MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC
Zagreb, Croatia, 20 January 2020

AGENDA:

1. **Opening of the meeting**
   - Welcome address by Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*
   - Welcome address by Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*
2. **Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**
3. **Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters**
   - **Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**
   - **Draft agenda of the LXIII COSAC**
   - **Outline of the 33rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC**
   - **Letters received by the Presidency**
   - **Procedural issues**
4. **Priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU**
   Keynote speaker: Mr Andrej PLENKOVIĆ, Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia
5. **European Union, National Parliaments and COSAC in the new institutional term of office**
   Keynote Speakers: Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of democracy and demography; Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with national Parliaments

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*

1. Opening of the meeting
- Welcome address by Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*
- Welcome address by Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*

Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, Speaker of the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, welcomed the participants to Croatia and to the venue of the meeting: the National and University Library. He continued by underlining the importance of the collaboration between national Parliaments and the European Parliament within the framework of COSAC, as well as their involvement in the decision-making process at the European level. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ pointed out the twofold significance of the Presidency of the European Union for Croatia. Firstly, it was taking place only six and a half years after Croatia's accession to the Union, thus symbolising the country's firm commitment to participate in the development of the European project, and to strengthen and promote the values upon which the Union has been built, as well as the common policies that make the EU a united family of nations and the largest global economic market. Secondly, the Croatian Presidency was taking place at a crucial moment for the Union, when it faced numerous internal and external challenges such as the crisis of multilateralism, climate change and global warming, the new arms race and terrorist threats, and the continuous pressure of migration and trade wars. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ further mentioned the challenges presented by economic differences and development perspectives, both between countries

and internally. He underlined the technological development that had led to the unprecedented spread of fake news, disinformation, intolerance and hate speech on digital platforms. In light of all this, Croatia sought to contribute to a strong Europe in a world of challenges, as stressed in the Presidency slogan. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ referred to the four priorities of the Croatian Presidency - *a Europe that develops*, *a Europe that connects*, *a Europe that protect*, and *an influential Europe*, and pointed out the three most prominent topics: the withdrawal of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and the continuation of the enlargement policy.

On the topic of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, he expressed his hope for an "orderly Brexit" that would guarantee the legal security of both citizens and business communities, as well as a close future relationship with the UK, based on a level-playing field.

As for the European budget for the next seven years, Mr JANDROKOVIĆ expressed his hope for a balanced and sustainable arrangement achieved in the spirit of partnership, enabling a timely foundation for financing the priorities and the beginning of the implementation of new programmes as of 1 January 2021. He also underlined the desire to aim for a compromise between the continued financing of traditional policies important for the development of newer Member States, including Croatia, and the financing of policies aimed at tackling new challenges.

Mr JANDROKOVIĆ underlined Croatia's strong support for the Union's enlargement policy, which he described as important for the stability of Southeast Europe, and for strengthening the resilience of the geographical territory and of the Union as a whole, as well as for the EU itself - both politically and economically, and from the security point of view. He warned that abandoning the enlargement policy gave a chance to other global players to exert their influence. He reiterated the importance of the confirmed European perspective for candidate countries and potential candidate countries, based on an individualised approach and their ability to fully meet the enlargement criteria. He further expressed his wish for a concrete timeframe with regard to the opening of negotiations, as well as on additional reform steps, in relation to the accession of Albania and North Macedonia.

Mr JANDROKOVIĆ also referred to the future of Europe and pointed out the importance of dialogue with citizens, which, *inter alia*, resulted in a higher European election turnout, particularly among the youth. This, he concluded, showed the citizens' wish to have their voice heard at the European level. Citizens should truly feel all the benefits of EU Membership, and this included a better standard of living. Mr JANDROKOVIĆ underlined the important role national Parliaments had to play in that dialogue, adding that they should be involved in the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe, in line with the Helsinki Conclusions of COSAC from last December. He stressed that the debate on Europe's future required a long-term vision that should serve as an impetus to European democracy and should focus on the policies that were important to citizens.

