

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 19 July 2021
(held via videoconference)

AGENDA:

- 1. Opening of the meeting**
 - Welcome address by Mr Igor ZORČIČ, President of the Slovenian *Državni zbor*
 - Introductory remarks by Mr Marko POGAČNIK, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*
 - Introductory remarks by Mr Bojan KEKEC, Chair of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs, Slovenian *Državni svet*
- 2. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**
- 3. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters**
 - Results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
 - Draft Programme of the LXVI COSAC
 - Outline of the 36th Bi-annual Report of COSAC
 - Letters received by the Presidency
 - Information on the Appointment Process of the new Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat
 - Procedural issues
- 4. Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**
Keynote speaker: Mr Anže LOGAR, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia
- 5. Cybersecurity in the EU - Strengthening the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure and Cyber Defence**
Keynote speakers: Mr Thierry BRETON, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market; Mr Matej TONIN, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia; Mr Juhan LEPASSAR, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA); Mr Uroš SVETE, Director of the Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia.

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Marko POGAČNIK, Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor*; Mr Bojan KEKEC, Chair of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs, Slovenian *Državni svet*

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Mr Marko POGAČNIK, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Slovenian *Državni zbor* welcomed all the participants to the meeting and assured colleagues that, despite it being held via videoconference, the meeting would nonetheless provide a good opportunity for an in-depth and constructive debate.

Mr Igor ZORČIČ, President of the Slovenian *Državni zbor*, welcomed all the participants and expressed regret that due to the epidemiological situation the meeting could not be hosted in Ljubljana.

While noting that this was the second time that Slovenia had taken over the Council Presidency, he emphasised that it was now doing so under completely different circumstances, not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of certain global developments which posed new challenges and required immediate action both from the EU as well as its Member States. He emphasised Slovenia's determination to use these challenging circumstances to confirm its adherence to the idea of Europe and its fundamental values.

He welcomed the fact that Slovenia had taken over the Council Presidency on the 30th anniversary of its independence. He stressed that, after becoming independent, Slovenia had followed its ambitions to join the community of like-minded countries that shared a commitment to peace, freedom and respect for international law, adding that, 17 years later, Slovenia was still a proud member of the EU, and expressed hope that its presidency would, through its priorities, contribute to the success of the EU and the well-being and prosperity of its citizens. He stressed the current global dimension of the economic and social devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and said that the curtailment of certain freedoms, once taken for granted in the EU, had resulted in the loss of citizen's trust in the EU.

He further stated that the stalemate in the EU's enlargement policy had dealt a blow to candidate and other countries with European aspirations. He expressed his belief that national Parliaments were the institutions closest to its citizens and should take an appropriate and responsible approach to restore the trust in the institutions of the nation state and the EU.

He also stressed the need for seizing the unique opportunity offered by the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE), adding that Slovenia would work to make the CoFE a success in terms of citizens engagement by enabling them to shape policies that corresponded to their visions for the future of EU.

He thanked the German and Portuguese presidencies for their cooperation in the Trio Presidency and outlined the four priorities of the Slovenian presidency: strengthening the resilience and economic recovery of the EU and improving its capacity to anticipate future crisis situations; ensuring a broad and inclusive space for debate on the EU's future in the scope of the CoFE; promoting a union of the European way of life, the rule of law and equal criteria for all; and ensuring a secure and stable EU neighbourhood.

In conclusion, he once again pointed out the central role of the national Parliaments and expressed his belief that the parliamentary dimension of the presidency played a crucial and responsible role in stimulating public's interest in politics and regaining its trust. He called upon national Parliaments to increase their mutual cooperation and work with the EU institutions. In his opinion, COSAC meetings already represented a platform for cooperation and integration within which interparliamentary ties should be further strengthened.

Mr POGAČNIK congratulated the Portuguese Presidency for their excellent parliamentary dimension and thanked the trio presidencies for their work and cooperation. He also welcomed France as the new member of the Presidential Troika.

Mr POGAČNIK also welcomed the fact that the Slovenian Council Presidency coincided with the 30th anniversary of its independence. He stated that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat not only to health but also to the economy and jobs. In this context, he stressed that Slovenia had implemented

successful measures and noted that it was among the Member States with the highest GDP growth rate and the lowest unemployment rate. He also emphasised that the Slovenian *Državni zbor* had already organized an event in the framework of the CoFE to bring the debate closer to the citizens and shape a common position on the future of the EU.

