

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE Virtual COSAC
Berlin, 30 November-1 December 2020
(held via videoconference)

IN THE CHAIR: 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*

AGENDA:

1. Opening of the meeting of the Virtual COSAC

- Welcome address by Dr Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE, President of the German *Bundestag*
- Introductory remarks by Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*
- Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the virtual COSAC

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
- Presentation of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC
- Letters received by the Presidency
- AOB

3. Session I – “Aktuelle Stunde” - “Restart for the transatlantic relations?”

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*

4. Session II – ‘Lessons learnt from the corona crisis - Cooperation in the EU in the event of pandemics and in health care’

Keynote Speakers: Dr Thomas GEBHART, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health; Dr Andrea AMMON, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*

5. Session III – ‘Review of the German EU Council Presidency’

Keynote Speaker: Dr Angela MERKEL, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

Moderator: Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*

6. Session IV – ‘The Future of the European Union’

Keynote Speaker: Dr Ursula von der LEYEN, President of the European Commission

Moderator: Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*

8. Session V – ‘Europe’s role in the world - A responsible partnership with Africa’

Keynote Speaker: Professor Dr Horst KÖHLER, President of the Federal Republic of Germany (2004-2010)

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*

9. Closing remarks

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting of the Virtual COSAC

Welcome address by Dr Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE, President of the German *Bundestag* and introductory remarks by Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*

Dr Wolfgang SCHÄUBLE, President of the German *Bundestag*, began his welcome address by showing a short film about the Parliamentary Dimension of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In view of the budget blockade, Dr SCHÄUBLE warned participants that exchange and understanding were urgently needed. He stressed that the corona crisis and the unsolved questions of migration required more Europe, not less. The protection of the climate and biodiversity required joint action, as did combating the economic consequences of the pandemic. Particularly with regard to China and the USA, Dr SCHÄUBLE pointed out that systems were competing with each other at a global level, and called on the delegates not to jeopardize the European model, which stood for freedom, security and prosperity, adding that stability and solidarity would characterize a democratic Europe.

Dr SCHÄUBLE said that intensive communication between the Member States, reliable agreements and mutual assistance in the border regions were needed. He stressed the importance of adopting a solid financial framework to strengthen a resilient Europe for the future.

In his closing remarks, Dr SCHÄUBLE emphasised that Europe had to take responsibility, especially for stability in its neighbourhood. Cooperation had to be intensified, especially with the African States, with whom a responsible partnership had to be established.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chair presented the draft agenda of the Virtual COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

Mr Gunter KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German *Bundestag*, and Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*, welcomed the participants, especially new Chairs participating at the COSAC plenary for the first time, namely Mr Gaëtan van GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat*; Mr Jean-François RAPIN French *Sénat*; Ms Radvil MORK NAIT -MIKUL NIEN , Lithuanian *Seimas*; Mr Piry NIEMI, Swedish *Riksdag*; Mr Mikuláš BEK, Czech *Senát*, as well as Ms Roberta METSOLA, newly elected first Vice-President of the European Parliament.

Mr KRICHBAUM referred to new formats, which the German Presidency would have liked to introduce within COSAC, such as open debates, for example in fishbowl format, and panel debates. New formats and more break-out sessions were intended to enable a freer and livelier debate among delegates.

He was pleased that in session I of the Virtual COSAC, the format "Aktuelle Stunde" made it possible to have an exchange on a topic to be named at short notice and of current particular interest.

Mr KRICHBAUM further referred to the practice governing invitation to the meetings. He stressed that COSAC was primarily be a conference for EU Member States and guests were welcome to attend if a topical issue directly affecting them was on the agenda. In this context, Mr KRICHBAUM briefly referred to the letters 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.

- **Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**

In briefing his colleagues on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC, which took place on 27 November 2020, Mr KRICHBAUM explained that the Troika had endorsed the new format of the “Aktuelle Stunde” and the Portuguese Presidency had signalled to take it up at the LXV COSAC. The Troika had decided on the topic “Restart for the transatlantic relations?” which was going to be discussed in the context of session I of the Virtual COSAC.

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

He went on to explain that due to the technical limitations of the virtual format, neither conclusions nor a contribution could be adopted. Instead, the Presidency had prepared a letter, already approved by the Troika, which highlighted significant findings of the 34th Bi-annual Report on the topic of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and invited the COSAC Chairs to co-sign it.

- **Presentation of the 34th Bi-annual Report of COSAC**

Mr KRICHBAUM thanked the staff of the German *Bundestag* and the German *Bundesrat* for the organization of the Virtual COSAC as well as the COSAC Secretariat and its Permanent Member, Mr Kenneth CURMI, for its excellent work on the 34th Bi-annual Report. The main findings of the report were presented in a video, which was played during the meeting.

- **Letters received by the Presidency**

The Chair referred to 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.

He briefly referred to the issue of the language regime highlighted in the two letters above. He regretted that due to the technical limitations of the virtual format the Presidency could only offer translations in the three chosen languages (i.e. English, French and German) during the Virtual COSAC.

Mr KRICHBAUM welcomed the Italian proposal to continue to hold a session on the rule of law. He went on to say that meeting twice in six months was not seizing the full potential of COSAC and suggested to continue to meet more often. In this context, he mentioned the format of the informal exchanges via videoconference, which the German Presidency had organized during the past six months with Chief Negotiator Michel BARNIER, Vice-President of the Commission Vra JOUROVÁ, Commissioner Didier REYNDEERS and Executive Vice-President of the Commission Margrethe VESTAGER. This “COSAC Agora” had received very positive feedback both by the representatives of the European institutions, who had been invited as keynote speakers, as well as by the participating COSAC Chairs. Mr KRICHBAUM concluded by saying that it would be an achievement of COSAC to initiate its own dialogue on the rule of law in connection with the publication of the European Commission’s report.

3. Session I: “Aktuelle Stunde” - “Restart for the transatlantic relations?”

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German *Bundestag*

Mr Guido WOLF, German *Bundesrat*, stressed that it was important that COSAC reacted to current political developments. Therefore, the “Aktuelle Stunde” (current affairs) session could be a new format bringing new life to the COSAC discussions. Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, briefly introduced the topic by noting that transatlantic relations had never been easy but had always been indispensable in order to provide for more stability in the world. He expressed his belief that the greater part of Europe welcomed the result of the elections held in the USA.

During the debate that followed, 17 speakers took the floor. In their interventions, parliamentarians expressed their satisfaction with the US elections result.