Mr JANDROKOVIĆ reiterated Croatia's firm commitment to a Europe of values and principles, founded on common values, equality, and the respect of mutual interests and differences. He concluded by stating that promoting dialogue, harmony and seeking compromise represented the best path to promoting such a Europe and overcoming challenges, and wished the participants a fruitful discussion, while expressing his eager anticipation for the meeting in May.

Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, referred to the upcoming conferences that were to take place in Zagreb and Brussels as part of the parliamentary dimension of the Croatian Presidency, and described the meeting which lay ahead.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ pointed out the Croatian Presidency was marked by new beginnings - the beginning of the new institutional cycle and the new European Commission, and the start of new relations

between the EU and the UK. The Croatian Presidency would also be marked by an ending: that of the finalisation of the MFF for the period 2021-2027. He expressed his belief that the Croatian Presidency would rise to the occasion and successfully face the important tasks ahead, adding that the Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor* would contribute to achieving the goals of the Croatian Presidency.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ reminded colleagues that the Croatian Presidency faced many global challenges and it was clear that discussions would increasingly be focussed on what kind of EU was needed, and not whether it was needed at all. He pointed out that citizens and national Parliaments represented the most important partners of the EU institutions. He said it would therefore be important to open a debate on the future format of COSAC, in order to keep it both a relevant forum for discussions between national Parliaments and the European Parliament, and an efficient platform for transmitting the positions of national Parliaments to the European Commission in the decades to come.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ concluded his intervention by wishing the participants a fruitful meeting.

2. Adoption of the agenda for the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ presented the draft agenda of the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting, which was approved without amendment.

3. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters
- Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
- Draft agenda of the LXIII COSAC
- Outline of the 33rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC
- Letters received by the Presidency
- Procedural issues

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ welcomed the Chairpersons who attended the Chairpersons' COSAC for the first time and informed participants of the topics discussed during the Troika meeting that had taken place the previous day, including possible changes and updates to the format of COSAC meetings, and to the voting procedure in COSAC.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ reminded colleagues of the transformation COSAC had undergone since its inception. He announced the topics of the plenary COSAC meeting scheduled for May: the state of play concerning the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, as well as the results of the EU-Western Balkans Summit; the transformation of the labour market; the distributive effects of the EU budget; the integrated maritime policy; and, finally, digital rights and responsibilities. He explained that the topics were selected to cover the above-mentioned four key priorities of the Croatian Presidency and thus face current European challenges. Some of the topics would also include climate change.

The questionnaire for the 33rd Bi-annual Report would be circulated early February, with replies expected by 9th March.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ referred to the letters received by the presidency regarding participation at COSAC meetings as well as two letters from the UK *House of Lords*.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ then gave the word to Lord KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*.

Lord KINNOULL addressed the meeting to express his hope that, after leaving the EU, the UK would continue the good and close relations with the remaining Member States that have been forged over the 45 years of UK's membership in the EU, and expressed his wish for the best possible outcome which would be mutually beneficial.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ then opened the debate on miscellaneous matters.

Mr Antonio TAJANI, European Parliament, underlined the importance of COSAC and the cooperation between the European Parliament and national Parliaments in view of the preparations for the Conference on the Future of Europe. While recognising the importance of involving citizens in debates on the future of Europe, he underlined the importance of stressing the representative nature of European democracy. He also referred to the importance of a good MFF for environmental, economic and scientific matters. Finally, he expressed his opinion on the importance of further collaboration with the UK. The stability of the Western Balkans was in the interest of the Union and he highlighted the important role COSAC had to play in ensuring this.

Mr Vaclav HAMPL, Czech *Sénat*, referred to the Rules of Procedure of COSAC, and the situations when the discussion about the contributions lead to confusing or disappointing situations, and suggested that the Troika prepare specific interpretation of the Rules of Procedures in advance, adding that the Czech *Sénat* would be able to offer help in this regard.

Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Romanian *Senat*, proposed that the agenda for the plenary meeting be partly drafted relatively shortly before the meeting, to ensure relevance of the issues discussed: COSAC should always discuss at least one current political topic. Mr MILOŠEVIĆ remarked that her comment resonated with the discussions held during the Troika meeting.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, European Parliament, reflected on the contribution of Lord KINNOULL, pointing out that this was a defining moment for the EU, and welcomed his wish for a close relation between the EU and the UK in the future. She also expressed her hope that the UK would be present in COSAC, as was the case with some other non-Member States. Furthermore, she called for an analysis into how and why the citizens of one of the leading Member States had decided to leave the Union. Finally, she suggested that, while acknowledging the many challenges that lay ahead, the numerous achievements of the EU should also be taken into account.

Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, expressed her hope for a continuous good cooperation with the UK, and in this regard thanked Lord KINNOULL for his constructive intervention and agreed with Ms McGUINNESS. She also referred to climate issues, stating that these were linked to all the priorities of the Croatian Presidency, as well as to almost all session topics of the plenary COSAC. She expressed her hope that Europe would be the first climate-neutral continent, show leadership and be an example to the rest of the world, and produce solutions that could be applied elsewhere.

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ thanked the preceding Finnish Presidency and expressed his belief in good cooperation with the subsequent German one. He also expressed his hope that the UK would represent a bridge between the European Union and the United States.

Mr Guido WOLF, German *Bundesrat*, emphasised that Member States should step up together to fight climate change and announced that climate policy would indeed be a priority of the German Presidency. With regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, he mentioned the importance of taking the national Parliaments' points of view into consideration, on equal footing with the European Parliament, in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

4. Presentation on the Priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Keynote speaker: Mr Andrej PLENKOVIĆ, Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia

Mr MILOŠEVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, gave the floor to Mr Andrej PLENKOVIĆ, Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, to present the priorities of the Croatian Presidency.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ started his address by stating that the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union was a historic moment for Croatia as it was taking place 28 years after the international recognition of Croatia, 25 years after the liberation of the occupied territories of the country and 22 years after the peaceful reintegration of the Croatian Danubian area into the country's legal and constitutional order. Seven years into membership, Croatia was pleased to be at the helm of the Presidency of the Council for the first time and to be able to provide its own contribution and impulse at the outset of a new institutional and legislative cycle of the Union.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ went on to highlight four overarching priorities of the Croatian Presidency: the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), new relations with the United Kingdom, the enlargement dossier and the Conference on the Future of Europe. Regarding the MFF, Croatia welcomed the negotiation mandate of the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and was prepared to support a swift conclusion of the process, possibly within the term of its presidency. It was important that the MFF retained its development-oriented and socially sensitive-character in order to ensure resources not only for treaty-based policies but also for the new challenges of climate change, migration, digitalization and innovation.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ expressed his hope for the completion of an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom by 31 January and briefly touched on the ongoing work on the negotiation framework on future relations. On the third priority, Mr PLENKOVIĆ emphasized the particular responsibility of Croatia in the context of the European enlargement process, its accession being the only success story following the Zagreb I process in the year 2000. In view of this responsibility, the Croatian Presidency had agreed to organize an Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in June. Bearing in mind the positive transforming power of the accession process, Croatia was strongly committed to actively support the European enlargement based on the fulfilment of all the membership criteria. Mr PLENKOVIĆ stressed the need for regular meetings every two years in addition to the Berlin process. He also called for a joint effort to deblock the participation of North Macedonia and Albania to the Intergovernmental Conferences should there be critical progress on the part of the two countries in the course of the next few months. Croatia felt it was the right moment to send a constructive and strategic message to the region while at the same time not forgetting other regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As for the role of national Parliaments, Mr PLENKOVIĆ expected a great deal of input on their part, especially with regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe. He highlighted the need to seize the opportunity of this inclusive process to work on the way Europe functioned and was being perceived in this day and age. It was important to obtain an open character of the process as well as to address the misconception of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system well before the next European election in 2024.

During the debate which followed, 25 speakers took the floor. In their interventions, many parliamentarians explicitly expressed their support for continuing the work on the enlargement of the European Union toward the Western Balkans and for intensifying efforts to establish an effective and safe European migration policy.

