of the Permanent Subcommittee on EU Affairs of the Austrian *Nationalrat*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Chair of the EU Committee of the Austrian *Bundesrat*

The session opened with a speech by Mr Josef MOSER, Federal Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Reforms, Deregulation and Justice of Austria. Mr MOSER underlined the common values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the mutual trust on which the Union was built. In his opinion this trust had been undermined by events such as the non-compliance with the Dublin Regulation in 2015 or with the Maastricht criteria during the financial crisis, as well as by the situation with the rule of law in some countries and the overregulation. The only way to re-create the trust was to bring the

Union closer to the citizens by making sure that the everyday political action highlighted the benefits of such action for the citizens. The Minister reiterated the motto of the Austrian presidency of the Council “A Europe that protects”, explaining that this meant protecting the prosperity and the competitiveness of the Union, but also guaranteeing security in the neighbourhood and sustainable environment. He also pointed out the importance of unity, noting that politicians could meet the expectations invested in them only if they worked together.

Mr MOSER mentioned some of the priorities and dossiers on which the Austrian presidency had been working such as strengthening the rule of law, improving the internal market, bringing security in the neighbourhood, more specifically through the cooperation with the Western Balkans. He highlighted the fact that crimes did not recognize borders so trust and coordination between Member States were key in fighting and preventing organised crime, terrorism, money laundering, cybercrimes, child pornography, hate speech in the Internet, drug dealing, etc. Tackling successfully these issues required confidence in each other’s judicial systems, with unified standards and unified rule of law.

The Minister called for deregulation, which in his view would bring greater efficiency in the decision-making process. He noted that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the citizens and action at European level should not be automatic and should be taken only if there is an added value. The small issues should be left to the Member States. In this regard he welcomed the conference on subsidiarity, held in Bregenz on 15-16 November 2018 and the strategy paper put forward. Mr MOSER finished his speech with a quote by Professor Stephen HAWKING: “Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet”.

The second keynote speech for the session was delivered by Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament. She echoed the importance of the word “trust”, noting that the bigger question was the trust in politics and politicians in general, not only at European but also at national level. On transparency the Vice-President pointed out that the concept had evolved since the Maastricht Treaty and that people today rarely asked specifically for it but they did want to know more about how decisions were taken and how things worked.

Ms McGUINNESS underlined that the European Parliament was the only directly elected European institution and it was held into account directly by citizens, business, lobbies, etc., making a strong evolution towards transparency over the years. At the same time there was need for more action at national level – governments, she said, needed to provide more information to their parliaments and to the public in general. In her opinion the European policies could become more visible and accessible to the citizens only if there was more transparency at national level, too.

Ms McGUINNESS pointed out that transparency alone could not answer all questions and the European citizens wanted concrete results. In this regard she believed that deregulation not always meant a positive thing: the Vice-President gave two examples – the regulatory regime on medical devices and the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy where more regulation at European level seemed to be preferable by citizens and national governments alike. She concluded that different policy areas had different appropriate levels of action. In the context of subsidiarity, Ms McGUINNESS called for a better communication between the parliamentarians at all levels, specifically for national politicians to react at the beginning of the legislative process and not towards the end when the text was almost finalised and little could be done.

Ms McGUINNESS also noted that people in general were more engaged in national elections, which in her opinion was due to the fact that they were usually focused on the issues here and now, while at European level the debate seemed to focus on the long-term issues. At the end, however, she underlined that both national and European parliamentarians were democratically elected, they were not in

opposition and they needed to work together. The Vice-President also warned against using the Union as a convenient enemy. Despite its faults, policies initiated at the European level did serve the common good and the main issue should be how to communicate and implement them better.

On the topic of the European elections in 2019, Ms McGUINNESS started by noting how Brexit had actually provoked more discussions about the benefits of the European membership. More people were aware of the meaning of the custom union, the internal market, the freedom of movement, etc. She said that Brexit had shown the complexity of the European Union but also what it had achieved and what might happen should it be fractured. On a positive note, the Vice-President underlined that the majority of the European citizens believed in the added value of the membership. In this regard, the upcoming European elections would be the first where the debate would be dominated by European issues and not simply national ones. In her view, citizens realised that issues such as rule of law, migration, and climate change could be dealt with only at European level. Ms McGUINNESS encouraged more people to vote and pointed out that politicians needed to do more to explain what the Union did for them or what the *spitzenkandidaten* procedure was.

At the same time Ms McGUINNESS called for citizens to take their responsibility as well, for example in regard to the fake news websites. She expressed her belief that younger generation especially were open and willing to engage and understand and politicians should concentrate their efforts on them. The Vice-President underlined that debating with someone did not mean telling them what to think, people had different views and a politician could not be close to every single one of them. What could be done however was knowing what you want to achieve and work together despite those differences, Ms McGUINNESS concluded, and called for words like solidarity and compromise to be brought back into the frame.