Ms Dita CHARANZOVÁ, European Parliament, who was first to intervene, noted that the new US Administration would enable the revival of cooperation between the EU and the USA. She stressed that today, more than ever before, the world needed the two of the biggest economic and security powers to work together in many areas: to fight the COVID-19 virus; to promote digital transformation; to strengthen common security and the rules-based multilateral system, including the World Trade Organization (WTO) framework; to tackle the climate change; to fight any decline in democracy and human rights. Ms CHARANZOVÁ reassured participants that the European Parliament would also play its role in building this alliance and that European Parliament President David Maria SASSOLI had already invited US President-elect Joe BIDEN to address the European Parliament.

Many parliamentarians, including Mr KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Ms Radvil MORK NAIT -MIKUL NIEN , Lithuanian *Seimas*, referred to several of US President-elect BIDEN’s public commitments and welcomed in particular the intention of the USA to re-join the Paris Agreement and to strive for carbon neutrality by 2050.

Ms HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, noted that it was important to be able to expect predictability from the side of the USA, following the elections result, while Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Nationalrat*, stressed the significance of going back to normality so that the focus would be laid on the most important issues, including the role of China, rule of law and human rights, climate change, the fight against terrorism and extremism and the restarting of negotiations relating to the economy.

Lord KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, highlighted the fact that US President-elect BIDEN was an internationalist, with a strong record as US Senator and Vice-President. He also referred to the President-elect’s strong Irish roots, while noting that this would not be a game changer as he had respect for the Institutions and would not want to interfere. Mr Neale RICHMOND, Irish *Houses of Oireachtas*, also stressed the fact that US President-elect supported multilateralism, referring to his statements, echoed by the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, that there would be no US-UK trade deal if the UK would not respect the commitments of the Withdrawal Agreement, bringing focus on the Internal Market Bill.

Mr Dimitrios KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, also noted his optimism for renewed transatlantic relations and his belief in a US-EU partnership. However, he emphasised that it would be a mistake not to be realistic and to just fall back into the pre-2016 period as if nothing happened in between and stressed the importance for the EU to keep emancipating itself in security and foreign policy terms. Mr Pere Joan PONS SAMPIETRO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, also stressed the importance of putting the Union’s strategic autonomy high on the agenda and noted, amongst others, that current technological and geopolitical changes would require from the EU to gain geopolitical power in the coming years. Similarly, Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Sénat*, noted that the elections result meant the return to multilateralism but also reminded colleagues that domestic forces in US - that led to the “America first” approach - were still influential; reaching out to US Congress and the new Administration for establishing good working relationships with the EU was crucial. He stressed that the EU should not accept a situation where it simply

followed the US, but rather to use this historic opportunity to pursue strategic autonomy and to restart the transatlantic relations as mutual reinforcing dynamics. In addition, Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, warned that, although the US Presidential election result was a positive signal, there should be cautiousness and reminded colleagues that Europe had stopped being a priority for the USA a while ago, with the country focussing instead on Asia. Mr SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, also observed that there was a big chance for multilateral policy now, including going back to WHO and reactivating the Iran deal, but stressed the need to maintain realistic expectations.

With respect to trade policy, Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, emphasised that the US and the EU should pursue the same strategy within WTO in order to counter unfair competition. Mr Andrej ERNIGOJ, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, referred to the EU-Japan and EU-Canada agreements as good steps in this area and called for re-establishing contacts with respect to TTIP, especially when China had signed the world's largest regional trade agreement. He highlighted health, environment and the rule of law as important elements in the framework of such agreements. Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, observed that the last years showed that the US needed the EU just as much as the latter needed the former, and he focused on the economic part of this partnership and on how to create a level playing field with China. He stressed that the EU had common goals with the USA in this area, especially in protecting SMEs from unfair competition from China due to the circumstances applying there.

Mr Bogdan KLICH, Polish *Senat*, concentrated in his intervention on the defence area and noted that while there were tensions between the allies within the Euro-Atlantic community at the political level, this was not the case with respect to the military level. Mr KLICH expressed hope that Mr Biden's election would mean reduction in tensions and more cooperation in the area of defence spending, trade, climate change and the Iran nuclear deal. He also reminded colleagues that work should continue within the EU within the framework of the European Defence Fund and PESCO. Ms MORKAITIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, acknowledged that the US were a strategic partner and drew attention to Russia and its threatening attitude including nuclear threats, while emphasising that this is an example uniting us with the US.

Mr Joe McHUGH, Irish *Houses of Oireachtas*, welcomed an enhanced cooperation in the area of climate, trade, and international relations, but also brought up the question of how national Parliaments could help to promote interconnections with the US and how to enable a proper public discourse. Finally, Mr Claude KERN, French *Sénat*, focused on the energy sector and welcomed the opportunity to correct cases of extraterritoriality of US. He referred to the North Stream pipeline in the Baltics and to interferences of the Americans in activities carried out from European legally operating companies.

Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, also made suggestions to consider meeting more often within COSAC via videoconference and to organise a debate between COSAC and the US Congress, a suggestion that was positively received by Mr KRICHBAUM, Mr LOPATKA and Ms THILLAYE. Mr KRICHBAUM said that the suggestion would be discussed within the COSAC Troika and that it would be in particular up to the forthcoming Presidency to follow up on this.

4. Session II: Lessons learnt from the corona crisis - Cooperation in the EU in the event of pandemics and in health care

Keynote Speakers: Dr Thomas GEBHART, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Health; Dr Andrea AMMON, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the German *Bundestag*

Mr Guido WOLF, German *Bundesrat*, opened his address by stating that the second wave of the pandemic showed in a very dramatic way how vulnerable our societies and our health systems were when faced with such an aggressive virus. On 18 November 2020, both the German *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat* voted to

approve a law in this regard ('Third law to protect the population in the event of an epidemic situation of national importance'), with which freedom-limiting measures in the fight against corona pandemic had been placed on a solid legal basis. He underlined that the urgency of measures should not result in national Parliaments being left out from the decision-making. He explained that in Germany, the federal states (*Länder*) and the federal government coordinated their actions in the fight against the coronavirus. Better coordination on European level was also necessary because the spread of the virus did not stop at national borders.

Dr Andrea AMMON, Director of the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), started her intervention with a brief overview of the current epidemiological situation of COVID-19 in the EU.

