MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TROIKA OF COSAC

Berlin, Germany, 27 November 2020

(held through videoconference)

PRESENT AT THE MEETING

CHAIRS: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German *Bundestag*; Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*

Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*; Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*; Ms Dita CHARANZOVÁ, Vice-President, European Parliament.

AGENDA

1. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

2. Approval of the draft programme of the virtual COSAC and agreement on the topic of Session I: "Aktuelle Stunde"

3. Presentation of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

4. Presentation of a letter by the Presidency, to be put forward for co-signing

5. Letters received by the Presidency

6. Any other business

PROCEEDINGS

1. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, German *Bundestag*, and Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*, welcomed the delegations of the Presidential Troika of COSAC (hereinafter referred to as "the Troika"), in particular Ms Dita CHARANZOVÁ, Vice-President, European Parliament, who also mentioned Ms Roberta METSOLA, First Vice-President, European Parliament, who was taking over from Ms Mairead McGUINNESS. Mr KRICHBAUM then referred to the agenda of the meeting of the Troika, which was adopted without amendment.

2. Approval of the draft programme of the virtual COSAC and agreement on the topic of Session I: "Aktuelle Stunde"

Mr KRICHBAUM then referred to the programme of the virtual COSAC, which would cover the following topics:

- Session I - "Aktuelle Stunde" (a current affairs subject covered under the first session, to be agreed by the Troika);
- Session II: Lessons learnt from the corona crisis;
- Session III: Review of the German EU Council Presidency;

- Session IV: The future of the European Union,
- Session V: A responsible EU partnership with Africa.

He noted some of the challenges that would be faced during the meeting, especially regarding the language regime, and the last-minute substitution of Mr Jens SPAHN, Federal Minister of Health by Dr Thomas GEBHART, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health.

Mr KRICHBAUM referred to the wishes expressed by both the Portuguese and Croatian colleagues to look for more flexible formats of the COSAC conferences and ensure lively debates, and in this regard referred to the agenda item "Aktuelle Stunde", which would be dedicated to current affairs, with a topic chosen closer to the actual date of the conference. In this regard, Mr KRICHBAUM noted that the issue of transatlantic relations was very topical, and this seemed to be the opinion of other colleagues in Troika, to which he made the proposal.

Mr KRICHBAUM further noted that, given the format chosen, the Presidency was of the opinion that it would not be viable to present any contribution and conclusions of the meeting, and, in lieu of this, was proposing a letter to be sent to the European Institutions highlighting certain views and reservations held by national Parliaments regarding the Conference on the Future of Europe (COFE), not least the importance of being involved on an equal footing with the European Institutions in the organisation of the Conference, in its steering committee and in drawing up conclusions.

Mr WOLF took the floor to express his agreement on the importance of having a thematic session relating to current affairs. This format could, if permanently integrated, be an important step towards even more liveliness and topicality in COSAC. Mr. WOLF suggested that it would be interesting to have a look as to whether the electoral victory of Mr Joe BIDEN and his presidency offered the opportunity for a new beginning in transatlantic relations.

Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, welcomed Ms CHARANZOVÁ and congratulated the Presidency for the very excellent agenda it had set for the Virtual COSAC. He also expressed his agreement with the topic chosen for the "Aktuelle Stunde" session.

Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, also expressed his agreement with the proposed agenda and endorsed the initiative to ensure that the national Parliaments were involved at the same level of the European Parliament in the context of COFE, noting that the Committee on European Affairs of the Croatian *Hrvatski sabor* was planning on having a briefing with Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission, in the coming days, during which he would be raising the issue.

Mr KRICHBAUM welcomed this news, and urged his colleague to raise this question with the Commissioner.

Ms CHARANZOVÁ also congratulated the German Presidency for the very ambitious agenda that it had put together, especially during such difficult times. She also agreed with the topic chosen for the "Aktuelle Stunde" session.

Having consulted with the Troika, Mr KRICHBAUM declared that the topic chosen for the "Aktuelle Stunde" was therefore to be "Restart for the transatlantic relations?". Moreover, he also noted that there would be no keynote speaker for this session: rather, it would take the form of open debate between Members of Parliament, while also proposing his intention of having the European Parliament launch the debate.

Mr KRICHBAUM said that COSAC had enormous potential that was not being fully realized, and noted that informal exchanges, especially via videoconference, would help ensure that COSAC was used to its full potential and encouraged incoming Presidencies to hold further such formats which he referred to as "COSAC Agora".

With regard to the letter for co-signing prepared by the Presidency, Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS noted his general agreement, with the exception of the question of the reopening of the discussion on the Treaty, as there was no consensus on this in the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, and therefore he had no mandate to support this point. In light of this, Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS said that he would be sending an alternative text.

Mr KRICHBAUM acknowledged the reservations raised by Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS and urged him to send a proposal for alternative text.

The draft programme of the Virtual COSAC was thus approved.

3. Presentation of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Mr WOLF presented the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which was drafted based on replies to the related questionnaire circulated to national Parliaments/Chambers on 24 July 2020, with 25 September 2020 set as the deadline for submitting replies, and which consisted of two chapters: the first one dealing with COFE, and the second one focusing on the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic. Having briefly described each, he then showed a short video clip produced by the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Mr Kenneth CURMI, showcasing some of the results of the report.

The Chair thanked the COSAC Secretariat for the splendid work they were doing.

Ms CHARANZOVÁ welcomed the very innovative approach to present the work done by COSAC, which improved communication and visibility of the work.

4. Presentation of a letter by the Presidency, to be put forward for co-signing

Referring to the letter, Ms CHARANZOVÁ recalled the lively debate already held on the parity issue and the adoption of a European Parliament resolution on the Conference, and reiterated that the European Parliament was in favour of involving national Parliaments and it was important to find the most appropriate way to achieve this. Mr. WOLF added that with regard to the Conference, a combination of citizen forums and expert forums proved particularly valuable. This had been an experience from the European Dialogue held in the state of Baden-Wurttemberg. He introduced this idea to the letter.

Mr KRICHBAUM also expressed his hope that a solution acceptable to all would be found regarding the establishment of the Conference.

5. Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair briefly referred to the letters requesting participation in the meeting received by the Presidency from the delegations of Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, explaining the Presidency's decision to invite all three delegations as they were participating in and closely cooperating with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, which was going to be represented during session II of the Virtual COSAC.

He went on to mention the following letters received by the Presidency:

- Letter from Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Chairman, Committee on EU Policies, Italian *Camera dei deputati*; about the language regime to be used during the meeting of the Virtual COSAC and proposing a parliamentary session to be held in order to specifically tackle topics related to rule of law.
- Letter from Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Chairperson of the Joint Committee for the European Union, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, about the language regime to be used during the meeting of the Virtual COSAC.

Mr KRICHBAUM regretted that technical limitations meant that the Presidency could only work with the three chosen languages (i.e. English, French and German) during the meeting. He welcomed the Italian proposal to hold a session on rule of law. He suggested holding another virtual informal exchange (Agora) under the Slovenian Presidency when the Commission presented its second Rule of Law Report.

6. Any other business

After noting some procedural issues relating to the running of the videoconference, Mr KRICHBAUM and Mr WOLF thanked the participants for a constructive exchange and closed the meeting.