

MINUTES OF THE XXVIII COSAC MEETING

Brussels 27/1/2003

Greek Presidency

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs of the Hellenic Parliament:

Dear Colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to Brussels, to the extraordinary meeting of the COSAC. Allow me to thank the European Parliament and in particular its President, Mr. Cox and its Vice-president, Mr. Martin, for their hospitality and readiness with which they accepted our request to hold this extraordinary meeting here in Brussels in the European Parliament's building.

Today's meeting is the continuation of the previous Presidency's work, as to the content, but it also constitutes our first meeting in the framework of the 4th Hellenic Presidency which has set ambitious goals and important political objectives. The completion of the enlargement procedure, the implementation of the Lisbon decisions, the harmonization of the EU immigration policy, the finalization of the decisions taken by the Convention on the Future of Europe as well as the progress achieved in the Common Foreign and Security Policy are, as of January, 1st 2003, Greece's central political objectives for its Presidency.

The Danish presidency has been a very successful and important one. The Copenhagen Summit with the participation of the 10 candidate countries, has paved the way to the biggest

enlargement Europe ever witnessed and has stressed the need to increase and strengthen the ties amongst the 25 members.

The century of conflicts, of world wars and social disruptions ended with the rising of a new era which sees the old continent united, strong in playing a leading role on the international political scene and determined to implement its social, political and cultural ideals. I would like to welcome from this rostrum, our colleagues, representatives of the new member states, who belong by now to our big European family. The signature, on April 16, in Athens on the historical site of the Acropolis, will mark an extraordinary event for the new Europe. Allow me to express the hope that by that time, Cyprus will have decided its membership as a united state after almost thirty years of division. Dialogue between the two parties must be continued and be concluded on the basis of the United Nations General Secretary's proposal.

The Hellenic presidency takes place in a period characterized by strong clashes and difficult political dilemmas at international level. The announced war with Iraq and the unpredictable consequences of such a crisis contribute to create a climate of uncertainty and preoccupation all over the world. Such a crisis situation proves the need for a Common Foreign and Security Policy, enabling Europe to speak with one voice on the political international exchequer. Greece will, on behalf of all peoples of Europe, resort to all diplomatic and political means in order to achieve a peaceful solution of the crisis and avoid an armed conflict.

As far as the EU's internal policy, the Hellenic Presidency coincides with the final phase of the European Convention's proceedings. The Convention will present its final project for a European Constitution at the end of the first semester of 2003. The role

of National Parliaments, who most directly represent the citizens of Europe in the institutional framework of the EU, is part and parcel of our priorities. We expect that the results of the Convention will be applied and respected since our preoccupation is not a Europe for the big and strong but a Europe for all of us!

For this reason, we believe that in the project for a Constitution which will be presented to the Member States, a special provision must be made for the role of National Parliaments and COSAC, on the basis of what has already been discussed both in the Convention's working group and the meetings in the framework of COSAC.

The Danish Presidency set very ambitious objectives and put forward a global and comprehensive proposal to review and enhance the role of COSAC and reinforce the role of National Parliaments within the framework of Amsterdam treaty. The proposal has been examined and discussed at various levels both in the Plenary (COSAC) and afterwards in the Working Group set up for this purpose. We are here today to discuss the final result of this proposal and hope to be able to achieve the maximum consensus possible.

The role of the European Parliament and national Parliaments was also referred to in the Franco-German proposal, which, as you know, envisages certain changes to the institutional competences of the EU. The above mentioned proposal contains various positive elements such as the election of the President of the European Commission by the European Parliament or the participation of national Parliaments in the EU decision making process. In this sense we believe that national Parliaments must not delay procedures by unnecessarily resorting to the «early warning system». We are against the idea of the double Presidency held by the

President of the Commission and the President of the Council as it was proposed by the two leaders. We believe that the President of the Council must have a democratic legitimacy and must be subject to parliamentary control and this is not included in the proposal.

It is worthwhile to note that 80% of our colleagues, who took part in the latest Convention meeting, were strongly against with this part of the proposal. In concluding I would like us to give greater emphasis to the new Intergovernmental Conference: the presence of national Parliaments' representatives is necessary in order to have a regular and close participation and a control of the Conference's proceedings and decisions. We as COSAC must closely follow the developments in this field.

Allow me to thank the outgoing President of COSAC, Mr. Larsen-Jensen, for his input and efforts during the Danish Presidency. I would, also, like to thank all colleagues who, with their constructive proposals, contribute to the proceedings of COSAC, and in particular colleagues in the troika whom I would like to encourage to continue in their cooperation for a successful outcome of our meetings.

And last, but not least, I would like to thank all of you who responded with your presence to the invitation to hold this extraordinary meeting of COSAC. I am sure that our efforts for an improved COSAC will be crowned by success and contribute to the rising needs of a new enlarged Europe.

Mr David Martin (Vice President of the European Parliament):

I'm going to be very brief. On behalf of the President of the European Parliament I'm very pleased to welcome you to our House.

I know that some of you know this place very well. When I look around, I see a lot of former members who are now members of national parliaments whom we regard as a vital link between the European Parliament and national Parliaments and a useful tool for mutual understanding between our institutions.

Of course a lot of you are almost non-stop in this House, at this moment, because you are members of the Convention, so again you know the facilities very well and others have been here for bilateral meetings. But whether you know the European Parliament well or if it's your first visit, we hope you'll make full use of our premises, if you have any problem ask our staff for assistance and they will be pleased to help you. The President of the European Parliament asked me to stress to you the importance that we, as institution, attach to good relations with national parliaments and how we see COSAC as a vital tool in developing these good relations.

It is not my place at this stage to talk about the items on the agenda, but I would like to join with the Greek Presidency and to thank the Danish Presidency particularly Mr. Larsen-Jensen for the way he has enthusiastically and energetically pursued the chairmanship of COSAC over the last 6 months.

We haven't agreed with every item that he has tried to push forward but we admire the way that he has tried to make COSAC a relevant body and an important one for giving national Parliaments a say in the running of the EU.

We look forward to the discussion this morning and we wish the Greeks well for their Presidency. We know that we'll have an interesting 6 months because of the very interesting agenda we have.

The European Parliament itself tried to give the Greek Presidency a boost by electing a Greek as our ombudsman at our first

session in January. We think we've made a very good choice, we think he'll be an excellent ombudsman for the citizens of the EU.

For the moment let me repeat your welcome to the European Parliament and I would like to thank our secretariat for the work done along with the Greek secretariat in making sure that this meeting could take place. We hope the organization is to your satisfaction and we hope we have a good outcome to the meeting. In the meantime, thank you very much and we'll see how the day goes.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen, (Denmark):

Can I begin by wishing my Greek colleagues all the best for their Presidency? We did agree on the principles of enlargement in Copenhagen, but there are still a lot of preparatory tasks before getting the new member states in. There are certain countries, geographically close to Greece, which may start knocking on the door during the Greek Presidency. Croatia has apparently suggested that it would be applying for membership and other neighbouring countries will probably feel the same, so exciting times lie ahead. I'd also like to thank the Chairman and David Martin for the kind words they said about the Danish Presidency.

I think that it is true that we did succeed with enlargement but we had to have the desire throughout Europe for that result to be achieved. I don't think the Presidency would have been able to take the decisions by itself; it was very much a collective decision.

I'd also like to thank the Troika, the Chairmen of the European Affairs' Committees in the various capitals for their work; we've had various meetings in Copenhagen during our presidency.

Let me try to summarize where we stand. When we met in Copenhagen in mid-October at the COSAC meeting, we adopted a

resolution with 9 points, which we agreed to discuss in the working group. Today we must decide upon the first 8 points on the basis of the conclusions of the working group.

Our major objective is the strengthening and improvement of parliamentary democracy.

Let me say from the outset that the European Parliament and national parliaments should not see each other as competitors; we should see our role as being co-legislators in the case of the EP at European level and ,for national parliaments at national level.

I've also said at other meetings that we are talking very much about the policies of the EU. We have legislation taking place at European Union level and if we, as national parliaments, are going to have scrutiny over our own governments and guarantee democracy and transparency to our electorate, we must strengthen the role that national parliaments have on the legislation that is adopted in the EU. There is a lot of work and money involved in terms of how much it costs national parliaments to carry out this role. Of course we must achieve results today in terms of our conclusions and what we do achieve today will give a clear signal to the Convention at the extent to which national Parliaments are able to take decisions together and speak with one single voice. As far as the contents are concerned, hopefully the documentation has been circulated. There is a draft contribution from COSAC to the Convention on the Future of Europe. This draft is based on the main conclusions adopted on the basis of the work of the working group. Some of you might have had slight hesitations about certain points but basically there has been broad support for this draft. I hope that today in this extraordinary meeting, even if you don't like some of the details, you can constructively come to a decision so that we leave Brussels today with a result.

Let me just run through the main points:

One thing that has to be pointed out is that, the introduction makes reference to the need for a new partnership for democracy, we say that COSAC wishes to call attention to the need of strengthening democracy and the parliamentary system in the EU and, that national parliaments and the European Parliament have an essential role to play in this regard. By saying this, we clear away any mutual suspicion as to what our intentions are.

If you look at page 2, it talks about the reform of COSAC. The first part is an explanation of what process has led up to this. Under point 1 we adopt the Copenhagen Parliamentary Guidelines, which govern the relations between governments and parliaments on European issues. The debate made it clear that national constitutions, national practice, and national traditions continue to apply. We are setting here some minimum principles for ourselves as individual parliaments carrying out scrutiny over national governments.

On voting rules we had a debate: when enlargement takes place to 25 countries and perhaps more subsequently, we have to see how current rules apply in COSAC with regard to unanimity. That is already now difficult sometimes.

The discussions here have led to the conclusion that decisions will be adopted with two thirds of the votes cast, the majority at the same time has to constitute at least 50% of the votes. When voting on the revision of rules of procedure, unanimity though will be required.

As far as the secretariat is concerned, a large number of national Parliaments want technical support for the work in COSAC so, a small secretariat would have to be set up. The delegations in December said that this should not become a new institution, it should not lead to new bureaucracy, and it should be paid by national parliaments. It should

be under the captaincy of the Troika and it should cooperate with the Presidency and with the representatives in Brussels of national parliaments. The Dutch delegation has made a proposal in which it emphasises that national parliaments are represented anyway in Brussels and the secretariat should use the staff already established there.

We are talking about a small secretariat but this doesn't rule out relations with the European Parliament although this matter is covered already by a paragraph on practical cooperation. Anyway, this secretariat is not going to be decided finally upon today.

In today's meeting we would like to discuss the idea of establishing a secretariat as we are going to go back to our national parliaments and ask them if they want to be involved in terms of financial contribution. It would be the Speakers of national Parliaments to decide on this when they meet in May.

During the Italian COSAC meeting we could adopt a final conclusion as to whether this is possible so we are not pressed by time today.

There has also been a discussion with regard to the role of the Conference of Speakers of national Parliaments, which decided to set up COSAC back in 1989, and which also has the responsibility for the financing of COSAC.

Another item concerns better parliamentary cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament. We don't want to set up a new structure on top of COSAC; we simply want to have better long term planning.

Our experience in the Danish Presidency was that COSAC meetings tended to be timed badly in terms of when they were being held. If national Parliaments and the EP are to make a contribution,

and we don't have an ordinary COSAC meeting held, then it should be possible for us to ask the Chairmen of the European Affairs' Committees of national Parliaments to agree and do this.

Point 5 concerns proposals for an upgraded, increased cooperation with Sectoral Committees. On the part of national Parliaments there is a question of time and money spent on their meetings. It is an important issue for COSAC, requiring cooperation.

Point 6 talks about inviting the European Commission to have a discussion on the contents of its legislative programme. This is going to inspire, we hope, national Parliaments and the European Parliament to have a debate that has an impact in terms of information, support and so on.

This procedure could be applied with reference to the early warning system proposed by the working group of the Convention on subsidiarity. COSAC has already a position on this under the Treaty of Amsterdam.

The working groups of the Convention suggest that subsidiarity is something, which is given from national level to the European level where the main participants are national Parliaments. It is their role to assess to what extent a proposal for European legislation is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity or infringing it.

When we are talking about the role of parliaments, we are suggesting that the COSAC secretariat could be a sort of information clearing house, passing information through to parliaments. COSAC isn't going to police the subsidiarity principle but it could be a platform to achieve a better flow of information.

We also had lengthy discussions on whether COSAC was an appropriate name. It is a sensitive question: some felt that the proposal for a new name was hiding the creation of a new institution with a

more permanent nature but that is certainly not the idea. COSAC isn't really a great name but it would be wiser to wait until the Convention is over to find a better name for us. So this is not a proposal we need to adopt today.

As far as information technology is concerned, we talked about improving our cooperation in terms of establishing new strategies.

We also invite chairmen to continue their work looking at operational agreements between national parliaments and the European institutions.

I did just speak before about the Convention, the Conference of Parliamentary Speakers; obviously national parliaments would like to see cooperation with the European Parliament on the basis of an agreement between the Speakers and the President of the European Parliament. The idea is that, if we are going to have cooperation between national Parliaments, COSAC and the Commission about the legislative programme, then all sides should know exactly what we want to do.

As far as agreements with the Council are concerned, if national governments back home are going to get their parliaments more involved then, they should commit themselves in the Council to do so. The European Parliament and national Parliaments should cooperate more and we should see how to bring this about without treading on each other's toes. If we are going to have proper parliamentary democracy, we have to ensure that the democratic role is played properly at all levels.

Finally, we should focus further on the reform of COSAC and the works of the Convention, which will be discussed in the meeting of Committee Chairmen.

As far as the rules of procedure are concerned, we agree on the different points which mean that, COSAC rules of procedure can change.

Clearly the question of the secretariat will not be involved at the moment.

I am sorry I've spoken at such length but I felt it was necessary to make things clear. In particular you needed to have some background to these conclusions to know where we stand now. Thank you.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

I have a first list of speakers. According to our rules of procedure speaking time is 4 minutes and I ask you to try to stay within that time.

We'll have a first round and then Mr. Larsen-Jensen will come in again to respond. Afterwards we'll proceed to the approval of the draft contribution.

Mr. Philippe Mahoux (Belgium):

Let me thank you for having called this extraordinary meeting and, let me congratulate the Danish presidency and praise it for the excellent work it did.

First of all, I think we can approve the working group's conclusions in total. I would like to stress that, on the role of the Conference of Parliamentary Speakers there is still some reserve on our part.

I think it is important to use another term than Presidium for this Conference, since the political role of this body varies according to parliaments; there are some parliaments where the Speaker is

simply the President of the Chamber. Where there is a budgetary responsibility there would be a kind of quaestorship for the new type of COSAC.

Secondly, something that was not on the agenda of the working group: a request has been submitted concerning the possible presence of regional representatives at COSAC meetings. I believe the Chairman has received such a letter and I wonder what scope there is to have representatives of regions at ordinary and extraordinary COSAC meetings.

We are in favour of this proposal and we would like to hear the Presidency's and the rapporteur's view on this. Thank you.

Mr. Jo Leinen (European Parliament):

I, too, would like to thank the Danish presidency. I was a member of the working group and I can tell you that there was a very pleasant working atmosphere that we had in Copenhagen and Mr. Larsen Jensen put in a great deal of energy and commitment and for this I am very grateful. I think that on the points set out as recommendations, we agree by and large though there are some which merit further discussion.

Mr. Larsen Jensen said that we don't want any new institutions and, that is very important because that was the big fear: that the system would become more and more complicated. The point is that if we want no new institutions then we have to stick to it. Let me comment points 3, 5 and 9.

The COSAC secretary is an issue which needs to be considered. There is the amendment of the Dutch colleague: no new institutions, no new bureaucracy and a small secretariat supporting the Presidency and linked to the Troika, which will be responsible for it. We have to

discuss further what this actually means, because for a secretariat based in Brussels there are legal issues such as, who rents the premises, who provides staff, who oversees the budget. All these are issues requiring a legal person which COSAC is not as such. Perhaps the most flexible solution would be to let the troika fulfil this role.

Point 5: COSAC the forum of cooperation between European Affairs' Committees .It is true that other parliamentary committees meet too. If COSAC is to take up the coordination of all standing committees as well then it does raise the question of whether it is something new. Is it something more than COSAC, is it a parliamentary forum, a term which we discussed and which was not very popular.