As of 27 November 2020, 12 million cases had been reported in the EU/EEA and the UK, including more than 300.000 deaths. A slight decrease of some parameters monitored by ECDC could be observed. One was the 14-day case notification rate for the EU and EEA countries and the UK, and the second parameter that appeared to have started to decline was overall positive cases from all the tests for COVID-19 for the EU/EEA and the UK, meaning a lower percentage of tests that had been taken yielded a positive result. She underlined, however, that overall and, in most countries, the positive rate was still very high.

Dr AMMON named two parameters that were increasing: death notification and intensive care unit occupancy. While the recent trends gave hope that the measures had an effect and some countries could have already gone past the second wave, many countries had probably not. She stressed that, from the epidemiological point of view, the situation in Europe did not indicate public health measures could be relaxed.

She gave an overview of the instruments available to the ECDC, EU institutions and the EU Member States. One of its central instruments was the European Surveillance System (TESSy), which collected all data reported by Member States. Another instrument was the EU Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), in which Member States reported and exchanged available information and data. A third instrument was the Center's Epidemic Intelligence and Surveillance Teams, which collected daily data on COVID-19 cases and deaths based on reports from health authorities, and published regular updates on the ECDC website.

Dr AMMON said the ECDC worked closely with the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. She stated that its most intensive cooperation was with the Member States themselves, adding that the ECDC had COVID-19 contact points in the Member States with whom meetings were held on a weekly basis.

Dr AMMON said that throughout the duration of the pandemic, the ECDC had supported the Member States by providing risk assessments and a scientific background. The ECDC regularly updated their risk assessments and guidance documents. In addition, Dr AMMON stated that the ECDC had intensified its cooperation with other centers for disease prevention and control at the global level, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the USA, China, Canada and Africa.

Dr AMMON underlined that it was too early to draw clear conclusions from the pandemic, however, the current situation would offer a unique and important opportunity to draw lessons on how international organizations and countries could better prepare for future pandemics.

She outlined the major challenges for cross-border cooperation that lay ahead:

1. Unpreparedness: The preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the Member States showed that significant investment was needed.
2. Surveillance: Member States still faced challenges in setting up robust population based surveillance systems to deliver reliable, timely and comparable data.

3. Testing and contact tracing: Another challenge for countries was to increase and maintain a high testing and tracing capacity. She underlined that rapid tracing of contacts and subsequent reduction of contacts remained critical to contain transmission at all stages of the epidemic. She said contact tracing apps could only serve as a complementary system.

In conclusion, Dr AMMON said communication remained a key challenge, since an appropriate understanding of the situation among the population was crucial for managing the pandemic. She said pandemic fatigue, misinformation and disinformation were ongoing challenges faced by many Member States.

Dr Thomas GEBHART, German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Ministry of Health, said the German Presidency had tackled a number of different issues with the aim to develop a common approach to combat the pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic had shown some deficiencies. Acting effectively together was in the interest of all Member States of the EU. Despite the progress being reached on the development of vaccines, the pandemic would drag on into next year. He also assumed that it might not be the last infectious disease of this magnitude. This gave the EU and its Member States cause for drawing lessons from the current crisis.

The German Presidency focused on three main areas for a common approach and wanted to endorse Council Conclusions in the EPSCO on 2 December 2020. Firstly, the Presidency has been engaged in the strengthening of the ECDC. Important in this context was a comparable data basis between the Member States, the expansion of the Early Warning System and an increase in the financial and human resources of the ECDC.

On the supply of pharmaceuticals, he secondly underlined that the EU should ensure more transparency, diverse supply chains and expanding the active ingredient production in the EU to reduce dependencies.

Thirdly, on data policy Dr GEBHART said Europe needed to adopt its own approach, based on its values, thus departing from the American approach, which emphasized the role of the private sector, as well as the Chinese approach, which relied on a state managed model. This included reliable and trustworthy rules on data sharing and interoperable infrastructures to enhance cooperation in health care and research.

Finally, he stressed that part of reaching a greater strategic autonomy of the EU was to engage globally. He mentioned the recent Council Conclusions on the reform of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the COVAX Facility aiming at fair access for every country to the vaccines.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, reminded the participants that the outbreak of COVID-19 dated back nearly exactly one year, referred to the progress made during this time and opened the debate, in which 17 speakers took the floor.

A number of speakers stated that the pandemic had shown weaknesses in the European project (Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, Ms Ria OOMEN RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Liliana TANGUY, French *Assemblée nationale*, Ms Saskia LUDWIG, German *Bundestag*, Mr Ioannis BOURNOUS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Nik PREBIL, Slovenian *Državni zbor*), with some mentioning lack of solidarity (Ms Liliana TANGUY, French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Joao DIAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*) and lack of cooperation (Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Ms Skevi KOUTRA-KOUKOUMA, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Mr Joao DIAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*).

In this context, the need to continue and deepen cooperation and coordination between the Member States was referred to by many speakers.

Ms KOUTRA-KOUKOUMA, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, called for a Union that prioritized health and was better prepared for crisis response and better equipped to protect its citizens. Mr Mark

DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, expressed the view that the EU needed to reduce its dependency on third countries with regard to protective and medical equipment.

Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, called for a structured, coordinated and timely response at EU level, while Mr Nik PREBIL, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, observed that Europe needed a uniform approach as well as deeper cooperation and solidarity, yet the response of the EU had been slow. Both emphasized the importance of science and knowledge.

In their interventions, some parliamentarians expressed their support for strengthening the ECDC (Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Mr Ruben MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*). Mr MORENO suggested establishing a European agency on alarm and critical situation, which could be formed within the ECDC if its mandate were to be changed. Ms Ria OOMEN RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, and Mr Ruairi Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *House of Oireachtas*, underlined the need for harmonizing rules for traveling in Europe in times of a pandemic. Referring to the limited competence of the EU in health policy, Ms OOMEN RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, asked what could be done to allow for a better coordination with and between the Member States without changing the Treaty. In a similar vein, Ms Liliana TANGUY, French *Assemblée nationale*, asked how coordination between the Member States could be enhanced especially with regard to vaccines. Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, suggested that the question of transferring competences to the EU warranted a serious discussion.

Mr Ioannis BOURNOUS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* and Ms OOMEN RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, expressed their concern that the set budget was too small. Mr BOURNOUS added that EU institutions could consider a health care cohesion strategy in Europe. In this context, he emphasized the importance of accurate access to health care for everyone.

