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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat
to:	Delegations
Subject:	Summary record of the meeting of the LI COSAC, held in Athens on 15-17 June 2014

Welcome address and state of play of the Hellenic Presidency

Mr TRAGAKIS, Deputy speaker of the Hellenic Parliament and Chair of the Committee on European Affairs inaugurated the 51st COSAC meeting. He welcomed the fact that the EU was finally seeing the green shoots of recovery, but focused on the challenges ahead: increasing growth and employment, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and increasing the credibility of the EU, particularly with the recent rise of euroscepticism.

The COSAC secretariat also presented COSAC's twenty-first bi-annual report which addresses the need to deepen interparliamentary cooperation (i.e. among national parliaments (NPs) and with the EP), develop the social dimension of the EU and implement the European Semester (suggesting that democratic control on closer economic integration could be ensured by the EP).

Mr MEIMARAKIS, speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, stressed the need for "a reconnect between EU politics and citizens". He encouraged NPs to play a key role in relaying to their national governments and to the EU institutions the demands and sentiments of their electorate.

Mr SAMARAS, Prime Minister of Greece, briefed COSAC on the outcome of the Greek Presidency of the Council. Despite the difficult juncture at which Greece began its Presidency, it successfully concluded a total of 67 texts, the most important of which fell under 4 priority areas: economic and monetary affairs, fighting recession and unemployment, immigration, and maritime policy. Mr SAMARAS mentioned the most noteworthy legislative achievements, which included the SRM; the political agreement on the single resolution fund; the Directive for the secondment of workers; the Regulation on the Funding of European political parties; the Directive on public tender; the Post-Stockholm Framework, the European Strategy for Maritime Security (due to be adopted shortly). The Presidency's greatest long-term accomplishment was, according to Mr SAMARAS, upgrading the EU's maritime policy.

Mr SAMARAS expressed pride in the work carried out by the Presidency (with Mr KOURKULAS, Greece's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, subsequently underlining that such success was achieved with a very tight Presidency budget) and in his concluding remarks stated that “Greece is coming out of the crisis stronger” and “the Union is our strength”.

Sharing a vision on 2025 - Address by President BARROSO

In a recorded message, **President BARROSO** presented his European vision for Europe 2025. He acknowledged the social cost and the "painful process" of economic recovery and highlighted the need to inject confidence back in EU citizens. He stated that the focus was now on growth and jobs and that there was a need to step up efforts to reinforce competitiveness.

BARROSO also noted that the EU strategy for growth and jobs will be reviewed next year, with public consultations allowing the concerns of citizens to be taken into account.

Appealing to members, the Commission President called for solidarity and for them to actively assist in reversing trends ("You are European politicians: Europe is not a foreign power within our countries"). He also highlighted, in relation to the role of NPs, that he did not see NPs as being in competition with the EP, claiming that measures should be taken to reinforce the participation of NPs in the EU's decision-making process.

Challenges for the EU: the crisis in Ukraine

Elmar BROK, MEP and Chairman of the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs, spoke about the need to improve conditions in Ukraine, and suggested that with the help of the EU, Ukraine could "become a showcase for a better life". He also called for a real energy union and a cohesive external policy, particularly with regard to Russia. He was critical of Russia's reaction to the association agreement negotiations with Ukraine, but in summing up, stated that the future of Ukraine could be decided neither in Brussels nor in Moscow.

The interventions which followed reflected calls for an independent strategic energy policy (Ms AUROI, FR Assemblée Nationale), a sustained and constructive political dialogue with Russia (members from FR, SK, EE, LV), international efforts to stabilise Ukraine (with NL suggesting that the Council of Europe could play a stronger role in improving relations with Russia) and greater efforts from the EU (members from ES, AT, EE and NL).