Point 9: Agreements with European institutions. As far as the Commission is concerned, there is no problem since it has a monopoly of initiative and it has all the information we want to get hold of. On Council and Parliament we need to know what form this agreement should actually take, because these institutions are legal bodies. I don't think it is for COSAC to enter into agreements with legislative chambers since this is the task of national parliaments who must control their own governments.

There are proposals being made in the Convention for a legislative Council to be accompanied by a number of consultative Councils. That raises the question of which Council would be cooperating with us.

Through the Napolitano report, the EP has been calling for an inter-parliamentary solution and I believe that the Speakers of our parliaments, and not merely the European Affairs' Committees, should undertake this role. They should conclude an inter-parliamentary agreement and were the secretariat to be located in

Brussels, there would have to be not only a political but a technical agreement as well.

I think that today we can make significant progress. There are 2 or 3 points, which we want to follow up, but we do need time to debate the question of the secretariat.

Lord Grenfell (United Kingdom):

May I begin by thanking our hosts for organizing this special meeting of COSAC and congratulate Greece on the assumption of the Presidency. I am glad that following our Chairmen meeting we have now an opportunity to discuss how to put some of our recommendations into practice.

I am very grateful to our Danish colleagues for their tremendous efforts in preparing the paper circulated to us. It is hard to imagine anyone matching the determination with which Klaus Larsen - Jensen has pursued this reform initiative.

I should start by saying clearly what Mr. Larsen - Jensen said that those who fear that a COSAC reform is aiming for a second Chamber should be reassured. My Committee would be amongst those who would not support such a move and it was for that reason that we were originally against the creation of a COSAC secretariat. We have, however, been persuaded that the proposal on point 3 for a light secretariat confined in number, budget and activity is both necessary to ensure that COSAC does what we want and sufficiently modest not to develop into something we do not want. In any case the decision on funding such a body is not ours to take and we will have to wait developments.

More generally, Mr. Chairman, I start from the belief shared by my Committee and the Convention's working group that there is a

very useful role for COSAC to play. We must however be clear on what that is, as put forward by the House of Lords in our own report on proposals on a second Chamber, it was to return to the original character of COSAC as a forum for the exchange of views about national parliamentary approaches to EU issues.

The summary of our Danish colleagues' original paper some months ago, proposed that the reformed COSAC should enhance the role of national parliaments through exchanges of experiences, benchmarking work and cooperation. I would support this objective and I hope it would remain central to our discussion today. I accordingly also support the minimum standards as set out in paper A.

My own Committee's recommendations for COSAC reform, inspired by the recent proposals, is that there should be less general debate and more emphasis on the scrutiny will of national parliaments. We would like to see COSAC focused primarily on the techniques and practical problems of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs. General debates on the presentation of major political themes of the day should be secondary elements in our works rather than a primary focus.

The present format of the COSAC meetings with extremely broad debates reflecting Presidencies' priorities with a series of set speeches and often-inadequate time even for those, And indeed the attempt to adopt conclusions in matters in which we are not experts and not representatives, all in my view weaken the value of COSAC. We should aim to share best practice on how we, as national parliamentarians, scrutinize our national governments. To that end, I draw colleagues' attention to our own Select Committee review on parliamentary scrutiny, which suggests nearly seventy ways in which the scrutiny system in the UK can be improved. That shows that no parliament can be complacent about its role.

Finally, turning to the question of subsidiarity, I support the proposal in paper E that COSAC should be the clearinghouse for the early warning mechanism on subsidiarity. This is work that someone will have to do and it is better done centrally by the proposed secretariat than by many national parliaments operating individually. It remains our view however that it is for national parliaments to monitor subsidiarity and we accordingly would not support debates within a reformed COSAC about how the issues of subsidiarity and proportionality arise on individual legislative issues.

Less positively it does follow from what I have just said that I cannot support the involvement of Sector Committees in COSAC. To my mind this will weaken our focus on scrutiny and its techniques. I also do not support the involvement of Speakers and Presidents for this would not work for Westminster although I know that others have different systems in their parliaments.

I, accordingly, have reservations about paper D. I do not however object to an annual high level and strategic discussion of the Commission's annual work programme. Finally I support the proposal that decisions regarding the rules of procedure should be made by majority. I also support the emphasis in the paper on work and I can support the proposal on information technologies. I would support the continuation of the current twice-yearly meetings but I would suggest that they take place at a different time of the European legislative cycle. At present our meetings are held towards the end of the presidency, which may be one reason why much of our proceedings had been devoted to hearing from outgoing presidencies not including my own country on how successful they have been. It would make better sense for our meetings to take place at the start of each presidency although that will change in nature if the cycle of

presidencies changes in the Convention. Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr. Mario Greco (Italy):

At this stage of the discussion I should like to express appreciation to the Greek Presidency and to their predecessors, the Danish Presidency, for their very valuable contribution and input to the Convention and to establish the role of COSAC without setting up a new body. I think that strengthening COSAC is something, which we all would like to see, and if that requires changes to our rules of procedure then so be it but let us precede with circumspection.

The Greek Presidency, in convening the extraordinary meeting of COSAC, has already testified to its desire to bring our contribution to a successful conclusion. I think there is a great deal of good will around and we would certainly wish to cooperate in this common endeavour.

It is important to remember our initial starting point, we did not want to adopt radical and revolutionary measures and this is why we don't want to set up new bodies. I think that this would dangerously interfere with the works of the Convention itself because clearly many of the issues before us are also prominent in the Convention, which is currently under way.

I noted the proposal made by Mr. Larsen Jensen that we have to send a clear and convincing signal to the Convention, but this must be done within our own terms of reference and competences. Having said all that, and I am sure that other Italian colleagues are going to take the floor to fill in what I've said, there is nonetheless a general point which needs to be made at this stage of the debate. I would like to express satisfaction at the contribution of the working group because on many points there has been complete consensus for

example on the so called Copenhagen criteria. The important point is that national parliaments can continue to scrutinize their governments in the context of decision-making at EU level.

At this stage we have to point out that we believe that national Parliaments, having regard to the Copenhagen criteria, need to take into account the constitutional entities of the various countries.

Under point 2, there is also a consensus, which we subscribe. I am sure that all of us want to transcend the unanimity voting system. Unanimity needs only to be preserved for changing the rules of procedure and our proposal today, inspired by caution is that apart from the majority with two thirds of the votes cast, we also have to take account of the demographic element.

There is a third point: the permanent secretariat. This is something, which we have to give very careful thought to and in the conclusions of the working group there are some observations on this point. We are still concerned about the setting up of even a light secretariat and if it were to be a fix post it would have to be very small in number.

We have a written contribution, which has been circulated, and we draw attention to this, which is the outcome of the work of two committees in the Camera dei Deputati and the Senate. I would commend these suggestions to colleagues in COSAC and I hope that they will be put down for discussion at the appropriate point, as we will get closer to the May meeting as well. The draft conclusion says that the Conference of Parliamentary Speakers plays the role of the presidium of COSAC. We cannot agree with this proposal and think that any reference to this should be deleted.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Thank you very much Mr. Greco and I also thank the Italian delegation for its proposal concerning the secretariat of COSAC. I think that there is scope for a compromise between the two proposals in order to achieve a more effective work of COSAC.

Mr. Josep Borell (Spain):

Having been a participant in the working group could I begin by thanking the Danish Presidency for what it has done and I'd also like to wish the Greek Presidency all the best. Obviously, some details still have to be sorted out and we have to work on that, but if we look at the contributions here, broadly speaking, they reflect what we have agreed upon in Copenhagen.

I think that, it is very important for us to emphasize that we are not talking about creating a new institution, that is something that has to be made clear and both the incoming and the outgoing presidencies have said this. We need to clear away any misgivings that may still exist in the various delegations as far as this is concerned.

I believe that a secretariat is necessary; with 25 parliaments it is going to be very difficult for this inter-parliamentary forum to be able to work unless it has some kind of secretariat to help it. Obviously, we see the code of conduct, the so-called code of Copenhagen as a very useful reference as to how this should be done and how relations between national parliaments and governments should continue to be developed within the framework of the European Union.

The decision on the vote is very important whereby contributions from COSAC are no longer adopted by unanimity but by a qualified majority. Within the Convention it was stated that the unanimity rule should be given up for a lot of sensitive issues such as social Europe, external policies, etc. It would be a bit paradoxical if we would call flexibility in the decision making rule for the EU on

such important matters as the foreign policy and we were to be saying that for adopting a simple resolution, not binding for anybody, we would require unanimity. It would really be contradictory in the extreme.

Our Italian friends started by saying that it is important for us to tread very carefully as far as the establishment of working groups is concerned. I don't agree with the idea of a demographic weighting applied to our voting system. That is a very difficult subject for us to work on; it would lead to a lot of argument.

I would say: one country, one parliament and one vote, except for those member states that have a second chamber, but let's not go further down this road. Obviously to start comparing the weight of a parliament representing 8 million people or one of 2 million is a very delicate matter and I really would advise against that avenue being explored. That is my opinion but I am obviously prepared to discuss it in the course of our meeting.

The European Commission is to present its annual working programme to COSAC. That is a very important proposal, whatever COSAC is called in the future and I would like to see it change its name; this inter-parliamentary assembly as we can call it, would be given a much greater political dimension. Within the Convention, and many of us participate in the work of the Convention, there is particular attention being attached to the early warning system. The idea is that national parliaments should participate more in what is going on in the EU and this is going to be an important tool for subsidiarity. COSAC also must continue monitoring the legislative programme produced by the Commission and the best way would be for us to be informed in good time about this in the framework of the presentation of the annual working programme. That would give the

COSAC of the future a more appropriate dimension given the size of an enlarged Europe and the adoption of a new constitution. Broadly speaking I think that the proposal is satisfactory enough and can be approved. Thank you.

Mr. Antonis Skyllakos (Greece):

I am not sure what changed since last time COSAC met in Copenhagen in connection with the majority voting system. One of the reasons why we didn't make progress then was exactly this, so it is difficult to see what changed since last time.

So far it has been said that we don't want to see COSAC turn into a new body in other words it can remain a forum for the exchange of views. Any change on the voting is a step along the path to turning it into a different kind of body. That is the simple truth if we look at the situation. The question that immediately comes to mind is what happens to representativity if a national Parliament finds itself in a minority; for example, 2/3 in favour of a proposal. It seems to me that this raises the question of whom they, in the vantage of national parliaments, will be representing. That is a way in which a whole group of the electorate can be denied a voice and it is not enough to say that a majority of 15 out of 25 countries is sufficient because public opinion in the member states must be represented. That is what applies under our Constitution and I think that we must examine the constitutional difficulties that may arise.

I think that is an inherent problem if the representative voice of the population of a particular country is going to be put in a minority and not heard. So I have fundamental difficulties with that. The fact is that national parliaments represent their population and it seems to me that when there is no unanimity there must be other ways of getting

around it. I can understand the need to enhance parliamentary accountability but it is important that the view that goes forward has the support of everyone. It could well be that there is a majority view in national Parliaments and there could also be a minority view I think that both views in their different ways, should be heard and are perfectly respectable and should all be put in a report presented to the European institutions. That is how we can preserve the consultative role of COSAC.

In connection with paragraph 4, the Presidency is to report twice a year with the authority of COSAC. I have some difficulty with that as well. Does that mean that the presidencies are going to adopt reports? I think that COSAC, in all its rich variety, should be the body articulating those views rather than having to go through the procedure of reporting.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece) :

That is one view, but I think there are other views within the Greek delegation. But certainly that is a view which reflects your political belief that is basically against the EU. This is a view, which we heard loud and clear but I'm afraid that it is not shared by all of us.

Mr. Antonis Skyllakos (Greece):

Thank you for helping colleagues to understand the spirit of my contribution. I think that there are other delegations, which might have a rich diversity of views.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

First of all let me thank the Danish Presidency for its work.

I think the Copenhagen guidelines show that it is in everybody's interest here to safeguard and strengthen the rights of national parliaments. I think we all agree that the rights of the

European Parliament should also be strengthened so it's the national parliaments and the European parliament that are currently seeing parallel processes under way.

All of us agree that we are not here to set up a new institution, that is why we are going to look at the proposals with a very critical eye.

I share the criticism on points 5 and 9 as set up by the European Parliament very much so because I think we are in danger of violating our very fundamental principle which is not to set up any new institutions. This would be taking us into dangerous territory. Let me make very clear that we welcome the fact that parliaments have the right to early information about European processes.

If we want to have a COSAC secretariat, then let's have a technical body rather than a political institution that is why I also support the proposal on information technologies which can improve exchanges of views on European programmes from the national point of view. But all this has to happen on a small scale: a secretariat mustn't grow into an institution of its own right.

If we are going to change the rules, we have to bear in mind the diversity of national parliaments. We have a parliament representing 400.000 people and we have a parliament representing 80 million so there has to be some consideration given to this. If there are to be two quorums, the population must be taken into account and the German delegation will be presenting a proposal to this effect.

I would like to stress that if we want to change COSAC and give it back its previous role of information, then this is very important, notably for the new member states. They need information about European processes and we have to encourage them.

I don't think sectoral committees should be involved. I think that's a matter for the European Parliament. Those then are the points, which I think, serve to strengthen the position of national parliaments while ensuring that the European Parliament is also strengthened in its particular function.

Let me conclude by saying that our life will be made much easier once we know what the results of the works in the Convention will be, because there is a number of points which we should postpone for discussion until such time as the Convention has arrived at a position. As for COSAC's own contribution to the Convention, I think that should be the subject of a separate meeting or, perhaps, be discussed in the May meeting.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Thank you Mr. Bodewig. I would just remind everyone that there is a proposal from the working group of committees' chairmen. We cannot really raise the question of demographic representation, it exists in the EP but we are representatives of national parliaments and have a consultative role. This is not the time to raise such a question and we need to be clear on that.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

Sorry, perhaps there is a misunderstanding here. Under point 2, the specific proposal to change the rules, the consensus is that unanimity is necessary. I was saying that if we apply the principle of demographic representation for other matters, as proposed earlier in the debate, and then we may as well consider applying it also for national parliaments. If a specific proposal will be submitted, we would like to know what exactly you are proposing.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

We will come to that point in due course because it is a very delicate matter. Mrs. E. Terpstra has the floor.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

Let me begin by congratulating and paying tribute to the Danish Presidency for the tremendous amount of work made during their tenure. This morning we listened with approval to what was said by Mr. Larsen - Jensen, who has stressed the desire for not creating a new body but said that we must find ways for strengthening and enhancing the position of national parliaments in the name of improved efficiency but within our terms of reference.

This takes me on to the first point for debate: the Dutch delegation has got question marks around the proposal of the early warning system as described at the Convention level with a role for national parliaments and COSAC. That is not something, which we simply want to replicate within COSAC because we have other different terms of reference. I very much agree with Lord Grenfell that we don't want to rehearse the whole debate about subsidiarity within COSAC either. I think that this isn't properly the role of COSAC to discuss this in the first place and the Netherlands is very reluctant in certain areas particularly when it comes to an even very small secretariat connected with the Troika.

You may remember that last time when we submitted a position paper intended to prevent any inkling of the advent of a new body we

already expressed these concerns. We certainly do fully support the information technology proposals.

The idea of a small secretariat connected with the Troika should be seen in the context of the Italian delegation's proposal, which we are very happy with. It is the proper basis for discussion because the Italian proposal is a very accurate reflection of what we proposed in our position paper at the working group last time. In any case, this is up for discussion, today we are not taking any definitive line nor can we, given the absence of a mandate, examine the budgetary consequences of that within COSAC.

I would like also to back up a point, made by Jo Leinen of the EP, earlier on, when he talked about making sure that reforms take place within the confines of our mandate. We agree that it is not for COSAC to hammer out political agreements that are for the EP and national parliaments but not for COSAC itself.

When we get to individual proposals, I would like to come back again on the question of majority voting; last time, I expressed reluctance and we ought to be very sparing of our efforts in that particular area particularly when there are budgetary repercussions. My colleague Hans Timmermans will come back on this point.

When it comes to the Speakers of national parliaments, functioning like a sort of presidium, I think again this is a bridge too far as compared to what we were saying at the working group in Copenhagen.

From the point of view of the Dutch delegation, there was no agreement on a unanimous decision on what COSAC was going to be called in future. I think that COSAC, in its expanded form, doesn't state very clearly what it is about and a change of name could very easily become a change of nature.

