



## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LXVIII COSAC

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC, 13 - 15 NOVEMBER 2022

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## **PROCEEDINGS**

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*; Mr David SMOLJAK, Member of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Czech *Senát*.

### **1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

**Welcome speech by H. E. Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ, Speaker of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna***

Ms Markéta PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ welcomed the participants and recalled the importance of COSAC and the exceptional time in which this meeting was taking place, with the conflict in Ukraine. She pointed out that a few kilometres east of the Czech Republic, civilians were being killed, infrastructures destroyed, and emphasised that all these events should not be considered as normal.

She said that the war in Ukraine had led to an unprecedented refugee and energy crisis, but at the same time it was also leading to choices and transformations for Europe. She welcomed the European Union's (EU) swift and effective response to the conflict with the package of sanctions against Russia.

Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVÁ highlighted the transformations of the European economies that were underway and that it would be necessary in the long term to reduce the European Union's dependence on fossil fuels. She pointed out that in the Czech Republic, the number of rooftop solar installations had more than doubled, and that the country was accelerating the preparation of new power plants and counting on new types of nuclear reactors.

She said that the Czech Presidency, with the support of the EU, should continue to provide financial and military assistance to Ukraine, especially to help with the country's reconstruction. She recalled that Ukraine needed this financial support but also

political support, reiterating the essential role of national Parliaments and parliamentary resolutions.

Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVIÁ also welcomed the granting of the candidate status to Ukraine and to Moldova and admitted that this was the beginning of a long process that would require a lot of work for all, noting that candidate countries must fulfil all the conditions for accession. She acknowledged that the issue of enlargement was of concern to many Member States, but emphasised that Europe had changed and would never be the same as it was at the end of the 1990s. She added that this was a reality that must be accepted, and that if candidate countries were kept waiting at the door, this would weaken the EU's security and prosperity, and create a geopolitical vacuum in our neighbourhood that would be readily filled by what she considered to be the EU's enemies.

Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVIÁ referred to a speech she delivered at the Interparliamentary Conference on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, held last September, in which she pointed out that there were discussions about changing the way decisions were made at the EU. In concrete terms, this was not only about enlargement, but also related to the debates on the future of Europe and on the reform of the EU's functioning, namely on whether it was better to decide by unanimity or by qualified majority vote. While acknowledging that this discussion was indeed necessary, she noted that no change in the decision-making rules would solve the problem. In fact, she considered that a majority vote, even against the will of a single Member State, should be a last resort. However, she also highlighted that the use of the veto should be equally exceptional, adding that the ease with which some Member States used the veto on key foreign policy issues was indeed irresponsible. She therefore appealed to all delegations to strive in finding consensus and compromising solutions, since albeit a long and challenging process, it was the only way the EU community could function in the long run.

On the issue of strategic autonomy, Ms PEKAROVÁ ADAMOVIÁ recalled that the EU must reduce its dependence on some parts of the world and take a more active role in the area of security beyond its immediate surroundings. She added that the EU must also continue to strengthen its international ties of friendship, particularly with regard to the transatlantic relations. She recalled the words of the former American Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who travelled to the Czech Republic in 1999 for the accession of this country and Hungary to NATO: *“Of course, there will always be differences between Europe and America. We have been aptly called cousins, but we will never be mistaken for clones.. We must never forget that the destinies of Europe and North America are inseparable... We know that when the democracies of Europe and America are divided, crevices are created through which forces of evil and aggression may emerge; and that when we stand together, no force on Earth is more powerful than our solidarity on behalf of freedom.”*

She ended her intervention by wishing all participants a fruitful and beneficial Conference.

#### **Opening remarks by**

- **Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna***

Mr BENEŠÍK recalled the exceptional moment the EU was facing at that time, in which democracy and the rule of law could no longer be taken for granted. He indicated the need to defend these values, as shown by the Russian aggression, and other global conflicts.

He said that some parliamentarians were on the front line in these conflicts, and that he was very pleased that representatives of non-EU member states who intend to join the EU were participating in this COSAC.

Mr BENEŠÍK recalled the Czech Republic's assistance to Ukraine and expressed his pride in the Czech citizens who showed solidarity with the Ukrainian people. He concluded by saying that COSAC should be an example of solidarity and unity.

- **Mr David SMOLJAK, Member of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Czech *Senát***

Mr SMOLJAK welcomed the delegations to the Conference venue, usually devoted to culture and sports, indicating that these themes were not so far away from the political debates being held at COSAC. He recalled the motto of the Olympic Games, which highlighted that the most important was not about winning, but participating. Therefore, the aim of the discussions was to participate in the public policy debate and to move things in the right direction, cooperating with a team spirit. He emphasised the need to play by the rules, noting that the situation Europe was currently facing was originated by the fact that one country decided to break those rules of the international order established after World War II.

Mr SMOLJAK also alluded to the role played by the Czech *Senát* as the Chamber that allowed for checks and balances in the decision-making and legislative process, and wished success for the Conference.

#### **Adoption of the Draft Agenda for the Plenary Meeting of the LXVIII COSAC**

Mr BENEŠÍK presented the draft agenda of the LXVIII COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

## **2. PROCEDURAL AND OTHER GENERAL MATTERS**

Mr BENEŠÍK welcomed Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, Mr Glenn

BEDINGFIELD, Chair of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Mr Raivo TAMM, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Hans WALLMARK, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*, and also the Vice-Chair of this Committee, Ms Matilda ERNKRANS, Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, recently appointed Chairwoman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and Mr Salvatore DE MEO, new Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), who were attending the COSAC Plenary meeting for the first time.

### **Results of the Meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**

Mr BENEŠÍK informed the delegations about the results of the COSAC Presidential Troika Meeting, noting the approval of the draft agenda of the LXVIII COSAC.

He also noted that he was pleased that the Troika had been able to find a compromise on the wording of the Draft Contribution and Conclusions, after having received proposals from different delegations. However, he also indicated that the French delegation would present proposals for amendments related to the two COSAC Working Groups established during the French Presidency.

He indicated that he hoped that these texts could be approved by consensus at the meeting of the Chairpersons later that day, reminding delegations that the amendments to these texts had to be tabled before noon.

### **Presentation of the 38th Bi-annual Report of COSAC**

Mr BENEŠÍK referred to the 38th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which was drafted by the COSAC Secretariat on the basis of replies to the related questionnaire circulated to national Parliaments/Chambers on 19 July 2022, with a deadline on 19 September for submitting the answers. Mr BENEŠÍK thanked the COSAC Secretariat for their work and gave the floor to its Permanent Member, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, to present the Report.

Mr DIAS PINHEIRO emphasised the fact that, besides the European Parliament, the Parliaments/Chambers of 26 out of 27 Member-States had replied to the questionnaire, expressing the expectation that the findings of the Report might prove useful not only for the COSAC Plenary but also for the works in the months ahead.

He further recalled that the three chapters of the Report were dedicated to: 1. The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE) – parliamentary procedures and institutional affairs; 2. The proposals of the COSAC Working Groups (WGs); 3. The EU and Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Georgia. The main results from the Report were summarised in a short video clip produced by the Permanent Member and displayed at the end of his intervention.

*A video presenting the highlights of the Report was broadcasted.*

### **Letters received by the Presidency**

Mr BENEŠÍK referred to the letter received by Sir William CASH, from the United Kingdom (UK) *House of Commons* requesting an invitation to attend the LXVIII COSAC. He added that, following consultation with the Presidential Troika, an invitation had been sent to the above-mentioned Chamber.

He also mentioned the letters sent by the Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Polish *Senat*, Mr Bogdan KLICH, on the possible establishment of a COSAC liaison office in Ukraine and the reply given by the Presidency.

Finally, he also alluded to the letter sent by the Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish *Folketing*, Ms Eva KJER HANSEN, proposing to include a point about the role of national Parliaments on the agenda of the LXVIII COSAC. Mr BENEŠÍK informed about the reply given by the Presidency, noting that the time frame dedicated to COSAC Plenary meetings was limited and rearranging the agenda at the request in such a short time before the Conference was extremely difficult for various reasons. However, and given the importance of the topic, the Presidency proposed to extend the agenda of the informal online meeting with Vice-President of the European Commission Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, scheduled for 24 November, so that the COSAC Chairpersons would have the opportunity to discuss efficiently current pressing issues related to the role of the national Parliaments.

All the letters mentioned were made available on IPEX.

### **Any other business**

Mr BENEŠÍK referred to other activities within the framework of COSAC during the semester of the Czech Presidency, namely to continue the practice inaugurated by the previous Presidencies of organising informal hearings of European Commissioners or other personalities by videoconference with the Chairpersons of the Committees on European Affairs of the national Parliaments and with the European Parliament.

With that regard, he mentioned that two of these hearings had already taken place, namely with Ms Margrethe VESTAGER, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age on the Single Market Emergency Instrument, held on 6 October 2022; and with Ms Věra JOUROVÁ, Vice - President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, on the Rule of Law and Media Freedom Act, held on 27 October 2022.

Furthermore, Mr BENEŠÍK recalled that a hearing with Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight was scheduled for 24 November 2022, on the state of play of EU-UK relations.

Finally, a hearing with the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans TIMMERMANS, was also foreseen to take place in December, whereas the concrete date will be announced in due course.

Mr BENEŠÍK also informed the Troika about the visit of a group of Chairpersons of EU Affairs Committees of national Parliaments and the First-Vice President of the European Parliament to Kyiv on 30 September, which was the first such visit to a candidate country in this format. He alluded to the [joint press statement](#) adopted and reiterated the importance of this initiative as a sign of solidarity and support to Ukraine.

### **3. KEYNOTE VIDEO MESSAGE: H. E. Ms URSULA VON DER LEYEN, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Ms VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission, addressed a video message to COSAC and thanked the parliamentarians for their involvement in these difficult times, recalling that their voice was essential as democratic representatives of the citizens. She recalled that the Commission had made 130 visits to national Parliaments.

She thanked the Czech Republic for its solidarity with Ukraine, pointing out that it was one of the ten countries that had provided significant military aid. She referred to the history of the Czech Republic, recalling its resistance to the Soviet invasion in 1968.

Ms VON DER LEYEN recalled that Ukraine needed financial assistance for parts of its economy but also for its reconstruction. She mentioned the reconstruction conference held in Berlin at the end of October, which had led the Commission to propose allocating 18 billion euros to Ukraine for 2023, i.e. 1.5 billion per month.

The President of the Commission also spoke about the energy crisis, indicating the initiatives taken by the Commission in this area: capping the price of gas, taxing the windfall profits of gas companies, reforming the electricity market.

She said that Russia had reduced its gas exports to the EU by 80% compared to last year, but that the EU had been able to compensate for this loss of supply with new partners such as Norway. The EU had filled its stocks to 95% and reduced its consumption by 15%.

