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PLENARY MEETING OF THE LXXII COSAC

Budapest, 27-29 October 2024

Contribution of the LXXII COSAC

(C/2024/7493)

The state of the European Union in the year of institutional transition and the 15-year application of the Treaty of Lisbon

- (1) COSAC recognises that in the previous institutional cycle Europe was mostly dominated by multiple crises and crisis responses and consequently, EU Member States and their citizens faced with significant number of emergencies.
- (2) COSAC welcomes the decisions of the European Council of 27 June 2024 on the election of the President of the European Council as well as on the nominations of the President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. In this respect, COSAC expresses its hope that the new European Commission will take office by 1 December 2024.
- (3) COSAC also welcomes the EU headline goals as set out in the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, promoting a Europe that is free and democratic, strong and secure, prosperous and competitive.
- (4) COSAC commemorates the human and material losses of the recent devastating floods in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the series of wildfires in Southern Europe and expresses its solidarity with the victims, their families and the people and communities affected by the severe flooding and wildfires in the respective countries.
- (5) COSAC underlines that these natural disasters also highlight the need to strengthen the EU's preparedness to act on such disasters. In this respect, COSAC recognises that cooperation between EU countries' crisis centres is essential to deal with a multitude of potential risks and crises.
- (6) COSAC notes that the green transition is a necessary step in reducing the EU's energy dependency and tackling climate change and the loss of biodiversity. COSAC recognises that, to step up this green transition, the Green Deal needs an economic and financial base, that ensures sustainable growth and that supports citizens and companies, notably, SMEs, farmers and fishers.
- (7) COSAC appreciates that over the past years, the EU has managed to withstand critical risks to its security of energy supply, regain control over the energy market, and accelerate the transition towards climate neutrality. COSAC points out that affordability of energy for households and industries is critical to ensuring social security and European competitiveness and stresses the importance of encouraging low-carbon energy mixes that can contribute to this, while respecting technological neutrality.
- (8) COSAC points out that the Single Market is one of the EU's greatest achievements, as it facilitates cross-border trade, stimulates growth and boosts innovation, while making citizens' lives much easier. Today, more than thirty years after its inception, the Single Market continues to be a cornerstone and asset of European integration, serving as a powerful catalyst for growth and competitiveness. However, the international environment has profoundly changed, thus highlighting the need to further develop the Single Market in the less integrated policy areas.
- (9) COSAC recognises the importance of Enrico Letta's report on the future of the European single market and calls for collective reflections.
- (10) COSAC stresses the need for the removal of remaining barriers, particularly in relation to services and essential goods, and calls for equal access to the Single Market through improved connectivity as well as for a balanced and effective state aid and competition framework. COSAC also calls on European institutions to strengthen the European capital market union.

- (11) COSAC calls for a renewed and ambitious industrial policy, anchoring and protecting the industrial base of the European prosperity. COSAC emphasizes the need for improving European competitiveness, integrating this objective into all policies, by applying a holistic approach. The adoption of a New European Competitiveness Deal is a key priority in order to restore economic development and create the conditions for sustainable growth, deepen the Single Market, focus on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. COSAC looks forward to swift and decisive progress on the New European Competitiveness Deal by the end of this year.
- (12) COSAC recognises the importance of Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness and calls for collective reflections.
- (13) COSAC welcomes the fact that more than hundred organisations recently signed the artificial intelligence (AI) Pact, which is a voluntary commitment that paves the way for compliance with the AI Act and which starts applying the principles of the AI Act ahead of its date of application.
- (14) COSAC highlights that since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the role of national Parliaments has been enhanced within the European constitutional framework, and they have proved to be active players in *ex ante* scrutinising EU policies and influencing EU draft legislations by using the means of political dialogue and subsidiarity checks under Protocols No. 1 and No. 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon. The constructive engagements of national Parliaments in shaping the content of EU policies should be further enhanced in the future by full exercise of their European functions, including the working on the green card initiative.
- (15) COSAC calls for enhanced access to Council documents to enable national Parliaments to fulfil their oversight role.
- (16) COSAC invites the members of the new European Commission to participate regularly in COSAC meetings.
- (17) COSAC regrets that strengthening the role of national parliaments is not one of the new European Commission's strategic priorities, even though this would help to address the European Union's democratic deficit and bring the European Union closer to its citizens.
- (18) COSAC calls for dialogue and exchanges between the European Commission and the national Parliaments to be stepped up in particular when the European Commission is drawing up its strategic priorities and annual work programme, so that the expectations of the national parliaments can be taken into account in the EU's major policy guidelines.
- (19) COSAC considers it desirable to strengthen the scrutiny of the principle of subsidiarity by national parliaments, in particular by extending from eight to ten weeks the deadline granted to national parliaments and by lowering the threshold for triggering the 'yellow card' to one quarter of the votes cast.