Democratic legitimacy and European leadership: the day after the European elections

Mr TASOULAS, the Culture and Sports Minister of the Hellenic Republic welcomed the fact that the two political groups in the EP that have traditionally been the largest still secure a majority of seats in the new EP. However, he expressed concern at the popularity of eurosceptic parties, claiming that the clear message sent by EU citizens could not be ignored. He was critical of austerity measures having been imposed on his country without having been sufficiently explained, but called on those supporting the EU to pursue efforts to show that a better EU is possible, particularly with solidarity, balanced growth, convergence between the north and the south and growth-inducing policies.

Mr CASINI, former MEP and chairman of the EP's Constitutional Affairs Committee, stressed that the rise in euroscepticism was a result of citizens' disenchantment and the feeling that the EU ignored their concerns. He conceded that the "democratic deficit" was more a question of perception, rather than of reality, although he called for the EP to have a right of initiative, for NPs to control their governments in the Council and for greater coordination between the EP and NPs.

As far as the Spitzenkandidaten exercise is concerned, Mr CASINI was critical of any institution which "ignores the voice of the citizens" on "legalistic arguments", since this would be an "attack" against a method designed to bring citizens closer to the EU. In the same vein, Mr CASINI was critical of the COM's reaction to the Citizens' Initiative, claiming that the COM should not be allowed to ignore them. He suggested that a vote by the EP should be made compulsory whenever an initiative is submitted.

Ms LEGATE (NL) referred to the NL parliamentary report "Ahead in Europe", which puts forward practical solutions to improve the role of NPs and their cooperation (including creating a group of 41; "clusters of interest, improving the yellow card, and establishing an action plan to strengthen the role of NPs)

Ms SUTOUR (FR Senate) was concerned by what he claimed was an excessive use of implementing and delegated acts in COM proposals. He urged the COM to limit delegated acts "to an absolute minimum".

A number of members expressed support for the Spitzenkandidaten experiment, claiming that it was "a success" (Mr SCHENNACH, AT Bundesrat), that there cannot be "any alternative to Juncker" and to renege on this would be a "betrayal" (Mr KOPF, AT Nationalrat) and "a step backwards" which "undermines the credibility of the main European political families" (Mr TANCREDI, IT Camera dei Deputati).

Not unexpectedly, several UK members called for radical reform of the EU (Mr CASH and Mr CLAPPISON, UK House of Commons), while others debated the traditional "democracy of parliaments" versus "democracy of governments" issue, with the common refrain being that the NPs should have more power. However, few practical solutions were actually put forward.

Mr LEQUILLER (FR, Assemblée Nationale) claimed that "Brussels" was all too often used by national governments as a scapegoat and that NPs should play a role in highlighting the successes of the EU and to send out a positive message.

In the margins of the COSAC meeting, the Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the DK Parliament, Eva Kjer HANSEN, circulated a draft letter addressed to the future President of the COM, calling for the setting up of a working group "to include national parliamentarians and representatives of the EU institutions to look at the role of national parliaments in the EU. The task of the working group should be to draft an action plan on how to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the European Union". She urged other members to co-sign the letter, which, at the end of the COSAC meeting, had gathered the signature of 23 members of national parliaments (see Annex I).

Tuesday 17 June 2014 - COSAC day 2

Rethinking the European Employment Strategy - Address by Commissioner ANDOR

Commissioner ANDOR gave a detailed presentation on the European employment strategy, which builds on the 2020 strategy, as well as the Youth Policy and Youth Guarantee.

He claimed that the priority of MS for the next 5 years should be to tackle growing economic and social disparities across the EU. He also referred to the need to strengthen social dialogue, suggesting that existing EU fora should be used more effectively to better involve social partners (he welcome in that regard the recent Tripartite Social Summit).

Commissioner ANDOR stressed the role played by labour mobility in fighting high unemployment and outlined the Commission's efforts to address the issue (e.g. ensuring greater awareness of the rights of mobile workers, improving the Eures network, launching the 'your first Eures job' mobility scheme). He underlined that free movement was a fundamental right and that the principle could not be dismantled.

The Commissioner lamented the "disappointing lack of progress" in achieving the 2020 targets, but cautioned against blaming the strategy: disparities could not be reversed only with policy packages, but needed finance and monetary mechanisms too. He suggested that the lack of progress should prompt leaders to step up their policy responses with serious reforms.