Ms VON DER LEYEN recalled that the future of energy lay in renewable energies, which were good for the planet, less expensive and produced in Europe. She mentioned the REPower EU plan, which provides for up to 300 billion euros to accelerate this green transition and permits for renewable energy. A new emergency regulation to accelerate the use of renewable energy was presented by the Commission.

The President of the Commission also said that the European Union must defend the values that we hold dear, such as the right of a people to choose its future, in the face of Russia. She said that it was not only about the war in Ukraine, but also about whether the European Union remained a model of democracy and progress in the region.

She recalled that Moldova had been granted candidate country status, that Georgia had been granted a "European perspective", that the Commission had recommended to the Member States that Bosnia and Herzegovina be granted candidate country status, and that negotiations had been started with Albania and Northern Macedonia.

Ms VON DER LEYEN concluded by saying that in this period of change on the European continent, not only the people but also their representatives were the authors of Europe's future.

#### **4. SESSION I - THE CZECH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU**

**Keynote Speaker: Mr Mikuláš BEK, Minister for European Affairs, Government of the Czech Republic**

Mr SMOLJAK opened the session and explained how the delegates could request the floor for the debate. Then he gave the floor to Mr Mikuláš BEK.

Mr BEK started his speech by welcoming all delegates and thanking them for their participation. He apologised on behalf of the Czech Prime Minister, Mr Petr FIALA, who was not able to participate at the LXVIII COSAC Plenary meeting due to other scheduled duties. He continued by noting that the remaining weeks of the Czech Presidency seemed to be the most demanding ones and thanked colleagues from all institutions for their contribution to the fluidity of the Presidency. He recalled the first Czech Presidency in 2009, after becoming a Member State in 2004, and mentioned that during those eighteen years the Czech Republic had matured and was now acting with more experience and better grasp of EU politics during its second Presidency. He mentioned that the EU had since then grown into a family of 27 Member States noting it was probably not the final number. He underlined that the enlargement of the EU was, after all, a part of the priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU and further added that granting Ukraine and other countries in Western Balkans candidate status was a huge commitment for security and economic growth of the whole Europe. He said that this year the EU had found out that peace was not given and pointed at Ukraine who was defending its territory against Russian aggressors.

Mr BEK also underlined that aid to Ukraine was a priority for the Czech Presidency including protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and mentioned that humanitarian aid was already being distributed, while the Czech Presidency was now showing leadership in the on-going work with post-war restoration and stabilisation of the war-torn country.



Furthermore, he recalled the sanctions adopted in order to exert pressure on Russia and Belarus, the agreement on the suspension of visa facilitation for Russian citizens and the EU's approval of aid to Ukraine in the form of long-term loans. He expressed his belief that the EU needed to be steadfast in its approach, emphasising that the conflict was taking place next to the EU's borders, showing how important it was to have a common foreign and security policy and for the EU to show its strength and united line towards Russia. With that regard, he considered that it was essential to strengthen the EU's common foreign and security policy in the future so that it could protect itself from hybrid war including foreign information manipulation, which was unfortunately the EU's everyday reality.

Mr BEK also identified other challenges for the Czech Presidency, namely the high prices of energy. In this context, he mentioned that the only way of responding to it was unity again, and that three special meetings of the Council with ministers for energy had already taken place, and a fourth one was planned in a few days. He recalled the EU's agreement on gas storage, thanks to which the EU would not suffer even if Russia was to suspend its supplies. At the same time, Mr BEK also reiterated the need for the reduction of dependency on Russian energy and for the self-sufficiency of the EU in the energy sector. He mentioned the Council meeting in October and the discussions on common voluntary purchases of gas for better prices and said that this cooperation should also be open for Western Balkans, Moldova, and Georgia.

Mr BEK also mentioned the adoption of special measures to reduce energy prices and a discussion over the reform of gas prices. He further noted that the EU's market system, which was about to be introduced in 2023, was a good step to strengthen the resilience of the Union. He emphasised that at the same time the EU needed to become globally competitive, adding that all these issues were discussed at the historically first meeting of the European Political Community in Prague, at the beginning of October, where 43 European leaders discussed security issues, aiming at ensuring stability and prosperity of the European continent as a whole. He added that similar meetings were already planned to take place in Moldova, Spain and Great Britain in the future.

Lastly, Mr BEK said that apart from the main objective to overcome the problems associated with the war in Ukraine, the EU also needed to deal with other tasks such as the digital transformation, media freedom and the Fit for 55 package. To solve those tasks, he argued that a lot of energy, an open mind, and a common will to achieve consensus would be needed. He concluded by saying that the EU had been recently struggling with the fragility of democracy and democratic institutions, which constituted one of its main pillars, adding that these institutions needed to be safe-guarded and protected throughout the EU.

During the ensuing debate, 36 speakers took the floor, expressing support and solidarity with Ukraine, underlining the need to strengthen even further the help provided to Ukraine and the importance of staying united. Most of the speakers also thanked and

expressed their support to the Czech Presidency, especially for its decision to put Ukraine as a top priority in the Council.

Mr Hans WALLMARK, Swedish *Riksdag*, emphasised that Sweden, when taking over the EU Council Presidency next semester, would be very much aware of the fact that all the future work would have the war in Ukraine and its consequences as its backdrop. He reiterated that the EU should bear in mind its strength which, according to him, was represented by European values, the rule of law, democracy and its economy. Mr WALLMARK reminded everyone of next year's thirty years anniversary of the Single Market and concluded his intervention by inviting all delegations to Stockholm.

Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, underlined the need to continue to support Ukraine economically, in humanitarian ways but also with weapons. He expressed his belief that large Member States could be of bigger help to Ukraine. He also considered that Ukraine should be welcomed as a Member State very soon but first the EU needed to reform itself, highlighting that the decision-making process should be part of this reform. Furthermore, he elaborated on the need of broadening the renewable sources of energy. He concluded by reiterating the need to defend the main strengths of the EU, which included upholding the rule of law in all Member-States, which was currently not the case, for instance in Hungary.

Mr Vadym HALAICHUK, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, summarised what Ukraine had achieved during the Czech Presidency. He mentioned the fact that Ukraine had become a candidate country, adding that discussions on the future of Europe went closely together with the future of Ukraine and that the membership of Ukraine was inevitable in the near future.

Ms Mariia MEZENTSEVA, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, asked for support to create an ad hoc tribunal for the Russian president Vladimir PUTIN and his closest counterparts, which was a priority for President Volodymyr ZELENSKY and the whole Ukrainian nation. She urged to make Europe a heart of international law and democracy again.

Mr Domènec RUIZ DEVESA, European Parliament, touched upon the 38th Bi-annual Report presented by the Permanent Member of COSAC Secretariat. He noted that in his view there were two very important points for the European Parliament, namely the Pan-European issues and the Treaty reform. He declared his disappointment regarding the lack of positions on those issues from national Parliaments and expressed hope that this would change in the future. He also urged Minister BEK to initiate negotiations within the Council on the new European electoral law still under the Czech Presidency, and to send a strong signal regarding the activation of article 48 of the Treaty on the European Union.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, stated that he wanted to further develop the relations with Georgia as a country very much affected by Russia's war. He also pointed out that there should be no fast track or two track candidate countries. He

underlined that many issues needed to be kept in mind throughout the negotiation process.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, noted that the EU's only goal should be stopping the war in Ukraine and working towards a stronger union, which included a successful green and digital transition and improvement of its strategic and energy autonomy. Mr RAPIN mentioned nuclear energy as a source that could significantly contribute to the energy independence of the EU and at the same time allowed to produce stable decarbonised energy.

Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée nationale*, reminded the delegates of the EU's flag symbolically raised by the Ukrainians when taking back the territory of Kherson. He called for the fastest possible entry of Ukraine into the EU and also invited the Member States to intensify the military equipment supplies especially during the winter.

Mr Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA, Polish *Senat*, reminded the delegates that the Polish *Senat*, together with the Parliaments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania considered the current Russian regime as a terrorist one. She emphasised that the Ukrainian fight was also a fight of Europe for their values and freedom.

Mr Ștefan MUȘOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, thanked the Czech Presidency for enhancing European coordination and solidarity when it came to the creation of the framework to support Member States most affected by the large influx of refugees. He also applauded the Presidency for the focus on strengthening the security and defence capabilities with NATO, as well as for the promotion of the EU expansion to the Western Balkans and therefore mitigating Russian influence in this area. Mr MUȘOIU also mentioned that Romania awaited the Council favourable vote enabling the country to join the Schengen area.

Ms Pia KAUMA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, stated that Ukraine needed more weapons and urged for the intensification of the military production, while also mentioning the need for a bigger role of Member States. She noted that the EU had too much power in issues that should be decided by Member States, such as the new regulation on nature restoration<sup>1</sup>.

Mr Rubén Fausto MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, recalled the Czech Republic did not have an easy task in its first Presidency of the EU Council in 2009, since it had to deal with the financial and institutional crisis, and especially the issues with gas supplies from Russia. However, he considered that the EU was learning how to deal with these crises, emphasising that a more pro-european stance had been essential to help tackle these challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on nature restoration, Brussels, COM(2022) 304 final

Mr Amer SMAILOVIĆ, Montenegro *Skupština Crne Gore*, welcomed the Western Balkans as a priority on the EU's agenda and underlined the need to stay focused on it, especially in the present times of deep political and institutional crisis in Montenegro.

Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, appreciated the response given by the EU to the recent and ongoing crisis and emphasised the need to remain strong and united. She added that during the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council, in the second half of 2023, Spain wanted to stay in this line adding more equality and topics that are important to citizens such as health, food, energy or gender gaps.

Mr Arto PIRTTILAHTI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, highlighted the importance of renewable sources of energy, and at the same moment to get rid of fossil energy, while also mentioning that the new regulation on nature restoration was unacceptable for Finland.

Mr Marius MATIJOŠAITIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, underlined the need for energy independence on Russia, and welcomed the sanctions adopted against this country but urged for more and their regular revision. He appreciated the first meeting of the European Political community on 6 October in Prague.

Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, noted that the EU should be optimistic when looking at the Russian military situation on the ground now when President PUTIN was starting to lose compared to recent months. He welcomed Georgia's attendance at the LXVIII COSAC and also agreed with Montenegro on showing a bigger focus on the Western Balkans.

Mr Marko PAVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, mentioned the successful meeting of the first Parliamentary Summit of the Crimean Platform, organised in October 2022, in Zagreb, supporting Ukraine and which gathered more than 50 delegations. He also recalled that Croatia was about to join the eurozone on the 1st of January 2023.

Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, welcomed the presence of the new candidate countries, namely Ukraine and Moldova, and expressed his belief that Georgia would soon also become one. He reiterated that Russia had to see that the EU perceived those countries as members of the family and also emphasised the need for the EU to have a clear perspective on the Western Balkans.

Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, stated that Georgia shared common European values and was prepared to fight for it and meet all conditions for accession, but at the same time she expressed her doubts concerning indecisiveness of the EU in this regard.

Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, reiterated the need for renewable energy sources and expressed her belief that the EU would be the leading and dominant in this regard.

Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, stated that the EU should not neglect the enlargement policy and evaluate according to the individual merit of each candidate.

She precised that the Serbian *Narodna skupština* was working very hard to meet all conditions leading to the full membership of the country in the EU.

Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, appreciated the leadership of the Czech Presidency in these unprecedented times, standing up for the European values and unity of the EU. She also mentioned that democratic resilient institutions were key to peace and stability, namely ensuring transparent governance and rule of law in every Member State, emphasising the series of reforms undertaken by Bulgaria with that regard. Still in the same context, she specified the role of the General Prosecutor and its deputies, and Bulgaria's support to the mandate of the European Public Prosecutor's Office.

Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato*, alluded to the newly elected Parliament and the newly appointed Government in Italy, reiterating its strong commitment to the EU values. He considered it was important for the EU to reassert the responsibility and solidarity in facing the challenge of the migration issue. He also referred to the conclusions of the CoFE, namely the one on the revision of the Dublin regulation<sup>2</sup>.

Ms Marina NIKOLAOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, urged for more social equality in Europe also in these hard times.

Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonia *Sobranie* thanked the Presidency for prioritising the topic of the European perspective of the whole region and precised that North Macedonia worked very hard in order to meet all conditions.

Mr Othmar KARAS, European Parliament, noted that, in order to gain trust of citizens in the decision-making process, the EU needed to apply what had been decided and not simply to talk about it. He praised the Czech Presidency for all its achievements, underling that it had been guided by decisiveness, mentioning among others the steps forward with respect to the pandemic, the Fit for 55 package, cyber security, and the financial market regulations. Notwithstanding the many challenges the EU currently faced, Mr KARAS stated that this meant that a revision of the Treaties was indeed needed and therefore a European Convention should be launched.

Mr Bruno NUNES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, started by saying that the help and support for refugees could not be mixed up with human trafficking and illegal migration. He further noted that the CoFE had highlighted the need for Treaty change, but he emphasised that this reform should keep in mind the protection of the EU's identity and territory, namely its countries and culture.

Mr Christos CHRISTOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, started by saying that biggest challenge for the future of the EU was migration, emphasising that Cyprus was one of the most affected Member-States, since the number of asylum applications was higher

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<sup>2</sup> Proposal 44, 2 of the CoFE: "Revisiting the Dublin system in order to guarantee solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility including the redistribution of migrants among Member States."

than the entire population of the country. He added that this was putting a heavy pressure on the Cypriot security, budget or health care and education systems. He therefore welcomed the compromise presented by the Czech Presidency with regard to migration and negotiations with the Republic of Türkiye.

Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, mentioned the question of the Media Freedom Act Regulation, stating that this Chamber considered the regulation as not having sufficient legal basis and that it was not in line with the subsidiarity principle.

Ms Helene RYCKMANS, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, while acknowledging the importance of the support to Ukraine, urged the delegates not to forget about the climate disruption, reminding this topic was on the list of the European citizens priorities at CoFE.

Mr Joe MCHUGH, Irish *Houses of Oireachtas*, supported the European Commission's commitment to the EU enlargement process when reminding of words of Ms VON DER LEYEN in her video message for LXVIII COSAC, namely the specific reference to the fact that it was our historical responsibility.

Mr Åsmund AUKRUST, Norwegian *Storting* reiterated the need to support Ukraine financially, but also as parliamentarians and as COSAC. He further underlined the importance of the protection of the critical infrastructure, especially after the sabotage on the Nord Stream pipeline in September. He noted that Norway welcomed the support from several European countries to protect European gas infrastructure and eventually welcomed the European Commission's plan on critical infrastructure resilience.

Mr Vytautas GAPŠYS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, thanked the Czech Presidency for its efforts and reactions on the energy crisis but noted that Lithuania was expecting more than that and was awaiting from the European Commission side an offer of price cap on gas to Member States. Eventually he remarked that finding a solution to the high energy prices was important to make sure European economies were able to grow.

Mr Kacper PŁAŻYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, mentioned that the future of the EU was being played in Ukraine, and - besides others - noted that Russia needed to pay reparations to Ukraine for war crimes, both material and intangible alike, also alluding to the Polish claims for similar reparations from Germany after World War II.

Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI, Kosovo<sup>3</sup> *Kuvendi i Kosovës* stated that Kosovo was fully committed and prepared to contribute to the common security in Europe and beyond. On the other hand, she expressed disappointment by the denial of the Kosovo visa facilitation regime.

Mr BEK thanked all for the debate stating that the feedback from national Parliaments represented a valuable source for the mapping of the positions of all the political

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<sup>3</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

partners. Mr BEK also noted that he was looking forward to meeting many of the delegates at the follow up event to the CoFE, due to be held in Brussels on 2 December. He further added this meeting was another opportunity to discuss other important issues indicated in the outcomes of the CoFE, including the Treaty changes.

## **5. SESSION II: FUTURE OF THE EU**

Mr Petr FIFKA, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, opened the session and gave the floor to the first keynote speaker.

### **Keynote Speaker 1: Mr Othmar KARAS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament**

In his opening remarks, Mr KARAS thanked, on behalf of the President Roberta METSOLA and himself, the Czech Presidency for the very good collaboration with the European Parliament. He noted that the world was in crisis mode and facing different challenges, including Russia's war against Ukraine, inflation, the pandemic and the climate crisis. But he also spoke of the crisis of trust, the fact that European citizens were no longer trusting the politicians and the media. He stressed that all these challenges had no borders and thus dealing with these in unity and solidarity was crucial. He gave the example of 91% of young Europeans being concerned about the climate crisis and nine out of 10 EU citizens having the opinion that democracy needed to be strengthened. He stressed that the citizens knew that crises could only be overcome by the EU acting together and called for the appropriate response. Mr KARAS also noted the decrease in the EU population and in the EU's economic performance at worldwide level throughout the years and underlined the importance of strengthening the EU in the world.

At the same time, he noted that the EU was weakening itself through inner blockades, a fact that also reduced the trust of citizens. If the EU wanted to be a global player that is capable of acting, then it had to move forward and reform its decision-making processes. He stressed the need for good and useful European solutions for the big challenges, ensuring that the EU could become more active, more efficient, greener, more digital, and more social, on the basis of democratic majority decisions and not based on individual national interests. He highlighted the duty for parliamentarians in this respect, as representatives of the citizens of Europe and as lawmakers, to implement what had to be done, while noting that being different was actually the EU's strong point, embracing the differences and being united in diversity.

Vice-President KARAS said that looking at the future in the framework of daily politics and crises meant looking at the debate about Europe. Given the present circumstances and room for manoeuvre, and precisely because there was a lack of trust in politics today, one had to acknowledge that although the EU's future had been discussed before in the past, it was never discussed to this extent. The CoFE delivered a very impressive

result, 49 broad proposals and 326 specific measures which should serve as the tailwind for politicians to implement the outcome of the CoFE. Mr Karas noted his disappointment with the little work done to date and in particular with the postponement of implementation from one Council Presidency to another and he disagreed with those who claimed that nothing could be done before the next European elections. He noted that all the signatories of the common declaration had pledged to effectively implement the results of the CoFE and thereby, in his view, the institutions had committed to convening a Convention.

For Mr KARAS it was not acceptable that there were no steps forward. He stressed it was high time for the Council to pave the way for a reform of the Treaties in order to implement the results of the CoFE.

According to Mr KARAS, strengthening cooperation was necessary for the EU to become stronger inside and outside and to ensure its credibility, and therefore the implementation of the CoFE should be the core concern of parliamentarians. In the European Parliament, the debate on the necessary reform of the Treaties was underway and the processes taking place were transparently communicated to the public on the website of the European Parliament. On 2 December 2022, in the Plenary of the European Parliament in Brussels, a feedback event with citizens was planned confirming that the promise to citizens was kept. Mr KARAS stressed that it was important that all EU Institutions and all Parliaments of the EU made this process their own, that national Parliaments would make their national governments responsible and would ensure they would stick to their commitments quickly and consistently. Finally, it was important to organise relevant debates in the national Parliaments, in view of the next Summit. Mr KARAS concluded by underlining that citizens expected more to be done and they should not be disappointed. Parliamentarians had the responsibility to be on the side of the future and not on the side of a blockade.

### **Keynote Speaker 2: Ms Věra JOUROVÁ, Vice-President of the European Commission**

Ms Věra JOUROVÁ, Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, noted, in her introductory remarks, that in a period of successive crises and challenges, from the COVID 19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, it fell to governments, elected representatives, and common institutions, to provide solutions to citizens' concerns and aspirations. One of the tools to provide some guidance and answers was the CoFE, a joint initiative of the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission, designed as a bottom-up pan-European democratic exercise, driven first and foremost by citizens, with particular attention to youth. Four European citizens' panels included 800 randomly selected citizens and worked on the issues they considered to be of priority for the EU to act upon. Ms JOUROVÁ highlighted that the plenary of the CoFE was a unique feature where citizens had deliberated with elected representatives at all levels, from European to local, for the very first time and she was impressed with the citizens' commitment.



Ms JOUROVÁ mentioned that the European Commission had put forward several initiatives addressing the outcome of the CoFE, such as the proposal on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market, the European Media Freedom Act or the European Care Strategy. The CoFE also influenced the European Commission's work programme for 2023, as 43 out of 51 initiatives in the work program were linked to the final report of the CoFE, covering subjects ranging from animal welfare to critical materials, from financial services to defence of democracy. However, she stressed that the follow-up to the CoFE was a joint responsibility. She also referred to the feedback event planned for December 2022, in close cooperation with the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, and mentioned that a number of proposals from the CoFE would require Treaty change. She noted that the European Parliament submitted a number of specific requests and that the matter was at the Council level for follow-up.

Ms JOUROVÁ said that the European Democracy Action Plan would be reviewed and measures would be developed in the package on the defence of democracy in 2023, as it was crucial to strengthen the resilience of democracies. She stressed that the long-term success of the EU and Europe's future hinges on the solutions it could provide to the concerns of citizens both in policies and in policy making. This included action beyond the European Institutions and stakeholders at the national, regional and local level had a crucial role to play.

Because national Parliaments also had a specific role as bridges between the citizens and the EU, their feedback, support, and participation was crucial. Ms JOUROVÁ welcomed that national Parliaments had engaged in a reflection process through the Working Groups convened within COSAC. Despite all the challenges ahead - the demographic challenge, the viability and competitiveness of the economy, the green and digital transition, the resilience of economy against high inflation and the energy security tasks, the rule of law issues, the future of freedoms and liberties in the world, the health challenges - Ms JOUROVÁ was confident that the EU would maintain its unity in full respect of its values. She also mentioned that it was important to keep citizens informed and involved and that the Commission stood ready to engage in a strengthened dialogue facilitating input from national Parliaments to the Commission's initiatives. She concluded by underlining that the Commission would play its role as guardian of the Treaties and would not spare any effort in creating the best conditions for a safe, clean, modern, prosperous, powerful and free Europe of the future.