A number of speakers (Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*; Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*; Mr Richard HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*; Mr Stefan MUŞOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*; Mr Antonio TAJANI, European Parliament; Mr Ejup ALIMI, North Macedonia *Sobranie*; and Mr Slaven RADUNOVIĆ, Montenegrin *Skupština*)

stressed the need for making progress in the EU enlargement process with the Western Balkans and therefore expressed their support for the Croatian Presidency's priorities that seemed to acknowledge this fact. The European Union door should be open to further accessions whenever individual countries manage to meet the criteria.

Mr RADUNOVIĆ went on to emphasise that the Western Balkans and the European Union needed to come up with a new approach to work together. He encouraged the view that accession, benchmarks and requests had to be strict but fair with a commitment to the accession criteria. He described the current challenges in Montenegro, such as the undermining of democratic institutions, lack of independence of the media, restriction of public freedom of speech and a new controversial bill on religious freedoms, and expressed his hope that during the Croatian Presidency people would be well informed about the situation and the reform process in Montenegro. Mr Momčilo MARTINOVIĆ, Montenegrin *Skupština,* highlighted the progress achieved to fulfil all the EU accession criteria.

Mr Ralf GJONI, Albanian *Shqipëria*, identified EU enlargement towards the Western Balkans as a key component for the future of the European Union, but noted that some countries had failed to acknowledge the key role of the region as a geostrategic investment in a stable and strong Europe. He stressed that negotiations had to proceed.

Both Mr MUŞOIU and Mr HAJDUKOVIĆ emphasised the importance of continuing to advance accession negotiations, in particular with North Macedonia and Albania, with the latter expressing his disappointment at the message sent to the two countries by not giving them a date for the start of negotiations, something he hoped would be rectified.

Mr ALIMI expressed North Macedonia's disappointment over the October Decision of the European Council. Great effort had been made in order to make constitutional changes in line with the Prespa agreement. He explained that North Macedonia had solved the name dispute with Greece and was soon becoming a full member of NATO, with only Spain's ratification still pending.

Mr Yves CRUCHTEN, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés,* referred to the third pillar of the Croatian Presidency programme – "A Europe that protects" – and while acknowledging that protecting borders was important, he advocated for a better protection of the rights of refugees, enquiring what the Presidency planned to do in this regard, and what the EU could do to help all the countries with external borders. He also enquired whether there would be any investigation in connection to media and civil society reports of violent pushbacks of asylum seekers on the Croatian border by Croatian police.

Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, shifted the focus to demography and migration and enquired about the possibility of establishing legal migration, in a similar fashion to what had been done in Australia and Canada. He questioned the Dublin Regulations and asked for elaboration on the Presidency's position on adopting the Geneva Conventions to the present-day conditions.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, Vice-President of the European Parliament, underlined the importance of the migration topic on the agenda of the Croatian Presidency and stated that strong economies kept people in their home countries. She supported Mr KAIRIDIS' contention that the Dublin Regulations certainly needed some amendments.

With regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag,* emphasised that national Parliaments should be involved in the Conference and its steering committee on an equal footing, insisting that the number of participating members of national Parliaments should be equal to the number of participating members of the European Parliament. The

national Parliaments could not accept a passive role as they were responsible towards their citizens, and this was therefore a topmost priority.

A couple of speakers commented on the MFF. Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, stressed the need for an ambitious MFF, one that would make it possible for the Union to handle actual challenges and deliver on its priorities. She proposed to find new budget opportunities within the Union's own budget without impinging on the Member States, and called for a reform of the European Semester. Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale,* underlined in this context the need to set a hierarchy as well as specify an exact amount, stressing the importance of reflecting on the priorities and the message that it would send.

Mr Bogdan KLICH, Polish *Senat*, praised the comprehensive presentation of the Presidency's aims concerning the defence and security of the EU. In this regard, the future of the European battle group should be discussed as well as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat,* stressed the need to emphasise the issues of artificial intelligence and digitalisation. He said that projects related to common economic interests needed to be tackled. Furthermore, he underlined that the European Union must remain competitive. He also advocated putting the topics of agriculture as well as cohesion policy on the agenda.

With regard to the New Green Deal, Mr Ettore Antonio LICHERI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica,* said that flexibility was necessary to ensure investments. He also expressed his concern for the social fabric of European countries which was currently being undermined.