European security and defence

- (20) Due to raising security threats and challenges, including hybrid and cybersecurity threats, COSAC reiterates the need for decisive EU action in security and defence area, working autonomously when and where necessary and with reliable partners. COSAC stresses the need for enhancing EU capacity to better anticipate, prevent and prepare for crisis. In this process, the security and defence interests of all EU Member States should be fully taken into account.
- (21) Recalling Member States' competences in the field of defence, COSAC calls for a smooth work and timely adoption of the Regulation on the European Parliament and the Council on European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) in order to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base. It also reiterates the importance of ongoing work on military defence lines at the EU borders with Russia and Belarus.
- (22) COSAC stresses the need for close coordination on EU's security and defence agenda with like-minded partners worldwide, notably with NATO and reliable non-EU Allies.

Ukraine

- (23) COSAC by reiterating its statements adopted at the previous COSAC meetings in Madrid and Brussels, strongly and unequivocally condemns Russia's unprovoked, unjustified, and illegal invasion of Ukraine, its war of aggression against Ukraine and the occupation and annexation of the parts of Ukrainian territory, which constitutes a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter.
- (24) COSAC is extremely concerned about reports of executions by Russian forces of Ukrainian prisoners of war. No crime can remain unpunished.
- (25) COSAC recalls its full unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders as well as strongly underlines Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence against Russian aggression.
- (26) COSAC reconfirms its enduring commitment to supporting the continued and sufficient provision of political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes and as intensely as needed. As far as military support is concerned, COSAC supports the idea of continuing military assistance through bilateral channels and the European Peace Facility. This does not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.
- (27) COSAC calls for the EU and its Member States to work actively towards maintaining and achieving global coordination and the widest possible international support for Ukraine and to achieve a comprehensive, sustainable, just and lasting peace based on the Ukraine's Peace Formula and principles of the United Nations Charter. COSAC appreciates the convocation and results of the Summit on Peace in Ukraine held on 15 and 16 June 2024 in Switzerland. COSAC calls for comprehensive accountability of Russia and its leadership for waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and other most serious crimes under international law.
- (28) COSAC stresses the importance of maintaining support for Ukraine among the Member States of the European Union and reaffirms the importance of not acting in a way that undermines this support.
- (29) COSAC calls on the EU and its Member States to continue work on further sanctions on Russia as a response to the ongoing aggression.
- (30) COSAC strongly condemns third countries' continued support for Russia's war of aggression and urges them to cease all assistance.
- (31) COSAC welcomes the global and European donors in the field of support for the reconstruction of Ukraine and looks forward to the implementation of the Ukraine Facility, of the granting of exceptional macro-financial assistance (MFA) loan of up to EUR 35 billion and of a new loan mechanism implementing G7 commitment. COSAC reiterates its appreciation and support for European and international efforts to restore, recover and rebuild Ukraine. It calls on the EU institutions and Member States to accelerate efforts to use revenues of the frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.
- (32) COSAC in particular condemns the persistent shelling by Russia of Ukraine's critical energy and civilian infrastructure. COSAC supports all efforts to urgently increase Ukraine's energy security before the winter and address the immediate humanitarian and civil protection needs.
- (33) COSAC reaffirms the importance of always ensuring the protection of all civilians and to address the consequence of the war on refugees and displaced persons.