Mr POGAČNIK welcomed Mr Harris GEORGIADES, Chair of the Standing Committee for Foreign and European Affairs of the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, who was attending this meeting for the first time. He also expressed his solidarity with the Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, German and Luxembourgish colleagues following the recent catastrophic floods, and stressed Slovenia's willingness to help.

Mr Bojan KEKEC, Chair of the Commission on International Relations and European Affairs, Slovenian *Državni svet*, welcomed all the participants and expressed hope that the LXVI COSAC would be hosted live in Ljubljana. He noted that the Slovenian Council Presidency in 2008 had also taken place in challenging times. He stressed the importance of the 18-month Trio Presidency programme for the well-being of the EU and emphasised that the Slovenian priorities under the motto "Together. Resilient. Europe." would contribute to building a stronger and more resilient EU.

Mr KEKEC further outlined certain key aspects of the Slovenian Council Presidency priorities. Firstly, achieving strategic autonomy, whereby Slovenia would work towards ensuring greater autonomy in the supply of medicines and vaccines, digitalisation, artificial intelligence and other strategic areas. Secondly, establishing the EU as a stronger global actor, whose actions were based on common values such as freedom, democracy and human rights. In this regard, he stressed the need for a strengthened cooperation in security and defence, in order for the EU to be able to successfully tackle various global threats. Thirdly, the future of the EU, which should be shaped by a common vision between political actors and citizens. In Mr KEKEC's opinion, the EU would not be able to fulfil its mission, namely to provide prosperity for all, without the citizen's participation. In this context, he highlighted the role of the CoFE in enabling direct engagement of EU citizens. He also emphasised the role of national Parliaments in shaping the common future of the EU and stressed the importance of transparency and dialogue with citizens and civil society. Fourthly, the need to strengthen the EU's values and principles. In this respect, he highlighted the respect of the rule of law and ensuring equal criteria and opportunities for everyone.

In conclusion, Mr KEKEC expressed his belief that the meeting would provide an opportunity for a dynamic debate on certain key areas of the EU.

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

Mr POGAČNIK presented the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, which was approved without amendment.

3. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- **Results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**
- **Draft Programme of the LXVI COSAC**
- **Letters received by the Presidency**
- **Information on the Appointment Process of the new Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat**
- **Procedural issues**

Mr POGAČNIK presented the results of the Presidential Troika meeting, noting the approval of the agenda and the outline of the 36th Bi-annual Report of COSAC and the debate on the draft programme for the LXVI COSAC, which would take place from 28 - 30 November 2021. With regard to the

outline of the Bi-annual Report, Mr POGAČNIK presented the three topics of the questionnaire: the digitalisation of Parliaments during the digital transition and the COVID-19 pandemic; the future role of young people in decision-making processes and beyond; and the Conference on the Future of Europe. These topics were related to the priorities of the Slovenian Presidency and would be covered by the LXVI plenary meeting of COSAC. The questionnaire would be sent to delegations on 26 July 2021, with a deadline set for 21 September 2021.

Mr POGAČNIK then referred to the appointment of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for 2022-2023, informing colleagues that an invitation to nominate candidates would be sent out to Parliaments/Chambers after the meeting, with 15 October 2021 set as the deadline for submissions. The decision on the nomination procedure would be taken on the basis of the received submissions and the Presidential Troika would propose a candidate at the LXVI COSAC. He also reminded colleagues of the letter sent by the Portuguese Presidency for Parliaments/Chambers to confirm their intention to contribute to the current co-financing mechanism for the COSAC Secretariat for the next two years, starting on 1 January 2022, and urged them to submit their commitments.

Mr POGAČNIK also referred to the letters requesting invitation to attend the COSAC meetings that were received from the Swiss *Assemblée Fédérale*, the Norwegian *Stortinget*, the UK *House of Lords* and the Andorran *Conseil General*. Mr POGAČNIK said that, following consultation with the Presidential Troika, invitations were sent to the parliaments of Switzerland, Norway, Andorra and to the UK *House of Lords*. A letter was also received from the *Croatian Hrvatski sabor*.