Mr TAJANI, European Parliament, agreed with the general sentiment expressed in relation to the Western Balkans, and the need for a strong neighbourhood policy but stressed that the European Union also had to pay more attention to Africa, and noted that the European Parliament supported a policy for more investments in the region. He also supported the approach of the Croatian Presidency concerning a common foreign, defence and security policy, pointing out that a common defence was necessary in order to have a common foreign policy.

Mr Martin KLUS, Slovak *Národná rada,* mentioned the problems of enlarging the Schengen Area and enquired about the status of Romania and Bulgaria with regard to Schengen.

Regarding the European Single Market, Ms Gabriella CREŢU, Romanian *Senat,* drew attention to the differences between the Member States and the need for different solutions. According to her, the European Union needed to reduce gaps and offer support.

Mr Igor PEČEK, Slovenian *Državni zbor,* stated that Slovenia would take over the rotating EU presidency for the second time in the second half of 2021 and expressed his opinion that future presidencies had to be able to tie in with the current Presidency program.

Mr Bojan KEKEC, Slovanian *Državni svet*, said that the four priorities set by the Croatian Presidency were in line with the situation and the challenges facing the European Union. He argued that a policy close to its citizens and an equally developed, integrated and secure European Union was the foundation on which European values could be built. He welcomed the Croatian efforts to organize the Western Balkans Summit in May.

Mr Ismail Emrah KARAYEL, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi,* said that Turkey should also be considered when talking about enlargement, and that it should be invited to the Western Balkan summit in May.

Mr Dragan SORMAZ, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, emphasised that Serbia had made considerable progress in internal reforms and wished to help shape the future of Europe as a full member of the European Union, stating that it was important to be clear on when Serbia should expect full membership.

Mr Ziya ALTUNYALDIZ, Turkish *Büyuk Millet Meclisi,* emphasised that joining the EU remained Turkey's strategic priority. He assured participants that Turkey would take all the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements of the 18 March Agreement. Referring to one of the top priorities, namely visa liberalisation, he asked whether the Presidency believed in the possibility of making concrete progress regarding this topic.

In his replies, Mr PLENKOVIĆ commented on the questions regarding the MFF that a compromise between the different positions had to be found. The long-term EU budget talks were being spearheaded by EU Council president Charles Michel, and it would be necessary to wait for his estimation results. He further promised that the Croatian Presidency would do its best, but could not guarantee that this topic would be finalised during its Presidency.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ informed delegations that the Croatian Presidency would continue the dialogue between the different positions regarding the proceedings under Article 7, which he described as an extremely delicate process envisaged by the treaties. The European Parliament would be kept fully informed.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ explained that organizing the EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb and opening negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania would be one of Croatia's priority tasks during the presidency. He pointed out that the Summit would send a clear message that, with a commitment to the accession criteria, countries in the Western Balkans region were welcome to join the European Union. However, he highlighted that the accession criteria were not flexible. He acknowledged progress made by North Macedonia and stressed out that Croatia was paying attention to the development in Montenegro. He promised that Croatia would steer the enlargement process towards the Western Balkans in an intelligent manner.

Regarding migration, Mr PLENKOVIĆ stated that there had to be a balance between responsibility and solidarity. Reminding colleagues that the Croatian presidency's programme focussed, *inter alia*, on "A Europe that protects", Mr PLENKOVIĆ made the promise that Croatia would protect the EU's external border from illegal migration. In this context, he pointed out the substantial length of the Croatian border. Nevertheless, Croatia had spent a great deal of effort in ensuring adequate border protection, training a substantial number of police officers, which made up the largest border police force in absolute terms, and provided state-of-the-art equipment to protect the Croatian border from illegal migration without the use of walls or barbed wire, and while respecting the rights of refugees and migrants. Mr PLENKOVIĆ referred to media and civil society reports of alleged violent pushbacks of asylum seekers on the Croatian border by Croatian police ", and said his country adhered to international and European rules and standards. He promised to investigate allegations and sanction them. He stated that the 2015 migration crisis had an impact on Europe's political architecture and mood not seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and should not be repeated.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ underlined that Croatia would continue the strengthening of the European defence. He repeated that there was a need to solve the illegal migration at the source and protect the entry points on the EUs' territory. Mr PLENKOVIĆ agreed that the European Union had to turn its attention towards Africa, a growing region which would have a significant impact on Europe.