Mr Bogdan KLICH, Polish *Senat*, emphasized that, in his view, all Member States should support the recovery fund, and the fund should be excluded from the ongoing political debate.

Some delegates referred to the availability of a vaccine. Mr Pere Joan PONS SAMPIETRO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, expressed the view that vaccine had to be made available to all and warned against disinformation on COVID-19 and stressed it was important to address this in the future. Mr KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, said that it was important to convince people to get vaccinated to protect others.

Some parliamentarians referred to digitalization in their interventions. Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, underlined the need for more digitalization. While agreeing that digitalization could provide solutions in the short term, Ms Saskia LUDWIG, German *Bundestag*, expressed her concern that digitalization could in the medium term affect freedom, democracy and fundamental rights. She said a European data space was needed, but appropriate attention should be paid to what kind of data was being collected. Finally, she enquired to what extent the EU recovery fund was used for digitalization.

Mr Lukas SAVICKAS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, was of the opinion that the EU had successfully passed the test of solidarity, unity and cooperation, but underlined that more efforts were needed, for example in coordinating COVID-19 testing and improving the functioning of the Single Market and the Schengen Area, with particular focus on strengthening resilience of the EU.

Mr Joao DIAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, said that the response to the pandemic had in some cases amounted to an attack on people's rights and freedoms. He further underlined the need to revitalize the economy.

Ms Sigridur ANDERSEN, Icelandic *Alþingi*, expressed her concern regarding the state of democracy in Europe and deplored the lack of parliamentary scrutiny when it came to COVID-19 measures, stating that many far-reaching measures had been adopted via government decrees, without appropriate parliamentary involvement. In response, Mr KRICHBAUM noted that the German *Bundestag* had held over 70 debates

on measures condemning the coronavirus both at executive and legislative level. He underlined that although measures taken had a considerable effect on citizens, the aim was to protect those who were most vulnerable.

In his response, Dr Thomas GEBHART underlined that it was important to take note of the lessons learnt, improve rapid reaction, and work up on digitalization and data management. He reminded delegates that the European approach to data policy was different to the one employed by China, for example, because the patient would remain the sole authority over the right to his or her data. Dr GEBHART expressed support to the idea of enhancing cross-border exchange of data, while noting that the competence would remain with the Member States.

In her closing remarks, Dr Andrea AMMON noted that the Member States were vested with the responsibility to decide on the specific measures, further noting that the ECDC had received requests during the crisis that did not match with the competences conferred to the agency. She noted that not all power could or should be transferred to the EU level since the pandemic was also local and knowledge on combatting diseases relied on local experiences. She assured the delegates that the ECDC fully complied with the data protection regulation of the Union (GDPR) in its processing of the data and only stored information related to age, gender and disease parameters from which it was impossible to identify individuals. She added that the ECDC only used public data, which would further dispel any concerns about data protection issues.

Referring to digitalization, Dr AMMON noted that the challenges related particularly to technical issues and that therefore cross-border coordination was indispensable. She noted, however, that these technical solutions could be easily found through constant and proper dialogue. Dr AMMON referred to the cooperation in developing mobile infection notification applications and noted that this was the first time in history such an endeavor had been undertaken to this extent. Finally, Dr AMMON took up the issue of vaccinations and underlined the need to coordinate prioritization and exchange of information in this regard.

5. Session III: Review of the German EU Council Presidency

Keynote Speaker: Dr Angela MERKEL, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

Moderator: Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, opened the session by stressing that the German EU Council Presidency had been dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic and coping with its consequences. Nevertheless, the Presidency had to deal with various other topics. He mentioned particularly the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU and thanked Mr BARNIER for his negotiation management as well as the close contact he maintained with the members of COSAC. Addressing the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), he regretted that they were currently blocked by Poland and Hungary. This was to be overcome, in order to provide the needed financial aid from the recovery programme Next Generation EU soon. Referring to the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) Mr KRICHBAUM stated that Treaty changes should not be excluded from the outset as a possible result. Therefore, national Parliaments should be involved in the Conference on an equal footing with the European Parliament.

In her keynote speech, Dr Angela MERKEL, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, acknowledged that the coronavirus had shaped Germany's EU Council Presidency and challenged the Union to learn how to find shared approaches to overcome the crisis. This was echoed in the motto of the German Presidency "Together for Europe's Recovery" and a lot had been achieved in this regard during the past months. Lessons had already been learnt compared to the first wave of the pandemic but it was foreseeable that the EU would have to deal with the economic consequences of the crisis for years to come.

Dr MERKEL emphasized the need to retain convergence and cohesiveness of the Union despite these challenges and expressed her hope that negotiations in the Council would eventually lead to the abandoning of current vetoes against the approval of the comprehensive recovery fund.

In view of the upcoming summit on 10 and 11 December 2020, Dr MERKEL touched upon several topics that were going to be discussed. She reiterated the Union's determination to reach a deal with the United Kingdom before the end of the year yet stressed that this was not going to happen at all costs. Dr MERKEL praised the work of the Task Force for the Relations with the United Kingdom (UKTF) and underlined the Presidency's full support of Chief Negotiator Michel BARNIER.

Regarding climate neutrality, she emphasized Germany's support for the European Commission's emissions reduction target of at least 55 percent by 2030 and said the Presidency aimed to announce an ambitious European reduction target at the Climate Summit on 12 December 2020. She conceded that consultations on the European Commission's legislative proposals, expected by June 2021, were going to be difficult. Every Member State brought its expectations to the table, part of the German position being, for example, that it wanted to commence CO₂ emissions trade for transport and buildings. Dr MERKEL highlighted the good cooperation between the Trio partners in this and other areas like digitization, referring to the development of a European digital single market as an important objective, in this regard.

Dr MERKEL expressed her hope for a kick-start of the CoFE during the German Presidency, and said that the main focus should not be on treaty changes. The aim of the Conference should rather be to listen to and meet citizens' expectations, and if this implied changes to the Treaties, then that option should not be excluded either. Dr MERKEL voiced support for the European Commission's New Pact on Migration and Asylum and said that it addressed the right tasks, namely well-managed external borders, cooperation with home countries and a fair treatment of migrants and refugees who were coming to Europe.