Furthermore, he noted that the Presidency had also received a letter from Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale* and Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*, proposing the establishment of two working groups that would deal with questions connected to the EU. Mr POGAČNIK informed the participants that the Slovenian Presidency had already replied to this letter and that as a result of an agreement reached during the meeting of the Presidential Troika, the French colleagues were to submit a more detailed proposal. He thus thanked the French colleagues for the subsequent detailed proposal regarding the working groups, which was also sent to all Parliaments. He stressed that before the Slovenian Presidency could take a position on the French proposal, consultations needed to be held in the respective committees on European affairs of the Slovenian *Državni zbor* and *Državni svet*. In addition, he emphasised the need to avoid duplication of work and/or competition between the proposed working groups and the CoFE, and proposed that the proposal should be discussed at the LXVI COSAC in November.

Ms THILLAYE explained that the reason for the submission of the proposal lay in the tight schedule of the upcoming French Council Presidency due to elections. She reiterated that the work of the proposed groups would not contradict the CoFE, as their work would focus on strengthening the role and visibility of national Parliaments on the European level.

4. Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Keynote speaker: Mr Anže LOGAR, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia

Mr Anže LOGAR, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, noted that interparliamentary cooperation was important in European affairs, and had to be seen as the basis of a tolerant dialogue.

The Minister elaborated on the Slovenian Presidency priorities, ranked into four overarching themes.

The first one was the resilience, recovery and strategic autonomy of the European Union.

According to Mr LOGAR, the main objective here was to strengthen the resilience of the Union, in order to improve its reaction in case of crises with significant cross-border effects. He mentioned two main areas that needed to be focussed on: resilience in time of a pandemic and cyber resilience. The Slovenian Presidency would pay particular attention to building a European Health Union, and to the need to achieve a strategic health autonomy. Therefore, the establishment of a new European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) would be necessary, and in this regard the Slovenian Presidency expected an ambitious proposal from the European Commission.

The Minister noted that another objective was to strengthen cyber resilience. A recast of the Directive for a high common level of cybersecurity of network and digital systems would be at the heart of the Slovenian Presidency work.

Mr LOGAR underlined that resilience was also an economical matter, based on the green transition and digital transformation. The focus would be on the implementation of the NextGenerationEU, and on the Fit for 55 climate and energy package: the negotiations on this comprehensive package would begin under the Presidency.

Accelerating digital transition was also a key element for the recovery, with a focus on the regulations of Digital Services and Digital Markets. The Slovenian priorities also put an emphasis on artificial intelligence, by supporting the Artificial Intelligence Act and digital sovereignty, with the promotion of fair and regulated access to the data. The Slovenian Presidency would continue to work on the adoption of the Data Management Act and would start working on the new Data Act.

The second priority concerned the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE). In line with its wish to play an active role in organising the discussions, the Slovenian Presidency was looking forward to having European citizens and stakeholders join the debate on the European project. The debate on the Future of Europe would also be at the heart of the 16th Bled Strategic Forum.

The third priority was the promotion of the European way of life, the rule of law and equal criteria for all. In the area of rule of law, the Slovenian Presidency sought synergies between different European mechanisms. Slovenia intended to continue the European Commission's second annual report of the rule of law in the form of two debates: the general situation in the EU, and the specific situation of five Member States. The aim was to succeed in having a better understanding of the rule of law, which was a common EU value.

The fourth and last priority was to build a credible and secure European Union, capable of ensuring security and stability in its neighbourhood. The Slovenian Presidency would try to implement a strategy for a fully functioning and resilient Schengen area. Slovenia would also seek progress with respect to the pact on migration and asylum, and wished to strengthen work on the external dimension of migration. A particular emphasis was placed on the Western Balkans, especially in view of the EU Western Balkans summit that Slovenia would host on 6 October 2021. The Slovenian Presidency wished to promote convergence of this region, in different European policy areas, such as infrastructure; transport and energy connectivity; research and innovation; decarbonisation; digitalisation; and cyber resilience. Finally, the Slovenian Presidency would also seek to strengthen transatlantic relations.

Mr LOGAR concluded by underlining that the Chairpersons meeting of COSAC was a very important form of interinstitutional integration that would assist in finding the appropriate solutions to the issues faced by the European Union in the upcoming months, on the basis of the slogan "Together. Resilient. Europe".

During the debate that followed, 21 speakers took the floor. In their interventions, parliamentarians expressed their support for the ambitious programme of the Slovenian Presidency.

