

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC
Vilnius, Lithuania, 8 July 2013**

AGENDA:

- 1. Introductory remarks by Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS, Deputy Speaker of the *Seimas* and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs; welcome speech by Dr Vydas GEDVILAS, Speaker of the *Seimas* of the Republic of Lithuania**
- 2. Adoption of the agenda, procedural questions and miscellaneous matters**
- 3. Priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – keynote speaker: Mr Linas LINKEVIČIUS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania**
- 4. Towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union: Next Steps – keynote speaker: Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, European Commission Vice-President for Inter-institutional Affairs and Administration**

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS, Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, the *Seimas* of the Republic of Lithuania.

1. Introductory remarks by Mr Gediminas Kirkilas, Deputy Speaker of the *Seimas* of the Republic of Lithuania and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs; welcome speech by Dr Vydas Gedvilas, Speaker of the *Seimas* of the Republic of Lithuania

Mr KIRKILAS welcomed the delegates to the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC and in particular welcomed the Croatian delegation as new fully-fledged members of COSAC after the accession of Croatia to the EU on 1 July 2013.

Dr Vydas GEDVILAS, Speaker of the Lithuanian *Seimas*, welcomed delegates to the first meeting in the calendar of events to be held in the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the first Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the EU. He also congratulated the Croatian *Sabor* on their country's accession to the EU. It had been 23 years since the restoration of the independence of Lithuania and 9 years since the accession of Lithuania to the EU he was eagerly waiting for the country's first EU Presidency. He stated that the Lithuanian *Seimas* wanted a better, stronger, more united future for Europe and he said that there was much to be done by national Parliaments and European Parliament (EP) to achieve this. For example, he said it was necessary to find ways to promote growth, jobs, competitiveness, and the single market in energy, services and digital economy. In relation to the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2014, it was the common responsibility of Parliaments to engage citizens in this process. He said that the Lithuanian *Seimas* had organised an ambitious Presidency and he highlighted in particular the meetings of the Interparliamentary Conference on Economic and Financial Governance of the European Union to be held on 16-17 October 2013 and the 50th COSAC meeting that would be held on 27-29 October 2013. The Speaker concluded by saying that he hoped that the Lithuanian Presidency would highlight the advantages of the EU membership to Lithuania and would promote Lithuania in Europe and in the world.

2. Adoption of the agenda, procedural questions and miscellaneous matters

The agenda of the meeting was adopted by the Chairpersons without amendments. Mr KIRKILAS informed the participants of the results of the Troika meeting held the previous evening. The Chair presented the agenda of the L COSAC and said that during the Troika meeting the Presidency had agreed to change the title of the session on democratic accountability to "Democratic Accountability in the EU and the role of EU Parliaments". The time given over to this debate would also be extended by half an hour. Mr Paolo TANCREDI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, suggested that the number of topics on the agenda could be reduced and that the debate on the role of COSAC should be relaunched in the future. He also said that the invited speakers should also include representatives of the Southern European Member States.

Mr KIRKILAS moved on to the consideration of the draft outline of the 20th Bi-annual Report on which Mr René LEEGTE, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, complimented the Lithuanian Presidency for their smart use of the Report to focus delegations on debates in COSAC and in particular he welcomed the chapter, as well as the plenary debate, on the 2014 European Parliament elections and how Parliaments engage citizens in the run up to them.

The Chair informed those present of the arrangements for the co-financing and appointment of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2014-2015. The meeting was reminded that the term of office of the current Permanent Member would expire on 31 December 2013 and, in light of the fact that enough support for the continuation of the co-financing agreement had been received, the Lithuanian Presidency would send a letter in the coming days inviting nominations for the post.

Mr KIRKILAS reported that a letter had been received from the Norwegian *Storting* regarding the attendance of their delegation at the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC and the L COSAC as special guest. After consulting the Troika, an invitation had been extended to the European Consultative Committee.

In interventions that followed Mr LEEGTE, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, and Lord David HANNAY, UK *House of Lords*, asked the Presidency if it would be willing to facilitate an informal session to exchange information on best practice within parliamentary scrutiny systems and how national Parliaments handle working on governance in the EU both individually and collectively. Lord HANNAY also appealed to COSAC colleagues to contribute to the *House of Lords* EU Committee inquiry into the role of national Parliaments in the EU.