Among the topics on the foreign policy agenda, Dr MERKEL named relations between the European Union and Turkey and future relations with the administration of the US president-elect Joe BIDEN. She said she was grateful for the unified stance of the Union regarding the sanctions against Belarus as well as with regard to the Novichok poisoning of Alexei NAVALNY. Dr MERKEL acknowledged the progress achieved by Albania and North Macedonia but said that the Bulgarian position had made the beginning of accession talks with North Macedonia at an intergovernmental conference during the German Presidency unlikely. She announced a meeting of members of the European Council with African Union high-level representatives that was going to take place on the eve of the Summit on 9 December and expressed her hope that a physical Africa Summit could be held under the Portuguese Presidency. Regarding the agreement on the protection of investment with China, the Presidency was going to undertake a new attempt to negotiate at the beginning of December.

During the ensuing debate, 25 speakers took the floor. There was an expression of general support for a speedy adoption of the comprehensive recovery fund and the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) as well as for the need to couple the Union's economic recovery with Europe's green and digital ambitions. Several Members referred to the conditionality mechanism and encouraged the German Presidency to stay firm in its position to tie payment of the funds to rule of law principles. Some Members made reference to CoFE, stressing that the process was yet to start in December (Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*), that national Parliaments needed to obtain a more important role in the process (Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*) and that the European youth should not be forgotten in its context (Mr Christian BUCHMAN, Austrian *Bundesrat*). A number of Members pointed out the need to revamp transatlantic relations and the global multilateral order.

Ms Gabriella GIAMMANCO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, stressed the need to review the EU's relationship with China in order to ensure fair competition and avoid compromises on European fundamental values. Mr José María SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, shared this view,

emphasizing that the agreement on the protection of investment with China needed to be approached with caution. Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, called for a unified European stance vis-à-vis Turkey's destabilizing influence, a view backed by Ms Christiana EROTKRITOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, welcomed the introduction of the "Aktuelle Stunde" to the COSAC and thanked the German Presidency for the good cooperation. Mr Andrej CERNIGOJ, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, raised the question of a German vision to the question of external border controls in the context of the European Commission's New Pact on Migration and Asylum. He said that the incoming Slovenian Presidency was looking forward to continuing the work of the German Presidency in the second half of 2021.

Lord Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, expressed his hope that the EU and UK would succeed in concluding a broad agreement. The new relationship had to mutually benefit the more than 500 million citizens involved. Mr Domas GRIŠKEVIČIUS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, thanked the German Presidency for its continued support regarding Lithuania's environmental and nuclear safety vis-à-vis Belarus' nuclear power plants. He stressed the need to debunk misinformation and counter hybrid and cyber threats within the EU. Mr Christian BUCHMAN, Austrian *Bundesrat*, thanked his colleagues for their solidarity in view of the recent terrorist attacks in Vienna. Mr Richard HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, explained Hungary's position with regard to the conditionality mechanism, stating that this was not conform to the agreement reached at the July European Summit and that any link between the rule of law and the financial interest of the Union required Treaty changes. Gabriela CREŢU, Romanian *Senat*, referred to the unfinished reform of the European Monetary Union, pointing out that the debts of each Member State were going to be even higher after the crisis.

Vice-President Dita CHARANZOVÁ, European Parliament, addressed the need to ensure a cost-free vaccine for all European citizens and said the Union needed to help Member States to deploy funds of the recovery package quickly. Ms Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, addressed the need to revamp the EU-Mercosur trade agreement. Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, underlined the need for a clear strategic doctrine with regard to European defence. Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Sénat*, referred to the issue of Catalonia's quest for independence. First Vice-President Roberta METSOLA, European Parliament, stressed the need to move from emergency solutions to a long-lasting framework with regard to migration, which also took into account the toxic narrative of populism surrounding this topic.

Ms Roxana M NZATU, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, welcomed the adoption of conclusions with regard to the situation of mobile seasonal workers as they were illustrative of the need to protect workers' rights especially in times of crisis. Ms Dušica STOJKOVIĆ, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, said Serbia had accepted to continue negotiations under the new methodology and hoped for a speedy start to the intergovernmental conference. Ms Rudina HAJDARI, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, explained that Albania was currently undertaking its judiciary reform.

In her response, Dr MERKEL said there was no explicit need to review EU-China relations as European values had always been a part of this relationship, yet acknowledged that China had become an important global player with multifaceted strategic interests. Dr MERKEL argued that the challenge was to find the right balance for EU-China relations also in view of European interests as there was not going to be any relevant global agreement, for example on climate neutrality, without China's support. In a similar vein, a balance needed to be found for Europe's relationship with Turkey. Despite legitimate criticism of Turkey's foreign policy, it had to be acknowledged that Turkey had taken in more than 3 million refugees from Syria alone. Dr MERKEL said there was not going to be a quick solution to the issue of migration as compromises needed to be found between countries at the European borders and countries with high numbers in secondary movement. Europe needed safe and orderly migration and she thus supported the European

Commission's proposals. She stressed the need for more legal formats of exchange, for example by means of education and training, and a deepened cooperation with countries of origin.

With regard to CoFE Dr MERKEL said the pandemic had shown the importance of good coordination on a European level. The question was whether the problems could be solved on the intergovernmental level or whether it was advisable to transfer competences to the European Union, with the latter making Treaty changes necessary. Dr MERKEL said she would not approach this issue merely from a legal point of view but would rather seek answers as to how the European project could be improved. The Member States were masters of the Treaties and it was important to safeguard the sovereignty of the Member States. At the same time there were areas, for example the development and production of a vaccine, where it would be constructive to have the European Commission negotiate on behalf of the European citizens.

On the issue of Brexit, Dr MERKEL said she too hoped an agreement could be reached and that contingency measures were the very last resort. With regard to nuclear power plants in Belarus, she said the Presidency was well aware of the difficult situation for the neighbouring countries. On the subject of the dissemination of online content promoting terrorism, Dr MERKEL said she also hoped to finish trilogue talks soon, but noted that the issue was controversial. She went on to say that if the recovery fund and the MFF were not adopted by the end of the year, the Union would have to cope with the twelfth part of its budget each month and with no recovery fund from January onwards. She called for willingness to compromise on the part of all involved, but made it clear that rule of law was the basic principle of the European project.

With regard to the Western Balkan countries, Dr MERKEL pointed out that Serbia's relations to the Kosovo* remained a prerequisite for the next steps in the accession negotiations.

Finally, Dr MERKEL called for realism with regard to climate neutrality as the carbon emissions reduction target of 55 percent already required a considerable effort on the part of all Member States. Discussions on how to achieve this target could be expected to last throughout 2021. Dr MERKEL said she hoped for less regulatory and more market-based instruments in the matter and that the Union should aim for a transformation that was feasible, avoiding to confront its industries with an unsolvable problem.