During the ensuing debate, 49 speakers took the floor.

Many of the interventions touched upon the Treaty change, the enlargement and neighbourhood policy, and the CoFE.

Several speakers agreed with the keynote speakers about the need to launch the Convention, to change the Treaties and act quickly (Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, Mr Ioannis BOURNOUS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Thomas HACKER,

German *Bundestag*, Mr Domènec RUIZ DEVESA, European Parliament, Mr Salvatore DE MEO, European Parliament, Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*).

Mr SCHENNACH said that it was important to overcome the unanimous decision making system, but he specified that due to its neutrality Austria would not be able to change unanimity with respect to security and defence. Mr BOURNOUS noted the need for stronger Parliaments, stronger national opponents and a stronger European Parliament that would actually take part in the law-making process, as well as the democratic election of the President of the European Commission. Mr HACKER noted that the Russian war against Ukraine showed that Europe could act together and that more countries wished to become members of this growing Union. He also specifically referred to the need to work on majority decision-making. Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA stressed the need to move forward towards greater democratisation of the European decision-making process, e.g. giving Members of the European Parliament the right to legislative initiative and voting with qualified majority in foreign policy and security. Mr RUIZ DEVESA stressed that the European Parliament was supporting a more democratic and more federal Treaty, and it was up to the Council to show its position. He said there were no false dilemmas, facing the war and the energy crisis and at the same time moving with the Convention. Mr DE MEO stressed that the outcome of the CoFE was that European citizens asked for more Europe. Parliamentarians needed to strive to make citizens' voices heard, and as Chair of the AFCO Committee he guaranteed that the European Parliament was working on the need to revise some rules to give Europe more flexibility and to make it more modern.

Mr Leo PIETERS, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, also referred to qualified majority voting as an area to look at in specific themes. Mr Axel SCHÄFER, German *Bundestag*, noted with respect to the CoFE that a bigger contribution from and involvement of EU citizens was needed and at the same time the number of EU countries supporting the Convention was not sufficient. Mr Marko PAVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, considered it important for the national Parliaments to be present in the follow-up event of the Conference in December 2022 and thanked the AFCO Committee Chair of the European Parliament for the interesting debate recently held in the European Parliament on the Conference and the national Parliaments. Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*, insisted that the representatives of the national Parliaments should have been invited to the follow-up of the Conference on 2 December 2022 because national parliamentarians were the interface to the citizens of Europe. He was joined by Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, who stressed that national Parliaments had a vital role to play. Mr Rubén Fausto MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, noted that most of what needed to be done was possible with secondary legislation and stressed that Europe was founded on solidarity and that the pandemic was an example of how Europe could work well, even when legal bases were not entirely clear.

Mr Martin KINNUNEN, Swedish *Riksdag*, said he was against changes to the Treaties and the introduction of majority decisions, and called for future conferences to take the

national Parliaments as a starting point. With respect to the CoFE, he questioned how 200 participants of a panel could truly represent EU citizens and stressed that there was no need for focus groups or panels when general elections existed. A similar line was taken by Mr Johannes HÜBNER, Austrian *Bundesrat*, in his intervention. Mr Kacper PŁAŻYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, commented that the selection of the citizens in the Conference was not transparent and very few people were engaged in it.

Mr Marius MATIJOŠAITIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, was of the opinion that the EU should not engage in lengthy discussions on Treaty changes without a real prospect of reaching consensus, and therefore instead of launching a Convention, it was better to make use of the existing Treaties to implement the proposals of the Conference focusing on initiatives for which there was potential to reach consensus and deliver concrete results. Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, addressed specifically the topic of qualified majority voting in the Council. In his opinion, this would promote greater fragmentation and he favoured the current opportunity for EU Member States to coordinate positions through discussions and negotiations. Mr Jeroen VAN WIJNGAARDEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, stated that there was no need for Treaty change and pointed to a fast track to a more agile and robust common foreign policy, the *passerelle* clause. He also expressed his disappointment with the fact that the Vice-President of the European Commission did not list migration under the challenges of the Union. Ms Lisa CHAMBERS, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, concluded from the debate that there was no consensus on what the future of the EU should look like and advised caution with Treaty change and with moving towards potential qualified majority voting on some issues. She also reminded parliamentarians that the constitutional changes required in Ireland in order to change the EU Treaties would prove difficult.

Mr Ștefan MUȘOIU Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, was of the opinion that policy making processes could be strengthened within the existing institutional framework, so as to deliver real and quick results to the citizens. Mr Glenn BEDINGFIELD, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, was of the opinion that the particularities of each country, especially of the smaller Member States, should be respected, and that it was important for Europe to remain flexible in its decision making. He said national Parliaments could be more effective in the EU legislative process even within the existing Treaties, for example on the basis of the existing political dialogue mechanism, while according to him the yellow card procedure had not been effective so far. Mr Claude WISELER, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, stressed that the Convention should not be used as an excuse not to make any progress, because the current Treaties already allowed for moving forward, for example in the areas of economy, health, environment or foreign affairs, and in these areas one could move quickly.

A number of speakers focused on enlargement. Mr SCHENNACH called for Georgia to urgently receive the same status as Moldova and Ukraine. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, noted that while the Union was formed as a peace project, it would not be complete until all the countries sharing the EU values and wishing to be

members of the political family, would become members, namely Georgia and the Western Balkans, including Kosovo<sup>4</sup>. Investment in enlargement was in fact investment in the EU's security and investment in making the Union greater and stronger. Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stressed the need to evaluate any new enlargement and the need for adequate financial and institutional mechanisms. Mr RUIZ DEVESA noted that those opposing the reform of the Treaties were to large extent also against the enlargement.

Mr SCHENNACH referred particularly to young people and the fact that they wish to see results. Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, stressed that national Parliaments could bring Europe closer to the concrete expectations of citizens and specifically of the young in this European Year of Youth. He underlined the need to put a sense back in Europe and to allow this to become a mobilising concept like the concept that followed the second world war. Ms Rosário GAMBÔA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, also spoke about the youth and welcomed the fact that 2022 was the European Year of Youth. She also applauded the Commission's work program for 2023 as a fundamental step for the creation of the European Education Area in 2025 and the importance of the year 2023 as the European Year of Skills. Mr PAVIĆ also welcomed the Year of Skills and underlined the importance of the Green Deal and REPowerEU for the environment.

Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS addressed in particular the issue of economic governance and the single market for energy. Mr Kalle GRÜNTAL, Estonian *Riigikogu*, spoke specifically about cancer and the fact that 49% of the deaths in the EU were related to it and called the Union to pay more attention to this issue. Mr Arto PIRTTILAHTI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, focused his intervention on climate change and sustainable development and the need for new forms of energy. So did Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, who also stressed the importance of citizens' rights and the rule of law. Ms Ilona SZATMARI WALDAU, Swedish *Riksdag*, referred to climate change as one of the main global priorities and concerns, highlighting that the EU should do everything within its reach to tackle this challenge. She pointed to renewable sources of energy as a way to overcome the excessive dependence on Russia. On another note, she advocated for the end of any discrimination of minorities within the EU, and also for a better welcoming of refugees, since more democracy and solidarity should be the future of the EU.

Mr Charles SITZENSTUHL, French *Assemblée nationale*, stressed that Europe had to move forward on the issue of taxation and be an example in the 21st century, and regretted that a limited number of Member States, against public opinion and the European Parliament and most Member States, were blocking the multinational tax. Mr Lazaros TSAVDARIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, elaborated on the agri food sector, stressing that the common agricultural policy was still a shield against hunger for the whole world and therefore it was important not only for supporting the farmers but for improving the situation in the entire world. He stressed the need for a strategic plan

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<sup>4</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

from the European Commission in order to make sure that agricultural income was supported and that better, healthier, safer, cleaner food could be produced thanks to technology and innovation.

Ms Juhász HAJNALKA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, elaborated on the topic of media and questioned the legal instrument chosen for the European Media Freedom Act. Mr José María SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, questioned President VON DER LEYEN's statements that inflation would go down and energy consumption would be reduced by 15% in the EU Member States and saw no real exit given by the European Commission to these problems. Mr Ferdinand TIEFNIG, Austrian *Bundesrat*, raised the issue of disinformation on social media with respect to Ukraine and Russia, which was further strengthened by artificial intelligence. Mr Vladimír ZLÍNSKÝ, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, was of the view that it was important to speak not only about the positive influence of digitalization, but also about the negative impact in particularly on youth and children.

Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, welcomed the citizens' participation in CoFE and agreed with the need to move forward. She underlined that Europe should be a political choice during national elections and called for pan-European elections in the decision of the highest executive offices in order to avoid voters feeling disconnected. Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, said he was very proud of the last two years and of the CoFE project, but also highlighted four different aspects worth attention, i.e. enlargement, deepening of integration, values, and voices in favour of less Europe. Mr Antonio GÓMEZ-REINO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, stated that the EU's response to the pandemic legitimised the European project. Democracy meant not to be afraid to reform the Treaties but the EU as a geopolitical actor needed a clear vision that should not be just economic but also taking into account social and human rights.

Mr Samer KHALIL, Slovenian *Državni svet*, reminded parliamentarians of the crisis linked to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, with more than 140.000 people dead, 1.000.000 refugees, 10.000 people still suffering psychological and physical consequences, and noted that Russia's war against Ukraine had been in preparation for years now.

Ms Charoula KEFALIDOU, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, stressed that the current unstable international environment made things more difficult for the EU which was becoming active but at the same time moving forward into uncharted waters. Still Europe was the only possible answer to all of this upheaval, because showing to the other side that the EU was not standing together would mean that democracy could become vulnerable. Mr Harris GEORGIADIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, stressed the need to deal with populists, demagogues, autocrats and dictators in order to guarantee a safe future. Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA, Polish *Senat*, spoke about external and internal threats to the future of Europe, ranging from the Russian regime to populists contesting EU integration. She also praised the work done by the COSAC Working Groups and noted

that national Parliaments should not be considered competition for the rightly increasing role of the European Parliament.

