

Task d): "To consider the organisation of future meetings of COSAC including the question of how to involve the sectoral standing committees as well as the composition of the delegations"

NEW NOTE

Note on interparliamentary cooperation and networking and the organisation of COSAC and future meetings

In order to ensure greater democratic entrenchment of EU cooperation it is necessary to involve national parliaments to a greater extent in national EU decisions.

This will give the citizens in member countries and their elected representatives in parliament a greater and more direct say in common European decisions. It is the role both of the national parliaments and of the European Parliament to ensure the necessary connection between the activities taking place in the EU and the wishes of the citizens.

The national parliaments should therefore organise themselves in a way whereby the parliamentary work in the EU becomes interlinked in a constructive manner without creating more bureaucracy.

This means that the organisational structure of COSAC should be adapted to the new challenges and the new tasks facing COSAC. It will thus be necessary to adapt the organisational structure of COSAC as well as the type and planning of meetings.

The description below contains proposals on how COSAC's work could be adapted in the following 3 areas:

1. The Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments
2. COSAC - the Conference and Forum of Community and European Affairs Committees
3. Cooperation/networking between the sectoral standing committees of the parliaments.

1. The Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments

1.1 Significance and future role

Historically, COSAC has strong ties with the **Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments** as it was this Conference of Speakers which established COSAC in May 1989.

The Speakers of Parliaments have overall responsibility for the coordination of work within their own parliaments. It is also the Speakers of Parliaments who have overall responsibility for coordinating cooperation between their national parliament and foreign parliaments. In order to strengthen coordination of parliamentary cooperation in the EU, COSAC therefore requests that the Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments be the Presidium for COSAC. In its capacity as Presidium, the Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments must decide on and approve COSAC's budget.

It is of course up to the Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments to consider whether to take on the role requested. Initially, this could take the form of COSAC approaching the Conference of Speakers. To this end **a declaration** has been attached; it is proposed that it be annexed to the rules of procedure.

The Conference of Speakers meets once a year and have held regular meetings since 1975. It acts primarily as a framework for the exchange of information and experience. The Conference may adopt resolutions on the basis of consensus.

The Conference of Speakers of the European Parliaments will meet next in June 2003. The Conference could use this opportunity to decide on the matter of the new role for the Conference within the context of cooperation in COSAC.

2. COSAC - the Conference and Forum of Community and European Affairs Committees

The European Affairs Committees of the national parliaments have different roles and tasks. These range from establishing coherence and coordination to actual scrutiny and issuing mandates when dealing with EU matters. The European Affairs Committees constitute the core of cooperation within COSAC and should continue to do so.

The scene is set for cooperation within COSAC to intensify over the next few years by increasing the exchange of information, benchmarking the roles of both

the European Affairs Committees and the sectoral standing committees¹, adoption of contributions, common IT and information policies in a COSAC context and administrative cooperation.

In order to increase coherence and coordination when dealing with EU matters in the national parliaments, it is also proposed that COSAC debate the annual work programme of the European Commission, hereby carrying out a first evaluation of the work programme in relation to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

As regards the adoption of contributions, it is proposed that the contributions be directed towards the new Council formations employed by the Council, cf. 3 below.

As a starting point, there will be no changes in the structure of the COSAC of the Community and European Affairs Committees, consisting as it does of meetings in the COSAC assembly, meetings of the chairpersons and a presidential Troika². Add to this meetings in ad hoc working groups.

The COSAC assembly

As hitherto, COSAC meets once every six months in the country holding the presidency. The proposal is for a discussion of the Commission's legislative programme to take place at the autumn meeting. To improve the preparation of the biannual meetings of the COSAC assembly there is also a need for long-term planning of the COSAC assembly's meetings, cf. more detailed information below.

Meeting of the chairpersons

The meeting of the chairpersons prepares the meetings in COSAC and meet as required.

Current practice is for two participants from countries with a bicameral system and one participant from the other countries. It is proposed that, in future, each delegation may have two participants in order to treat countries equally.

¹ As proposed by the Conventions Working Group IV on the role of the national parliaments.

² COSAC is managed according to the general principles of EU presidency. This is laid down in article 11.1 of the present rules of procedure:

"The Community and European Affairs Committee of the Member State holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union shall hold the Presidency of COSAC during that presidency".