With regard to the big global players like China or USA she saw the urgent need for the EU to act unified and coherently. She appealed to everybody to show tolerance, respect for the different cultures and the will to find compromises.

6. Session IV: The Future of the European Union

Keynote Speaker: Dr Ursula von der LEYEN, President of the European Commission

Moderator: Mr Guido WOLF, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions, German *Bundesrat*

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, initially congratulated the President of the European Commission for being in office for exactly one year wishing her luck for the challenges ahead. An important forum to take up these challenges was the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE). National Parliaments in their important function as linkage between citizens and civil society on the one hand, and the European level on the other hand, expected to be adequately involved in this Conference. Mr KRICHBAUM further mentioned several ambitious projects of the Commission, inter alia regarding dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. As an early initiative in this context, he emphasized the SURE programme (Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency). A number of Member States now hoped for a timely approval of the EU's long term budget that was interlinked with the recovery fund.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council and to the opinion of the ICJ on the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

In her speech, Dr von der LEYEN, focused on the corona crisis and the tools already available to the EU to combat the crisis, as well as the role of the European Commission in securing the vaccine, the contracts with pharmaceuticals and its production in Europe, leaving to the Member States the national vaccination plans.

References were also made to the Recovery Plan Next Generation EU, to create a more sustainable, a more digital and a more resilient Europe with EUR 750 billion worth, and to the new European budget, which needed a solution to overcome the differences that made the two Member States to block this package. Dr von der LEYEN reiterated that a conditionality mechanism was appropriate, proportionate and necessary and, if legal doubts subsisted, they needed to be brought to the European Court of Justice, avoiding the delay in assisting Member States to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Dr von der LEYEN recalled that the impact of the crisis that could have led to a fragmentation of the Single Market, and pointed out that Europe was putting forward a plan not only to repair the economy, but also to prepare for the future, with a focus on solidarity and with joint investments.

On the national recovery plans, she underlined the importance of aligning these plans with the European Green Deal and the climate-neutral objective, with the use of clean technologies, modernisation of buildings, digitalisation, the resilience of the economy and the Paris Agreement goals, and expressed the hope that the US would re-join the Paris Agreement.

Other issues were raised by Dr von der LEYEN, such as the multilateral rules-based system and the work with partners such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the World Health Organization (WHO), during the crisis, the cooperation with the Western Balkans and African countries on medical equipment and with doctors for the Syrian refugees. The COVAX Facility, as a way to guarantee that the middle-income countries have access to equitable and affordable vaccines, was also mentioned.

Referring to the national Parliaments, Dr von der LEYEN welcomed the continuous debate and activities during the pandemic, ensuring that the epidemiological crisis did not turn into a crisis of democracy, and reiterated that this decisive role of Europe's democracies was why Parliaments would also play a key role at the Conference on the future of Europe, which should start before the end of the year.

During the debate that followed, 26 speakers took the floor. Several speakers focused on the importance of the national Parliaments' role in the CoFE, as well as of the citizens participation (Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*, Mr Neal RICHMOND, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Spanish *Cortes Generales*), with Roberta METSOLA, European Parliament, highlighting the need of bringing the EU closer to citizens and for a deepened dialogue with the national Parliaments and developing a true parliamentary dimension of the CoFE, while Mr Marko POGA NIK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, stated that Slovenia would be focused on this discussion also during the Slovenian EU Council Presidency. Mr Daniel FREUND, European Parliament, pointed out that there is an urgent need for EU reforms and that the CoFE should be rapidly launched, while Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, and Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Bundesrat*, mentioned the importance of the Conference. Mr BATTELLI added that this would be the opportunity to promote common values. On the topics that should be covered by the Conference, Mr Dario STEFÀNO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, underlined that it should be centred on policies and Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, said they would be conditioned by the pandemic crisis.

Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, also mentioned the need for better decision-making process in the EU. The cooperation among the Member States during the crisis was also stressed by several participants, namely Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, Mr Neal RICHMOND, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, and Mr Nik PREBIL, Slovenian *Državni zbor*.

On the rule of law conditionality mechanism, Mr Tibor BANA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, said that the institutions could not apply this rule to the allocation of EU funds without clear definition of conditions, while Ms Roberta METSOLA, European Parliament, underlined the need to ensure protection of the EU budget under the rule of law conditionality mechanism. Mr Neal RICHMOND considered it at the heart of future Europe and Ms Isabel ONETO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, said that, even without interference in the national Parliaments' autonomy, this question affected the whole EU and a solution should be sought in order not to compromise its future. Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, considered that the legality of the process should be decided by the European Court of Justice. Mr Bogdan KLICH, Polish *Senat*, also alluded to the existing connection between the European values, such as the rule of law, and the European funds and the solidarity principle.

Referring to the corona crisis, Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, considered the urgency of providing the support to European industry, especially in pharmaceutical area and the data protection and called for strict rules for big-tech, while Mr Marko POGA NIK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, referred to the problems the European economy was facing. Mr Domagoj MILOŠEVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, highlighted the importance of Small and Medium Enterprises and the Single Market. Mr. Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Bundesrat*, thanked the European Commission for its effective work in the procurement of vaccines.

The relations with the Western Balkans and the accession process were pointed out by Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*, Mr Domagoj MILOŠEVIĆ, Ms Liliana TANGUY, French *Assemblée nationale*, and Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, Serbian *National Assembly*, who also considered important the participation of the Western Balkans in the CoFE as a way to promote reforms and ease the enlargement process.

Lord KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, alluded to the shared values, joint recovery and the joint climate objectives of the UK and the EU.

Mr Nicos TORNARITIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, expressed concerns about the international law violations and the protection of the external borders of the EU, bearing in mind Turkey's actions on Cyprus and Greece. Migration and the need for solidarity was a key point for Mr Nikitas KAKLAMANIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*.

Climate issues were also addressed by some speakers. Mr Marko PAVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, welcomed a commitment by China to become carbon neutral by 2060, and the promise made by the new US President-elect. Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, supported investments in climate protection and informed participants of Finland's commitment to use half of the recovery funds for climate and green recovery. She also underlined the importance of improving resilience through biodiversity.

Mr Gatis EGLITIS, Latvian *Saeima*, raised the question of the appointment of new Head of the Commission Representation in the country.