Can I just repeat my tribute to the hard work of the Danish Presidency and I wish the Greek Presidency every success over the coming semester. Thank you.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Thank you Mrs. Terpstra and thank you also for your kind words for the Greek presidency. I think that we already had a detailed discussion on the question of unanimity and we are now beginning to talk about a reinforced majority unanimously accepted. Could you please clarify this question?

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (Netherlands):

Let me spell out things very clearly: the decisions I was talking about were the ones, which have budgetary repercussions and that is not properly the subject of majority decisions. For example the presidium of the Dutch Parliament has the final say there and we are very cautious in this area. The gist of the demographic representation is clear and it is understandable why some of us would like to see it applied. Let's not forget that COSAC is the conference of national parliaments and I don't think it would be good to tie it with the demographic element.

Mr. Guillermo Martinez Casan (Spain):

I'd also first of all like to thank both the Danish Presidency for its work and the Greek Presidency for the initiative of convening this extraordinary conference. Let me start by stressing the nature of this body. I think that we should focus on the work of coordination and exchange of information. This form of cooperation isn't exclusive or

inclusive: national parliaments meet bilaterally and also have meetings with the committees of the European Parliament.

As we all know, none of us have any kind of mandate from our parliaments in terms of adopting initiatives in this forum so any attempt to change this gathering into anything else would be pointless. It is quite acceptable that the conference of speakers of national parliaments continues to adopt the agenda and decides on the dates of our meetings , but to have it taking the debate away from us would be really jumping the gun. First of all, we would have to indicate if we want a mandate from national parliaments and, secondly, we could then talk about different functions.

I am entirely with the proposal of extending duration of meetings and start meetings off with a debate on the Commission's legislative programme. We know all very well that one and a half day meetings- once you've had the presidency speaking and a member for each delegation there is not enough time for anything else.

I, also, feel it important for a secretariat to be established. Without a secretariat we will not have the continuity, we will not have the historic transition nor, proper regular attention to what is going on. As far as the practical aspects are concerned, I think it's too early to say whether there should be 4, 5, 12 or just one member of staff, we have time for further discussion on this very sensitive subject. We shouldn't be treading on the toes of any national delegation in this regard.

The way of financing the secretariat should be more along the lines of the Committee of Regions; both are bodies of the EU. Why shouldn't be COSAC also be paid out of the General Budget of the EU, that would solve all kinds of problems in terms of taxation, we would avoid problems with social security, privileges and immunities

and so on and we would also prevent national parliaments from having to finance the secretariat.

Finally, the plenary of the assembly has to take decisions on this; national delegations are not equal in representation or size, their composition is different, they don't have a mandate, some are from the government and some are from the opposition so if there were to be any changes we would have to take this into account.

There is not a mandate from the national parliaments and the question of the secretariat cannot be decided by the conference of presidents.

Mr. Albrecht Konecny (Austria):

I want to add my voice to those who have paid tribute to the Danish presidency. It was indeed very important for COSAC to take a long look at its structure, its successes, and its failures over the last six months and try to draw some conclusions.

It would be a real shame if, after the intensive meetings of the working group in Copenhagen, we were unable to come to some kind of agreed decision today.

The redrafting of our rules has been discussed at length and I think that this is a way of breathing new life into COSAC even though I, as a parliamentarian from a so called small country, have some sympathy for the view that there shouldn't only be provision for a double majority in our rules but even some kind of triple majority.

Furthermore, I remain extremely sceptical about the setting up of a secretariat. It is not as though we loose our memory between COSAC meetings, we do have continuity already and I think that there is the possibility of finding a compromise between what the Italian

proposal and the other suggestion. We aren't yet under pressure; we have until the second half of this year to take a decision on that matter.

I note with satisfaction that in the introductory paragraph, there is a clear mention of the fact that we are not here to establish new bodies in the complex European institutional structure. We ought to practice restraint to ensure that we don't even give this impression. I think on institutional agreements what is important has already been said and on the early warning mechanism and the somewhat imperialistic attitude of COSAC towards standing committees likewise. I'd like to come back to Lord Grenfell's proposal and say that the text should include the dates on which COSAC meets every half-year. It's no good us simply hearing the presidency praising its own achievements, if we are to make an impact we have to meet as early as possible and I think that this is a message that we could send to future presidencies. Thank you.

Mr. Bogdan Barovic (Slovenia):

Dear chairman, dear parliamentarian colleagues, first of all on behalf of the Slovenian parliament and its Committee for European Affairs, I would like to thank the Danish Parliament, in particular its European Affairs Committee and its chairman Mr. Larsen Jensen, as well as his entire staff for the great efforts during their presidency. The result of their proposals, prepared in July and discussed in autumn last year, is that we are here today and will hopefully adopt amendments on the rules of procedure and the Greek Presidency can continue in the progress towards a greater role for national parliaments in the EU legislative procedure.

The Danish Presidency namely made a great step forward in trying to reduce the democratic deficit and improving the role of

national parliaments and getting Europe closer to its citizens. They prepared concrete proposals to increase the role of national parliaments as legislators. I think that a message from the Danish presidency was particularly addressed to the applicant countries where parliaments have still a great role to play.

The Slovenian parliament, for example, confirmed all negotiating positions of our government and we were strongly involved in the negotiation process. Our strong role, we would like to continue also when we will become members of the EU in, hopefully, May 2004, through the effective scrutiny of the government's work in the Council and that means also sharing responsibilities for the adopted decisions.

The EU in 2004, especially after the adoption of the new constitutional treaty will be different from the point of view of tasks and responsibilities. It is different already now if compared to the Community of the '50s, '60s and '70s and obviously the role of national Parliaments cannot be the same as in the past.

We would like to support the conclusions of the working group, as we think that the Copenhagen conclusions should be published in the Official Journal and I propose that they should be translated and published also in the national official journals. We agree with the proposal for new voting rules and with the idea that the secretariat has to be small, its main role should be to connect parliaments and its financing has to be born by national parliaments otherwise it would be a new institution. Its seat in Brussels is understandable, since almost all EU institutions are based here.

Cooperation between sectoral committees must be increased and chairmen meetings are a useful way of planning activities. The parliamentary speakers could play the role of a COSAC presidium.

The early warning mechanism, as proposed by the Convention's working group, concerning subsidiarity control must go through the new secretariat, which could collect different opinions and distribute information. We have to give COSAC a new name such as, for example, European Forum of Parliaments.

If we want to influence the work and proposals of the Convention then we have to prepare a recommendation on the new treaty to be adopted at the COSAC meeting in Greece in May. Maybe the working group should continue its work until May 2003, to prepare concrete proposals for the new treaty. Thank you.

Mrs. Camelia Kassabova (Bulgaria) :

The Bulgarian delegation welcomes the purpose of this COSAC extraordinary meeting. We are convinced that the present reform of COSAC directed at active involvement of national Parliaments in the European affairs is more than necessary.

Allow me to present the Bulgarian position on some of the most important issues the working group has dealt with.

First of all, we strongly support the introduction of minimum standards for parliamentary scrutiny of governments. The scope of the application of the Copenhagen parliamentary guidelines allows each parliament to decide to what extent to implement them. Bulgaria approves this democratic approach.

Secondly, we would like to participate in the process of assessing the Commission's legislative programme, although we would like to have an observer's status at this stage. We stand for the proposed new rules concerning the voting system on COSAC contributions. The new qualified majority principle enhances the

decision making process in COSAC, in view of strengthening its role as an efficient parliamentary mechanism.

We also approve the long term planning of COSAC meetings; it will, undoubtedly, make the work of COSAC more efficient. The regular biannual meetings of the chairmen would foster the efficiency and what is more the mandate granted to them by the COSAC assembly to adopt contributions is another step towards listening to the voice of national Parliaments and to respect the opinion of the people of Europe.

As far as the COSAC secretariat issue is concerned, such a body would streamline and better organize the work of COSAC. We would gladly participate in the further discussion on this issue in our capacity of observers. Last, but not least, we approve the publication of all contributions in the Official Journal of the EU. Such publicity would make the work of COSAC more transparent and would disseminate its ideas and proposals to a wider European audience.

The Bulgarian delegation supports in principle all the amendments concerning the new rules of procedure. We consider these new rules as a tool providing a more adequate framework for the future COSAC activities.

I would like to pay tribute to the Danish Presidency and to wish all the best to the Greek Presidency.

Mr. Wayne David (United Kingdom):

Could I begin by thanking the organizers for all the hard work, which has gone into the preparation of today's extraordinary meeting, and also in the preparation of the draft paper we have before us.

I attended the Copenhagen working group and I have to say that it was a good and frank meeting, with a full freight exchange of views

and, I thought that we had come to a general consensus so I am rather surprised to hear some of the comments today from the various delegations. The draft before us is, I believe, an accurate reflection of that consensus which we all thought we had achieved in Copenhagen.

It is frequently said that, in the European Union today there is a democratic deficit, it is a truism and I think that if as democrats we are keen to plug that deficit, then we have to reinforce parliamentary democracy.

That needs to be done in two ways; firstly, there needs to be more powers for the European Parliament but equally there needs to be greater coordination of the work of national Parliaments and the enhancement of their role as far as scrutiny is concerned. It is important to stress that that parliamentary perspective, the two facets of it, goes together in parallel, in tandem.

I would like to make briefly a couple of references to specific recommendations in the paper; one concerns the qualified majority voting. That, I think should not be contentious because most of us in this room have argued for an extension of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers and I think that we should all practice what we preach. I think if we are to be credible we have to be consistent.

Secondly, as far as the secretariat is concerned, I think that is absolutely vital for the future development of COSAC. Some people have expressed deep concerns that what we might be talking about here is something like an embryonic second chamber but it is important to stress that that is not the case. If it were the case the European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons in Britain wouldn't certainly support this proposal.

Moreover, if anybody has any doubts about what is behind this proposal, we have to recognize one simple fact: we are not talking

about the creation of a secretariat of 500 people or even of 50 people, we are talking over a secretariat of 5. Does anybody seriously suggest that that, in any way at all, can be seen as a new institution in the EU? It is clearly not, that is not the intention behind it. The intention is to enhance the work of national Parliaments, to bring about coordination and to make national Parliaments themselves more effective in the EU.

Could I say finally, that I think a great deal of work and effort has gone into the preparation of this draft and many compromises have already been made? I think it represents a general consensus, which has been established already, and I would certainly support the document in its total. Thank you.

Mr. Andrea Manzella (Italy):

I am also convinced that our work under the Danish Presidency represented a strengthening and consolidation of parliamentarism at European level.

One of the key points of the discussion is the majority voting system. If we have majority votes, this does not mean that the traditional nature of COSAC changes and that it becomes a new institution.

I agree by and large with the conclusions, but there are three specific points I would like to raise where we are clearly in opposition.

The first point has to do with the famous Copenhagen criteria, which we all accept as a reference. The fact that the document talks about adoption, in other words something which would make them binding, seems to me to be at odd with the general philosophy of the EU and indeed with the open coordination system of Lisbon. I hope

that we can get some clarification here because the Copenhagen criteria are simply a reference parameter and I don't think that we want to adopt anything which would have the effect of setting them in concrete.

Turning to the so-called mini-COSAC and the meetings of sectoral committees, we believe that the application of the COSAC system to these meetings is a useful and helpful initiative. You know that under the Danish Presidency, very useful meetings of the environment and agriculture committees of the EP and of the national parliaments took place, with very good results at the end of the day. The same goes for the constitutional committees of both the EP and the national parliaments, just to give you one example.

My third point concerns the question of the secretariat for COSAC. Here there are three areas where we disagree and where we have concerns. The first is the contribution, which we are going to debate tomorrow and which is intended for the Convention. The Convention is a constituent body and is not intended to deal with details or organization questions. There are certain things which will have to come in due course such as proposals and decisions but let us first see the Convention's proposals on relations between national Parliaments and the European Parliament and on the role of national Parliaments.

The second problem we have is the idea of having a standing secretariat. The problem is not one of having a large or a small secretariat it is that of its permanent nature. We have been networking all this time between national Parliaments and the European Parliament and I think the secretariat, if there is to be one, needs to take network form. Having it tied in the Troika, puts it in an organizational structure, which is tantamount to institutionalising it.

The Austrian colleague said we have not amnesia from one meeting to the next and that is certainly not the case. The Troika will work in Brussels and will be under the auspices of the European Parliament.

A third point concerns the Speakers of national Parliaments. The Conference of speakers of national parliaments brought COSAC into existence. It is now proposed that this body can bring us one step further. There is an umbilical cord between COSAC and those early beginnings but I think that we have already severed this link. We are now a self-standing body not tied to another vessel. We are asking the speakers of national parliaments to help us evolve but this means undoing the good work, which we did earlier on, and is not in line with our independence and vitality.

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

I wanted to add my voice to the words of thanks and encouragement to you and to the Danish Presidency.

I would like to focus my remarks on the question of majority voting on contributions.

You will know that the Dutch delegation has always had major hesitations in this area and today's discussion has strengthened these reservations. It has been said during the discussion that many of us who are also members of the Convention, ask for greater majority voting in the Council with co-decision for the EP and that is already the case. It is not however a true comparison because we are talking about fully-fledged institutions and our concern is not for COSAC to turn itself into another institution.

Why should COSAC become a body taking decisions by majority? If we have 2/3 majorities that would mean that 1/3 of the club would disagree and yet those majorities have to represent

COSAC views to the outside world. COSAC would cease to be the voice of the parliamentary forum, it would represent itself only and going down the path of majority voting would mean the institutionalising of it. The Dutch delegation has major reservations about that.

This morning the idea of a population benchmark has come up in the discussion as well as changes to decision making. It seems to me that European democratic legitimacy is going to be conferred upon COSAC but we already have a double form of legitimacy within the Europe of the states and the Europe of the peoples.

In COSAC we represent national Parliaments. We are talking about the Europe of member states, which are on an equal footing since we don't distinguish between countries great and small. When we talk about majority voting and add to that the demographic plank then, it seems to me that we are disregarding the fact that the democratic centre of Europe is indeed the European Parliament. We don't want the centre of gravity in democratic terms to shift to COSAC.

The Dutch delegation has therefore strong reservations on majority voting, which have been born out and reinforced by contributions today. It is important for us to reassert our view and we agree with Lord Grenfell that COSAC is a forum within which we can exchange national points of view.

Soon there will be 25 of us and there is the fear that it is not going to be possible to work on the basis of consensus but I can tell you on the basis of my experience in the OCSE, which has a bigger membership, that their size has not prevented them from functioning. Thank you.

Mr. Christian Philip (France):

I too on behalf of the French delegation should like to thank our Danish friends for all their work over the last six months and I congratulate them on their achievements in the form of the agreement that was reached in the working group. I want to stress how much effort everybody put in, to arriving to a compromise at the end of the day.

I can very well understand reservations on individual points but it seems to me that we ought to stick to the compromise as much as possible because, as any compromise, it has required sacrifices from everybody.

There are just three points, which I would like to comment on in detail: Firstly the majority voting. There are many of us who have commented on this already. The debate shows once again that different individuals have reservations about different points. If we maintain the simple unanimity rule, we will never evolve and our usefulness will become questionable.

We are a conference, but the fact that we are a conference doesn't mean that we can never arrive at any conclusion. I hope that we will not end up voting very often let's have faith in our presidency, in its ability to seek a consensus in such a way that votes would become the exception rather than the rule.

On the secretariat: for us what is important is for our work to be efficient. I don't think there is a risk of institutionalisation. We are a body of representatives of national parliaments and we also have the EP represented in COSAC. We are therefore all representatives of different institutions. I wonder how COSAC could become a separate institution with members of the European Parliament on board.

I think that the idea of having the Troika manage the secretariat as in the amendment is an interesting solution. We don't need to reach a solution today but we believe that a small secretariat is desirable in the interest of efficiency. It is a useful item to discuss but if some delegations have reservations it could take the form of a reinforced cooperation that could be tried out to see whether or not it works.

Finally, there is a very interesting and worthwhile proposal to debate the Commission's programme. That could be a very useful way for all of us in our parliaments to have an opportunity to raise issues, which might be worthy of consideration and subsequently leading to the drafting of submissions to our different governments according to our national traditions. Thank you.

