

Note regarding a three-year trial scheme to improve secretarial support for COSAC

(proposal of the Danish delegation)

Copenhagen, 14 March 2003

The issue of a COSAC secretariat has been discussed by COSAC for a considerable period of time.

It was decided at the COSAC meeting in Copenhagen on 17-18 October 2002 that a working group comprising the chairpersons of the European Affairs Committees from the national parliaments and a representative from the European Parliament should draw up a proposal describing how a secretariat could be established for COSAC.

This decision was approved by the XXVIII COSAC meeting in Brussels on 27 January 2003, which therefore decided to continue the work of investigating the various aspects of the establishment of a COSAC secretariat. COSAC asked the working group to prepare a decision so that COSAC could present its views on the establishment of a COSAC secretariat to the national parliaments. However, at the same time a minority of the delegations at the meeting in Brussels expressed reservations regarding the establishment of a permanent "COSAC secretariat". Among these the Italian delegation suggested that secretarial support to COSAC should instead be based on the staff from the parliaments of the Presidential Troika of COSAC. It was therefore pointed out in Brussels that the final decision on a secretariat should be based both on the work already carried out by the working group and on the contributions from the delegations - including the contribution from the Italian delegation.

The following conclusions from the working group are therefore proposed, in that they can hopefully create a foundation for a compromise, which pays due attention to the reservations of the minority while respecting the wishes of the majority to establish a COSAC secretariat.

1. Three-year trial scheme

A COSAC secretariat with three permanently appointed employees and three employees seconded from the national parliaments which comprise the Presidential Troika of COSAC will be established for the purpose of strengthening secretarial support to COSAC for a period of three years.

The purpose of establishing a COSAC secretariat is to help to ensure the necessary continuity in planning and implementing COSAC's work in an EU with 25 member states. It is proposed that employees from the Presidential Troika states' parliaments be attached to the secretariat for the period during which the individual parliaments are members of the Presidential Troika. Each seconded employee will hereby be seconded for a period of one and a half years. This will allow the national parliaments of the member states to contribute with seconded employees every sixth year (on average with 15 member states).

The Meeting of Chairpersons should lay down the overall conditions for the activities of the COSAC secretariat, such as general tasks and financing. The operational management of the COSAC secretariat should be the responsibility of the Presidential Troika. Finally, a head of secretariat should be responsible for the day-to-day management of the secretariat. In consideration of the continuity of the secretariat's work the head of the secretariat should be selected from among the group of permanently appointed employees.

It is proposed that the permanently appointed employees at the secretariat should be employed on terms corresponding to those of employees in the EU's institutions. With regard to the details of the appointment of employees these should be in accordance with their qualifications and seniority.

Regular meetings should be held between the COSAC secretariat and the permanent representatives of the national parliaments in Brussels with the aim of performing tasks of joint interest and exchanging information. Finally, the Meeting of Chairpersons could ask the national parliaments to help in performing concrete, ad hoc tasks via their permanent representatives in Brussels if this is considered appropriate.

An evaluation of the work carried out by the COSAC secretariat should be carried out well in advance of the expiry of the three-year period for the purpose of a possible continuation of the scheme.

Conclusions :

- a) A COSAC secretariat comprising three permanently appointed employees and three employees seconded from the parliaments of the Presidential Troika states should be established for a period of three years.
- b) The Meeting of Chairpersons should lay down the overall conditions for the activities of the COSAC secretariat, including general tasks and financing. The operational management of the COSAC secretariat should be the responsibility of the Presidential Troika. Finally, a head of secretariat should be responsible for the day-to-day management of the secretariat.
- c) An evaluation of the work carried out by the COSAC secretariat should be carried out well in advance of the expiry of the three-year period for the purpose of a possible continuation of the scheme.

2. Financing

The costs of establishing the trial scheme will be limited to the costs connected with appointing the three employees of the permanent COSAC secretariat in the form of salaries, social welfare contributions, pension contributions, etc.

The costs will be covered by the national parliaments in accordance with the principle of equal sharing of costs. If not all the national parliaments are capable of taking part in the scheme or do not wish to take part in the scheme it is proposed that the costs be shared equally between the national parliaments that wish to participate in the trial scheme. However, it is a precondition for a financing solution of this nature that all COSAC delegations acknowledge that the COSAC secretariat can provide COSAC with support.

The costs connected with the seconded employees will be covered by the national parliaments that second these employees.

Finally it is proposed that the working group comprising the chairpersons from the European Affairs Committees and a representative from the European Parliament presents a concrete financing model for the increase in secretarial support at the forthcoming COSAC meeting in Athens with the aim of making it possible for COSAC to present its final view of the situation to the national parliaments. The working group may obtain the necessary information from the national parliaments and the European Parliament.

Conclusions :

- a) The COSAC secretariat will be financed by the national parliaments
- b) If not all the national parliaments are capable of taking part in or do not wish to take part in financing, the possibility of financing the three-year trial scheme without the participation of all the parliaments will be investigated
- c) The working group will present a concrete financing plan for the COSAC secretariat at the COSAC meeting in Athens.

3. Location

It is proposed that the COSAC secretariat should be located in Brussels, as has previously been recommended by the working group.

Concrete inquiries will be made at the competent bodies in the European Parliament and the Belgian Parliament with the aim of obtaining more information on their ability to house the COSAC secretariat before the COSAC meeting in Athens.

Conclusions :

- a) The COSAC secretariat will have a permanent address in Brussels
- b) The COSAC Presidential Troika will inquire at the European Parliament and the Belgian Parliament with the aim of obtaining more information on their ability to house the COSAC secretariat before the COSAC meeting in Athens.

4. Tasks

The task of the COSAC secretariat is to provide COSAC with support and thereby to supplement the secretarial resources of the parliament holding the Presidency. It is proposed that the tasks of the COSAC secretariat should include:

- a) assisting the parliament holding the COSAC Presidency and the meeting of chairpersons in connection with preparing, convening and organising COSAC meetings (ordinary as well as extraordinary),
- b) providing the Troika meetings and Chairpersons' Meeting with secretarial support and with support in connection with preparing, organising and convening these meetings,
- c) assisting with the preparation of drafts of "contributions" from COSAC,
- d) assisting COSAC in connection with co-ordinating and exchanging information between the national parliaments, including benchmarking and designating "best practices", and functioning as a "clearing house" in connection with evaluating the principle of subsidiarity in the national parliaments,
- e) preparing minutes of meeting held under the auspices of COSAC,
- f) operating an official archive containing COSAC's documentation, and taking responsibility for operating COSAC's website,
- g) assisting COSAC in connection with the enhancement of co-operation between the sector committees of the national parliaments.