Middle East

- (34) COSAC condemns in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and stresses that the further escalation of the conflict into a regional war must be avoided by any means.
- (35) COSAC insists on Israel's right to exist and its inherent right of self-defence in accordance with international law.

- (36) COSAC calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire, for the release of all hostages and for the increase in the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance through the Gaza Strip.
- (37) COSAC is deeply concerned by the high number of civil casualties and the imminent risk of famine and infectious diseases in the Gaza Strip and calls on all parties to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law.
- (38) COSAC is very concerned about the latest developments in the Middle East, the ongoing conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah and urges all parties to refrain from any further escalation. Support from reliable partners must be strengthened in the region and work must be done to counter destabilising actors. COSAC condemns the attacks against the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which are grave violation of international law.
- (39) COSAC condemns in the strongest terms the Iranian attacks on Israel on 1 October 2024 and Iran's seriously destabilising actions throughout the Middle East through terrorist and armed groups.
- (40) COSAC calls for political and direct dialogue among the parties concerned to reach lasting peaceful solutions and to ensure the protection of civilian lives.
- (41) COSAC welcomes the approval of the Council declaration of 15 October 2024 on fostering Jewish life and combating antisemitism. COSAC reiterates its serious concerns about recent alarming incidents and condemns in the strongest possible terms all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, intolerance, racism and xenophobia.

Migration

- (42) COSAC stresses that the constant migratory pressure on Europe places different burden on individual Member States and that addressing these challenges, including the effective external border protection should be a common European objective. COSAC reaffirms the need to prevent and counter illegal migration.
- (43) COSAC calls for the removal of reintroduced temporary internal border controls within the Schengen Area.
- (44) COSAC urges decisive actions to enhance, expedite and increase the returns of illegal migrants and the enforcement of measures against the lucrative networks of human smuggling and trafficking of smugglers. COSAC insists on additional steps to prevent people from embarking on dangerous journeys or falling victim to migrant smuggling or trafficking.
- (45) COSAC calls for closer cooperation with third countries bordering the EU as well as with the key countries of origin and transit to address the root causes of migration, including the conclusion of new partnership agreements and other effective and innovative forms of cooperation.
- (46) In this respect, COSAC recognises the significance of the EU's comprehensive partnership agreements reached with Tunisia, Egypt or Lebanon, as well as the recent agreement concluded by the EU and Serbia on operational cooperation in border management with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to strengthen border management cooperation.
- (47) COSAC welcomes the European Council Conclusions of 17 October, stressing the importance of implementing adopted EU legislation and application of existing legislation, in order to best address the current challenges.

The enlargement of the European Union

- (48) COSAC recalls the importance of the 20th anniversary of the 2004 EU enlargement, which brought tangible benefits to citizens in terms of freedom, opportunities and prosperity, including by creating the world's largest integrated market. The transformative effect and the benefits of EU enlargement on the lives of Europeans is obvious and undeniable.