Ms Roberta METSOLA, European Parliament, started off by saying that the coming months would be decisive for the EU and called for a resilient EU to consolidate democracy, the rule of law and to make the CoFE a success. Ms METSOLA considered that the EU had to strengthen its position on the international stage, through the use of proper instruments and coordinated action, as evidenced by the EU's reaction to the recent events in Belarus. She said that the EU had to act in one voice. Ms METSOLA highlighted the importance of the CoFE, and the necessity for the EU to answer to 21st century challenges, in particular referring to vaccination and Western Balkans enlargement, while stressing the continued support of the European Parliament to their EU ambitions.

Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, and Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat* welcomed the Slovenian Presidency's prioritisation of resilience and the rule of law.

Ms THILLAYE stressed the importance of the future of Europe, which would also be one of the priorities of the French Presidency, and emphasised the role of national Parliaments in enforcing democracy. She also referred to the need to discuss the subject of Western Balkans enlargement, a sentiment echoed by Mr BUCHMANN. Mr KRICHBAUM thanked his colleagues for their support and solidarity for the recent deadly floodings, and stressed the need to strengthen cross-border cooperation.

Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, commended the choice of Slovenian priorities which were a continuation of the trio of Presidencies. Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS stated that Slovenian Presidency could count on the support of the Portuguese Parliament.

Several parliamentarians underlined the importance of the CoFE. Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Nationalrat*, referred to the debates on the future of Europe organized in his country, involving citizens and young people. Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, mentioned the subjects of *Spitzenkandidaten* and qualified majority voting which could be used to take efficient decisions. Mr Siim KALLAS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, emphasised the importance of maintaining the existing institutional balance between European institutions and Member States. Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, said it was extremely important that European institutions listened to the citizens, as the latter had an important role to play in the future of European policies. Mr ROBRA underlined the essential role of national Parliaments in the EU. Mr Kacper PŁAŻYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, stressed the importance of national constitutional courts, and the rule of law.

Several parliamentarians noted migration as a fundamental policy challenge to Europe. Mr MORENO said that Spain was particularly concerned about this subject and emphasized the necessity for the EU to act. Mr Jani MÄKELÄ, Finnish *Eduskunta*, considered EU action in preventing mass migration necessary. Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, referred to the political difficulties on the border between Belarus and Lithuania, and called for the EU to act.

On the economy, Mr MÄKELÄ said that EU recovery funds were useful tools to respond to the crisis but they should not become permanent funds, because each Member State had to assume its responsibilities. Mr Nikitas KAKLAMANIS, Greek *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, highlighted the importance of recovery plans to stimulate the economy and to create jobs in new sectors, such as energy and digitalization, and recalled the sacrifices made by Greece during the financial crisis of 2009.

A number of speakers referred to the Western Balkans and the enlargement process in their interventions. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, stressed that there could be no possible stability in Europe without stability in the Balkans. Mr Domagoj HADJUKOVIČ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, considered the Western Balkans as a top priority for Europe. Mr LOPATKA referred to the organization of two conferences on this subject, in Vienna and in Paris, in cooperation with the French *Assemblée nationale*. Mr Ștefan MUȘOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, congratulated the Slovenian Presidency for opening the debate on Schengen area enlargement. Mr MUȘOIU mentioned that Romania had an important role to play in the enlargement of Western Balkans and commended the election of the pro-European party in Moldova.

Mr Aber ADEMI, North Macedonian *Sobranie*, Mr Branimir GVOZDENOVIĆ, Montenegrin *Skupština* and Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, expressed their satisfaction to see the integration of Western Balkans as a priority of the Slovenian Presidency. Mr ADEMI declared that his country would manage to overcome difficulties encountered with Bulgaria. Mr GVOZDENOVIĆ called for better defined enlargement criteria, and stressed the fact that security and prosperity in Europe depended on the integration of Western Balkans, a region of historic importance. Ms KOVÁCS stated that Serbia had worked intensively to fulfil the criteria to access to the EU.

Mr Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, emphasized the necessity of building new relations between the UK and the EU, as these faced common issues, such as, for example, climate change. Mr KINNOULL reminded participants of the 26th annual United Nations Climate Conference taking place in Glasgow, and stressed the importance of parliamentary cooperation.