With regard to the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr PLENKOVIĆ agreed with Mr KRICHBAUM that national Parliaments had to be involved in the Conference and its steering bodies.

He emphasised the importance of dialogue, and the need to listen to citizens and thus bring them closer again to the European integration project and therefore not risk a policy of isolation. In this respect, he pointed out that the European Parliament had a strong role to play, and that national Parliaments and the European Parliament had to achieve their goals together.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ said that Europe needed to invest more in the digital economy. He argued that the European Union should not neglect common agriculture policy.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ underlined the importance of cohesion policy. There was a need to find a sustainable and long-term solution to financing the European Union. In this context, Mr PLENKOVIĆ stated that solidarity was of vital importance to the European Union. In his opinion, the fact that the UK was leaving the European Union should serve as a wake-up call and shift the focus to ensuring popular support of citizens.

Mr PLENKOVIĆ emphasised the strong relationship between Croatia and Turkey that has existed for many years. He underlined that the European Union must maintain the dialogue with Turkey.

5. European Union, National Parliaments and COSAC in the new institutional term of office

Keynote speaker: Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of democracy and demography.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with national Parliaments.

Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission, opened her speech by stating that national Parliaments were and would remain an important partner for the European Commission. For more than a decade, the Commission had developed an active partnership based on subsidiarity control of Commission proposals, a rich political dialogue and fruitful direct contacts. Ms ŠUICA underlined the central role of national Parliaments in linking the citizens with the EU institutions.

Concerning the new von der LEYEN Commission, Ms ŠUICA underlined its close engagement with national Parliaments and their important role in the Conference on the Future of Europe which should start in spring 2020, and particularly welcomed the letter signed by 23 chambers in 20 national Parliaments to President von der LEYEN, calling for the close involvement of national Parliaments in the preparation and organisation of the Conference.

In relation to the next steps, Ms ŠUICA stated that the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission needed to agree on the scope, format, structure and objectives of the Conference on the Future of Europe. This could take the form of a jointly agreed text - a Joint Declaration - that would be open to input and signatures from other actors, such as COSAC or the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee.

Concerning the timeframe, she said the Commission would like to launch the Conference on Europe Day (9 May 2020) and this would last for two years. Ms ŠUICA suggested the launch could take place in Dubrovnik where she had served as mayor. This would enable the Croatian Parliament to play an important role in the organisation of the launch.

Ms ŠUICA stated that, on 22 January, the Commission would present its own contribution in the form of a Communication, and invited national Parliaments to send any feedback, as part of the constant

political dialogue. She also mentioned that the European Parliament had recently adopted its resolution on the Conference and stressed that ownership of the process had to be shared.

On the Conference's content, Ms ŠUICA stated that the Commission envisaged two strands of discussions. The first strand would be based on the EU's headline ambitions as set out in the Commission's six political priorities and the European Council's Strategic Agenda, to ensure that the EU delivered on what citizens wanted, and created the right space for citizens to talk freely. A second strand of discussions would involve institutional matters, including the lead candidate system for the election of the President of the European Commission and transnational lists for elections to the European Parliament, adding that citizens should have their say on these issues.

On the organisation, Ms ŠUICA said that the Commission's view was that the Conference should build on the well-established Citizens' Dialogues, notably outside the capitals. Each Commissioner was asked to take part in Conference-related events across Europe and engage with national and regional politicians as part of this. Ms ŠUICA also added that the Conference should address the connection between citizens' views and the practical policy-making.

In addition, Ms ŠUICA stated that the Conference could build on the positive examples of participative processes in several national Parliaments, and that the success of the Conference would also largely depend on how effectively and widely its results would be communicated to Europeans. The Commission also saw an important role for national Parliaments in the overall communication of the Conference, in terms of the overall single branding of the Conference, and in adhering to the principles of the Conference as set out in the Joint Declaration, as well as in building bridges between the Conference and COSAC.