Mr. Jaime Gama (Portugal):

Let me begin by congratulating the Danish Presidency, the President of the European Affairs' Committee for the documents we are looking at today. I also wish the Greek Presidency every success in its work.

There is a number of important tasks in front of us; to adopt the rules of procedure and change the way we work. We will introduce 2/3 majorities for everything but changes to the rules of procedure and I think that this will make our work easier and more flexible.

We should also submit to the Convention our views on various issues and we must also adopt the Copenhagen guidelines on relations between national Parliaments and governments. That was the task put to us in various inter-governmental conferences and under the Treaties of Amsterdam and Nice.

On the individual points, allow me to start with the secretariat: what we are doing here is something that was decided last year at the

meeting in Copenhagen. Back then, we decided on the idea of setting up a secretariat to guarantee the continuity necessary in our work and hence I agree with the conclusions.

I think we should be going with a small-scale secretariat working with the Presidency linked to the Troika to ensure that its work has a structure. If it is to work efficiently it cannot be a nomadic secretariat, a wandering secretariat; what we need is to have a permanent secretariat but on a small scale. That is the only way to guarantee continuity.

Coming now to the Conference of Speakers acting as a COSAC presidium, there we have doubts. The Conference of Speakers is a very important body; that is the appropriate body for the adoption of significant decisions, notably those concerning the budget. But to call the Conference of Speakers a presidium, that seems to me to be going over the top.

Furthermore, the idea that some delegations have had, to include a third criterion, that is a question concerning the rules of procedure and therefore requires unanimity.

COSAC is not a European institution. COSAC is recognized in the Annex of the Treaties but it is a conference of national parliaments and not a European institution. Were it a European institution, there would be a weighting according to population as in the EP or in the Council but this is essentially an inter-parliamentary conference without an institutional vocation. Hence, each delegation has an equal number of members and the same vote. Once you start bringing in a majority requirement to guarantee the 2/3 of the votes, then that is a standard quorum and there is no need for additional criteria. Demographic weighting is therefore unnecessary; this is a conference of sovereign parliaments, we are not an institution of the EU.

We are seeing now colleagues who don't want COSAC to turn into an institution of the Union, coming up with criteria which would do just that: it is counterproductive. Thank you.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

First of all, can I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Larsen Jensen for all the work, which he put in under the Danish Presidency? We are now able to have a proper discussion on the document, which was outlined to us at the start of his presentation. This is a very good starting point since it sets out the key issues, which we need to look at.

On the content, I think there is still room for improvement and it is for that reason that colleagues from the Italian delegation who have spoken before me, have all sought to be constructive and have made proposals in this sense.

As far as Mr. Larsen's proposal is concerned, my colleague made a few comments up to point 4. I would like to continue on point 5 and stress that we must not set up a complicated mechanism.

On point 6, we think that the ideas presented are excellent but we think that we have to discuss whether to keep a reference to the early warning system at a time when the Convention hasn't come to a decision on this yet. We think that it should be deleted from the document.

On point 7, we have no objections.

On point 8, overall we can accept it but perhaps there is some scope for rewording it and remove a reference to the working groups and to replace it with a technical administrative group and the working group of General Secretaries. This is just a suggestion but we can find the optimum solution when we look at the Larsen Jensen paper.

On point 9, we have no difficulty.

On point 10, we think that it needs revision, as it has not been discussed in the working group at all. It is difficult to see how to set this forth as a recommendation without at least discussing it today and I think there is need of clarification from Mr. Larsen - Jensen.

One last comment with regard to paragraph 11: It seems to me that point 11 isn't clear at all and needs some explanation in what it says. Perhaps it could be put off to another extraordinary meeting of COSAC and perhaps the Speakers might want to meet to consider the revised rules.

Finally, on the question of the secretariat, there was a specific contribution from the Italian delegation, which colleagues will have received. We don't want to take any fast decisions on that question today and I think it should be held over until a future meeting. It requires however careful thought since there is no agreement amongst delegations and it is not helpful to insist on something, which is going to require general support at the end of the day. To my mind it is too early to come up with a final form of words. The final document will be decided upon this time but that part isn't ripe yet. Thank you.

Mr. Giorgio Napolitano (European Parliament):

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I very much appreciated the input of Mr. Larsen Jensen over the recent months and I also took good note of what he said this morning in his introductory note about the EP and national parliaments having different responsibilities. The national parliaments have responsibility for national legislation whereas the European parliament is responsible to scrutinize the legislation at European level. That is a very useful and clear distinction to draw.

He, then, went on to say and, here I agree with him as well, that the European Parliament and national parliaments were not rivals but would all derive benefit from cooperation. I think that it is important that we have this clear in our minds even more so than has been the case hitherto. On the 7th of February 2002, the EP adopted a resolution in its plenary session and we have been working on this in the Constitutional Affairs Committee since then. In the Convention as well, careful thought has been given as to how to enhance the role of the national parliaments in building Europe.

It has been said and, I would agree with this, that you must begin by strengthening the ability of national Parliaments to scrutinize their national governments before decisions are taken in the Council on European affairs. That is the appropriate way of strengthening the role of national parliaments and it may be necessary to modify the Amsterdam protocol as the COSAC meeting in Versailles has already suggested.

We need also to ensure that there is a proper exchange of experience, so that best practice can circulate and there ,COSAC, I think, plays a vital role because if national parliaments have best practice, their position will be strengthened vis a vis their national governments.

At the same time, nonetheless, there is need for strengthened cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Parliament and our suggestion is that this should be the object of an interparliamentary agreement between the European Parliament and national Parliaments. I was happy to hear from Gisela Stewart, representing the national parliaments in the Presidium of the Convention, express the desire to go ahead with an agreement of that

kind. We want to see COSAC strengthened and we want to make our contribution to today's conclusion.

If I could backtrack to something said by Mr. Philip earlier on, I was very surprised when he talked about the European Affairs Committee from the French national Parliament and said there was "opposition from the European Parliament side as to the idea of strengthening COSAC". That I think is simply wrong.

The concern expressed about COSAC being not able to develop and evolve because of opposition from the European Parliament to any suggestions of reform, is not correct. I attended at Copenhagen and spoke on behalf of the European Parliament and that is not at all what I was saying on that occasion. Having said that, it is up to individual delegations and indeed, up to the EP delegation to express their views, in favour or against individual proposals, without subsequently being accused of obstructing the work of COSAC.

Therefore, as I say, we have never spoken against the move from unanimous to majority voting or against the advent of a secretarial back up but I think that there are different ways in which we can organize the secretariat and there are also reservations on moving to majority voting. However, in the European Parliament we are not coming out clearly for any of these subjects and Mr. Philip was wrongly saying that in this way "COSAC could become an institution alongside the European Parliament".

I am not sure if that has significance in constitutional terms and it would be something quite new: either you have an institution or, you don't. You don't have an institution riding alongside another institution and, there is a general consensus that COSAC should not follow that path.

Let me, finally, pick up some comments made by Mr. Jo Leinen.

In connection with point 3, the idea of the Conference of Speakers turning itself into the presidium of COSAC is a strange form of words. I think we should ask the Conference of Speakers to tell us if they wish to accept the role as a presidium for COSAC since this would be another gem in their diadem. In legal terms, the Conference of Speakers of national parliaments is not mentioned as such either in the Treaties or in any of the protocols or declarations so it is difficult to see how it should become the presidium of COSAC which of course has its role in the treaty arrangements

Moving on to point 5, I have asked Mr. Larsen - Jensen to give me a clarification, which he has done. When we talk about enhanced cooperation between the Sectoral Standing Committees, these are not committees, which will be set up under COSAC auspices, but they would be the standing committees of national Parliaments. It is a legitimate desire to see these committees working together however I think it is even better for them to meet with the corresponding committees of the European Parliament.

That is already the case for practical purposes, for example, the Constitutional Affairs Committee met with its counterparts at national parliaments' level. We are trying to programme and regulate those joint meetings by means of an interparliamentary agreement. We have already some experience on this and I think that the European Parliament could provide the supporting structure, as has been the case so far in Brussels.

Finally, on point 6, it has been said that the early warning mechanism has not yet been adopted as such by the Convention, far less by the Intergovernmental Conference. I listened very attentively to what Lord Grenfell said earlier on, that we have to bear in mind that there is already an early warning mechanism at national level because in the

member states the relevant committees as soon as they receive the Commission's proposal can sound alarm bells vis à vis their own governments and that is a clear message to Council.

I think, Chairman, that we can trust the perspicacity and wisdom of Mr. Larsen - Jensen when it comes to the contribution. Thank you.

Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Thank you. We will have the benefit of your experience as well. I think that the relative roles of the EP and national Parliaments are clear in our minds.

Mr. Philip wants to come back to clarify a point before we move on.

Mr. Christian Philip (France):

Thank you. Without wishing to get into an argument, I want to say to Mr. Napolitano that I didn't say that we wanted COSAC to become an institution, quite the reverse, with COSAC being made up of representatives of national Parliaments and a European institution; we have a guarantee that it cannot become a new institution. So it is actually the opposite and I just wanted to clarify that point. Thank you.

Mr. József Oleksy (Poland):

Mr Chairman, dear colleagues,
We are confronted today with the need to reform COSAC. The COSAC working group responsible for preparing the reform has focused on drafting some general guidelines setting out minimum standards for national parliaments' scrutiny of governments and on streamlining the decision making process. The working group also

dealt with the organization of future COSAC meetings including the possible involvement of standing sectoral committees, the composition of the delegations and COSAC's new functions connected with the review of the Commission's annual legislative programme in order to ensure their compliance with the principle of subsidiarity. All these activities are aimed at increasing the role of COSAC and national Parliaments in the future European architecture.

Special mention is due to the setting up of principles governing national parliaments' cooperation with their governments on European issues. Member states' governments are requested to provide national parliaments with all the EU documents as soon as they become available and with the information concerning legislation at European level. To ensure that these principles are more than just wishful thinking, the new treaty should ensure their implementation by member states' governments. But the treaty must not interfere too strongly in the national Parliaments' cooperation with the governments. Its provisions must be of a general character and without excessive detail.

COSAC's work is to be strengthened and made more efficient by a strong secretariat based in Brussels. We fully support the Dutch colleagues' position that the secretariat should serve both the Troika and the Presidency in office and that its establishment must not lead to creating a new institution or expanding European bureaucracy. Its task should be defined clearly and in detail. Obviously it should closely cooperate with national parliamentary representations in Brussels. It is my personal opinion that the secretariat should be financed out of member states' national parliamentary budgets at equal level. This is because each country, whatever its size, is going to benefit from the work of the secretariat in equal degree. However, this is not a decision

which we can take in this meeting; it should be left to the Conference of Parliamentary Speakers which, as COSAC's founder should take a position on additional expenditure, financed out of national parliamentary budgets.

In this context, we support the proposal for the Conference of Parliamentary Speakers to play the role of COSAC's presidency with the sole task of making decisions on and approving COSAC's budget. Care should be taken to make sure that this role is defined strictly and not broadened onto other areas of COSAC activities.

Another question has to do with the involvement of sectoral standing committees. The working group is of the opinion that COSAC should support the cooperation between these committees and that it could provide an auxiliary structure for them. We believe that COSAC should provide a platform to coordinate this cooperation. Given the ever-larger extent of Community regulations, confining COSAC to meetings of European Affairs Committees would mean that we ignore the trend going on in the EU.

The most important task that national parliaments can pursue with COSAC's help is more and more in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, drawing on the early warning mechanism. We are convinced that we are capable of performing this function with COSAC's assistance. We therefore accept the proposal to set up principles of regular cooperation between COSAC and EU institutions. We are not afraid that this could lead to COSAC's excessive formalization and institutionalisation but when analysing the output of the working group, I could not find an answer to the question of who would negotiate and sign such agreements on COSAC's behalf. I suggest that the Troika be able to negotiate and sign such agreements.

In concluding and on behalf of the Polish MPs, let me express recognition for the output of the COSAC working group and especially for the highly effective work of the Chairman, Mr. Larsen Jensen. Thank you.

Mrs. Tuija Brax (Finland):

I agree with those who have said that COSAC has to turn into a coordinating forum for information exchange where we find out what happens in different national parliaments, how issues are being dealt with and what is being done with them. COSAC is not going to become a new institution nor is it going to have any legal jurisdiction.

Its conclusions are advisory and political in nature. They are not legally binding on any national parliament, on the European Parliament or any other European institution.

That being the case, it would be logical to maintain, more or less, the same voting rules: each national parliament having equal voting rights, and with the budgetary issues being decided unanimously. It is not possible to agree unanimously on political advisory conclusions and that is why we agree that qualified majority should vote them otherwise our meetings would never end and would never reach a decision.

Moving on to another issue: I strongly support the working group's idea of the forum also bringing together sectoral committees. Let me give you a specific example: in all our national parliaments, we know that on environmental issues our governments are always saying that they are willing to take decisions favourable to the environment but they blame other governments for not wanting to bring in progressive legislation. This we hear time and again in all the

member states. That is why it is so important for the national environment committees to be able to exchange information as to what exactly the situation is in different countries. That way they would find out if it was true that only the Finnish government wanted good environmental policies and nobody else did. I think that is not the case; I think that all the parliaments want good environmental policies and that it is the governments that block it.

That is why it is so important to get to know each other and get accustomed to exchange information and some times, ideally, we should reach broad agreements as to the best possible solutions. Thank you.

Mr. Hubert Haenel (France):

First of all I should like to thank our Danish friends, in particular Larsen Jensen for all the work that they have done. I admire the work they have produced following the meetings held in Copenhagen.

The draft we are working on is of very high quality and particularly pertinent. I am convinced that under the Greek Presidency today we will be converting the try.

We left the Copenhagen meeting on the basis of a consensus, which still reigns now. There are some adjustments that needed to be made and you have done so. There is one or two shades of meaning that have crept in today's debate but things are pretty well sorted out.

First of all, on the secretariat: were it not to be settled unanimously today, those countries which are in favour of the secretariat should follow up on this excellent idea and prove to those who are not convinced that it is actually a good idea. Without any further delay, we could use those officials of national parliaments already present in Brussels to create the embryonic form of that secretariat and to get it working.

Colleagues are saying no new institutions. I think, and this is clearly said in the Danish document, that we are not talking about a new institution.

Another point concerns the enhancement of cooperation between sectoral committees. If we want to do it, nothing is stopping us from doing it. You will recall that during the Belgian Presidency you got together the Defence Committee Chairmen of the different national parliaments and the European Foreign Affairs Committee. That meeting was a success and some are saying that it should be carried on under the auspices of COSAC whereas others are saying that it should be the EP that organizes this. I would say that it doesn't really matter, a solution can be found to all that but a coordination of this kind is necessary.

There is one further issue which is crucial and which we need to debate once we look at the contribution in detail and that is point 2 which gives rise to most difficulties but is the most important point at the same time.

I don't think that we can leave this evening without having an agreement on the most important points. We would be doing just what the European Council is being criticized for and that is to put things off to the following presidency. Let us carefully assess the consequences: if COSAC does not reach an agreement, we will prove that it has to be replaced and we will be leaving all decisions to the Convention and the Intergovernmental Conference and will not be in charge any more. I appeal to every body who still questions this: please let's try to get together as much as possible.

Finally, COSAC should stop to be introspective and start thinking about the current European debates which are much more important than our today's internal discussions. Thank you.

Mr. Herman De Croo (Belgium):

I am by nature pragmatist; otherwise, for 35 years I would not have been in Parliament. What I have seen in watching COSAC's work is something very positive in the attendance of the delegations expressing the European concerns as seen from the national parliaments. In other words, these are regular encounters bringing together members from national parliaments who are motivated and also practitioners.

COSAC has been trying to find its way without wishing to tread on anyone's toes but how is it going to find its way.

The first point is very practical: a common secretariat. The Belgian Parliaments, as other parliaments, like for instance the Luxembourg Parliament, are prepared to make an offer to host the secretariat on their premises.

On the costs: in Copenhagen I said that the cost of the secretariat would be just about half a salary for a member of all the parliaments here. That gives you the measure of the costs, which could be paid either by national parliaments or by other bodies; on this I am very open-minded.