- (49) COSAC underlines that enlargement - based on the experiences of the 2004/2007 and 2013 enlargements - is one of the most successful policies of the European Union. To preserve this favourable tendency for the future rounds of enlargement, it is essential to keep enlargement policy merit-based, balanced and credible, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria.
- (50) COSAC notes that due to the geopolitical and security situation, fundamental changes have occurred in the enlargement policy over the past three years and expresses its conviction that the recently gained momentum around enlargement will prevail and lead to the accession of further countries in the near future. EU institutions made historic decisions in the past years and consequently, nine candidate countries and one potential candidate country progress towards the European Union. There is new dynamism in the enlargement process and both the EU and aspiring countries have a responsibility to make the most of this opportunity.
- (51) COSAC shares the assessment of the European Council that both the European Union and future Member States must be ready at the time of accession.
- (52) COSAC expresses its support to all candidate and potential candidate countries participating in the enlargement process and urges them to step up their reform initiatives, especially in the field of rule of law, with the assistance of the European Union, its Member States, the European Parliament and the national Parliaments through bilateral cooperation and capacity-building activities. In parallel, the necessary reforms must be perceived and conducted so that an enlarged European Union can continue to work effectively for the benefit of European citizens.
- (53) COSAC reiterates its support for the Western Balkans in line with the Thessaloniki Declaration adopted more than 20 years ago; it promotes the accession process and welcomes the adopted Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. Economic convergence is an essential element in getting the Western Balkan partners closer to the EU therefore, the Growth Plan should also accelerate the reform processes in the respective countries.
- (54) COSAC appreciates as a milestone moment, that Montenegro has met the interim benchmarks in rule of law chapters 23 and 24, as confirmed by the intergovernmental conference in June, thus paving the way towards closing further negotiating chapters in the coming months. This breakthrough in the negotiations may serve as an incentive for all candidate countries.
- (55) COSAC welcomes that Albania became eligible for starting negotiations on Cluster 1 on the Fundamentals by the fulfilment of its opening benchmarks.
- (56) COSAC welcomes the adoption of negotiating frameworks by the Council for the accession negotiations of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova respectively as well as the start of accession negotiations with these two countries on 25 June. COSAC expresses its hope that the Cluster 1 on the Fundamentals will be open for negotiations in the coming months after Ukraine and Moldova have met its opening benchmarks.
- (57) COSAC commends the creation of the EUR 50 billion Ukraine Facility as well as the payment of the first instalment amounting to EUR 4 365 million after the satisfactory fulfilment of the relevant conditions by Ukraine.
- (58) COSAC is of the opinion that the prospect of EU membership is an incentive for Ukrainian authorities to implement key reforms that are necessary to consolidate the rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy.
- (59) COSAC equally commends the announcement of a new Growth Plan for the Republic of Moldova aimed at supporting the acceleration of EU-related reforms, economic growth and accession negotiations.
- (60) COSAC is concerned by the preliminary findings of the election observation missions in Georgia, which point to incidents distorting the independence of the vote. The proper functioning of democracy, free elections and political pluralism are conditions for accession to the European Union. Respecting these conditions is essential if the Georgian people are to continue on their path towards membership of the European Union.

European demographic trends and responses at national and European level

- (61) COSAC welcomes the European Commission's Communication on Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action as it rightly identifies the main challenges in this field by respecting the national competence of the EU Member States and the life choices of individuals.
 - (62) COSAC points out that demographic changes will affect Europe's future on a scale like the green and digital transition as already evidenced by the regional and territorial disparities and the different migration flows.
 - (63) COSAC considers that the ageing societies in Europe, rural depopulation and the shrinking working-age population have a growing impact on the productivity and competitiveness of EU economies, including public debt sustainability, labour and skills shortages, in addition to the sustainability and adequacy of social protection systems.
 - (64) COSAC stresses that demographic changes exercise wide-ranging effect on the social, territorial and intergenerational cohesion of the EU, especially in less densely populated, rural or remote regions. Therefore, the cohesion policy under the next Multiannual Financial Framework should take into consideration the challenges deriving from depopulated regions and outermost regions.
 - (65) COSAC encourages intergenerational solidarity and cross-sectoral supportive measures to strengthen individuals and families and it welcomes the proposed portfolio in the new European Commission for intergenerational fairness. COSAC considers that such forward-thinking governance is essential to ensure a comprehensive life-cycle rights-based approach that empowers all generations to realise their talents and aspirations.
 - (66) COSAC invites all relevant stakeholders and policy makers to ensure the effective implementation of the regulatory framework for life-work balance, for targeted initiatives for the younger generation to be able to choose to start a family and for the access to affordable housing and childcare services.
 - (67) COSAC expresses its hope that the targeted measures can help to provide long-term incentives for families, thereby paving the way for positive demographic changes in Europe.
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