Ms ŠUICA proposed that the European Parliament and the EU Member States, via their national and regional Parliaments could also designate points of contact to act as public faces or as national ambassadors for the debate, as an effective way of increasing visibility and national and regional buy-in.

According to Ms ŠUICA, ensuring information was transparent and readily available at all times in the form of a new multilingual digital platform that would give permanent access to the work of the Conference was crucial to the outreach of the Conference. The platform could maximise accessibility and transparency in the process by livestreaming debates, including all documentation related to the Conference and the topics discussed, and by gathering the outcome of debates in one place. A calendar of all Conference-related events could be made public via the platform, and meetings and large-scale events could be web-streamed whenever possible.

Concerning the follow-up of the Conference, Ms ŠUICA underlined that the Conference's aim was establishing a connection between citizens' views and practical policy-making and stated that President von der LEYEN had pledged to follow up on what would be debated and agreed during the Conference, and that this would include legislative action and proposals for Treaty change if appropriate.

Ms ŠUICA concluded by pointing out the positive momentum, from the European elections, Europe overcoming years of fighting crises, with more Europeans in jobs than ever before, increases in growth and investment and people's support for the EU being one of the highest in almost 30 years. From this position of internal strength, Ms ŠUICA urged participants to help forge a vision for the

future with every European citizen and asked participants at the meeting for their help, ideas and best practices, in view of making the Conference a success.

Following Ms ŠUICA's intervention, the Chair gave the floor to the second keynote speaker.

Ms Mairead McGUINNESS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, referred to the recent resolution on the Conference on the Future of Europe adopted by the European Parliament, which was preceded by a very lively debate. Ms McGUINNESS pleaded to put people first and not the institutions, as otherwise the Conference would fail. She also stated that the Conference was also important to increase support for EU, also in the context of the Brexit debate.

Ms McGUINNESS referred to citizens' concerns on migration, jobs, security, economy, and the future, topics that the Conference should address as core issues. She then compared the EU to a large family with different and strong relations, which remained united when threatened from the outside. Ms McGUINNESS also welcomed the fact that the outcomes of the Conference were not predetermined and underlined the importance of listening to the concerns expressed by citizens.

Ms McGUINNESS emphasised that this was a new decade, with a new Commission, new issues and new opportunities. In her concluding remarks, Ms McGUINNESS underlined that both the European Parliament and the national Parliaments were elected by citizens, and hence could not be in conflict with each other, but rather had to work together and be prepared for compromise.

During the debate which followed, 15 speakers took the floor. Participants emphasised the need to fully involve national Parliaments/Chambers in the functioning and structure of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Ms Åsa WESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, welcomed the concrete perspective given by the keynote speakers and underlined that the focus of the Conference should not be on constitutional change, but on concrete deliverables while also maintaining the Union's centre of attention on imminent policy challenges and responding to public demand. Ms WESTLUND also suggested that COSAC should clarify its voting procedures.

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Nationalrat*, stated that cooperation on an equal basis was not currently guaranteed and underscored the importance of representing the European Parliament and national Parliaments on equal terms in the Conference. Mr LOPATKA suggested that an extraordinary meeting of COSAC could be convened before the foreseen launch of the Conference in order to elaborate on the question of representation further. Mr Ettore Antonio LICHERI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, expressed support for such an extraordinary meeting and stressed that in order to adequately represent different views in each Chamber in the Union, the number of parliamentary delegates should not be lower than four per Chamber.

Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, underlined that, as elected officials, national parliamentarians represented the general public, voicing the needs and demands of their citizens, and should therefore be fully and concretely involved in the work of the Conference.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, similarly stressed that national Parliaments should be fully integrated in the Conference and expressed support for the view that the reasons leading to the Brexit referendum should be discussed and elaborated upon. Mr HÖRCSIK also referred to demographic trends in Europe and underlined a need to address such challenges as ageing population and rural flight.