Taking the floor for his final remarks, Mr Anže LOGAR thanked the speakers for their support. He promised that the Slovenian Presidency would be working hard to progress on its priorities. He was delighted to hear the support from national Parliaments on these priorities and particularly from the European Parliament on the subject of enlargement with regard to the Western Balkans. Mr LOGAR mentioned the holding of a summit between the EU and the Western Balkans during the Slovenian Presidency and hoped that this summit would become more regular.

On the subject of the rule of law, Mr LOGAR referred to the mechanisms of prevention already existing in the treaties. He confirmed the will of the Slovenian Presidency to have a balanced debate on this subject.

Concerning the CoFE, Mr LOGAR noted that the preservation of the interinstitutional balance was essential for parliamentarians. He stressed the importance of the respect of the subsidiarity process. To conclude, he promised that the Slovenian Presidency would continue to cooperate with national Parliaments and the European Parliament to achieve its priorities.

5. Cybersecurity in the EU - Strengthening the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure and Cyber Defence

Keynote speakers: Mr Thierry BRETON, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market; Mr Matej TONIN, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia; Mr Juhan LEPASSAR, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA); Mr Uroš SVETE, Director of the Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia.

Mr Thierry BRETON, EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, addressed the participants through a pre-recorded video message. The Commissioner referred to the increasing number of cyberattacks, be them in the economic, political, commercial or military spheres, with one single aim: to destabilize the system. The EU had become a major global player and, therefore, a target for cyberattacks,

creating the need to protect critical infrastructures. Mr BRETON recognized that the EU was not prepared to tackle the threats and, in this regard, the European Commission had adopted in December the European Security Strategy to detect, defend, deter and protect the Union from cyber attacks. In order to achieve these goals, the Commissioner stressed the importance of the revision of the Directive on security of network and information systems (NIS Directive); the implementation of the principle «cyber-secure by design»; closer cooperation in research; and the importance of the Security Operations Centre (SOC). With regard to defence, Mr BRETON thought Europe should be better equipped to cope with major cyberattacks and, in this perspective, the Commission proposed the creation of a Joint Cyber Unit to manage large scale crises and to accompany the Strategic Compass.

Mr Matej TONIN, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia, was the second keynote speaker to take the floor. He pointed out the importance of cooperation in achieving common goals, particularly in the area of cybersecurity. Mr TONIN acknowledged the societal benefits of new technologies and rapid digitalization but also the vulnerabilities, risks and threats that these gave rise to. On critical infrastructures and provision of key services, the Minister highlighted the targeted cyberattacks on hospitals and healthcare facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential of these attacks to cause economic damage and threaten state sovereignty. He underlined the importance of a coordinated action and solidarity to develop effective solutions to protect critical infrastructure, ensuring an open, reliable, secure and predictable cyberspace.

Mr TONIN also welcomed the proposals of new Directives on the security of network and information systems (NIS 2) and on the resilience of critical entities (CER), the cyber security strategy and the Commission's proposal for a Joint Cyber Unit, as an important element for further complementing the EU's cyber crisis management framework. He also mentioned the importance of investments in modern capabilities and technologies and in cyber defence, including enhancing the military CERT network and promoting not only civil-military cooperation, but also cooperation with international organizations, especially NATO. The Minister concluded his intervention by reiterating the significance of ensuring coherence between international and national efforts, and foster a genuine culture of cooperation to collectively face the challenges of the digital age, in the spirit of the Presidency's slogan.

Mr Juhan LEPASSAR, Executive Director of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), also referred to the alarming rise of cyber incidents globally in 2020. He welcomed the European Commission's proposal to amend the NIS Directive, the first European wide cybersecurity legislation. Mr LEPASSAR listed the opportunities the amendment of this Directive would bring: the revision of its scope, which should be expanded in order to prevent and counter cyberattacks in critical infrastructures, expanding not only in terms of the size of entities but also including new sectors (pharmaceuticals, cloud computing service providers, data centers, food manufacturers, wastewater); enhanced cooperation, including information exchange across borders and levels; the increase in cybersecurity investment, with the EU Recovery plan offering a way out by investing in targeted areas that would improve cybersecurity and foster a robust cybersecurity market. In this respect, Mr LEPASSAR also alluded to the introduction of accountability for the top management for non-compliance with cybersecurity measures.