As in the case of the ordinary presidency of the EU, the presidency of COSAC involves a **presidential Troika**. COSAC's **presidential Troika** consists of the presidency, the preceding and the next presidency and the European Parliament (article 1.3 of the rules of procedure).

In view of the expected increased activity in COSAC, including the call for the sectoral standing committees of the parliaments to join in the cooperation, the meeting of the chairpersons is expected to have to tackle considerably more tasks than was the case so far.

It is therefore proposed that, in concrete cases and on the basis of a *mandate* from COSAC, the meeting of the chairpersons is given the opportunity to assume a more active role, including the opportunity to make contributions on behalf of COSAC.

There is also a need for more long-term planning of the meetings of the chairpersons. In this context it is proposed that a regular biannual meeting of the chairpersons be held in Brussels in between the meetings in the COSAC assembly. It is also proposed to establish a rolling calendar of meetings with meetings fixed up to 2 years ahead. Such a rolling calendar of meetings should comprise all types of meetings within a COSAC framework, including the meetings of the presidential Troika and the biannual meetings of the COSAC assembly.

The meeting of the chairpersons may also constitute a working group, as was the case with the working group set up at the COSAC meeting on 16 to 18 October 2002. Here, the presidency was given the task of following the work during 2003 and 2004 in the Convention on the Future of Europe and work on the next intergovernmental conference.

Troika meetings

As hitherto, the Troika meeting preparing the COSAC and chairpersons meetings will be held when required. The suggestion is for meetings to be held in Brussels in close cooperation with the proposed COSAC secretariat.

3. Cooperation/networking between the sectoral standing committees of the parliaments

As part of its task, the working group has been commissioned to take a closer look at the possibility of involving the sectoral standing committees and other parliamentary committees in political questions of a sectoral kind within the framework of COSAC cooperation.

Convention Working Group IV on the role of national parliaments also recommends that the sectoral standing committees be involved in EU cooperation, including cooperation in COSAC.

Today, representatives from various committees in national parliaments already meet in various contexts, inter alia in the fields of agriculture, environment and

equality and in foreign policy and defence. There is also cooperation in the area of justice on the matter of Europol (the so-called Parlapol-cooperation between member states' legal affairs committees), while meetings are also held between MPs in the parliamentary assembly of the WEU.

Thus, a development in the direction of increased cooperation between the sectoral standing committees and other parliamentary committees is already under way. It would however be possible to achieve even better results and form a more general view of the efforts of the parliaments if this cooperation were coordinated with the work in COSAC.

COSAC could support such a development by making itself available as a supporting structure for the sectoral standing committees of the parliaments. This would mean that, inter alia, COSAC and its secretariat would help coordinate and prepare meetings and draw up opinions. However, the administration in the country planned to host the actual meeting should still head the practical organisation and preparation of the meetings.

The relevant committees of the European Parliament should be involved in the cooperation.

The report from Convention Working Group IV on the role of national parliaments further proposes that COSAC should be able to convene interparliamentary ad hoc conferences on important sectoral questions (e.g. reform of the Common Agricultural Policy), where the gap between national positions block agreement at the European level. Such conferences would contribute to involving sectoral standing committees in the national parliaments in COSAC cooperation and it is therefore proposed that COSAC support the idea.

As regards drawing up opinions or the like it is proposed that, like COSAC, the sectoral standing committees take as their point of departure the Council formations from the Council of Ministers, cf. the table below. This also applies to opinions from the interparliamentary conferences.

Council formations cf. the rules of procedure of the Council	
1.	General affairs and external relations
2.	Economic and financial affairs
3.	Justice and home affairs
4.	Employment, social and labour market affairs, health and consumer policy
5.	Competition (internal market, industry and research)
6.	Transport, telecommunications and energy
7.	Agriculture and fisheries
8.	Environment
9.	Education, youth and culture

In connection with certain COSAC activities, including benchmarking of the involvement of sectoral standing committees in EU policies, the proposal is also to take as the point of departure the above Council formations. Such benchmarking should take place in cooperation with the sectoral standing committees.

Overall, the Council formations could thus provide the framework for further cooperation between COSAC and the sectoral standing committees of the parliaments.

4. Consequences for COSAC's rules of procedure

As a consequence of the proposed changes, the rules of procedure need amending in various places.

The concrete proposals for amendments are contained in the draft proposal for new rules of procedure.