Being a former Member of the European Parliament herself, Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, acknowledged that the European Parliament tended to see itself as the only directly elected European body but noted this view did not take into account the fact, although unfair, that citizens felt national Parliaments to be closer and easier to follow. For this reason, Ms HASSI emphasised national Parliaments' fair role in the process which could help prevent unnecessary feelings of alienation from development and decisions on European level. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, stressed that, through the national Parliaments, the Conference could gain more visibility and benefit from better dialogue and a feeling of inclusiveness, which in turn could provide the European project with new enthusiasm. Mr HAJDUKOVIĆ also suggested involving other institutions in the Conference, such as the Council of Europe.

Ms Anneli OTT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, stated that in order to avoid a fragmented debate and ineffective results, the debate should be focussed around those items that were part of the Strategic Agenda and particular attention should be given to those topics that contributed to the development of EU policies in the medium and long term. Ms OTT stressed that the governance structure of the Conference should be kept light while ensuring a strong role for the national Parliaments.

Ms Karin BROUWERS, Belgian *Sénat*, expressed hope that the interest of regions would also be taken into account in the Conference and looked forward to the debate that would involve the public and civil society organisations, all with the purpose of maintaining and ensuring citizens' support for the European project.

Mr Capoulas SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stressed the main focus of COSAC should be how to enable effective participation of national Parliaments in the Conference.

Ms Gabriela CREŢU, Romanian *Senat*, stressed that division, including dividing competition between the European Parliament and national Parliaments or between different EU institutions, risked undermining the Union and should therefore be avoided. Ms CREŢU underlined that the Union needed new impetus, a new story that would keep citizens united and, to this end, citizens should be able to feel real change. Ms CREŢU further suggested political parties had to assume a more serious role in the integration and provide a genuine platform for political debate.

Ms Vita Anda TĒRAUDA, Latvian *Saeima*, agreed that the Conference should be about reinvigorating enthusiasm for the European project and stressed the importance of finding a way to communicate with the citizens of Europe in ways and methods that create engagement and enthusiasm among the citizens. Ms TĒRAUDA suggested the Conference use various means, including digital technology, to receive feedback and to identify core issues citizens would like to address. Ms TĒRAUDA stressed that, for it to be successful, the Conference should seek to reach those citizens who felt apathy towards the EU. Similarly, Mr Igor PEČEK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, recalled that the Conference was not the first instance the Union had tried to engage citizens with the debate on the future of the EU and underlined, based on previous experiences with different forms of citizens dialogue in Slovenia, that the key challenge was how to reach out to those citizens and people not professionally engaged in politics.

Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, emphasised the importance of involving national Parliaments also in the steering committee of the Conference and suggested current Treaties provided sufficient flexibility via their *passerelle* clauses to accommodate better functioning of the Union. Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, underlined that national Parliaments served as a bridge between citizens and the institutions and should therefore be fully involved in the Conference, including in its governance structures. Ms Sabine THILLAYE stressed real efforts were needed to engage with all citizens, including those sceptical of the Union in order to reflect public opinion appropriately. Ms Sabine THILLAYE underscored the need for transparency throughout the process.

The Chair echoed these views and stressed the need to engage with those who were sceptical about the EU, consider their arguments and have a genuine debate.

In her closing remarks Ms ŠUICA assured participants that, for the Commission, participation of national Parliaments in the Conference was pivotal and that she shared the view that national parliamentarians should be more involved since they are close to the citizens. Ms ŠUICA agreed that the issue of governance structure should be revisited and expressed hope that the question of participation could be resolved in the Joint Declaration of the three EU institutions. Ms ŠUICA underlined that the Commission wished the Conference to be open, transparent and inclusive and reach out also to those who don't live in the capitals but in the periphery and in the regions. Ms ŠUICA emphasised that the Conference had to yield concrete results and focus on those issues that were of interest to the citizens

Ms McGUINNESS noted that according to the resolution of the European Parliament, the Conference would achieve a close equivalence between the European Parliament and the national authorities if the representatives of national Parliaments and governments were counted together. Ms McGUINNESS assured her support of the view that national Parliaments should be involved in the governance structure of the Conference but pondered how it could be achieved in practical terms. Ms McGUINNESS emphasised the Conference should serve as an opportunity for the citizens to assume greater responsibility and pleaded that the idea of simplicity should not be forgotten. Ms McGUINNESS underlined that the Conference could provide a forum and an opportunity for citizens to be heard.