He touched upon the role of ENISA, set up by the Cybersecurity Act, and the need to achieve a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, as well as the need for cybersecurity professionals, research and innovation and the importance of the EU Cybersecurity Competence Centre and the Network of National Coordination Centres. Mr LEPASSAR thanked the Slovenian Presidency for the opportunity to discuss this issue with the national Parliaments and looked forward to visiting Slovenia in September for the Cybersecurity Conference.

Mr Uroš SVETE, Director of the Information Security Administration of the Republic of Slovenia, was the last speaker in this session. In his brief intervention, Mr SVETE stressed the importance of cyber resilience, which included EU leadership in digital technologies and enhanced cyber security throughout the digital supply chain. He emphasized the need to strengthen digital autonomy, including improvements in numerous areas, such as connectivity, efficient and resilient digital infrastructures, secure and open internet, resilience to cyber threats, digital skills and new technologies. The Director also recorded the most important dossiers in this area – NIS 2 Directive and Joint Cyber Unit – as well as the establishment of the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Competence Centre.

During the debate that followed, 16 speakers took the floor. In their interventions, parliamentarians expressed their overall support for cybersecurity as a priority area of action for the Member States and the EU.

A number of speakers, including Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Mr Siim KALLAS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Claude KERN, French *Sénat*, and Ms Jessika ROSWALL, Swedish *Riksdag* noted that digitalisation, and in particular the accelerated digitalisation noticed during the COVID-19 pandemic, was also accompanied by increased cyber-crime activity. Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales* noted that threats had become more sophisticated and that the EU was one of the primary targets. He stressed that the environment had itself become more complex and for example with respect to the internet of things a break-down of several services would result in great consequences. Similarly, Mr KALLAS noted that cyber-attacks had become a threat to many areas and activities in life, and stressed the importance of raising awareness and educating the citizens in the fight against cyber-crime.

In her intervention, Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, focused on the space sector and noted that little attention had been given to this area so far, although a large number of satellites were critical for many services. Ms THILLAYE mentioned that cybersecurity of satellites mostly relied on private companies which used open source software, being therefore more vulnerable to cyberattacks, a fact threatening the use of services. She referred to the relevant efforts made at national level and called for more discussion at EU level. Ms ROSWALL referred, amongst others, to the banking and finance sectors, stressing that since these sectors were mainly private, their protection was necessary in order for society to be able to function. She also noted that authorities should work efficiently, and that it was important to ensure cooperation between the EU's and Member States' authorities, echoing Mr KERN's plea for strengthening the exchange of information between the EU and its Member States.

Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, noted that a lot of information, including sensitive information, was being transferred, and that therefore cyber security was crucial. He was convinced that debates on this topic would frequently surface during future Council Presidencies. He also referred to the new EU industrial strategy and stressed that it was crucial for the EU to be able to rely on its own resources in this context. Similarly, Mr KERN referred to the EU industrial strategy and the need to invest in cybersecurity if the EU wished to avoid dependence on foreign technologies, which could eventually take control over infrastructure in certain business systems. In addition, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, referred to industrial espionage, a topic of special importance for Germany, and stressed the need to cooperate with the US in this area while being aware of the latter's own interests. In addition, Mr KRICHBAUM enquired about the existence of systematic data on cyber-crimes and what action was being taken with respect to cyber activity aimed

at influencing elections. Mr BATTELLI spoke about the impact of online propaganda and disinformation and the need to address the issue through inter-state cooperation.

Ms Roberta METSOLA, European Parliament, underlined that the European Parliament supported strengthening cybersecurity in the Union via European legislation and its Agency for Cyber Security ENISA, relying strongly on the capacity and expertise of all Member States. Ms METSOLA noted that cybersecurity was a great example of the complementary role of the Union's and the Member States' policies and agencies. She called for the EU to be resilient against digital challenges and to invest in cyber security in order to maintain competitiveness and to protect the EU citizens. Ms METSOLA stressed the need to be future-oriented and called for more progress in the area of hybrid threats.

Several speakers spoke about the national situation with respect to cybersecurity. Among these, Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/ Senaat* noted that Belgium had been a victim of many cyber-attacks, with the education and university systems being especially hit, and that in order to gain the population's trust, Belgium had invested in this area during the last years, provided targeted measures for the period 2021-2027 and also earmarked a significant part of the recovery plan to such relevant actions. Mr Dario STEFÀNO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica* noted that Italy had allocated considerable amounts to cybersecurity in the framework of its national recovery plan, while Mr BATTELLI provided information about the ongoing process of establishing a national agency. Mr KAIRIDIS stated that Greece had made a lot of progress in digitalisation and had delivered tangible results in the last two years, while cybersecurity and addressing vulnerability challenges were now on the forefront of the agenda. Mr MORENO noted that Spain had an advanced cybersecurity legislation in place and had from the outset supported the goal of reaching a harmonised high level of cybersecurity and resilience in the EU.