Dr von der LEYEN replied to the questions and comments regarding the importance of creating solid structures to deal with crises, pointing out the development of the European Health Union, the enlarged competences of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), along with the setting-up of a new agency the Health Emergency preparedness and Response Authority (HERA). She stated that the EU needed more innovation, technology, continuity in the renewable energy, the development of a growth strategy based on circular economy, the digitalization as crucial for the Green Deal objectives, a human centric way to deal with data, the maintenance of the level playing field in what concerns Brexit. Importance was also given to the enlargement policies, the new accession methodology and the progress in the Western Balkans. On the CoFE, Dr von der LEYEN underlined that it was an important process, welcomed the participation of national Parliaments, as well as

in the executive board, and expressed support for maintaining gender balance and inclusion of young people.

8. Session V – ‘Europe’s role in the world - A responsible partnership with Africa’

Keynote Speaker: Professor Dr Horst KÖHLER, President of the Federal Republic of Germany (2004-2010)

Moderator: Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German *Bundestag*

Mr WOLF underlined that partnership with Africa was essential for the future of the EU, reminding colleagues that deepening relations with Africa was one of the German EU Council Presidency priorities and in this regard, the Presidency had planned to organise a summit with the African Union to define a common strategy for the coming years. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the summit had to be postponed. Mr WOLF stressed Africa’s enormous potential for economic growth from which the EU could also benefit, since both needed to address the same challenges, for example with respect to climate change and digitalisation. He stressed that the times of the donor-beneficiary relationship between Europe and Africa were over, and the EU had to build new relations with Africa on an equal footing. In conclusion, Mr WOLF highlighted the importance of better communication between the EU and Africa in the future, and underlined that the prompt implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could open up new opportunities for cooperation.

Professor Dr KÖHLER welcomed the attention COSAC would give to Africa, especially during the challenging times marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the transition happening in the United States, the post-Brexit negotiations and the concerns about the future of the EU. He acknowledged the significant role Africa could play for the future of the EU and focused his intervention on the importance of forging a new economic and strategic partnership between the two continents, on an equal footing and with due respect to reciprocal responsibility.

Professor Dr KÖHLER began by quoting positive demographic trends in Africa, compared to the demographic downturn being faced by Europe. He underlined that it would partly depend on the EU’s actions whether a young generation in Africa could become a transformative force for economic growth, peace and stability. He continued by noting that many African countries were undergoing socioeconomic and democratic transition. However, far too few jobs were being created in Africa, and the continent was still primarily a supplier of raw materials, whereas value creation itself, which generated jobs and income, was taking place elsewhere. Professor Dr KÖHLER went on to emphasize the economic and strategic importance of Africa for Europe, since both continents had common interests in a rule-based international order and especially since Europe needed new allies, markets and trading partners to maintain its prosperity, amid global economic upheaval and to continue promoting its values and interests worldwide.

As a prerequisite for establishing a new partnership between Europe and Africa, Professor Dr KÖHLER underlined a question of the attitude towards each other and added that Europe should reshape its established perception and acknowledge Africa as an independent political actor, with its own visions and its own options for action. He also warned that Europe had ceased to be the only possible partner to Africa and, as an example, pointed out China. Against this backdrop, Professor Dr KÖHLER concluded that it was in Europe’s own interest to offer a better partnership to Africa.

He welcomed Africa’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak, and noted that under the leadership of the African Union (AU), Africa had reacted early and decisively and formed coordinated cross-country strategies to fight the pandemic, whilst the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention had shown

foresight and leadership. He also acknowledged the AU's commitment to democracy, human rights and good governance and its Agenda 2063, the vision of the future of Africa, and contemplated whether Europe was engaging enough in discussion with African intellectuals and think tanks. He also recalled the fact that the first international visit of Dr Ursula von der LEYEN, after she became President of the European Commission, was to the AU Commission in Addis Ababa, a visit which was well received by African partners and marked a new era in the EU-Africa relations. He continued by welcoming the draft Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, which the Commission had published in March the same year, as a reference point for the discussion, including in the national Parliaments of Africa and Europe, while also noting that both sides must come to a clear understanding of their respective "top priorities" for cooperation.

As a second essential element of a substantive new partnership between Europe and Africa, Professor Dr KÖHLER underlined the need for reciprocal responsibility. He recalled positive developments in Africa with regard to the issue of good governance, namely in areas such as the rule of law, democratic participation, education and health although there was a setback in the last year. He emphasized that Europe must consider whether the Economic Partnership Agreements had provided African countries with sufficient support for the development of agriculture and industry, and whether and how they had contributed to the implementation of the large-scale African domestic market. Referring to agricultural policy, a particularly sensitive issue for Europe, Professor Dr KÖHLER suggested a mutual agricultural transition that would bring benefits to both continents. Europe should convert from industrial to ecological agriculture and use public funds to reward ecological value creation rather than land ownership, and, in turn, Africa would thus have more space for its own productive agricultural business, generating jobs and income for millions of people.

Since certain structural reforms in Africa and Europe were mutually dependent, Professor Dr KÖHLER underlined the need for new ways of thinking highlighting the programme *La Verticale Afrique-Méditerranée-Europe*. He stressed that European business associations should develop ideas and strategies, preferably with African partners, on how they could contribute to making Africa a new growth hub within the global economy.

In conclusion, Professor Dr KÖHLER underlined that a vaccine against COVID-19 must be made available to Africans as a "global public good". He also underlined that Europe should advocate for debt relief for African countries. He continued by highlighting the United Nations' Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement as a political framework for cooperation between the two continents and noted the strength of the EU and the AU in multilateral fora as they together represented around 40 percent of the international community. In this regard, he welcomed the EU's support to the candidacy of Ms Ngozi OKONJO-IWEALA as the new head of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Prior to the opening of the discussion, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Affairs, German *Bundestag*, stressed that parliamentarians needed to accept the criticism that they far too often regarded Africa as a problem in public discourse and not enough as an opportunity. He introduced distinguished invitees and speakers from African countries, which was a novelty to COSAC, and welcomed the fact that Africa was high up on the agenda of the upcoming Portuguese EU Council Presidency.

In the subsequent debate, 15 speakers took the floor, including three speakers from Africa. In their interventions, all parliamentarians welcomed the new impetus planned to be given to EU-Africa relations, which would be sought on an equal footing. The vast majority of speakers acknowledged the importance of Africa for the future of the EU and called for greater EU investment and assistance to Africa with the aim to eradicate poverty, promote education, strengthen health systems, stimulate socioeconomic progress and support the fight against illegal migration and human trafficking.