Thirdly, we would be able to draw on the resources of the secretariat for the activities of the Troika. I am full of admiration for you, Mr. Vrettos as a very capable chairman but imagine, for example, if our Greek friends were to be in an election period, it would be very difficult to fill in the gap, which the Troika would have during a presidency without the backing of a secretariat. This would be of great assistance to the outgoing and also to the incoming presidency because there would be a structure of staff available to bridge the gap. Our Danish friends made an outstanding effort and it is clear that we

don't need to wait too long to try out an embryonic secretariat. I hope that the Speakers will take a favourable decision on this.

Turning now to the contribution and other important matters, imagine for a moment that this was the United Nations. Each of the countries represented here would have a vote. I remember, for example, the Speaker of the Chinese parliament, which is a very big parliament, who came to address the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments at UN level in 1999. China, like Belgium or Luxembourg or Greece had 5 seats, which put them on the same footing. Of course, the UN has some experience and respect the structure of every state.

When it comes to our contribution, I hope that we spend a little more time on essence. It seems to me that the Copenhagen compromise is reasonable and pragmatic. In the spirit of the comments made by the Finnish delegation we would need a 2/3 support that would mean an extra guarantee built in and not 2/3 of half, which would not be respectful of the structure. At least half of the countries represented would be deciding on the contribution.

Finally, chairman, it must be said that it is very frustrating to chase one's tail. December last in Copenhagen brought some progress although there were nuances and an embryo of secretariat.

We want to avoid that individual delegations have a veto right except for questions concerning the rules of procedure or the budget because that would be against the spirit of political compromise and there would be no real pressure to negotiate.

To facilitate negotiations and to act in the interest of parliamentary dimension we need to try to find broad consensus. If every delegate has a veto then you are not going much further by way of legislation and the government is not going to make much progress

in its term of office. There are ways in which you can make more progress while respecting the minority opinions. Thank you.

Mrs. Maria Eduarda Azevedo (Portugal):

You have begun your half-year with the debate on the reform of COSAC and I hope that this work will start well. We have in the past been in a vicious circle of constant announcements of COSAC reform and I would like the Greek Presidency to grasp the nettle and hope that the working group will be granted its mandate as soon as possible.

I am very happy to say that there is a broad consensus in the Convention of which I am a member.

On the subject of today's document, in general I am in agreement with it but there are one or two points where I would have something to say. I believe that parliaments need to have direct access to European institutions, and should be able to submit proposals. The Commission, when it produces green papers and white papers, should go directly to national Parliaments without working through national governments.

On the subject of voting practices, I know there is a great deal of frustration but I think that at the end of the day Europe itself has not changed so I am not sure that COSAC really needs to change.

On the question of the secretariat, I think that it should be efficient and as small as possible; we should not complicate the process excessively. The COSAC secretariat is sometimes compared to the secretariat of the NATO parliamentary assembly, but that is misleading.

The document drafted by the working group has arrived at the conclusion that a COSAC can only be what it was designed to be: a platform for the exchange of information and opinions devoid of any

ambition to accumulate powers and competences from elsewhere. We should not be moving towards an institutional structure, we don't want a political presidium, we don't want cosmetic changes but we should be able to wrap up this paper today. Thank you.

Mr. Antonio Girfatti (Italy):

Very briefly, I should like to advance two arguments, a small one and a heavier one.

The first one is on point 7 which we discussed this morning in the working group meeting and concerns the new name for COSAC. I would like to support the colleague of the Italian Senate when he talked about a European interparliamentary conference. This, I think, does reflect adequately the role of comparison and coordination of the national parliaments, which COSAC could perform in future.

The second point, which is a major question, ties in with point 11. It is far from clear looking at the contribution whether we can assume that we are going to get new rules of procedures for ourselves. Today we have discussed some of the aspects of the individual provisions of the rulebook, which would have to be put to the vote one at the time with their amendments at a separate self standing meeting of COSAC.

It says here that the rules will enter into force on February the 1st 2003, the Italian delegation, in accordance with its general approach does think that we need a sufficient period of *vacatio legis* and we also need to wait for the publication in the Official Journal of the new rulebook. I think that the date of the 1st of February is very tight indeed.

Mr. Elmar Brok (European Parliament):

Thank you, Chairman for this opportunity to make a few more remarks in this discussion.

Could I begin by saying that the Danish Presidency did all the preparatory work very thoroughly and that will help us all today. I think that it is necessary for us to recognize that we are now moving onto the key phase of the Convention in May-June and this is a very apt moment for us to make our contribution to stress the need as to the involvement of national parliaments. It is all the more important if this work is going to be adopted and bring fruit.

It has been said that COSAC can be the vehicle for exchange of information between parliaments and this is very useful because it can be of great assistance to us and to national parliaments who will be much more able to properly influence the national governments. We are not talking here about the different parliaments being in competition; I think that all parliaments are trying to impress certain things on the executive arm and we are all going to gain from that. What we don't want to see is a trend going in the other direction.

As long as that is on the back of our minds, we will not go far astray. We need to look at the objectives of today's discussion and at the Convention against the backdrop of May because then we will be able to come up with a position, which has our full support and will therefore also have more weight.

I would like to draw attention to one critical point: when it comes to majority decisions published in the Official Journal and a collective use of the early warning system and at the same time when it comes to making proposals to the Commission's programme, I think that there is a substantial potential which goes beyond what we were anticipating earlier on. I am not sure whether this is fully intended and I think that we need to see these different aspects together. We want to

be something more than the Committee of Regions; I don't think that national parliaments would like to see their role restricted in that way since they have their own standing and we have to be careful on what our proposals can entail. Could this be an embryonic first form of a third chamber?

We have discussed coordination of parliamentary committees but I think that we have to look at everything as global whole and it seems to me that there are some problematic elements in this. We need to get a common position which doesn't push in the wrong direction.

Let's not forget that it was the representatives of the EP in the subsidiarity-working group who, against the will of the national governments, argued that with infringements of subsidiarity and proportionality the member states' parliaments should be able to seek redress.

This was not to the liking of the governments but we felt that there was a need to make that point and this is of importance in the context of the early warning system as well.

Each individual parliament should have this scope even if they are out of step with everyone else, even if they are in a minority of one they should be able to challenge a decision by invoking the subsidiarity clause. I think that here we want to avoid that this right of redress be undermined in any way. This is an important part of majority voting and it is vital to assert the position of the national parliaments. This could be brought out a little more clearly but the important thing is that they should not be seen as one single body.

Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Whether it's going to be called a conference or a body, structures of that kind are going to be able to take decisions. Of course

if we deprive them of that right, we create a big problem and I ask our friends from the European Parliament to think about the consequences.

Mrs. Anna Psarouda - Benaki: (Greece)

Can I begin, as others have, by expressing satisfaction for the work which took place at the working group under the Danish Presidency and in the capable hands of Mr. Larsen Jensen. The text before us testifies of the high quality of that work, because it takes up the decisions taken in Copenhagen and sets out in clear terms the way ahead for us.

This is a very important meeting of COSAC, in the sense that decisions, which we take now, are going to anticipate on how we proceed in the future. It is a great pity that around the room today, in this meeting of COSAC, we are hearing things being said which might make things more difficult at this moment. It is also likely to inhibit our ability to have a contribution to the Convention, which is of such importance for the future of Europe.

We have got to take a decision this time, on the basis of the Danish document because this to a large extent will dictate whether COSAC will be enhanced in the future. Is it going to remain the kind of free and easy forum, which it has been so far, is it going to become a conference whose views on the formulation of the European policy are taken seriously? This is at stake and we have to pitch it at the right level, so that COSAC does not become a fully-fledged institution of the EU, which I think no one has been calling for. It can also go beyond simply being a free forum for the articulation of parliamentary views. There are others for around, in the context of the EU.

If COSAC is going to become an important player looking to and making practical proposals for the future of Europe, then I think, it has got to change. First of all, it has to become streamlined and more efficient, so that it is able to come up with recommendations, which will stand as COSAC's considered view. These decisions could be taken more efficiently by means of the enhanced majority. Let's not forget that if we have 25 countries seeking to find agreement, it is going to be very difficult to get them all on side. It seems to me that the majorities will mean that we are better able to formulate our positions and these would be recommendations for the benefit of other processes.

In the light of that, I am having some difficulty in understanding why some colleagues are tracking from what I thought were achievements from Copenhagen and also throwing in other ideas and challenging the demographic question; since we are not taking binding decisions, since they are recommendations, I don't think that you need to add in the population criterion. This must not be taken as a pretext for changing the balance of forces we've had in the past. We need to be able to make proposals intended to prove the arrangements, which are in operation in the EU.

Another way in which we can enhance the COSAC is to see how to ensure that national parliaments can scrutinize governments and secondly enforce the respect of the subsidiarity criterion. I don't think that we want to take decisions at this point in these two areas, because the Convention is going to bring forward its proposals in June and we ought to hang far before we come out with our own proposals. Nonetheless the national parliaments are not in a position of strength at the Convention level and we have a valuable input to provide

building on Copenhagen. The proposals we make will have an influence all of their own, in any case.

On the question of the secretariat, this is a perfectly legitimate object for discussion but it is a secondary item if you consider the scale of other major decisions. Particularly, how we intend to come to a position in future in COSAC, how COSAC can work in a way that can strengthen the hand of the national parliaments and how COSAC will be able to work alongside the EU institutions. If we wait too long, if we wait for the Convention to come up with its results, the danger is that time will have marched on and we may well miss the boat. Thank you.

Mrs. Inger Segelström (Sweedeen):

This is the fifth meeting in which we talk about internal organization and I don't think we've made much progress since September.

One of the questions is, should COSAC become an institution in its own right? It seems to me that nobody wants this to happen; we are of the view that we cannot have one meeting after another, discussing internal issues. If somebody wants COSAC to become a separate institution then let them say so. We are left talking about how we are running our own work and meanwhile everybody else is taking Europe forward. It's time for facts.

Mr. Andreas Christou, (Cyprus):

It has been said that none of us wants COSAC to become a separate institution but I think it does require a secretariat to give permanent back up and support to this forum and it would have to be located somewhere. I think that all of the national parliaments need to

shoulder their responsibilities on the financial side in funding this kind of permanent secretariat. There were those who said that it would be possible for individual parliaments to contribute but I think that is not really on and the proposed figure for the contribution, 24.000 euros, is not really exorbitant and is affordable.

On the question of the Conference of Speakers and their contribution, I think that we want to see COSAC further strengthened with the Speakers' Conference but Speakers should not replace the will of the parliaments.

We disagree with any attempt to bring in a population parameter, because we think that this would undermine the forum. When it comes to decision making procedures in their own parliament, it is no definite and final view on this subject, the majority feeling is that it is not yet time to depart from the principle of unanimity. Perhaps as a halfway solution, you could simply divide the decisions into two categories: ones where unanimity still applies and, the other ones where a 2/3 majority will be sufficient.

At the end of the day, I think that the name COSAC does not fully render what that acronym infers; it is difficult to understand what the spirit of COSAC is from its present abbreviation and instead of that, we want something that directly reflects the nature and the content of what is this forum. We need to find a name, which embodies the sense of a forum of parliaments, and this would have the desirable effect of getting across better what COSAC's nature really is. Thank you.

Mrs. Charlotte Antonsen (Denmark):

As has just been said, these issues have been discussed on several occasions and nobody will be surprised therefore to know how much I support the proposal before us today.

The new proposal from five Italian parliamentarians does not meet the points we agreed upon in October in Copenhagen. What we said then is that we wanted a secretariat that would guarantee continuity but the Italian proposal doesn't give that continuity.

It just says that , national officials will fly to Brussels every so often. I don't think that this alternative proposal can be used; I think that it would be a bad idea to put these two proposals together.

We all know that a secretariat with fewer than 5 people will not be able to work properly in practice; it would be just the same as asking for the whole thing to fall apart. I think that we should stick to earlier agreements and should put the proposal to the people responsible for the budgets, that national Parliaments will have a joint secretariat that can deal with practical issues and that there is 5 people manning it.

There is one further new proposal tabled today from Germany. They are proposing that bigger member states be given more votes. Many colleagues have already spoken against that, using good arguments and I think that if we start doing this, COSAC will become an institution and it is not and should never be one. If you feel this point has to be debated, we could do so in June and there will be enough time to do that whereas these new proposals could be dealt with in the forthcoming COSAC meeting.

Finally, what do we want COSAC to do and what do we want to see coming out of the new Constitution. We want more powers for the national parliaments. Having agreed already, let's, please, agree on this today and those 3 countries that are against: could they, please,

think very carefully about what they are doing? Could I point out that, in article 43 of the Treaty, we have already the possibility of strengthening cooperation and this is something which you can consider further but those 3 countries: Germany, The Netherlands and Italy? Please think very carefully about this point which is not worthwhile having a confrontation. Thank you.

Mr. Traian Dobre (Romania):

I will be very brief. May I hope that during today's debate on the subject of Mr. Larsen Jensen's work, we will arrive at a conclusion, which will secure COSAC's future work.

Mr. Axel Schäfer (Germany):

I am delighted to be here, speaking to COSAC as a member of a national parliament. I used to sit in this room, during the course of 5 years, as a MEP and, I was speaking about institutions and the development of procedures.

We have 50 years of experience in Europe, not just about how procedures sometimes have to change but we also know that various structures can develop in certain ways and institutions can spring up. That is why we have to be very cautious in discussing this. So while I was at the Amsterdam Summit with Elmar Brok and others, I remember very much the night-time discussions over this very protocol. To avoid any misunderstandings, colleagues, what the German delegation has been saying as a contribution to the discussion about how we could make a transition from unanimous decision making to a new formula, should not be misunderstood: it is simply a proposal to take our work forward.

If it becomes clear in the debate that this proposal is leading to misunderstandings, which we did not seek or, that some people see a danger that this constitutes creeping institutionalisation, then neither clearly it is, nor right. I am sure that today's debate constitutes progress and that we are a step closer towards a decision but one thing is clear: that we must take a decision by Athens because there we have to realize that we are going to be winners. We members of the national parliaments are going to have our role incorporated in the new treaty and we will have helped to strengthen the position of the European Parliament members. If we are all strengthened in our position, members of the EP and members of the national parliaments, then this will also strengthen the position of COSAC. This kind of optimism should be driving us to discuss the Danish Presidency's proposals. Thank you.

Mr. Nino Strano (Italy):

I would like to comment on 2 points, which have come up in the discussion since Copenhagen. I think it cannot be said that we have been going backwards since then. The important point that we bear in mind, as the Dutch delegate said, is that we need to attend to the document in front of us and make it as hard hitting as possible.

I hope that Italy, which put forward a document, will be understood in its purpose, which was not to back track as compared to Copenhagen. We can make the case that we have helped to bring along change in a way in which we were all able to sign up to. We are not trying to undermine COSAC's ability to take decisions, nor to frustrate or inhibit the work of our secretariat. One is entitled to make a different proposal from what the secretariat has been putting forward

and I don't think there is any disgrace to advancing proposals, which is exactly the spirit in which we are doing this.

On the question of unanimity and decision-making, it does seem to us that it is possible to further complicate the picture by bringing in the population benchmark. There are avenues open apart from the secretariat, for example: the demographic aspect and the population.

I would like to draw the attention to something which is very dear to my heart and mark out alternatives; Over the past 6 months we've seen the Convention getting up to speed and I think that in our conclusion there are things which could be held out until the results of the Convention are known but at the same time we have to have regard to what is going on in that context. I think we should, if anything, have a working group following the work at the Convention so that if there are any problems from COSAC's point of view, we would be the first to know.

I am one of those romantics who believe in a united Europe and this sense of unity is certainly being put to the test now in connection with Iraq. With the euro, we have seen important achievements and we do need to keep the question of our secretariat in contest. I am a little bit disappointed that there are those who resist this idea that Europe apart from being a bureaucracy also has the fingerprints of the national parliaments and we are trying in our small way to make sure that those fingerprints are visible. Thank you.

Mr. Gay Mitchell (Ireland):

In relation to the code of conduct for minimum standards for effective scrutiny, we, in principle, have no problem at the main trust of the Danish proposals.

In my own country, we have only recently put on a statutory basis the right of the European Affairs' Committee; the right to scrutinize in advance and on extensive terms of reference from both Houses of Parliament.

We also now examine Ministers before they go to the Council.

I also have no great difficulty with the majority decisions rather than unanimity or the establishment of a COSAC secretariat in Brussels. We would like to know a bit more about the details and the cost, but we should really consider whether the best place for location is the Belgian Parliament or the European Parliament and, we should have a view about that not just who makes us the best offer or who is prepared to accommodate us.