In the following debate, 39 speakers took the floor.

Mr Pieter OMTZIGT, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, reminded the participants of the joint initiative of the Dutch *Staten-Generaal* and the Danish *Folketing* on the transparency of the European institutions work. He pointed out a recent finding by the European Ombudsman of maladministration of the Council in regard to transparency and called for the other parliaments to join the initiative.

Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, noted that despite the extensive discussions on transparency over the years, little had been accomplished. He underlined the crucial role of the national Parliaments in regard to the subsidiarity principle, and pointed out two outstanding issues in his view – the lack of scrutiny of the delegated and implementing acts and the possibility to scrutinise a draft legislative act towards the end of the legislative process. His sentiments were echoed by his colleague Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, who pointed out that Europe was not just an economic entity but more cohesion, solidarity and better understanding of the European project were needed. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with the work of the Task Force on Subsidiarity, proportionality and “Doing Less More Efficiently” and called for more transparency.

Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, welcomed the work of the Task Force and the contributions of COSAC in this regard, underlining the good cooperation with the Austrian representatives. He also called for the work to be continued by strengthening the coordination between national Parliaments, bringing the focus back on citizens and regaining their trust.

Mr Milan BRGLEZ, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, agreed that the Council was traditionally the most closed of the institutions and that the Commission needed to do more in order to meet its promises. He also stated that the democratic deficit was in fact the bigger problem and more attention should be paid to the respect of the rule of law, the human rights and the judicial decisions. This was echoed by Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, who called for closing the gap between the decision makers and the citizens.

Baroness Lucy NEVILLE-ROLFE, UK *House of Lords*, reiterated that the lack of transparency undermined the faith in democracy and that politicians needed to engage more at an early stage.

Ms Margarida MARQUES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República* and Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, both stated that the majority of their citizens were strongly pro-European, recognizing the benefits of the membership. Ms MARQUES pointed out the Member States willingly gave up certain competences to the Union, and were not forcefully deprived of them. Mr HÖRCSIK cited the example of the public consultations and debates on the future of Europe as providing useful information to the citizens. Mr Edward ZAMMIT LEWIS, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, said that the EU membership had brought many benefits to the Maltese citizens. With regard to transparency and subsidiarity, Mr ZAMMIT LEWIS stressed that citizens had the right to be informed about what was discussed in the European institutions, including the Council. More accountability and more transparency were needed, as well as trust in each other, since Europe was our common home.

Mr Darij KRAJČIČ, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, pointed out that the lack of trust existed at all levels and that there was a tendency to claim every success as a local achievement and every failure as an imposition from Brussels. In his opinion better communication was needed, as nothing in the world was self-evident. Ms Isabel PIRES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, echoed this, noting that the overly bureaucratic debates tended to put off citizens.

Mr Angel TÎLBĂR, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, agreed that politicians needed to raise the visibility of their activities and to find new ways to involve citizens. He confirmed his country's pro-European attitude and dedication to further integration, also in line with the European Parliament stance on the matter.

Mr Guido WOLF, German *Bundesrat*, said that if there was a gap between the citizens and the European Union, more bridges should be built and, in fact, national and regional parliaments represented such bridges. He called for a Europe of the regions, a Europe of diversity and welcomed the recommendations in the report of the Task Force.

Mr Toomas VITSUT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, noted that while 74% of the Estonian citizens supported their country's EU membership, some 76% also felt that their voice was not being heard in Europe. In this regard he said that decisions should follow the words and called for a reform of COSAC so that the topics on the agenda could bring a more specific outcome.

Mr Sergio BATTELLI and Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, both spoke about the perceived democratic deficit and the need to re-engage with citizens. Mr BATTELLI suggested more direct and digital democracy and Mr GIGLIO VIGNA called for a reform of Europe.

Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, focused on the upcoming European elections, which, in his view, were strategic and politicians had to be constructive and careful not to provoke more Euroscepticism. Mr Markus TÖNS, German *Bundestag*, agreed on the importance of the elections, warned against using Brussels as a scapegoat and said that if we wanted a democratic Europe, we had to fight for it. Mr Othmar KARAS, European Parliament, pointed out that more people participated in the European elections in general than in the US presidential elections. He also noted that there was a discrepancy between the people feeling the EU as something distant and the fact that most of the EU budget was in fact spent at the municipal level. Ms Renske LEIJTEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, said that elections were usually about hope for change and politicians had the task to explain to people what Europe stood for.

Ms Agata BOROWIEC, Polish *Sejm*, pointed out that the vast majority of Polish citizens saw the benefits of their country's EU membership, but they also perceived unfair and unequal treatment on the labour

market. She called for a shared vision of Europe, with more compromise and less divisions between the Member States.