Mr KIRKILAS said that the Presidency would be happy to accommodate the request of Mr TANCREDI to invite a speaker from Southern Europe which would be an expert on constitutional law. He also expressed willingness to facilitate the informal session suggested by the colleagues from the Dutch and UK Parliaments.

3. Priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – keynote speaker: Mr Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

Keynote speaker: Mr Linas LINKEVIČIUS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr LINKEVIČIUS stated that the Lithuanian Presidency would try as much as possible to continue the productive work of the Council in all policy domains based on the Trio programme. In specific terms, he said it would focus on three priorities: a credible, a growing and an open Europe. He outlined what this would mean in practical terms. On a credible Europe, the Lithuanian Presidency would focus on financial discipline, that is a Banking Union and strengthening the financial system including negotiations on the Single Resolution Mechanism. On a growing Europe, the focus would be on the Single Market, the digital agenda, research, innovation and jobs and in particular youth unemployment and the youth guarantee. On an open Europe, the Presidency said they would continue dialogues with third countries, facilitate accession negotiations with candidate countries and focus on the Eastern Partnerships. The Minister appreciated the role of the European Parliament and all parliamentarians in general in that regard. He mentioned also several national priorities for Lithuania. These were, firstly, the development of the internal energy market by 2014 and the elimination of islands of energy by 2015 and secondly, the development of Macro-regional strategies, thirdly Eastern Partnership and finally the protection of external EU borders.

In the debate which followed 24 speakers took the floor. On social Europe, Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Slovak *Narodna rada*, emphasised the need for greater solidarity and the fight against tax evasion and tax havens while Mr Fritz NEUGEBAUER, Austrian *Nationalrat*, spoke of the need to foster the social dimension of the EU with Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, who noted that the new Article 13 Conference would strengthen democratic legitimacy and possibly a new EU Committee for Energy and Climate Change would also help in this regard. Mr Christopher FEARNE, Maltese *Kamra Tad-Deputati*, and Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, spoke of the help needed at the Union's borders to deal with illegal immigration and the deaths arising from it and said that there should be increased partnerships to the east where conditions were met. Mr Paolo TANCREDI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, and Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, focused on the need for continued work on Southern partnerships. On the political aspects, Mr Carlo CASINI, European Parliament, urged the Council to finalise the legislation for European political parties presently before it. Lord David HANNAY, UK *House of Lords*, and Mr Jovan MARTINOVIĆ, Montenegrin *Skupština*, asked the Minister about the Lithuanian Presidency's aspirations for the Eastern Partnership countries while Mr Philippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Sénat*, cautioned that there were human rights issues in some of the countries within the Eastern Partnership. Mr Peter SZALAY, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, stressed the importance of implementation of macro-regional strategy for Danube. Mr Dorin Silviu PETREA, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*, asked about the Romanian and Bulgarian accession to the Schengen zone. Mr Jožef HORVAT, Slovenian *Državni Zbor*, noted that while the EU-US trade talks were worthwhile the recent surveillance issues did not show respect for citizens. Mr Mehmet TEKELİOĞLU, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, did not believe it to be correct

that a military coup in Egypt should remove the government and called the European Union to be more active in peace projects in Middle East, with particular attention to Syria and Egypt. Turkey did not support the change of government in an anti-democratic way.

In response on the Eastern Partnership, Mr LINKEVIČIUS noted that the Lithuanian Presidency would operate on the basis of the principle of "more for more" and that while not all partner countries were qualified he hoped that Association Agreements including DCFTA's (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area) would be signed with Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. With the Ukraine it could be signed at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit this November, however, now everything was in the hands of Ukraine, if it would be ready, because the European Union was ready. He praised the efforts undertaken by the European Parliament's monitoring mission to Ukraine headed by former Presidents Pat Cox and Aleksander Kwaśniewski. Talks with Azerbaijan would continue while the Presidency also wanted to continue engagement with Belarus. In the final analysis he noted that any accession agreements required the ratification of all 29 Parliaments.

Mr LINKEVIČIUS agreed that it was not easy for border Member States to manage illegal immigration, pointing out that Lithuania had also accepted migrants who had arrived in Malta and that the situation arising in Syria was also dramatic in this regard. On the EU-US trade talks, he urged everyone to stay rational and noted that if they were successful 0.5% of GDP could be added to both economies. On Egypt, he agreed that the removal of the government there by the military should not become a precedent. In relation to Schengen, he stated that he would support Romanian and Bulgarian accession to the agreement but that domestic reforms had to be undertaken first.

4. Towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union: Next Steps – keynote speaker: Mr Maroš Šefčovič, European Commission Vice-President for Inter-institutional Affairs and Administration

Vice-President Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ gave the Commission's insight on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and on a closer political union and its weaknesses revealed by the financial crisis. The Commission's immediate response measures ('six-pack', 'two-pack', etc.) had already started to take effect by re-establishing confidence in and stability of the euro and shown a commitment towards the future development of the EMU.

There were changes to be expected en route, for example, Europe would soon enter a new phase of relations between national governments, national Parliaments and the European Commission, when the first national budget proposals were scrutinised at the European level, as agreed as part of the 'two-pack'. In the longer term he said decisions that would require either Treaty change or pooling of sovereignty would also raise questions of democratic accountability, and the national Parliaments and European Parliament have a vital role to play in that respect. The Commission's view on the issue of democratic legitimacy, according to the blueprint, was based on two principles: first, accountability should be ensured at the level where the respective decisions are taken, whilst taking due account of the level where the decisions have an impact; and second, the level of democratic legitimacy always needed to correspond

with the degree of pooling or sharing sovereignty. He said the Commission had suggested ways to improve *ex ante* coordination of major economic reform plans in Member States as well as holding a debate on a Convergence and Competitiveness Instrument, which proposed contractual arrangements for Member States to undertake specific reforms and offered financial support to help Member States implement these reforms. This procedure needs to be explained to European citizens.

He referred to the full Banking Union and noted that a Single Supervisory Mechanism had been agreed. On the Single Resolution Mechanism, an agreement by the European Parliament and the Council on the draft directive setting out common bank resolution rules was anticipated, while the Commission would soon put forward a proposal for a single European Resolution Mechanism. The full banking union should be operational from 2015. He also referred to the social dimension of the EMU, acknowledging that the adjustments made had brought about considerable social problems, including high levels of unemployment. The proposals aimed at strengthening the social dimension of the EMU included better integration of social indicators and the closer involvement of social partners in the European Semester, which would also give an impetus on the issue of accountability and transparency.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ described the roles of national Parliaments and the European Parliament as specific and complementary and urged the two sides to talk to each other on a more regular and structured basis, such as the European Parliamentary Week and the Article 13 interparliamentary conference, the agreement on which he welcomed. Within that process, the Commission was committed to become engaged in an intensified dialogue on the Annual Growth Survey and country-specific recommendations with national Parliaments. Moreover, he referred to the letter he had co-signed with Minister Creighton, urging the parliamentarians to participate more actively in the European Semester both through inter-parliamentary cooperation involving the European Parliament and via national debates on the country-specific recommendations, as that would help to raise awareness and facilitate the engagement of national Parliaments in the early preparation of the national budget plans and the National Reform Programmes. He also underlined his eagerness to visit national Parliaments to exchange views with parliamentarians, as well as his support for the idea of "Europe Days", put forward by the Speaker of the Irish Parliament where members would debate topical European issues on the same day in their respective parliaments. More specifically he suggested that national Parliaments organised such "Europe days" at the end of each year in order to discuss the Commission Work Programme for the following year, which would enable MPs to identify those upcoming proposals and help them to focus their input.

Lastly, Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ referred to the Contribution adopted by the XLIX COSAC in Dublin, which included several new ideas and proposals on how to ensure greater involvement of national Parliaments and reassured the Chairpersons of COSAC that the Commission will respond formally in due course.

In the debate which followed, 15 speakers took the floor. Mr Philippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Sénat* and Mr Edgar MAYER, Austrian *Bundesrat*, both referred to the need to restore citizen's confidence to Europe, with Mr MAHOUX who criticised the lack of a social dimension in the crisis management and underlined the need to focus on the social dimension and employment measures. Mr William CASH, UK *House of*

Commons, questioned whether the concept of sovereignty and a more integrated political union was consistent with the political dynamics existing today in Europe. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ replied that after a period of crisis management the Commission was using whatever room for manoeuvre it had to support youth unemployment and the social dimension of EMU. Ms Nadia GINETTI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, said that it is time to address the issue of European citizenship and in view of the European Parliament elections make voters more aware of building their common political future.