Many of the speakers addressed the enlargement and neighbouring aspects. Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbia *Narodna skupština*, noted that the EU had lost valuable time and a large degree of trust in the Western Balkans in the last two decades and that it was very difficult to maintain the enthusiasm of citizens. She called on the EU to make a choice whether to continue to be only an economic Union or transform itself into a real geopolitical actor internationally. Similarly, Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU, Albania *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, stressed that if the EU would not come to the Balkans, other powers would fill the empty space and he was concerned that Russian influence was growing in all Balkan countries. He also underlined the need for a strategic approach toward the Balkans to accelerate the process of integration. Ms Arbëreshë KRYEZIU-HYSENI, Kosovo<sup>5</sup> *Kuvendi i Kosovës*, emphasised that Kosovo was preparing to apply for candidate status and indeed working hard to become a member of the Council of Europe, with focus on fighting corruption, increasing the performance of rule of law, and growing economically. Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, stressed that when discussing Europe's future, it was important to consider the voices and the approaches that countries of the South and countries of the East aspiring to join the EU have to add to this discussion. As a second point Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE emphasised that energy prices had hiked because the Russian Federation ignored all international norms and rights of the sovereign nations to exist and define their own future.

Mr İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, highlighted the different sectors in which Türkiye cooperated with the EU and NATO - in defence, energy and food supply, immigration - and noted that the European project would not be complete until this country would be part of the EU. Mr Yalım ÖZKAN, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, also underlined that Türkiye could assist Europe during the time of food and energy crises and could in particular be a good partner for food.

Mr KAIRIDIS expressed his doubts about the role of Türkiye as a security provider, since he considered its recent actions as not conducive to peace and stability in the area.

Mr Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, stated that the latest world events underlined the necessity for liberal democracies to work together and especially on foreign policy security and defence. With respect to the Northern Ireland Protocol affecting the UK's relationship with the EU, he said to be very confident that this could be overcome.

In her concluding remarks, Ms JOUROVÁ noted that the debate was inspiring, thanked all participants and promised to convey the message of national Parliaments about the event of 2 December 2022. In his replies, Vice-President Mr KARAS thanked the

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parliamentarians for the very interesting debate, and considered the different issues raised a good reason to continue the debate, while the Convention would be one of the possibilities to take the next step. He drew attention to the difference between mid-term and long-term priorities, and also promised to solve any issue of participation of the national Parliaments in the follow-up event of the Conference in December 2022.

## **6. SESSION III: STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EU**

Mr SMOLJAK opened the session by welcoming the two keynote speakers.

### **Keynote Speaker 1: Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission**

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ thanked the organisers and the Czech Presidency, recalling the importance of democracy, which was currently under threat since the Russian aggression in Ukraine. He stressed that Europe should remain united in the face of the challenges related to the war and the pandemic, while doubling down on the long-term generational tasks, making the EU greener, digital, fairer, and more resilient.

He also insisted on the need for Europe to act in the face of rising energy prices, especially to avoid relocation or the deindustrialization of the continent. To this end, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ announced three priorities: accelerating the green transition, increasing energy savings and efficiency and diversifying sources of energy supplies

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ emphasised some aspects of the European response in the face of the energy crisis. He recalled that the REPowerEU strategy had reduced Russian gas imports from 40% to 7.5%, thanks to the doubling of deliveries of American and Norwegian liquefied natural gas (LNG), and that the gas storage regulation had made it possible to fill gas stocks to 95%, against an initial of 80%. He added that European gas consumption had also been reduced by 15% and that the principle of joint purchase of gas had also been endorsed.

He recalled that the Commission was also working on the joint purchase of gas with no time to lose, as well as a smarter design for the electricity market to be tabled early next year.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ appreciated the good cooperation with the Czech Presidency, especially in the framework of REPowerEU, which requires a rapid deployment of 300 billion euros. He said that the Commission was also proposing a flexible use of cohesion funds to address the impact of the energy crisis on citizens and small to medium enterprises (SMEs), with the redeployment of 40 billion euros of unused appropriations.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ then spoke about the Commission's actions to promote renewable energy, with the new emergency measures to enable the rapid implementation of projects on renewable energy and to increase the mandatory share of these sources the

energy mix from 40 to 45%. He also recalled the target of 20 million tons of green hydrogen by 2030, half of which would be produced on European soil.

He also emphasised that another lesson learned from the crisis was that the Union should avoid falling into a future trap of becoming over-dependent on any one supplier or technology for our energy, while adding that Member States should increase their investments in interconnections and renewable energy.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ called for better preparation of economies and public institutions for future crises. He recalled that "the European team" would continue its assistance to Ukraine, with, in addition to the 22.8 billion euros already spent, unprecedented support in 2023 of 18 billion euros and easier access to cohesion funds for states and regions that want to help people fleeing violence. He also said that the Commission had adopted a first cross-border cooperation program of 66 billion euros Interreg NEXT for Ukraine's partnership with Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ alluded to the need to strengthen Europe's open strategic autonomy, including by reducing the strategic dependencies laid bare both by the pandemic and identified several areas for European action. He said that the European Union can go further in the field of defence and security, by thinking more about common capabilities and means of action. He also stressed that the European Union must have a forward-looking approach to green and digital transition, as well as to dependence on essential raw materials. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ thus recalled that a new proposal for legislation on the supply and availability of raw materials was going to be presented, to promote internal European sources of supply and to work better with partner states: Canada, Ukraine, the Western Balkans. He said that this new alliance would allow for the development of industry, refineries and recycling equipment in compliance with sustainable development standards. He then said that the Union also needed to address the shortages of electronic chips and that the Commission will present a proposal for legislation on the subject in February 2023.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ also argued that the Union should take all measures to remain an attractive destination for investment industries. For example, he stated that the battery alliance, which was launched by the member states in 2017 and now carries 110 important projects, including 40 giga-factories that are expected to be created in Europe, should help develop the European industry. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ noted that another major challenge was to better train the European workforce and highlighted the existence of a pilot project under the European alliance for batteries: the creation of a European academy, to train personnel and recycle equipment. He invited governments to contact the European Commission to create such academies

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ mentioned, under strategic autonomy, the need to build relations and partnerships with the rest of the world, taking as an example the first meeting of the European Political Community, organised by the Czech Presidency. He noted that the Union should also be part of other partnerships, in Africa and Asia.



Mr ŠEFČOVIČ concluded by noting that the Union was facing a series of short, medium and long-term crises, but could emerge from them with a more forward-looking perspective.

**Keynote Speaker 2: H. E. Mr Václav BARTUŠKA, Ambassador-at-Large for Energy Security of the Czech Republic**

Mr Václav BARTUŠKA began his presentation by noting that the question was whether the European Union wanted to be more energy independent or totally autonomous. He indicated that before the war began, there were 40% of imports of energy materials of Russian origin and that these imports have dropped significantly. Today, these imports were almost at zero. However, he said that the European Union needed to import its energy and had few very reliable partners.

Mr BARTUŠKA also mentioned a report by the International Energy Agency of October 2022, which noted that 4 raw materials were essential: lithium, cobalt, nickel and rare earths. He emphasised that the report showed that while diversification of supply sources for oil was possible, the situation was different for lithium with three producing countries that produced 80% of the resource, while China controlled 90% of the world's rare earths. He concluded that the risk was therefore to abandon Russia for Riyadh or China for Kinshasa.

Mr BARTUŠKA also showed the net decrease in the European and advanced economies' share in the consumption of coal and oil for electricity production. He said that Europe wanted to be a model for the world in terms of the renunciation of fossil fuels, but that it could no longer set the guidelines and the main energy directions alone.

Mr BARTUŠKA concluded by quoting Václav HAVEL, from whom the European Union could draw inspiration: *"Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed"*.

During the following debate, 37 speakers took the floor.

A large number of speakers emphasised the need to strengthen strategic energy autonomy, for instance Mr Andrzej GRZYB, Polish *Sejm*, Mr Péter BALASSA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Jaak MADISON, European Parliament, Ms Gabriela MORAWSKA-STANECKA, Polish *Senat*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, Mr Robert TROY, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Mr José María SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Ms Lisa CHAMBERS, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, Mr Ľudovít GOGA, Slovakian *Národná rada*. Several parliamentarians, such as Ms Christiana EROTKRITOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, insisted on the need not to create new energy dependencies by seeking to reduce dependency on Russian imports.

Mr Paulo MONIZ, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, insisted that Russia was in a strong position because of the difficulties of European countries to agree on the issue of energy interaction of European networks and on the issue of financing RePowerEU. Mr Bruno NUNES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, noted that Portugal had several ports, which could be a gateway for energy imported from South America, Canada or Africa. Mr Eric FAIJANIC, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, also raised the issue of adapting European equipment, especially ships to transport LNG.

Several speakers also called for reflection on the use of transitional energies: Mr Kacper PŁAŻYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, spoke of the convenience of nuclear energy and Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIC, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, of the usefulness of gas in dealing with the current crisis. Antonio GOMEZ-REINO, *Spanish Cortes Generales*, stressed that European countries do not agree among themselves on the use of nuclear energy and also recalled the need for Europe not to become dependent on energy imported from Africa or Asia.

Several parliamentarians, such as Mr Kalle GRÜNTAL, Estonian *Riigikogu*, insisted on the impact of the energy crisis on the economy, especially with the bankruptcy of several energy companies. Ms Anna KWIECIEN, Polish *Sejm*, also recalled the usefulness of hydrogen to build the future independence of the European Union.

A number of speakers insisted on the need to better take into account strategic interests in terms of defence at the European level, such as Mr Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*. Mr Luis-Jesus URIBE-ETXEBARRIA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, thus pleaded for the Member States to elaborate a common vision of the interests and threats and to reinforce the European capacities to answer them. Mr Charles SITZENSTUHL, French *Assemblée nationale*, regretted the dispersion of European efforts in the field of defence and the lack of will of the Member States to go further. Mr Audronius AŽUBALIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, emphasised that Europe was currently far behind the US in military matters but can challenge Russia by providing substantial economic support to Ukraine. Mr Jacek CZERNIAK, Polish *Sejm*, said that the debate was about strategic issues, but it was necessary to move on to military, food, cyberspace and said that European security today depends on the alliance with NATO. Mr Rubén Fausto MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, also emphasised that the ties between the European Union and NATO must be strengthened to achieve strategic autonomy. Mr Keogan SHARON, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, however, made it clear that the construction of a European defence system should not call into question Ireland's military neutrality.

Several parliamentarians also focused their remarks on the need to achieve European autonomy in various strategic areas. Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, called for closer cooperation between Member States in the area of health, for example in the production of medicines. Ms Marketa GREGOROVÁ, European Parliament, welcomed the European Commission's position and its proposal on electronic chips. Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, stressed the

importance of ensuring the independence of the Union in the field of semiconductors and artificial intelligence. Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, pleaded for the opening of a reflection on the way foreign investments are accepted in strategic sectors. Mr Arto PIRTILAHITI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, said that Finland was in favour of strengthening autonomy within the Union, in particular by creating public funding to ensure European resilience and attract foreign investment. Mr İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi* recalled that this country was a key partner of Europe in geopolitical terms, especially in the context of the current war in Ukraine.