A number of the speakers referred to different policy areas, which, in their opinion, needed improved political involvement in order to regain the trust of the citizens. For Mr Nicolaos TORNARITIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, these were the defence of human rights, law, order, and secure borders. Mr Tibor BANA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, pointed out tackling the migration issues and the need to revise the subsidiarity scrutiny and to improve the “yellow card” procedure. Mr Arto SATONEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, focused on the economic stability and the fight against tax evasion. Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, noted the need to adopt a strong and effective budget for the next MFF. Mr Piero DE LUCA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, called for improved exchange of information in order to fight terrorism. Mr Gerard P. CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, highlighted the need for a complete single market for medicines and drugs, as it was unacceptable that a burger could have the same price across the continent but not the aspirin. Mr Anthony BEZZINA, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, concluded that more transparency and strengthening the rule of law were needed to reassure citizens who were becoming more sceptical with regard to the work of the European institutions.

Mr Ľuboslav BLAHA, Slovak *Národná rada*, spoke about the division between rich people living in urban areas who in general benefitted from globalisation and supported it, and the poor people from more rural areas who considered it a threat to their livelihood. He called for a socially strong Europe that listens more to its working people.

Ms Monika HAUKANÕMM, Estonian *Riigikogu*, underlined the enormous responsibility of national politicians to explain to their people why the EU was needed. In her opinion citizens felt detached because their right to decide was restricted and Brexit had to serve as an alarm bell in this regard.

Mr Jaroslav PAŠKA, Slovak *Národná rada*, expressed his dissatisfaction with the European Parliament’s report sanctioning Hungary for non-compliance with Article 7 of the TEU and his support for the Hungarian government, a sovereign institution, over which the European Parliament had no supremacy. In the case of Poland, Mr Jarosław OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*, suggested that the procedure for infringement of the rule of law might not have been triggered, if it was concerning another Member State.

With regard to subsidiarity, Mr Ioannis KEFALOGIANNIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, called for more action and not just hollow words. Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Romanian *Senat*, noted that there was no formal criteria what the appropriate level of action was and the scrutiny approach was always political. She spoke in favour of more transparency and more parliamentary control over national governments and concluded that the rule of law without democracy constituted dictatorship whereas democracy without the rule of law would result in anarchy.

Mr Bernard DURKAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, pointed out that globalisation was not the enemy of small countries and that national parliamentarians needed to take ownership of the European project. This sentiment was echoed by Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, who agreed that national representatives could be more active as ambassadors between the EU and the national level. To this end more tools were needed, such as the right to initiate European legislation (“green card”), similar to the existing citizens’ initiatives.

Mr MOSER took the floor to address some of the comments made by the participants in the debate. He underlined that it was up to all politicians at all levels to make their contribution towards transparency and upholding of the rule of law. Improved communication was needed, so that citizens knew in advance what the benefits of European action were, as well as more transparency on how public money were spent. Mr MOSER called for a new financial control architecture in Europe and more trust between the Member States and between them and the European institutions, since all work for the same goal.

Ms McGUINNESS also provided her remarks on the debate. She noted a certain evolution in politics – people made political choices based on their current opinions and moved away from traditional parties. This limited the possibility for collective action in her view. The Vice-President noted also that populism had its roots in the Member States, despite the blame placed on the European Union and its expansion. On the topic of subsidiarity, she expressed support for major involvement of national Parliaments, but also pointed out that when citizens could not find solutions to their problems by the national institutions often they referred to the European ones, which indeed could help them. Ms McGUINNESS agreed that more attention should be paid to the social dimension of the Union, while questioning at the same time whether Europe would be able to maintain its level of social policies in the future. On globalisation, she noted that it had been beneficial for the world as whole, lifting millions of people out of poverty, but she also admitted that the European union might not had had the best response to some of the challenges posed by it. The Vice-President however warned the national parliamentarians against feeding the already high level of hostility towards the European Union. She specifically mentioned Italy, where, in her opinion, gambling politicians were actively telling their citizens to mistrust the European institutions. Ms McGUINNESS pointed out that the EU was born out of countries' collective, voluntary decision to work together. She concluded by calling everybody to listen to all opinions and not to ignore those who expressed different views.

8. Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LX COSAC

The texts of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LX COSAC were unanimously adopted with no amendment.

Mr LOPATKA thanked all participants for their active participation, as well as the interpreters, the COSAC Secretariat, the technicians, and all the people involved in setting the meeting. He then gave the floor to Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*, who informed the delegations about the upcoming meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons in Bucharest on 20-21 January 2019, as well as the LXI COSAC on 23-25 June 2019.

Ms CREȚU echoed the grateful sentiments, and invited participants to Romania for the COSAC meetings during Romania's Presidency of the EU Council, and looked forward to welcoming delegates to Bucharest in January for the Chairpersons meeting.

Mr LOPATKA then closed the conference.