I am, also, supportive of the future involvement of sectoral standing committees and I don't see a problem with the assessment of the Commission's annual legislative programme.

In relation to a name change for COSAC, I would like to come back in a moment, because I think that this is very important.

We could support the idea for an IT strategy and the idea for enhanced cooperation between national parliaments and EU institutions needs to be flashed out.

I do think on that particular point, we are putting too much emphasis on institutional-type arrangements. I think enhanced cooperation gives a great opportunity. I don't know what it's like in the other parliaments but in the Irish Parliament, MEPs have the full right to participate in and attend at both the European Affairs Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee. Both are joint Committees of our Senate and they do participate particularly at times when the European Parliament is not meeting.

I believe if there was right of access for the chairpersons of the European Affairs Committees of national parliaments to attend at and speak occasionally, not as observers but with the right to raise concerns of national parliaments at the EP that form of enhanced cooperation would work. Even if it were done on the basis that the EP would only reciprocate where MEPs are given the same right of participation at national parliaments. I do believe there is an avenue there for discussion, which would not need any constitutional or institutional arrangements.

To conclude, I want to come back to the name of our organization: I believe this is the single most important proposal here before us today. Nobody knows who COSAC is. Members of the EP don't know who COSAC is; members of staff coming in here don't know who COSAC is and certainly in Ireland nobody knows who COSAC is. It doesn't convey anything and therefore we should think about the sort of name that we might use. Maybe we don't want to use parliament, we might use parliamentarians, the EU Conference of Parliamentarians or, Council of Parliamentarians because it's not just national Parliaments, the European Parliament is also involved. The word forum is far too weak in my view, it just indicates a talking shop and the name of this body for the future is really important.

I want to conclude by saying that if we want to be relevant and close the democratic deficit, then first of all our citizens will have to know that we exist and the name of the body is important in that regard and secondly, in relation to the concerns of the institution we are members of the national parliaments, we should have the opportunity from time to time to directly raise those concerns with the institutions primarily in reciprocation with the European Parliament. I would like those two ideas to be considered. Thank you.

Mrs Cobi De Blecourt Maas (The Netherlands):

I think we are not going to decide today definitively about the next name for COSAC. Of course, if there are things we are not deciding today we still need to be clear about the duties and the competences of COSAC before we think to change its name.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the change of name isn't only important for the future and the citizens' ability to recognize us as a group, but also for our tasks as COSAC.

It is clear from the debate in many countries that there is broad agreement that COSAC should be a discussion forum rather than a conference and an opportunity for parliaments to exchange information. We had been discussing the topic of strengthening the role of national Parliaments and a conference of organs specialized in European affairs has a lot to be said for it.

The proposal for a European parliamentary conference as suggested by the Italian delegation is a good one as well. If we are changing the voting and the tasks, then we have to make sure that the name keeps up with developments. I think that we must first of all decide on decision-making and all the aspects of a remit but certainly we are not pushing towards a self-standing institution.

One final point: as a biologist, can I just make a comment about the secretariat? Many colleagues have been saying that this was an embryonic secretariat but as a biologist I can tell you that embryos do tend to grow and that is the concern we had in the Dutch delegation. Thank you.

Mr. Alexandros Voulgaris (Greece):

If we want to come to a conclusion capable of getting broad support, we will need to do certain things. All of us would agree that, fundamentally, COSAC is not seeking to evolve into an autonomous body. In the member states' Parliaments or in the European Parliament, representatives are the vehicles for democratic legitimacy and I don't think we want to use the word decisions because this is tantamount to something emanating from a democratic body based on principles of democracy and which is representative.

I think we could use a different term such as position or recommendation; those are the kind of term we would need to use in order to steer clear of the trappings of a separate institution. The term decision carries with it the suggestion that this is an institution, which is promulgating its views. This is one point that needs to be borne in mind.

Secondly, in the Convention you have parliaments from 25 countries represented and I think that we may want to draw up a report based on consensus and support so that we can put forward a recommendation for a qualified majority. This is in paragraph 2 where it talks about a 2/3 majority and if you like it is a qualified majority.

It would need to be clear that these voting procedures would apply in certain areas and where we had 2/3 support behind an opinion or a recommendation and also 50% of the votes, this would stand as an authoritative view. If we want to be more democratic then I think there is room for a majority view and also for a minority view which would both be useful and interesting in their ways.

When it comes to the question of secretarial back up, this is perhaps the most important aspect of our work here. It is important for information to pass among national Parliaments so that everyone knows what is going on elsewhere on the big issues, which concern

us, and on the enlargement and the Convention on the Future of Europe. We must make sure that the pathways are open between the parliaments and we have to take the necessary organizational steps to make sure that information is genuinely passing around and our IT proposals will have to provide that. The Troika is a very small organ representing COSAC and we should make full use of it.

In conclusion, we need to clarify the role of COSAC in conjunction with the specialized committees in the national Parliaments. As Mr. Napolitano has said, there is of course a sectoral conferring taking place between, for example, the constitutional affairs' committees in the European Parliament and in the member states. Recently we have seen meetings of that kind, in the social affairs and the employment area, looking in particular at employment and social exclusion.

This is a very vital dialogue taking place at national level and concerning also the economic policy, which is very important and does of course have a big bearing on employment as well. So there are things, which are equally important to the specialized committees in national Parliaments, and COSAC must find ways to bring in the different strands of the debate in these important areas. Thank you.

Mr. Mauro Zani (Italy):

I sincerely appreciate the work of the Danish Presidency and I think there is much benefit to us in the working group document. However I am not entirely sure that over all we are going to be able to overhaul COSAC before the end of the Convention. It seems to me that we are not going to be able to complete that task because it is important in the overall picture of the institutional future of Europe and we must take into account the conclusions of the Convention.

There are important areas set out in the proposals where we will be able to make progress but otherwise we are going to have to come back on certain things in due course. We need to remember that we are talking about far reaching reforms in the institutional arrangements.

It has been said that our delegation's proposal might have the effect of undermining the role of COSAC. I think that the Convention is the vehicle by which the national parliaments are going to be able to better assert themselves.

I agree with paragraph 5 on the question of the sectoral committees meeting and using the COSAC method, but only provided that they are going to make a proper input into COSAC which can then be adopted or rejected. I think they must be result driven so that they can make submissions to COSAC, which can then go forward on its behalf. We need also to look at paragraph 2 where in pragmatic terms we agree on the need for us to have voting by 2/3 majority but lets be careful since there are arguments advanced very ably by the Dutch delegation when they say that using a 2/3 majority does at least in theory, bring along certain implications. We need to take the broader view of that.

The most delicate area is the question of the secretariat: there are different schools of thought, which we should allow to settle for a while. It is not the time for us dictating what final form a secretariat is going to take and this is the best way to ensure that the discussion can carry on.

I'd rather we've not spent very much time discussing a third chamber because this is something which has been advanced but I think that it is an objective subject for debate.

I think that the debate is going to continue and we can come back on this when the views have further worked themselves out.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

Having heard the final comments, it was my intention to ask delegations from national Parliaments of the 27 countries represented here those who are in favour of a having a new chamber to put their hands up. But nobody seems to want it. I, therefore, cannot see where these ideas come from, apart from the imagination, because in the whole process we have been through in the working groups, in the COSAC meetings, not one single person either directly or indirectly said to be in favour of this. I hope that this makes it absolutely clear that there are no hidden agendas here.

The alternative for such a second chamber should not be COSAC becoming a place where nothing goes on with national parliamentarians doing nothing because that would sap the interest in participating in such a venture and it is not a cheap activity since it costs money.

I would say how much respect I have for the work people are doing in the Convention and in our European Affairs Committee in Denmark we are following it very closely but from point A through to H, these are the keys for the working group and its conclusions, have all been aimed really at filling out the framework already set by Protocol 9 of the Amsterdam Treaty. Maybe it is a bit late since it dates back to 1998, but the Amsterdam Treaty reforms our own way of working after a new treaty enters into force after an IGC and ratification in all the parliaments in 2005 or 2006.

If we don't improve our own working methods in the intervening period from now to 2003, then what on earth are we

meeting for at all? If we are going to spend so many meetings doing so little, are we in a position to meet and discuss anything at all? I'm saying this because over the next three years we have a Convention, an IGC and a new treaty that doesn't mean that we can't do anything now.

What we are deciding for adoption derives from the Amsterdam Treaty it says as follows:

“Here and after referred to as COSAC, established in Paris on the 16th and 17th of November 1989 may make any contribution it deems appropriate for the attention of the EU institutions. In particular on the basis of draft legal texts with representatives of governments of the member states, may decide by common accord to forward to it in view of the nature of the subject matter. COSAC may examine any legislative proposal or initiative in relation to the establishment of an area of freedom, security and justice, which might have a direct bearing on the rights and freedoms of individuals. The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall be informed of any contribution made by COSAC under this paragraph. COSAC may address to the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission any contribution, which it deems appropriate on the legislative activities of the Union, notably in relation to the application of the principle of subsidiarity, the area of freedom, security and justice and questions regarding fundamental rights. Contributions made by COSAC shall in no way bind national parliaments or prejudice their position.”

It is so clear and sometimes during the debate I felt that even what is already in the existing treaty was too much. What we are

trying to do is to organize the work to live up to the existing treaty. Then we can have a fight on the future, in the Convention, in the IGC, etc, but if we are not able at this stage, 4 years after the last treaty, to fill in the frame, then we should better go home.

After having listened to the points of view here, we are 27 delegations including the European Parliament, as I hear it 17 countries are strongly in favour on the general lines in the proposal. Two to three delegations are, on some points reluctant.

What I will try to do now is to see if we can focus on these points to reach as much agreement as possible. I strongly appeal to those who are reluctant in some fields to see if they will be able to make a constructive abstention, not to block the whole proposal supported by a great majority.

My proposal for the procedure is the following: page 1 in the draft is a summary. The first part of page 2 is a summary of the process taking place. I propose to focus on the points from 1 to 11 and then we take point III.

As I hear it the main problems are related to two points; I'll leave them for a while, it is point 2 on the majority voting and point 3 on the secretariat. We will come back to them. We could take the rest of the points and clarify some of the points to find an agreement. I'll do it slowly.

Point 1: The Copenhagen parliamentary guidelines

I hear that all can support this point underlining that contributions made by COSAC shall in no way bind national parliaments or prejudice their position and with the addition, discussed in the working group, that these are recommendations which every parliament implements according to its constitutional practices. With this clarification, I think the point is acceptable to everybody.

Point 4: **Long term planning of our work.** I think that everybody agrees.

Point 5: **Cooperation between COSAC and standing committees.** The European Parliament asked this. We know that there is cooperation between committees we could clarify in the text and say that it could be a technical support structure for these committees in national parliaments and there will still be such a need. On the other hand there will be a need for interparliamentary relations between the European Parliament and national Parliaments but this is not what the point is referring to. I propose that we underline that this cooperation is between sectoral standing committees in national Parliaments. What is meant by the point is not that COSAC should be an imperialistic body, taking over responsibilities from the different committees but the idea is that if we are asking our national parliaments to spend some money to create a technical support structure in the form of a secretariat, we know that this secretariat will not only have to support the European Affairs' Committees but also Foreign Affairs.

It is better to take point by point, if you agree, Mr. Chairman in order to have a global picture.

On point 6, I heard that some were reluctant on the question of the **legislative programme** of the Commission. It is important to underline what was said by one of the delegations: this is not a question of deciding on the programme but it is a joint presentation to all national Parliaments and the European Parliament of the legislative programme we will have to follow up in each and every parliament afterwards.

I would strongly appeal to those delegations that are reluctant to constructively abstain so that we could reach consensus.

On the early warning mechanism, there is a reference to the Protocol of the Amsterdam treaty and to the works in the Convention.

On the clearing house, this is not to be misunderstood. We should underline here that the main role of controlling subsidiarity lies in the hands of the national parliaments. The role as a clearinghouse via COSAC is a technical safeguard so that we all know what reserves there are in the different parliaments. This is the thinking behind it; not that we have to adopt anything.

Point 7: this is only noting at this moment, that many of us want a new name but now, despite the proposals including the Italian one, we are not able to take that decision. This point is still on the agenda we will return to the name after we have finalized the Convention.

IT Strategy as a practical cooperation should create no problems.

The operational agreements: There was a question about who is making the agreements. In the text it is open whether it is the Speakers of Parliaments who are signing the agreements with the Council or the European Parliament, it doesn't matter, the important thing is to organize work between these two institutions.

I think we should try to clear these points and then return to points 2 and 3 afterwards, Mr. Chairman, if that is acceptable to you.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Lets start with the easiest points where it's clear from the discussion that there are no major problems. Once we get into the more difficult point, I think we can take them with one speaker in favour and one against and then look at the majority-minority arithmetic.

Of course there will be proposals from the side of Mr. Larsen.

We can begin then with point 1 which, as Mr. Larsen said is a proposal.

Mr. Andrea Manzella (Italy):

In connection with the point you just made, I think we can specify that this is a framework of reference to make clear what exactly we are looking at.

Mr Mario Greco (Italy):

Just to add to what my colleague just said: there are two inaccuracies when it talks about the final document it should be general conclusions, instead.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Can we take paragraph 1, is that unanimous? Thank you. We can go on to paragraph 4, this is also straightforward unless there are objections.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

On paragraph 4, we called for a deletion of the second part, which pre-empts the contribution from the speakers. We have an amendment on that when it comes to the rules as well. We would simply have the first part where it says that COSAC recognizes the need for better long term planning of meetings adapted to the Council's one year's planning scheduled activities. The next two sentences would disappear.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Mr. Larsen agrees with the Stucchi/Bodewig proposal, to go up to the word “activities”, do you agree? Adopted unanimously.

Point 5

Mr. Jo Leinen (European Parliament):

It's good but this is the first point where we have to decide if we are going to keep the framework of Protocol 9 of the Amsterdam Treaty or if we are going to change it. Here it's changing because COSAC would not just be coordinating European Affairs' Committees but all committees of the various parliaments.

My proposal would be to put a full stop after standing committees. And delete the phrase with “supporting structure” in and put in a different text saying “the necessity for an inter-parliamentary agreement, COSAC asks the Speakers of the Parliaments to prepare and decide on such an inter-parliamentary agreement”.

What we need is an agreement between all parliaments governing the exchanges between our committees and our work and that would fit very well in here. So drop the last half sentence, replace it with this inter-parliamentary agreement and that's a matter for the Speakers of our Parliaments not for COSAC.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

Just a clarification: there are two things. There is the inter-parliamentary agreement proposed by Jo Leinen and, there is the point related to the coordination between sectoral standing committees in the national parliaments. We take the first sentence and add “sectoral standing committees of the national parliaments” and then we add the proposal you put forward where we appeal to the Speakers to work in

favour of an inert-parliamentary agreement. That could be a good solution.

Mr. Giorgio Napolitano (European Parliament):

As Mr. Larsen - Jensen said, there are two different aspects and parts. The first part should include “cooperation between the sectoral standing committees of the national Parliaments”. Following the idea of a broader inter-parliamentary cooperation, including the standing committees of the European Parliament, and for this goal, the agreement that has been proposed.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Do we agree on paragraph 5?

Mr. Mario Greco (Italy):

On paragraph 5, there are no difficulties in the first part; where there is a slight problem is on the question of making itself available as a supporting structure. That does somewhat anticipate on a body and it seems to me that we have said no for the time being to a secretariat.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

Just to make sure that we understood the proposal, where it says “COSAC wishes to support cooperation between the sectoral standing committees of the national Parliaments” is that to just facilitate information, IT, transfer of knowledge or is it more than that. If there is a full stop after this sentence and nothing else then we can accept it. Can you please tell us what kind of support this is?

Mr. Claus Larsen Jensen (Denmark):

It is the result of the working group where it was said that if we ask the Parliaments to finance a secretariat to strengthen the national Parliaments' coordination at a European level then they will demand that to be done not only for the sake of the European affairs' committees but also for sectoral standing committees, because national Parliaments they see the issue as a whole. This is the meaning of the term technical support structure.

Mrs Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

Can we decide on this before we decide on the role of the secretariat?