Some speakers noted that the deepening of the strategic autonomy of the Union also had political implications. Ms Matilda ERNKRANS, Swedish *Riksdag*, called for a European Union that would directly benefit its citizens by promoting free trade. Ms Nathalie OLIVEIRA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, indicated that strategic autonomy must encourage political integration, particularly in the field of security and defence. Mr Andrey GUROV, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, stressed that ensuring economic resilience must go hand in hand with ensuring the rule of law. Ms Ria OOMEN-RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer* argued that in order to achieve strategic autonomy, the European principles of trade policy and strategic compass should be implemented quickly. Mr Pierre LOUAULT, French *Sénat*, noted that the objective of food security in the European Union required care to ensure that the implementation of the Green Pact for Europe did not break the agricultural dynamic. Mr Joe McHUGH, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, also recalled the European Union's duties to help famine-stricken populations around the world, notably in Ukraine and Africa. Following the debate, Mr SMOLJAK invited the keynote speakers to respond.

Mr BARTUŠKA said that with regard to the US Inflation Reduction Act, which had led to a confrontation with China, Europe could no longer be left out of the negotiations.

In his reply, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ reminded that European strategic autonomy was crucial, as global supply chains were a problem. He said that in future strategic economic decisions, it was a political imperative to ensure that the European Union remained a political and economic superpower, that it would always be on the same level as the United States of America (USA) and China economically, politically and strategically. The Vice-President then observed that, as the speakers had pointed out, Europe must exploit all the possibilities open to it for sourcing critical raw materials, since it had a number of them, and that it was therefore necessary to work on the issue of exploitation permits in conjunction with local authorities. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ then pointed out that other neighbours of the European Union also have critical raw materials, notably Ukraine, Norway and Iceland, calling for collaboration with these partners in order to secure and diversify European supplies, but also with other strategic partners further away, such as Canada, Australia and the USA. He then pointed out that the President of the European Commission had proposed to establish a sovereignty fund, in order to invest in projects that respect environmental and social standards, while purchasing part of these rare materials from our partners.

On security and defence issues, the Vice-President, in response to speakers who had mentioned that the EU and NATO complemented each other, echoed this view, saying that they had different technologies and approaches. He went on to say that the new security and defence policies under the Strategic Compass offered new perspectives that had not yet been considered at European level because the EU was too dependent on the USA. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ also spoke about the efforts of the European Commission and the heads of State and Government to face rising energy prices, mentioning in particular the strategy of diversification of supply and the reflections on decoupling the functioning of the electricity market from gas prices. He expressed his hope that measures would be adopted by the European Council in December.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ reiterated that the EU would do everything it could to help Ukraine reach a peaceful situation, but also to rebuild itself. He then mentioned the creation of a network of parliamentary committees, notably with the idea of dealing with strategic foresight issues.

Finally, the work carried out with the leaders of Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom was highlighted by the Vice-President of the Commission, recalling that the Good Friday agreements have been a synonym of peace for the last 25 years, and must also be a synonym of peace and prosperity for the next 25 years.

## **7. MEETING OF THE COSAC CHAIRPERSONS - DISCUSSION ON THE CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE XLVIII COSAC**

Mr BENEŠÍK informed the Chairpersons of the procedure regarding the adoption of Contribution and Conclusions by the LXVIII COSAC, noting that it was the first time in three years (since the LXII COSAC, in Helsinki) that COSAC was adopting these documents, given the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic context. He then recalled that the Draft Contribution and Conclusions had been circulated to all delegations on 31 October. Since then, the Presidency had received amendments from Parliaments/Chambers within the set deadline of 9 November and, following the discussion during the Troika meeting on the day before, delegations had received a modified document, as well as the amendments tabled until the deadline of noon, that day.

Mr BENEŠÍK explained the voting system, reminding participants that each Parliament had two votes with the vote split for bi-cameral Parliaments. Moreover, and as stipulated by Article 7.5 of the Rules of Procedure, *“COSAC shall seek to adopt contributions by broad consensus. If this is not possible, contributions shall be adopted with a qualified majority of at least 3/4 of the votes cast. The majority of 3/4 of the votes cast must at the same time constitute at least half of all votes.”*

Following some debate, including a number of votes, the draft Conclusions and an amended text of the draft Contribution of the LXVIII COSAC were agreed.

## **8. SESSION IV: UKRAINE - STATE OF PLAY, RECONSTRUCTION, MIGRATION**

Ms Lucie POTŮČKOVÁ, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* opened the session by emphasising that it should not be forgotten that the Russian aggression had not begun on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, but already at the turn of 2013 and 2014 when Russia occupied Crimea in complete violation of international law. She stated that, at the time, the international community had not stood up for the integrity of Ukraine forcefully enough. Ms POTŮČKOVÁ further emphasised that it was absolutely crucial that all the crimes committed during the war conflict were properly investigated, and also punished and that all the damage caused by this Russian aggression was properly compensated. She then quoted the words of the former Czech President Václav HAVEL: *"For many centuries, there has been a Russian problem that Russia does not know exactly where it begins and where it ends, even though it is the biggest country in the world, they still feel they are a little bit small and that they are threatened by the tiny neighbours around them."*

The Chair then added that it was absolutely more vital than ever that the smaller and the larger neighbours stick together to form a block against the aggressive expansionist character of what she called a Russian terrorist regime, and that in the future this block should be more alerted, united and consistent in the event of any outbreaks of further conflicts.

### **Keynote speaker 1 - Mr Tomáš POJAR, Advisor to Prime Minister of the Czech Republic on Security and Foreign Affairs Issues.**

In his opening speech, Mr POJAR started by stating that the Russian President, Vladimir PUTIN, had been dreaming about recreation of the Soviet empire and wanted to be remembered in the same way as Alexander the Great or Stalin had been. He further considered that there had been a systemic problem of awareness of borders between Russia and Europe from both sides as those frontiers had been shifting for three hundred years and they had also been under tension recently. Such shifts of borders had to be stopped for good, according to Mr POJAR. For this reason, the EU should help Ukraine politically, economically and militarily, otherwise they would lose to Russia and consequently the borders of the EU/NATO/Schengen would be threatened. He further added that the Ukrainians had been fighting on Europe's behalf and thus it was in Europe's deep interest to support them and sustain the help in the future. Such help should, according to him, focus also on reconstruction in the immediate term, along with the long-term perspective, and support should also be budgetary, because the implosion of the Ukrainian economy would make it hard for them to fight and would lead to another refugee wave. In this context, Mr POJAR mentioned that the Czech Republic was the country with the highest per capita ratio of Ukrainian refugees, precisely 4.5%.

He then acknowledged that the EU had been doing well in terms of humanitarian help as well as military assistance to Ukraine, which had been unprecedented on both the EU and national levels. However, according to him, such help had to continue as the EU had

been doing it for its own security and future. Such support should be kept even in the event of a ceasefire or peace agreement, since long-term help should be offered to Ukraine in order to build its own strong army able to protect its country and serve as deterrence to any potential threat.

Mr POJAR also addressed the topic of unstable energy supplies and energy crises in Europe, which had been caused by the Russian regime. However, he noted that the European countries were also responsible for this, since they had been too much dependent on Russian supplies. He therefore exhorted the EU to build long-term, secure and stable energy supplies which would prevent European countries from being vulnerable to any future threats or attacks.

At the end of his intervention, Mr POJAR pointed to the fact that the USA had been leaders in providing help of all sorts to Ukraine and the EU lagged behind. On top of that, he stated that the USA had been guaranteeing security, prosperity and peace in Europe once again and that Europe should catch up and cooperate with them in order to ensure persistent support to Ukraine as well as its own security.

**Keynote speaker 2: Ms Ivanna Klympush – Tsintsadze, Chairperson of the Committee on Ukraine’s EU Integration, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada***

In her introductory remarks, Ms KLYMPUSH–TSINTSADZE thanked the Czech Presidency and the whole COSAC family for taking yet another unprecedented step by accepting her invitation to visit Ukraine on 30 September and make, for the first time ever, a trip outside of the EU. She sincerely appreciated it and expressed her hope that such a visit could be repeated. Ms KLYMPUSH–TSINTSADZE also thanked every nation for all the financial, humanitarian, military, economic, political and moral support to her country, while adding that the war against Russia had been a common fight and that the Ukrainians were just in the forefront of it, protecting not exclusively their own nation, but also Europe and its common values.

She then elaborated on the development of war since the last meeting of COSAC Chairpersons in Prague in July 2022, mentioning the sham referenda in several of the occupied regions of Ukraine and their subsequent declaration as Russian territories, Russia’s partial mobilisation, the provision of drones from Iran to Putin's regime, which she commented as Russian enlargement of the axis of evil.

She highlighted that up to 40 % of Ukrainian critical civilian energy infrastructure had been destroyed and people of this country faced severe blackouts, and stated that Russia aimed to destroy the Ukrainian economy and cause major humanitarian crises leading to additional waves of refugees and internally displaced people.

Ms KLYMPUSH–TSINTSADZE assured that Russia was not reaching this goal and that Ukrainians would keep fighting as they had proved by liberating conquered territories such as Kherson. She then emphasised the importance of recognition of current Russian leadership as a terrorist regime by national Parliaments and making all

the possible steps to continue supporting Ukraine and to ensure that Russia could not resort to further terror attacks, not only in Ukraine, but also elsewhere. In this context she stressed the importance of continuous help for Ukraine by all means, but also the fact that nobody should be fooled by current Russian calls for negotiations. She elaborated that they only served as a smokescreen, because Russia wanted to regroup in order to be able to attack with additional force.

Further, Ms KLYMPUSH–TSINTSADZE focused on the scale of destruction across her country stating it was immense and that the Ukrainian GDP shrunk by 30 % and could continue its downfall. Therefore the country was, according to her, deeply dependent not only on military aid, but also on economic and financial assistance. In this respect, she mentioned how grateful her nation was for the decision of the European Commission to provide additional macro-financial help with additional 18 billion euros and she expressed her hope that no EU nation would veto this decision at the European Council.

Like the previous speaker, Ms KLYMPUSH–TSINTSADZE highlighted the urge for early recovery and future renewal of Ukraine, while noting the urgent need for generators, transformers and other components to repair their critical infrastructure. In this context, she also mentioned that the Ukrainian government had come up with the idea to set up an early fast recovery fund which could be governed by a supervisory board with up to 75 % of representatives of the international donors and she encouraged everyone to join. In order to fund this mechanism, one of the options would be that the Russian assets were not only frozen, but also seized. Thus, she called for a legal way of doing so in order to compensate for the destruction that was caused to Ukraine by Russia. Towards the end of her intervention, she considered that, once Russia had been defeated, the long-term reconstruction of Ukraine required adequate ways and instruments, so that the country could be rebuilt and become a valuable part of the EU and NATO.

During the ensuing debate, 33 speakers took the floor.