Ms Lilia BELLIL MANAI, *Assembly of the Representatives of the People* of Tunisia, opened the debate and recalled the crucial importance of political, economic and cultural ties between Europe and Africa. She emphasised good relations and cooperation between Tunisia and the EU, especially in terms of trade, tourism and transport, and continued by underlining the strategic geographic importance of the Maghreb for the EU.

Ms Anna BONFRISCO, European Parliament, stressed the need for the EU to assist Africa in accomplishing greater regional integration, as well as in achieving a prosperous and peaceful Africa governed by its citizens. Mr Brendan HOWLIN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, underlined that the EU must strive to achieve a true partnership with Africa, while Ms Lucia PUTTRICH, German *Bundesrat*, called for a wise implementation of a joint EU-Africa strategy with a focus on addressing common challenges and achieving prosperity. Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, noted a positive outlook for democratic and economic growth in Africa. Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, stressed that tackling the irregular migration largely depended on the consensus within the EU on a new asylum policy, while Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, underlined that the migration crisis had shown the EU's dependence on Africa. He therefore called for a better management of migration flows, notably by establishing better cooperation with countries of origin to address the root causes of migration and suggested setting up migrant camps in third countries. Mr Pere Joan PONS SAMPIETRO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, welcomed the so-called 'Marshall plan' for Africa and called that due attention was given to demographic challenges, migrant and refugee issues and human rights. He concluded that a dialogue on these issues could be a win-win scenario for both continents. Ms Gabriella GIAMMANCO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, also spoke about the need to provide assistance to Africa to decrease migration flows, as well as to support the stabilisation of Libya with a view to saving lives in Mediterranean and tackling human trafficking. Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS and Mr Pere Joan PONS SAMPIETRO called for providing African countries with an access to affordable vaccine against COVID-19 as soon as it was made available. Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Belgian *Sénat*, welcomed the reorientation of the EU's attitude towards Africa. Ms PUTTRICH noted that the EU should rethink its expectations of Africa, while Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, emphasised that the renewed EU partnership with Africa should be linked to development, security and rule of law. She welcomed the participation of African speakers in the panel, and emphasised the importance of cooperation with Africa, especially with regard to rethinking a future partnership and in terms of the situation in the Sahel region. Mr Duarte MARQUES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, confirmed the upcoming Portuguese EU Council Presidency's commitment to Africa. He emphasised the importance of education for achieving gender balance or environment sustainability, and called for greater investment in education, thus creating favourable conditions for future generations in terms of food, schooling and technology. Mr MARQUES concluded that a successful partnership with Africa would also largely depend on Europe's ability to listen to African partners. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVI, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, recalled Africa's geopolitical and economic importance for the EU and argued that the EU should not ignore Africa while becoming a global player. He underlined the Partnership for Peace, Security and Governance and the Partnership on Migration and Mobility, which he deemed vital for both sides. Mr HAJDUKOVI concluded his intervention by welcoming the participation of African speakers and expressed his hope that this practice would continue. Mr Mark DEMESMAEKER, Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Ms Gabriella GIAMMANCO and Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS noted that Africa had other options for potential partners, such as the US, China and Russia, and therefore the EU needed to demonstrate that it was the best partner for Africa in the future. Mr Pere Joan PONS SAMPIETRO also referred to China's influence and interest in Africa.

Ms Emilia MONJOWA LIFAKA, *National Assembly* of Cameroon, supported strengthening of mutual relations between Africa and the EU. She focused her intervention on the need for enhancing the

cooperation and trade relations, energy issues, transfer of technology to African countries and supporting democracy and promoting peace and stability in Africa.

Ms Jeanine MABUNDA, *National Assembly* of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, welcomed the inclusion of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in this new format of dialogue between the EU and African countries. She referred to the Compact with Africa (CwA) initiative, proposed by German Chancellor Dr MERKEL, to promote innovation and investment, and welcomed the direct dialogue. Bearing in mind relations with some EU Member States in the past, Ms MABUNDA expressed the will and readiness to go beyond past visions and build future relations on an equal footing. She underlined the need for greater responsibility and accountability towards the future EU-Africa partnership, from both sides. Speaking about the COVID-19 pandemic, Ms MABUNDA stressed that in terms of the crisis, Africa had been less exposed than Europe or Asia, but the economic shock would be greater in Africa, and called for finding ways to address this issue within the ongoing dialogue on the new partnership between the EU and Africa. She listed a few topics that she thought EU and African countries should focus on in the discussions, namely migration, green transition of African countries and sharing EU's experience in the field of participative democracy. With regard to the migration issue, Ms MABUNDA suggested the opening of more resident opportunities for young people. She concluded by underlining the need for better promotion of economic democracy in Africa, alongside participative democracy.

In his closing remarks, Professor Dr KÖHLER expressed his satisfaction with the large support expressed during the debate to a new partnership between the EU and Africa, which could contribute to an increased awareness of shared interests and challenges. He underlined that Europe could and should have done more in terms of supporting and promoting education in Africa, particularly in rural areas and recalled that relations between Europe and Africa needed to be seen in the geopolitical context of political and climate changes. He especially welcomed the participation and dialogue with African parliamentarians, underlined the importance of interparliamentary cooperation and expressed hope that COSAC would continue to discuss with Africa, while in a reciprocal way the African parliamentarians should discuss with Europe.

9. Closing remarks

Mr WOLF thanked colleagues for the constructive dialogue, both during this session and during the previous sessions, and thanked them for their participation in the conference.

Mr KRICHBAUM echoed these sentiments, and highlighted the value behind the new concept introduced to COSAC of dedicating a session to current affairs. He then gave the floor to Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, to introduce the incoming Portuguese Presidency.

Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, congratulated the German Presidency for their outstanding work during difficult times, especially their efforts to ensure the coordination among the Troika despite circumstances that did not make communication easy. He also thanked the previous Croatian Presidency and welcomed the Slovenian colleagues who were joining the Troika. He assured colleagues that the Portuguese Presidency would continue on the good work of its predecessor, and announced the dates of various interparliamentary meetings to be held, pointing out in particular the date of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, to be held on 11 January 2021, as well as the LXV COSAC to be held on 30 May - 1 June 2021.

Mr KRICHBAUM thanked Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS and briefly referred to the letter presented for co-signing before closing the conference.