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

This has nothing to do with the secretariat. This point supports the cooperation between standing committees.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

If it was written that the COSAC secretariat is a technical support structure, you could be right. But right now, all Presidencies have a supporting structure of some kind; we did call in for several meetings of standing committees, others did: the Greeks are doing it, the Belgians did, etc.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

I think it is clear enough now and we can proceed to the vote of paragraph 5 as amended by the Leinen proposal.

On paragraph 5, where it says “standing committees” we add “of the national Parliaments”. Follows the Leinen amendment

“COSAC is in favour of an inter-parliamentary agreement; it asks the Speakers of Parliaments to seek and conclude such an agreement”.

Do you agree? Adopted unanimously.

Paragraph 6, is there anyone against it? Are there any amendments or does it remain unchanged?

Mr. David Martin (European Parliament):

We could support the first part of point 6 “COSAC shall invite the European Commission to a general discussion of its work programme”. I think that part is fine, but the problem with the second part is that we are anticipating the outcome of the Convention.

We know what the working group has proposed, we know there is a debate on an early warning mechanism but we don’t know if that is going to happen yet and we also don’t know if we are going to have a COSAC secretariat even if we are going to support it. If we could end at the words “legislative programme” we could be in favour of paragraph 6 but the second part is premature and should be discussed at a second meeting.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

The German Parliament and its European Affairs’ Committee has precisely the opposite point of view to Mr. Martin; we couldn’t agree with the first sentence and that is why we suggest to leave point 6 until after the Convention has completed its works.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Mr. Larsen has another proposal.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

The early warning mechanism is a reference to the Convention; what we could do here is that if we want to live up to what we refer to in Protocol 9, i. e. the existing treaty, we have to underline that COSAC is, you could call it a technical clearing house or otherwise, but it is the place where we exchange information on the points of view of the national parliaments on the question of subsidiarity.

This is in correspondence with the treaty and then we could delete the rest on the early warning mechanism or we could write that we are waiting for the work done by the Convention on the early warning mechanism.

I don't care which possibility we choose but in that way we have a reference to something, which is coming, we wait but we don't take a stance.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

A question: is that with the first sentence being dropped?

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark) :

The question of the legislation programme to be discussed is kept; this is where the Commission is setting the lines for what is being discussed in all parliaments, because this is the monopoly of proposals for the EU. It is up to the national parliaments to determine their standpoint on that. This is clear; I just wanted to clarify the point on the early warning mechanism.

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

On this point, Chairman, I can understand if you were to say that the European Commission is invited to make a presentation of the contents of its working and legislative programme to the COSAC.

That is logical, but a discussion would not tell that delegations would be able to express the position of their parliaments; and that of course, cannot be the case because the discussion will take place in the national Parliaments.

The problem is that we as delegations do not have a mandate from our national Parliaments and I for one am not going to force my parliament to come with a mandate every time we go to COSAC.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

I think you should take it easy because this is not the point. We cannot discuss what the standpoint of our parliaments is before knowing the proposals made by the Commission. The Commission's legislative programme is a framework for the planning of the Commission so that it has the chance of having all of us together to present its intentions with the legislative programme. We decide afterwards, it is not interference into the national role.

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

This is precisely my point, that is why you should say that the Commission makes a presentation and not a discussion.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos Vrettos (Chairman):

Now I see many hands being raised. We could change the word discussion to find something more appropriate, we could say presentation so that we don't get bogged down. I think we are in danger of that happening.

Lord Grenfell (United Kingdom):

Mr. Chairman,

That is fine about presentation. Could I just address one word on the subject of the early warning mechanism? To me one of the strong points of the phrasing, as you have it here, is that it sends a clear message to the Convention that in the event that they do agree to an early warning mechanism, COSAC stands ready to put in place a clearing house. I think it would be a great pity if we could not make that clear and all we need to do is to say that in relation to an early warning mechanism proposal by the Convention's working group on subsidiarity, in the event that it is agreed, COSAC stands ready to offer secretarial support. Let's not lose the opportunity to send the message to the Convention that we are ready to do so.

Mr. Gay Mitchell (Ireland):

First of all, in relation to the discussion, the words are "a general discussion", nothing specific and I don't see anything wrong with that wording. I could accept the proposal made by the Vice President of the European Parliament, but in relation to the second part of the wording, the words "in relation to the early warning mechanism etc.", could we not do the same with that as we are doing with point 7 and refer it to the working group's follow up to the works of the Convention, so that it would be actively in consideration by some group? I think that would be the best thing to do.

Mr. Elmar Brok (European Parliament):

How can you have a mechanism and a procedure for something, which hasn't been decided yet? The early warning system is a proposal, which is on the table; it is the outcome of the Convention's working group. It is not in the Treaty and nobody knows whether it is actually going to be there.

There is a whole series of reservations and amendments. If this is going to lead indirectly to a second chamber, then I think we can give up the early warning mechanism altogether. The early warning system is in the interest of each individual national parliament and therefore it would be premature to try to turn it into some kind of a collective clearing house.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

I think that if we say “presentation and information” instead of “discussion” it is a major step forward and I agree to say that after the term “legislative programme” you need a full stop. We cannot anticipate decisions, which have not been made yet.

Mr. Albrecht Konecny (Austria):

I have two questions: I think the wording “presentation” is good and it does of course include discussion if a parliamentary body receives a report from a quasi governmental body, what else should it do than to debate? This is the very essence of our work but it is up to the Commission to present, and this is the first thing we should mention.

As to the second part of this paragraph, I don’t understand why it is all in one paragraph, it concerns the future so we could express our interest in an early warning mechanism and to play a role if there will be such a system. That is definitely a question for the future and a future working group should deal with this question if an early warning mechanism comes out of the Convention and is finally agreed in the treaty. We should not solve tomorrow’s problems today.

Mr. Giorgio Napolitano (European Parliament):

I think that all of us see that on the legislative programme there is something very delicate because the Commission has to be accountable to the European Parliament and also to the Council. It is hard to imagine, there being a response to the Parliament, to the Council and to the member states' Parliaments. In the February resolution of last year, we say that the European Parliament must engage in a dialogue with the national parliaments when the Commission brings forward its programme to avoid any problems there. The European Parliament and the national Parliaments must be kept distinct on this area; this brings us back to a parliamentary resolution talking about engaging in dialogue and it is a debate, which is very general and informal. I don't think it is something, which will turn COSAC into a body judging the Commission's programme.

We don't want to anticipate from conclusions, which may emerge from the Convention, but in relation to the early warning mechanism, if adopted by the working group, we could take out the definition "as a clearing house". Let's avoid vague definitions.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Chairman):

Before giving the floor to other speakers, I would say that there is not much point in having a reference to the Greek Presidency either. If we could agree on that, it would be fine since we have to keep up our own information levels. We can call on the Commission to outline to us the contents of its programme. This doesn't require any decisions here, we can address questions and anything else, but that is quite separate from our own parliament.

In order to make progress, I propose that we say instead of "general discussion" "presentation" and finish it there;

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

Could I just point out that if we leave out the matter relating to the Convention and the clearing house, that is fine but we must support mutual information between parliaments through COSAC, whatever you might think about concrete matters, the principle of subsidiarity, etc.

It says so in the Amsterdam Treaty and it is something we should all be able to agree on. We have chosen that wording in order not to get muddled up with future organization.

We are just concentrating on what is said in the treaty. Can we agree on that?

My concrete proposal would be to say that with reference to the Amsterdam Treaty and Protocol 9, we exchange information between the national parliaments in COSAC in the case where we don't think that a proposal is in correspondence with the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

That is a reference to the treaty and we don't need to spend too much on that. We don't need to take this any further:

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

Chairman,

In the first sentence we can say it is a general presentation. Then you don't need anything else in terms of communication and IT but we all say that we don't want to have COSAC as an institution but an information clearing house. In that case we don't need the Larsen proposal.. When you talk about IT strategy, it is pretty

straightforward. We have to wait and see once the Convention reports whether we need to have regard to its findings.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Thank you. We replace the word discussion with presentation and we do as we agreed.

We all agree?

Paragraph 7: no one can seriously dispute this one.

Mr. Antonio Girfatti (Italy):

Do we need this paragraph at all? Since we mention constructive abstention, here we are talking about important issues such as for example an inter-parliamentary conference and it seems to me that it is absurd if we cannot come up for a name for ourselves. I proposed European inter-parliamentary conference.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

I don't think that we can discuss on this point because we have already dealt with it both in the COSAC meetings and in the working groups. I don't think there is any margin now to table a proposal and discuss it. I think that we will be able to come back on the proposal in due course but that said, we cannot get into a lengthy discussion today.

Can we accept the present wording?

Paragraph 8: any objections?

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

Just two points: first of all, at the beginning when it says “COSAC adopts”, could we put “considers” instead?

At the end, when it talks about the working group, could we say “deliberating in contact”, and this takes me back to what I was saying this morning whereby we envisage here a link with the technical structure administrative group and the IPEX working group of General Secretaries.

Mr. Wayne David (United Kingdom):

We are getting increasingly concerned as this discussion is going on. People should remember that we have had a working group who came forward with proposals and we are now having ideas thrown in at the last minute. We have to be serious about the work we are conducting here and have some respect for the person who has brought his proposal forward.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Mr. Larsen agrees with Mr. Stucchi’s proposal. Can I take it that agreement on point 8 is unanimous? Thank you.

Paragraph 9.

Mr. Jo Leinen (European Parliament):

I am coming back to my original point; if COSAC enters into an agreement with the Commission, which has a monopoly of initiative, it has the information that we want, and so an agreement is worthwhile. I cannot see the point of an agreement with the Council or the EP.

My proposal is that COSAC invites the Conference of Speakers to find an operational agreement with the Commission.

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

I think we should be fair here; we are talking about agreements between national parliaments who are meeting together like here and the EU institutions. I think it is enough just to say that COSAC will work to ensure that there will be agreements between the national Parliaments and the EU institutions in order to alleviate the work in the area of responsibility of national Parliaments. Leave it up to the people who adopt decisions in the national Parliaments to deal with it.

We are not talking about increasing powers but we are talking about cooperation, relations between national Parliaments vis à vis the EU institutions.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

I fully agree with Mr. Larsen.

Mr. Andrea Manzella (Italy):

Just a clarification on the word operational; what exactly does that mean? Is it in terms of reciprocal information in which case we might want to say that or, could it be something else like functional?

Mr. Giorgio Napolitano (European Parliament):

Are they supposed to be transitional agreements? I read in the conclusions that “they should run until the entry into force of the new treaty. These are the conclusions of the working group, now you mean that they should be transitional agreements, operational or not, these are your words.

Mr. Claus Larsen- Jensen (Denmark):

Let me repeat: what we are doing now is in correspondence with the existing treaty and will last until a new treaty enters into force; we have to look then at the contents of the new treaty and see whether these questions are included or not. Let's wait for that. Answering to the question of my Italian colleague: let's find a formula saying that we are asking for agreements, between the national parliaments and the EU institutions, to ease the work to be done at European affairs level;

Mr. David Martin (European Parliament):

We don't want to spoil the consensus but we would like to be noted that the European Parliament has a constructive abstention.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Thank you, that is very helpful.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

On point 9, we don't agree. I want to make very clear that the purpose of the guidelines is to enable the parliaments to submit their position to the government in European affairs matters. Paragraph 9 mixes up functions; COSAC is to set up initiatives and we certainly don't agree to that

If COSAC has a purpose under the Amsterdam Treaty, then it is to bring the national Parliaments into European decision-making processes through influence on their governments.

The problem in Europe is that its structures are not transparent and the citizens cannot understand how decisions are made. Paragraph

9 makes a further contribution to this opacity and so we cannot agree to it.

Mr. Jaime Gama (Portugal):

I should like to remind the previous speaker of one thing: he refers to the Amsterdam Treaty and in the Protocol, paragraph 6.2 it says that Parliament, Council and Commission can make presentations to COSAC within the framework of the principle of subsidiarity. It is not COSAC taking over the role of the national parliaments but COSAC can, under the Amsterdam Treaty, call on Commission, Parliament and Council to make presentations.

We are talking about setting up COSAC to work in a new environment after the convention and IGC have completed their work; we cannot go against a treaty that has already been ratified.

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Germany):

The Amsterdam Treaty doesn't grant COSAC a role of initiative in terms of arrangements between institutions; that is why Mr. Leinen's proposal relating to an agreement between the COSAC and the Commission is important. It is about information provision.

We cannot agree; this is going too far and we keep people saying that COSAC is not a European institution but then they keep wanting to give it institutional trappings. I think that if we really want it not to be an institution then we have to make that clear in our actions.

I can agree to the Leinen proposal, I can't agree to the one on the table. I could recite the Amsterdam Treaty as well with all the obligations incumbent on us – to do with subsidiarity, early warning and so on.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

We could add instead of “COSAC invites the Conference of Speakers”, the wording “COSAC invites the national parliaments to continue their work with respect to the operational agreements between them and the EU institutions”.

Do you agree?

German delegation:

Abstention.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Agreed. We proceed to Paragraph 10.

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

On points 10 and 11, I propose to make only one sentence. We refer to the decision at the COSAC meeting in Copenhagen, point I, that the working group continues to follow the work in the Convention and the IGC. We can even take the text from point I instead of points 10 and 11.

Mr. Mauro Zani (Italy) :

We agree with this proposal. We wanted paragraph 10 to be reconsidered and I think that the working group in Copenhagen did not actually discuss this. Paragraph 10 and 11 could be taken together and this would help the discussion. On the merits, our delegation would like to reserve the right to comment.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

May I clarify what is in point I from the meeting in October?

It says that the working group shall have the following tasks: to follow the work of the Convention and the IGC. We have to say that the working group continues its work referring to the decision in Copenhagen. This is not moving any power, decision right or sovereignty from any parliament.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman, (Greece):

Adopted.

This brings us on, dear colleagues, to the first of the difficult items. I hope we can come to an agreement fairly quickly, with your help. Let's go back to paragraph 2, are there any objections?

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

I have listened very carefully to all the arguments put forward this afternoon, in support of paragraph 2 and most of them were of a practical nature in order to make our work easier and in order to come to conclusions.

I understand and respect these arguments but, introducing qualified majority voting in this process is not just a practical solution, it is a fundamental change in the way COSAC operates and, I think we cannot decide this before we know exactly what the Convention decides on the role of national parliaments.

I think that would be changing the order of business, therefore, I maintain that we should wait for the results of the Convention on the role of national parliaments, not change the way we vote in COSAC before then and come back to this issue once the Convention has finished its task, when we have more clarity on the role of national parliaments and we can put this into perspective.

I am very sorry to say that the Dutch delegation cannot support paragraph 2 in its present form and would urge you to return to a position of unanimity on voting. Thank you.

Mr. Josep Borell (Spain):

Could I speak in favour of making some progress on this particular point and enabling COSAC to be able to adopt declarations with qualified majority voting? If we don't agree on this, everything we have said or done amounts to nothing.

I worked in the working groups, if after the long and winding road we've been down, we continue saying things that are not binding anyway by unanimity and then what is the point? If everything this kind of body says, has to be said by unanimity, then frankly it is absurd; we are 25 countries, soon we will be 30 and the tax-payer will think that our meetings are a waste of money.

I am calling on all of you, please don't take refuge in the Convention, don't say let's wait until they will decide. The Convention would be happy that the national Parliaments are giving them the decision on their own role. Who better than the national parliaments to tell the Convention what national Parliaments should be doing? To say that the Convention will decide and, in the meantime we don't decide anything, is frustrating and hopeless.

Please reconsider your position! If you don't, then we've all made a long journey for nothing.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Dear colleagues, I don't want to give anyone any lesson here. Certainly there is a great deal of experience around the room, however

when you have got near a consensus and there is a veto, it is a difficult situation.

The veto is intended for a situation where national interests are at stake and I am not sure that we have that in this particular instance.

I don't think that we want to see the veto used in that way, because there was an overwhelming majority of members new and old, seeking for something to work coming from the Amsterdam Treaty so that we can do our job and so that members of national parliaments can be proud of their work. It is not a good thing, for one or more countries, to sap good work being done. I hope we will be able to find a way out of this and not backtrack. I am very sorry to have to say that.

Mr. Alojz Peterle (Slovenia):

As a member of the Convention, I would like to say that I don't expect the Convention to decide in this respect about the role of the national parliaments. I think that it is up to decide on that and to give a good example. You know how much we have been discussing the introduction of qualified majority voting as a general rule and I think it is time to decide on that. I am definitely supporting the idea that QMV is introduced in our procedures.