Almost every intervention mentioned support for Ukraine and condemned the war led by Russia. Ms Gabriela MORAWSKA-STANECKA, Polish *Senat*, revealed the impact on civilians and critical infrastructure and emphasised the need to condemn Russian authorities as a terrorist regime.

Many of the interventions touched upon the topics of continuous assistance for Ukraine in any possible terms – military, humanitarian, political, macro-financial as well as need for reconstruction of the country which should already begin and continue after the war was over (Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Vytautas GAPŠYS, Lithuanian *Seimas*; Ms Zita PLEŠTINSKÁ, Slovakian *Národná rada*; Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*; Mr Miguel SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*). Ms Diana STOICA, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, declared that the recovery and reconstructive efforts should be a priority which should also include a comprehensive effort to rebuild, reform and modernise

Ukraine. Likewise, Mr SANTOS stated that Europe needed to prepare for the reconstruction of the whole country, its economy, communication systems, infrastructures etc. Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, drew attention to the many forms of assistance coming from the EU, especially the envisaged macro-financial help with additional 18 billion of euros for Ukraine.

Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée nationale*, discussed, among other issues, what would Ukraine need to endure the coming winter and beyond and mentioned an envisaged conference on this topic to be held in Paris on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

There was a strong support to facilitate the process of the Ukrainian integration in the EU, which was mentioned, for instance, by Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*; Mr GAPŠYS; Mr Claude WISELER, Luxembourg *Chambre des députés*; Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*; Ms MORAWSKA-STANECKA; Mr Othmar KARAS, European Parliament.

Mr Hans WALLMARK, Swedish *Riksdag*, mentioned the important role of NATO and thanked everyone in the room for supporting the applications from Finland and Sweden to join the Alliance, expressing his hope to ratify Ukraine as a member of NATO and as a new member of the EU soon.

The idea of holding Russia accountable for this war and of setting up a special tribunal for the crimes in Ukraine was also largely supported, for instance, by Mr Claude WISELER, Luxembourg *Chambre des députés*; Mr GAPŠYS, Mr WALLMARK; Mr SANTOS; Mr Hårek ELVENES, Norwegian *Storting*.

Some delegates agreed that Russia should pay for the human and material destruction created by its aggression and its assets should be used to rebuild Ukraine (Mr GAPŠYS; Mr SANTOS; Mr ANGLADE).

Several interventions concerned the impact of Russia's war on the West, the consequent energy crises and the issues concerning ecology and green transition. Mr Rubén Fausto MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, stated that the Russian aggression led to two wars, a conventional war against Ukraine but also an economic war between Russia and the West. Similarly, Mr Pere Joan PONS, from the same Parliament stated that it had been an ecological war too, as there had been energy and environmental crises, and he wondered if the EU could make the desired transition. Ms Jytte GUTELAND, Swedish *Riksdag*, mentioned that security and climate policies were very closely intertwined in this context and that the EU should speed up its transition to a sustainable energy, security and energy independence. This idea was seconded by Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, who considered that, in the current context, the EU could only hope that it could accelerate the green transition and the development of renewable energy.



A number of parliamentarians also directed their remarks towards the issue of immigration and refugees. Mr Andrzej GRZYB, Polish *Sejm*, elaborated on the number of refugees in Poland, which was the highest in the EU. His colleague from the same chamber, Mr Jacek CZERNIAK, added that there had been a total of 7,720,000 Ukrainians who crossed the Polish border, from which 5,900,000 returned back home and about 2,000,000 Ukrainian stayed in Poland. Mr Antonio GOMÉZ-REINO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, reflected on the current situation in the context of previous immigration crises and the Spanish experience. Similarly, Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, reiterated the solidarity with the unprecedented heroism of the Ukrainian people, mentioning that Portugal had provided support in all areas (economic, military and humanitarian), including welcoming a large number of refugees. Mr Joe MCHUGH, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, informed that in Ireland there were more than 60,000 refugees from Ukraine and also pointed to an important issue of physical and emotional trauma and the need to address it.

Mr Othmar KARAS noted that the future of Ukraine and the democratic development of the region was very closely linked to the EU's. He suggested setting up a task force among the European Parliament, COSAC and the Council of Europe, in order to make sure that all activities such as training programs, visits for staff and members, committee activities etc., were to be coordinated as effectively as possible.

Mr Raivo TAMM, Estonian *Riigikogu*, drew attention to the fact that Ukraine, in addition to being successful on the battlefield, was able to deal with other matters. He recalled that the Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada* adopted a resolution to support minority nations in Russia. Mr Jeroen VAN WIJNGAARDEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, mentioned that Israel had been blocking deliveries of its spike anti-tank missiles to Ukraine, which were very much needed by Ukrainians. Mr Samer KHALI, Slovenian *Državni svet*, reminded that the EU should not forget Western Balkans.

In connection to the current situation in Ukraine, the question of relations between Greece, Cyprus and the Republic of Türkiye was also addressed by some interventions (Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS and Mr Christos CHRISTOU, from the Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, *Greek Vouli ton Ellinon*, and Mr İsmail EMRAH KARAYEL, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*).

Mr David SONGULASHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, shared the experience of his country with Russian occupation and emphasised that Georgia would like to become a member of the European Union together with Ukraine and Moldova. Mr Nathan ALBAHARI, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, stated that there were other voices in the Serbian parliament, which did not agree with the government's position on foreign policy alignment and on Ukraine.

In her replies, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE thanked for support that had been expressed and shared the hope that such political will and support would translate into further concrete actions that the EU would be taking. She also appreciated that the

debate touched upon the issue of punishment for the crimes committed by Russia and once again called for the establishment of a special tribunal for that purpose. She also reminded that the war in Ukraine should be referred to with the right name – a war, a Russian aggression against Ukraine, not a Ukrainian crisis or so. Furthermore, she expressed her gratitude for granting Ukraine with the EU candidate status and also mentioned the desire of her country to join NATO, while being fully aware that there was a lot of work to do in this respect.

In his concluding remarks, Mr POJAR stated that he had no doubt that the alliance supporting Ukraine was on the right side of history. He emphasised that the European integration of Ukraine was crucially important and the support of that integration was in Europe's best interest. He concluded by sharing his view that he had no doubts about Ukraine joining NATO and becoming one of the strongest pillars of the Alliance and the guardian of the eastern flank.

## **9. SESSION V: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES**

Mr Jaroslav BŽOCH, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* introduced the topic stressing the importance of EU enlargement and the need of assuring that the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries would meet no further obstacles to access the EU as soon as they would comply with the conditions.

### **Keynote speaker 1: Mr Mirek TOPOLÁNEK, former Czech Prime Minister**

Mr TOPOLÁNEK thanked the Czech Presidency for being invited, and informed that he was replacing his old friend Mr Miroslav LAJČÁK, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade - Pristina Dialogue and Western Balkans. He noted that Mr LAJČÁK would have been an excellent keynote speaker given his present role, deep knowledge and long experience of the region.

Mr TOPOLÁNEK first referred to the fundamental values the EU being founded on, being the strive for peace, security, prosperity, and above all freedom. He referred to the tale of the boiling frog saying that if a frog was put suddenly into boiling water, it would jump out, but if the frog was put in tepid water which was then brought to a boil slowly, it would not perceive the danger and would be cooked to death. This being an often used metaphor for the inability or unwillingness of people to react to or be aware of sinister threats that arise gradually rather than suddenly, this could also be used regarding the EU, he said. The EU had now been thrown into boiling water and needed to take steps to protect the very basic values it was founded on and the way it worked. He said that people sometimes found themselves in a situation where they were so occupied with nominal problems that they forgot basic needs such as getting food, drinking water and energy. For the EU, this had been the case in recent times, he argued.

He recalled that in 2009, during the last Czech Presidency of the EU, he had addressed COSAC in the then unfolding financial crisis arguing that we all were in the same boat. He questioned however if that had been really true. Some had argued that even if being in the same boat it had different decks, the first class deck, the second class deck and others. And others had said the boat was the Titanic, drowning because of the climate crisis or for other reasons. Some had called for protectionism and regulation to prevail, yet others had wished their national boat to be saved only.

Mr TOPOLÁNEK said he now experienced a kind of *déjà vu* looking back to the priorities for the 2009 Czech Presidency, one being energy security and what had the EU done on that topic since then, he asked rhetorically. Basically nothing, he argued, since we had become even more energy dependent. Another theme had been economic recovery, and today we also had a priority on economic recovery and resilience. And again, we needed to ask ourselves what had been done the last 13 years to boost competitiveness? Very little, he argued. The third priority in 2009 was Europe and the World, focussing on the Eastern Partnership including Ukraine. And again, he argued, what had the EU really done to make the east more secure and prosperous the last 13 years? He recalled it had been hard to place the Eastern Partnership high on the agenda back then, but with strong support from Sweden and Poland an Eastern Partnership Summit had been held in Prague in 2009.

Mr TOPOLÁNEK said that when the Czech Republic, together with other central European countries, joined the EU in 2004 there was huge scepticism towards the new Member States and what they could bring to the EU. But the Czech Republic had shown huge flexibility, and among other things in just six years they had dramatically changed the directions of exports from the Eastern Europe to the Western Europe, he said. But the Czechs also brought the experience of being under the Soviet bloc not having freedom and of working hard to gain that freedom. He said that no one had believed and listened when the new Member States argued that Russia never would give up their imperialistic ambitions. That being a piece of experience not being fully used, he said.

He then said he had two pieces of news, actually two pieces of bad news. The first one being the need to find new ways and new methods of broadening the space of freedom, security, prosperity, and peace. That being broadening the European Union. The Eastern Partnership as it was created and intended was dead, he argued. The other piece of bad news being that countries like Republic of Türkiye, that had been waiting to access the EU for decades, today had no chance in succeeding, he said. Older Member States were now looking into new ways of cooperation rather than membership, and the countries wishing to join were not ready to do so, he argued.

He further stated that this reality should not be accepted and that a change in paradigm was needed. For that, either the area of freedom, prosperity, and peace should be expanded or the ever-deepening Union should be sought. In conclusion, he said that only by expanding the area of freedom, prosperity, and peace could the problems of today be overcome, reminding that war was back to Europe.

## **Keynote speaker 2: Mr Salvatore DE MEO, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs of the European Parliament**

Mr DE MEO initially made a link between the previous session on Ukraine and the present focussing on EU enlargement since they were closely intertwined and correlated. He recalled that Ukraine, just four days after the Russian invasion, had officially submitted its application of accession to the EU. That itself was remarkable, he noted, as the Ukrainians, at the most chaotic and darkest hour in their country's modern history, had devoted time and energy to submit a formal application of accession to the EU. It was the most important message of hope by the Ukrainian Government to its people, which was something the EU should reflect upon and also be proud of, Mr DE MEO noted.