Mr Luboš BLAHA, Slovak *Narodna rada*, referred to the first "yellow card" against the so-called "Monti II" proposal and the first European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) "Right2Water" as two important examples for the protection of social rights. He asked about the current state of debate on the so-called social union and called for enhanced EU competences in the social field, including the fight against poverty. Mr Miguel Ángel MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ, European Parliament, also called for the restoration of the social dimension of the EU in order to regain citizens' confidence. This would require relaunching the project of a political union as an antidote to the crisis, to stop Europe becoming insignificant globally and less social progress being achieved for European citizens. Mr Dominic HANNIGAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, suggested extending the proposed indicators to measure a country's progress by including poverty, especially child poverty, and emigration of young people and asked how the EU could help countries that were failing to meet social indicators. Mr Ioannis TRAGAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, asked for robust measures stimulating employment in order to avoid losing an entire generation.

Mr Paolo TANCREDI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, regretted the delays in the construction of the EMU and the lack of a clear indication from the June European Council on the way forward. He called for moving forward towards a real guidance on economic activities and not just governance since if the eurozone had been a federal state its accounts would be much better than those of the United States and no one would have dared to doubt the solvency of its members and banks. Mr Svein Roald HANSEN, Norwegian *Storting*, welcomed the new supervisory structures in the EU as well as other measures designed to put the European economy back on a sustainable and social track and hoped that it would soon be possible to extend regulations on the financial sector to Norway since the economic and financial crisis impacted on the Norwegian financial sector as well.

Ms Tineke STRIK, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, pointed out that crisis measures often required swift parliamentary approval, e.g. in the European semester, even if the subject in question was often very complex. She therefore encouraged the use of the COSAC framework also for discussions on the "national semester" and in this regard welcomed the Danish initiative to scrutinise national budgets and to compare how EU funds were spent by the Member States. Mr René LEEGTE, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, was in favour of national Parliaments working closer together, e.g. in the framework of a working group to be set up by the European Commission and the Danish *Folketing* meeting on national social welfare issues in Copenhagen. Treaty changes were not necessary at this stage since the current treaty offered plenty of unused opportunities for national Parliaments to cooperate on EU affairs. He said that the eight weeks given for the submission of reasoned opinions was insufficient for

national Parliaments to coordinate between themselves and called for this period/deadline to be extended.

Mr Herman DE CROO, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, suggested for upcoming COSAC meetings to add the European political party family to the list of participants to facilitate contacts and as a measure to promote transparency even without requiring a rule change.

Vice-President ŠEFČOVIČ pointed out that even though Europe has not left the crisis behind it, the gradual stabilisation of the currency would now provide a basis for and giving more leeway to taking further steps such as social policy measures. He highlighted that recently €8 billion were dedicated to the support of youth unemployed and that the European Commission pushed Member States to allocate 25 per cent of EU structural funds to the European Social Fund (ESF) which would make another €300 billion available for vocational training and employment measures. He welcomed the idea to extend the analysis on the situation in Member States also to the social dimension by adding criteria on poverty, unemployment, etc. The Vice-President emphasised, that help to the most deprived persons was now included in the multi-annual financial framework (MFF), but only following difficult discussions between Member States since quite a few of them felt that social policy should stay a national responsibility.

He pointed out as well that negative feelings held by citizens in the European Union were not only the fault of the EU institutions and that the European public held the same feelings also towards the management of big companies as well as towards national and municipal levels of government. The phenomenon could rather be described as a crisis of elites he reasoned because the crisis was very tough, very long and citizens saw the worst period since WW II. The only way to overcome it was that politicians showed that they were serious about what they do and that they had solutions to offer, to gain the trust of the citizens, but this would take time.

The Vice-President stressed that national Parliaments still did not use all the opportunities at hand to influence European politics, especially in the pre-legislative phase when the Commission had public consultations on policy proposals such as green papers, white books and on communications. He pledged the Commission would value very much the input from national Parliaments in this preparatory phase on whether the EU should legislate and if so what the parameters of that legislation should be. In practical terms he proposed to use the network of representatives of national Parliaments to highlight the most important on-going public consultations as an awareness-raising measure. He welcomed the recent COSAC contribution and said that the proposals were being examined for practical and legal implication and a Commission's reply would be sent within a couple of months.