Mr. Axel Schäfer (Germany):

We have had a very intensive discussion seeking to come to an agreement around the room. Having gone through certain points, which have been, adopted unanimously, it seems to me that we are making progress and I don't understand Mr. Borell's point. We've had very constructive discussions and we are getting somewhere. This is an area where we have to proceed with a majority and not be kept

back. If you look at the political rationale, despite all the ups and downs over 50 years, we'd have never made any progress because it would have meant to have unanimity across the parliaments and governments to get anywhere.

Let's not allow the discussion to degenerate and I take on board the point made by the Dutch delegation. We want to bring Europe forward on a federal basis and we cannot allow ourselves to wait until Athens and not to take any majority decisions now.

We've made some progress and we must be able to agree on this point as well, as we did on many other questions earlier today.

Mr. Gay Mitchell (Ireland):

Looking at the rules of procedure for COSAC, in section 1 it says that COSAC enables a regular exchange of view without a prejudice to reducing the competences of the parliamentary bodies of the EU. It goes on to say that contributions made by COSAC "shall in no way undermine the national parliaments or prejudice their position". It is absurd to suggest that when this body grows to represent 25 members plus the European Parliament, we cannot make decisions with unanimity. The proposal is perfectly reasonable.

Mr. Jo Leinen (European Parliament):

You managed to wrap up 8 points in a very wise and skilful way, so let's hope the other ones can go the same way. Rather than seeking to divide us, let's try to come together. Clearly, with 25 member states, it is going to be difficult to achieve unanimity. Many people though, have also said that a qualified majority is a particular formula, which is employed in the institutions, and it could be that there is another possibility. The Convention works on the basis of

consensus; that is not unanimity, there are always minorities but, nonetheless, we agreed on our contribution. Consensus, therefore, lends itself to another possibility, somewhere in between unanimity and qualified majority. In the second pillar, we also have constructive abstention.

Rather than hold an artificial vote and get certain people into difficulties, how about leaving this until Athens and my suggestion would be to have these two sentences:

“In an enlarged Union, of 25 and more parliaments, the working group consisting of the Chairmen of European Affairs Committees should in this respect make proposals for the next COSAC meeting in May in Athens.”

That will give us an opportunity to think about today's debate. There are arguments for and against, you cannot say that one is right and the other is wrong and maybe we'll arrive at a formula which will enable us to move forward. We don't want to tread water but we want to find the best way to move forward; there is no hurry, it is better for us to stay together and come up with something good rather than go for a breakthrough with many people unhappy.

Mr.Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

We would be able to find an agreement today supported by a vast majority of participants with some constructive abstentions too, as has been the case before. The two countries, which have problems, will be able to abstain constructively. It is up to them to think about it.

Mr. Christian Philip (France):

If we want to achieve a result, everybody will have to make an effort;

As we went through the last few paragraphs, we were able to change the wordings without actually damaging the compromise reached at Copenhagen. We didn't get involved because we didn't want to obstruct but now I think it is time for everybody else to make a similar gesture.

If it's always the same people who have to make the sacrifices, paragraph after paragraph, then eventually we will end up asking what the point is. I imagine that a constructive abstention would be a way out because the postponement until Athens would mean that there we would be still talking about ourselves.

I am a young parliamentarian, i.e. a new member, and ever since I've been in COSAC, I've never heard it talk about anything other than itself. It might be a modest objective for us to seek to talk about something else in Athens and not our working methods. I think we really need to achieve a result today so that in Athens we can talk about the real issues facing Europe today. Therefore I call on everybody to go that extra mile.

Mrs. Charlotte Antonsen (Denmark):

I have been sitting in COSAC for a long time, since 1991. We've spent a huge amount of time on small things because even the smallest decision requires consensus. I think it's crucial for us, if we have done any constructive work at all, that we adopt this proposal. We've been very generous and open to the desire of certain countries and we've gone a long way to get a compromise but if we are going to get anything out of this, we've got to be in a position to take a decision now and also in the future.

If we insist on unanimity, Jo Leinen has indicated the possibility we have in the Convention for consensus to be struck even if not everybody agrees.

The Chairman has said we have to do that here as well so people should make concessions. If there are new proposals for the future please make them but let's try to take a step further towards effective political cooperation even though we might not have final influence on what happens in the EU.

Lord Grenfell (United Kingdom):

I'm a pretty old politician and Athens seems to be an awful long way away in my lifetime. I would like to get this matter settled out. May I propose a possible compromise based on both what Mr. Leinen said and on what our Dutch colleagues just said. Would it be possible to say that COSAC decides to change the voting rules in the rules of procedure with respect to the adoption of contributions? These should, where possible, be adopted by consensus. Where consensus proves impossible we would adopt with a majority etc.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Could we agree then on what Lord Grenfell proposed and then move on?

Unanimous.

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

I am very sorry; I will not be bullied into agreeing anything in this way. I am very sorry this is not the way we precede. I've made my points clearly, I understand and I respect British humour but this is not a serious proposition. The position of my country is clear, I can

live with the proposal put forward by Jo Leinen, but if you retain the proposal as it is formulated now, my country will not support paragraph 2.

Mr. Axel Schäfer (Germany):

If we remain loyal to our principles, we can say that in the future there can be QMV provided that we can agree unanimously on that here. If that is the direction that we want to take, as formulated by Jo Leinen, then let's do it with the intention of attaining this objective by Athens. We can get away from rigid unanimity by accepting consensual approach.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

I'm from a country, which at certain points in the history of the EU, has actually lost its footing on several occasions; it certainly dragged its feet. The veto, I agree, is the last resort for guaranteeing your principles but it is not usually a wise move. We've been in situations where we've said we'll be constructive and make concessions.

The problem with Jo Leinen's proposal is that we are postponing the decision again and again, to May this time. The majority of the speakers, except two have been in favour of changing this proposal, so it's not a simple majority, it's 2/3 and 50% of the votes cast.

Couldn't we just say instead that for COSAC work we will try to establish broad political consensus in the decisions, which are taken, but 2/3 is a compromise because you are afraid of being crushed by the majority. $\frac{3}{4}$ is still better and gives a minority

protection. Couldn't we agree on that and get on one further step towards consensus?

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

That was a compromise proposal from Mr. Larsen. Does anyone object to that together with the proposal from Lord Grenfell?

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

We find a formulation saying that the normal way of working is trying to achieve a broad consensus in our work so that no parliament feels pressed still keeping in mind that these decisions are not binding for parliaments and then instead of saying 2/3 majority, we say $\frac{3}{4}$ majority, i.e. 75%. This is much higher and it is a stronger protection for those who feel pressed. It is a double guarantee. Could it be a compromise? It is even better than what we have now.

Mr. Frans Timmermans (The Netherlands):

I am prepared to adopt a position of constructive abstention on this formula.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Constructive abstention from the European Parliament.
Agreed.

Mr. Larsen-Jensen has some proposals for the secretariat.

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

Concerning the secretariat, I have to underline that the final decision will not be reached today. What I want you to agree upon is the following:

Point 1: there has been a broad consensus that we need more continuity.

Point 2: better secretarial technical support.

There has been a common understanding that the conditions put forward by the Dutch delegation at the Copenhagen working group meeting, should underline what the secretariat will have to do.

Then we have the question on how to proceed: I propose to ask the working group of chairmen of committees to prepare for the next meeting in Athens a final proposal for decision, which takes into account all points of view, including the Italian proposal, to examine what is needed and we will make a decision on that in Athens.

On the question of the Presidium of COSAC, we ask the national Parliaments to decide in favour or not. If the Speakers of Parliaments want then to meet or not, that is their business; so we quit the question of the Presidium and leave it to national Parliaments. If that could be a conclusion, we make a final decision against this background in Athens.

Mr. Jo Leinen (European Parliament):

Just two little additions:

On top of page 3, it says that the secretariat cooperates with the representatives of national parliaments in Brussels, and adding and the European Parliament.

In the second paragraph, when it says “related to the establishment of a COSAC secretariat”, I propose to say “related to a better secretarial support to COSAC.”

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Dear colleagues, do we agree on that as set out by Mr. Larsen and Mr. Leinen. Are we unanimous?

Thank you.

Can we now pass on to the rules of procedure?

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (European Parliament):

Just one point of clarification: paragraph 3 is out? It is deleted and replaced?

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

There was a proposal from Mr. Larsen to discuss it, together with your proposal, in Athens.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

So this paragraph has not been adopted?

Mr. Claus Larsen-Jensen (Denmark):

The first part that clarifies what we agreed upon is still there; we then leave it to the decision in Athens, on the basis of the proposal of the working group of chairmen. It is not being formally approved today.

The adoption of paragraph 3 relates to procedures once the working group has finished its work plus the proposals for final adoption in Athens.

Mr Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Let's refer now to the rules of procedure. We took certain decisions in connection with this item. Do we agree on them?

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy) :

I'm not sure that we finished with paragraph 3. We need to clarify this? Because even having listened to this explanation, it is not clear to me what debate we are going to have in due course. We want to know what form of words we are going to use in paragraph 3.

Mr. Claus Larsen- Jensen (Denmark):

Paragraph 3 is mainly a point to clarify a procedure in the future. The first part of the existing text underlines that we want continuity, a technical secretarial support and that we make clear what was agreed in Copenhagen.

We say that COSAC should not be an institution and there was an additional proposal i.e.; that we do not only refer to cooperation with the representatives in Brussels but also with the EP. We ask the working group of chairmen to work out all the details, including your proposal and the previous one to find a common text, which will be decided later on. The part on the Presidium we delete, and we ask national Parliaments to take a stance on the question of the secretariat.

Mr. Andrea Manzella (Italy):

Are we talking about setting up a permanent secretariat? A small one in Brussels. Because if this is the question, we are against.

It just takes 5 minutes but could we have a couple of lines in front of us in writing? I want to be sure whether we are talking about setting up a small permanent secretariat. If we are, my delegation will be voting against.

Mr. Mario Greco (Italy):

To get away from any problems, would it not be sufficient to keep paragraph 3 from the word “reaffirming” to the word “COSAC” and the rest will be discussed by the working group and decided in Athens.

Mr.Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

All of us here, the Italian delegation and the presidency, recognize the need for a form of secretarial support. There may be differences of opinion on how it should be done in practical terms, but that is a general conclusion.

We can come back on this question in Athens, once the preparatory work of the working group will be done. We agreed on the need for secretarial support.

Mr. Andrea Manzella (Italy):

You are talking about secretarial support and our colleague Mr. Greco has asked for that. It is just the first 5 lines of paragraph 3, down to the words “COSAC meetings”. There is a broad mandate to the Conference of Speakers to decide whether to follow the lines of the Italian proposal or any other proposal. We don’t want to pre-empt the discussion in Athens.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

During the last meeting in Copenhagen, we spent a lot of time discussing the criteria and the type of secretariat we wanted. The Dutch delegation put forward a proposal, which has been taken, over here. Delegations signed on these criteria, two Italian representatives signed. Since the final decision will be reached in Athens, let’s accept it.

Mr. Mario Greco (Italy):

What we are deciding now is a secretarial support; what kind of secretariat that is (standing, temporary, the criteria etc) is postponed to Athens and we don't want to pre-empt the structure or the criteria, which will govern it. We are not against the Dutch criteria or against the structure proposed by the rapporteur, all we want is to make sure that all this will be decided in Athens. We agree of course on the point that we need better secretarial support.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

We'll renew our discussion on the criteria during the working group. Do we agree on the paragraph up to the word "COSAC" and we will follow the discussion in the working group.

We have the new rules of procedure. What we decided and what relates to the rules can be now adopted together. Do we agree?

Mr. Albrecht Konecny (Austria):

There is one point in the draft for the change in the rules of procedure, which we dropped: the question whether the chairperson should be able to act on behalf of COSAC. We dropped this in point 4 of the draft but it still in, in point 10. 7. If we took it out from one text we have to do the same and drop it from the other.

Mr. Claus Larsen –Jensen (Denmark):

The proposal is that those things that have been taken out from the contribution decided today, will obviously be taken out from the rules of procedure but trust us we will tidy that up.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

We have every trust and confidence in you that this text will be modified in order to take account of today's discussion. However as members of parliament we would like to have another look at this before we accept it; we can look again at this in Athens and adopt it. It cannot enter into force as of the 1st of February.

Mr. Wayne David (United Kingdom):

Given that there are no massive changes to the rules, would it be possible to ask staff to work for a few hours tonight and then the meeting of chairpersons considers and hopefully agrees the changes in the rules tomorrow?

Mr. Albrecht Konecny (Austria):

I'm very sorry, I think we should keep to some "Brussels' criteria" on parliamentary procedure. I cannot imagine that we vote on a draft promised it will be the right one, and I cannot accept any committee working on our behalf to decide.

What we have is a consensus on the basic changes of our rules. I see two possibilities: one is that we vote and include a paragraph saying that these new rules enter into force one hour after the start of the Athens' COSAC, if there are no objections.

The other way, is, simply, to vote in Athens, but honestly, this is not a parliamentary body, it is a body including parliamentarians and I am not willing to vote to something I don't know.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

I support those reservations made by the Austrian colleague. It seems to me that going through the provisions one at the time, is

certainly going to facilitate our work so that we can be sure what we are voting on; particularly when we're talking about a new rulebook where every single word is carefully chosen. When it comes to changing the rules, there should be time for us to put down amendments on subjects that have not yet been covered.

We ought to examine one article at the time and there should be the possibility of tabling amendments. I wonder if you could just check paragraph III in the new rules, because we have certain problems when it comes to entry into force as of the 1st of February 2003.

Mr. Claus Larsen – Jensen (Denmark):

The best of all would have been for us to have the text as amended this evening, but it's not the case. We have everything on computer; people will work tonight on it and make the necessary changes on the basis of today's decisions. Tomorrow the chairpersons will have the text, they can respond to it. We will have a deadline for parliamentarians to respond to it as well. If there are any points still to discuss, they could be left over to Athens.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

We complicate the whole thing; we have to decide right now.

Mrs. Erica Terpstra (The Netherlands):

Sorry Chairman, but we must not infringe the rules, article 14 in this procedure. We need time, also to table amendments, and it seems to me that it would be wiser to take a decision in Athens. It is impossible to change the rules tonight and then vote on it tomorrow

morning. For this reason I prefer Mr. Larsen's proposal to have a written text and vote on it in Athens.

Our rules of procedure say that changes to the rules must be voted by COSAC and not by the chairmen.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

There are several points that need clarification: we agreed on the question of majority voting and this will not be discussed or submitted to a vote again in Athens. This decision will be built in, in the rulebook and there cannot be any objection to this.

If there are other articles of the rules of procedure which need to be changed or improved, it will be done in Athens but it is clear that we will not repeat today's discussion.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

One point of clarification: we agreed on the changes to the rulebook concerning the majority voting but what are we adopting today? Just this small change to the rules concerning majority and we don't have the text with the other changes to the rules. Are we postponing everything to Athens? We are not really satisfied with this way of proceeding.

The rules of procedure are something of major importance, which cannot be modified at every meeting.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Let's be clear about this: there is a proposal on the rules of procedure which everybody has read.

Mr. Giacomo Stucchi (Italy):

There have been some changes on certain points.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

The central point of the proposal was the question of majority voting. The other points are of operational nature and are secondary to the central one. We agreed in principle with the new rules, which will be voted with no debate in Athens. What we are saying is that the rules will be voted in Athens if there will be no changes to the proposals tabled. Do we agree? Any objections ?

Mr. Kurt Bodewig (Italy):

Such a procedure would be totally unacceptable in the national Parliaments. A rulebook is made up of various paragraphs and the Italian delegation has already said that they will table an amendment, to which they are perfectly entitled. I am in favour of the Dutch and Austrian proposals to have 1 month or 4 weeks time to table amendments and to vote in Athens. This is the procedure, which is normally applied, in national Parliaments.

We cannot accept a text, which we do not know.

Mr. Dinos Vrettos, Chairman (Greece):

Let me repeat once again that we have taken a decision on majority voting which cannot be put in discussion again. For the rest, Mr. Larsen will table a proposal, on which we will vote in Athens. I repeat, the question of majority voting will not be discussed again.

Thank you very much for your constructive attitude during this meeting.