He further said that in moments of great despair for a country, the EU stood for hope, peace, and future. He continued saying that the European integration project for more than seven decades had remained the best guarantee for peace, democracy, and prosperity in our continent. But at the same time, he argued, we should recognize that the EU risked losing its credibility if it was not re-launched and strengthened. He further said that the prosperity, strength, and prosperity of the EU were based on its ability to defend and promote its shared values, not only inside the union but also in its immediate neighbourhood.

Mr DE MEO said the Russian war on Ukraine had reminded the EU of the horrors of the Balkan wars in the 1990's, and it had pointed to an urgent geo-political and strategic requirement because it constituted a security threat concerning the whole Balkan region and Eastern Europe. He argued that it should be against this background that the European prospects of our neighbours should be discussed, stating that enlargement was the most effective foreign policy tool the EU had at hand. This was also why the enlargement policy itself needed to be developed and effectively implemented in order to strengthen the European model, Mr DE MEO argued. He further said that it was in this light the Western Balkans should be viewed as the EU's closest partners geographically, historically, economically, as well as strategically. Their European future should be acknowledged, and for the EU it was also a geo-strategic investment for a stable, strong Europe based on shared values, he argued. He further stated that the EU must keep strengthening the European prospect for the whole region, because democratic consolidation, peace, and sustainable economic growth were essential both for the Balkans and the Eastern Europe, but also for the EU as a whole. The EU should therefore confirm its intention to proceed with enlargement and support our Balkan partners, he argued.

Mr DE MEO said that accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia should start as soon as possible based on the political decisions from March 2020, and that accession negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro should be accelerated. He also said that Bosnia-Herzegovina should be supported in dealing with the 14 priorities, which included electoral and constitutional reforms allowing them to proceed to the status of a

candidate country. Kosovo<sup>6</sup> should also be granted visa liberalisation, he argued. In that respect he was grateful to the Czech Presidency, that the day before had repeated the need to take a step forward in that regard, as well as on the need to promote dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade for the entire region's own good. He further said that in this context of insecurity, now more than ever, the EU needed to accelerate the integration process and to keep the pro-European spirit alive in the Western Balkans. . He further said that the EU should support the aspirations of the Western Balkan countries to become members of the Union based on the principle of conditionality, taking into account the Copenhagen criteria, and the commitment of keeping good neighbourhood relations, as well taking into account the Union's capacity to integrate new members.

Mr DE MEO said that unfortunately significant progress was lacking in the integration of the Western Balkan region despite the revised method for enlargement. This could seriously compromise regional and European security, he said, arguing for the EU to carry out a strategic security analysis to clarify the obstacles causing the dead-lock in the accession negotiations with the Western Balkans. A dual-approach was needed, he said, on the one hand the EU needed to assess in-depth its real ability to carry out enlargement, on the other hand it should promote an integration strategy based on two steps. First the integration of these countries to the Single Market and other sectors, and then the full accession to the EU, with both steps dependent on the progress made, he said. This would allow the citizens of candidate countries to experience and appreciate concretely the advantage of European integration throughout the process, he argued.

Mr DE MEO said that his hope and appeal from this COSAC meeting was that during the Western Balkans Summit in Tirana, organised by the Czech Presidency on 6 December 2022, all the leaders of the EU should confirm their strong commitment with the Western Balkans. The credibility of the enlargement process was firmly built on both the commitment made by candidate countries to respect European values, and the EU's commitment to take due account to the progress made by these countries, and thereby making accession a realistic prospect as well as keeping the promises made by the EU, he said. In this context the decision made by the European Council on 23 June 2022 was historic because it recognised the European prospect of Georgia, and granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. He further noted that this decision was also fully in line with the resolution decided by the European Parliament the same day. Next week the European Parliament in plenum was also voting on a resolution on the EU's strategy on enlargement, and Mr DE MEO expressed his hope that the final resolution would confirm the AFET Committees call for the enlargement policy to be updated to be more flexible, dynamic, and more gratifying and in the end lead to a re-launch of the whole accession process.

Mr DE MEO said that there was a false narrative of a fast-track procedure for accession, which was not possible. Accession should always be based on the implementation of

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<sup>6</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

reforms and the *acquis* being enshrined in national legislation, he said. This could only be successful if the enlargement was based on a shared responsibility, whereas progress should be made on both sides, he said. Today's dead-lock was due to the lack of political will, both in some candidate countries to carry out necessary reforms, but also in some Member States sceptical to further enlargement, he noted. But each side could do more, he said, including national Parliaments and the European Parliament in their role as houses of democracy in our continent. As Parliaments, they should continue to monitor the process of enlargement and provide new impetus to governments so as to have a concrete will of enlargement, and make the EU a more credible and stronger global player, he said.

In conclusion Mr DE MEO said that today's scenario was unique, and if the EU failed to act now, a very critical geo-political gap could occur which could then be filled by other countries trying to increase their influence in the continent. This could in turn seriously impair the peace and democracy progress that was launched with so many sacrifices so many years ago, he said. Mr DE MEO finished his address by expressing his gratitude to the Czech Presidency for putting this important debate on the agenda, and expressed his hope that it would lead to further reflection and concrete action from all.

In the ensuing debate 26 speakers took the floor.

A large number welcomed the debate and the fact that enlargement was again put high on the political agenda of the EU. Several speakers underlined the need for stronger political support and will, not the least from Member States, to pursue the EU's enlargement policy successfully. In the debate this was underlined by amongst others Mr Rubén Fausto MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales* and Mr Ioannis BOURNOUS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*. This was also emphasised by delegations from candidate countries including by Mr İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*. Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat* especially pointed to the need of making progress with enlargement for young people in the Western Balkans, something which also was underlined by Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*.

Strong support for the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU based on principle of own merits was voiced by many delegates including by Mr Zoltán ZAKARIAS, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*. On the same theme it was underlined by Mr Jeroen VAN WIJNGAARDEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*; that the EU should encourage countries to join the Union, but it must be clear that there can be no enlargement without alignment.

Many speakers recalled the EU as being a union of values, including Mr Didier MARIE, French *Sénat* and Mr Luis Jesús URIBE-ETXEBARRIA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*. Several delegates pointed to the enlargement of the EU as a shared responsibility on the one hand between the Union and its Member States to fulfil its promises, and on other hand the candidate countries to implement necessary reforms. This was argued by

several delegates including Mr Andrzej GRZYB, Polish *Sejm* and Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*.

Another theme addressed in the debate was enlargement as a much-needed geopolitical investment for the EU, as a crucial tool for increased stability and security and as well as a means of fostering prosperity. Among others, this topic was raised in the interventions made by Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA, Mr Alekos TRYFONIDES, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Ms Jytte GUTELAND, Swedish *Riksdag*, and Mr BOURNOUS. This theme was also recurrent in the interventions from delegates from candidate countries including from Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonia *Sobranie*, Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbia *Narodna skupština*, as well as from Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgia *Sakartvelos p'arlament'I*.

Mr Lavdrim KRRASHI, Albania *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, recalled the saying that winning the peace was more important than winning the war, and underscored the need for political support of Western European countries for further European integration of the Western Balkans. Mr Amer SMAILOVIĆ, Montenegro *Skupština Crne Gore*, noted that the support for EU Membership in his country was 80 %, and expressed hope for enlargement to be put at the very top of the EU's political agenda, which was not the case at present.

Some participants in the debate pointed out that if the EU did not succeed in pursuing its enlargement policy and integrate candidate countries into the union it would create a political vacuum to be filled by others. This was argued by Mr GRZYB, Mr Zoltán TESSELY, Hungarian *Országgyűlés* and Mr SMAILOVIĆ, Montenegro *Skupština Crne Gore*.

The need for Treaty changes and to give up on unanimity voting in an enlarged EU was argued by some delegates including Mr MARIE, Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA, and Mr MORENO.

Mr BUCHMANN pointed to the need for more intense exchange amongst candidate countries to promote freedom of movement of capital and people between themselves. Mr José María SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, questioned in his intervention if this was the best time to enlarge the EU, and asked rhetorically why enlargement always was discussed as a philosophical necessity with no other alternatives or solutions, when it was in fact possible to live in Europe without being part of the EU.

With reference to Mr TOPOLÁNEK's introductory remark about the Eastern Partnership, originally a joint Polish and Swedish initiative, was debated by some speakers including by Mr Giedrius SURPLYIS, Lithuanian *Seimas* and Mr GRZYB, who said it had not lost its significance even if it had to be re-defined according to the present geo-political context.

## **10. CLOSING SESSION: ADOPTION OF THE CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE LXVIII COSAC**

Mr Ondřej Benešík, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, concluded the meeting by recalling two days of fruitful discussions.

He mentioned that the priorities of the Czech Presidency, including the ones of its parliamentary dimension, were strongly influenced by the Russian aggression against a free country. He reiterated that the Czech Republic had in the long term been in favour of the Western Balkans membership in the EU, while noting that these countries are not a monolith but individual countries with different stages of readiness. He stated that the Czech Republic had supported these countries based on the premise of meeting all the necessary conditions for accession, while expressing the Czech Republic's long term support of Georgia's integration into the EU, referring to the expectation that Georgia would relentlessly continue to pursue its integration.

He also mentioned that it was during the Czech Presidency that Moldova and Ukraine received the candidate status, while recalling that the Czech Prime Minister was amongst the first politicians to visit bombarded Kyiv, followed by a recent visit of the Czech Government to the Ukrainian capital.

Mr BENEŠÍK also considered that the factual and not only political support of the Czech Republic to Ukraine was also proven by the help provided to Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic.

He expressed his belief that the EU stayed further united and that the LXVIII COSAC Plenary meeting reassured all delegations that the most important value of the EU - also shared with its allies - was unity. Together with perseverance, he considered this value as the only way to victory and peace.

Mr BENEŠÍK then alluded to the texts of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXVIII COSAC, distributed to all delegations, which were adopted by consensus with no amendment. He extended his thanks to all delegates for participation and fruitful and constructive discussions.

The Chair had also expressed the readiness of the Committee on European Affairs of the Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna* to cooperate with and support the upcoming Swedish Presidency and gave the floor to Mr Hans WALLMARK, the Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*.

Mr WALLMARK thanked the Czech Presidency for the very well organised LXVIII COSAC Plenary meeting, noting that the delegates had the opportunity to hear very interesting speakers and that there were many different views expressed. He noted that, although Europe had many different heartbeats and breaths, when its forces were joined



together it created European unity, which was especially important in the current context of a world full of problems and challenges.

Mr WALLMARK noted that during the LXVIII COSAC Plenary meeting the delegates underlined many times the solidarity with Ukraine and the overall awareness of the consequences of the war and the EU's readiness to build a better, stronger and safer Europe after the war had been won and Russia had been defeated. He concluded by noting that he would like to welcome all delegates in Stockholm in the first half of 2023.

Mr BENEŠÍK concluded the LXVIII COSAC Plenary meeting by extending his thanks also to the COSAC Secretariat and to both Chambers of the Czech Parliament.