Foreign interferences and threats from third countries were also an aspect addressed by several speakers, including Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Mr Kacper PŁAŻYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, and Mr STEFÀNO. Ms MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ urged parliamentarians not to forget the Western Balkans or the Eastern Partnership countries, given their proximity to neighbouring countries which had views that conflicted with the EU's, and stressed the importance for Member States of standing together as a group. Mr STEFÀNO noted that, geopolitically, the EU needed to assert itself *vis-à-vis* Russia and China, requiring to this end that the EU dispose favourably towards adequate technologies to respond to cyber threats in a collective manner. Mr PŁAŻYŃSKI was of the opinion that only NATO had the capability to efficiently address the issue. He acknowledged that most attacks originated from the Union's Eastern neighbourhood and that strong sanctions should be considered, for example in the case of Russia; Mr MORENO stressed that the EU's sanction regime should be more efficiently used in the future. Ms ROSWALL called for strategic autonomy of the EU and for working with like-minded countries and democracies, including strengthening transatlantic relations.

Mr Harris GEORGIADES, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, agreed that a collective approach in the fight against cyber-crime and implementation was imperative.

The importance of investing more in research and innovation was also noted by Ms MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ and Mr GEORGIADES. In this respect, Mr KERN underlined the importance of innovation partnerships in the EU. Mr ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, also called for cybersecurity to be improved in the education system and stressed that cybersecurity was not only about IT and technology, but also about the timely identification of weak areas.

Mr BATELLI, Mr GEORGIADIS, Mr KAIRIDIS and Mr STEFÀNO welcomed the European Commission proposals and called for their quick adoption. Mr STEFÀNO highlighted that the Italian Senate had examined the proposals and found no issues with subsidiarity. Mr ROBBA raised some concerns with respect to the NIS Directive and the limited involvement of the regions. Mr KAIRIDIS highlighted the significant work done by ENISA and underlined the importance of having adequate resources to fight cyber-crime.

The keynote speakers took the floor at the end of the debate to address some of the questions. Mr TONIN once again welcomed the revision of the NIS Directive with a view to achieving resilience of critical entities. He stressed that an integrated approach had been followed, based on thorough risk assessment and planning. Strengthening resilience would require that both non-cyber and cybersecurity would be considered in a complementary way. He underlined that Slovenia was in favour of a flexible and pragmatic approach to allow Member States to make adaptations according to their national systems when needed. He confirmed that the Slovenian Presidency would strive to harmonise the two Directives in the Council's working groups.

Mr SVETE stressed the need to progress with Directive proposal on NIS 2 in Council, this being the main pillar of cybersecurity in EU, and that Member States understood the need for quick progression in this area. Rules would need to be implementable in practice and the burden for national authorities be kept at a minimum. With respect to the new joint cyber unit in the Commission, he stressed the need for harmonious cooperation with all stakeholders involved.

Finally, Mr LEPASSAAR noted that cyber-crime was not a new area, but that accelerated digitalisation revealed that work still needed to be done. While he confirmed a 72 per cent increase of significant and impactful incidents between 2019 and 2020, he acknowledged the lack of reliable statistics, especially since data from Member States was not comparable, given that there were discrepancies with respect to who had been reporting and what had been reported. He underlined that the mindset was the problem: businesses did not consider cybersecurity crucial, despite the fact that this should be a priority issue for managers of organisations and businesses, rather than being merely an issue to be solely dealt with by IT departments. He welcomed the Commission proposals and the establishment of the new cyber unit toward changing this attitude.

Concluding the debate, Mr POGAČNIK thanked all participants for the very interesting discussion confirming that joint action in the area was necessary and was convinced that the topic would be further discussed in the framework of COSAC.

Mr KEKEC echoed these sentiments, and stressed that the future of Europe had to be built on fundamental European principles and values, and it was the responsibility of politicians to uphold these values, working for a resilient Europe by working with and building the trust of its citizens.