The Commissioner's speech prompted many interventions. A number of members were critical of the Commission, either for its policies which, it was claimed, caused more harm than good (Mr TRIANTAFYLLOS and Ms KONSTANTOPOULOU, both from the EL Parliament) or for not having done enough. Some suggested it should be investing more, should be more supportive of the social economy (Mr BLAHA, SK National Council), and should focus on the creation of good jobs (Mr ULRICH, DE Bundestag). Suggestions for improving the employment situation included developing a European unemployment benefit system (Mr SUTOUR, FR Senat), improving education and finance opportunities (Ms ANASTASE, RO Chamber of Deputies), and following the Norwegian policy of gender equality and the full integration of women in employment (Mr HANSEN, Norwegian Parliament).

Investing in European Youth: the way out of the economic crisis

Mr Paulo MOTA PINTO (PT Assembly of the Republic) stated that investing in young Europeans was an indispensable way out of the crisis. He felt that youth unemployment remedies should focus on: modernising education and training systems to improve youngsters' transition from school to the labour market; avoiding a brain drain from some MS; encouraging SMEs to take part in the Youth Guarantee, and offering targeted credit for young entrepreneurs. He also suggested the progressive harmonisation - even communitarisation - of part of this policy area.

Youth Guarantee Scheme: Best Practices

Ms Silvia MODIG (Finnish Eduskunta) spoke of the problems of social exclusion of young unemployed persons. She claimed that the Youth Guarantee was not sufficiently focused on the most vulnerable groups and called for greater preventive measures to help youths with mental health problems. She also suggested a one-stop-shop for young unemployed persons, with a designated contact person for each young job-seeker.

Encouraging creativity and Young Entrepreneurship

Ms Zanda KALNINA-LUKASEVICA (Latvian Parliament) illustrated a range of ways to boost youth entrepreneurship by reference to Latvia's recent support programmes for business start-ups. Such programmes, which were launched between 2012-2014, provided for, among other things, the creation of "micro-companies" which benefit from simplified start-up procedures and requirements as well as simplified tax and accounting rules. This has been recognised as a successful tool to also encourage young entrepreneurs to set up their own business.

Adoption of the Conclusions and the Contribution of LI COSAC

The Contribution and Conclusions of COSAC were adopted (see Annexes II and III).

Discussions on the amendments revolved around a potential reference to the "Spitzenkandidaten exercise being a success" (wording rejected primarily by the UK, with supporting statements by members from IE, NL and SV). The reference was thus deleted.

The UK also expressed concern over wording which indicated that after the recent elections there had been a "rise of euroscepticism, extremism and xenophobia" - the UK member argued that "euroscepticism" was a "virtuous democratic stance" and a far cry from the more objectionable categories of "extremism and xenophobia". Only the latter two categories were therefore kept in the COSAC contribution.

Mr TRAGAKIS closed the meeting, giving the floor to the incoming Italian Presidency, which gave a brief presentation on its upcoming priorities, to be discussed in more detail at the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting in Rome on 17-18 July 2014.

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Draft letter 11 June 2014

On the establishment of a Commission working group on the role of national parliaments in the EU

Dear Mr./Mrs President

Firstly we would like to congratulate you on your election as President of the European Commission.

We are confident that under your presidency, the European Commission will continue to be a positive force for developing the European Union's democratic legitimacy and not least for the political dialogue with Member State national parliaments.

Democratic legitimacy is crucial for the European Union. But in the wake of the economic and financial crisis, there are signs of fading democratic legitimacy of the EU. Europe needs a new relationship of cooperation between the union and its member states. Only together we can rebuild trust in the European project.

We – the signatories of this letter - therefore call on the new European Commission to set up a working group to include national parliamentarians and representatives of the EU institutions to look at the role of national parliaments in the EU. The task of the working group should be to draft an action plan on how to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the European Union.

Legitimacy and support for European decision-making must be established bottom-up from citizens' level.

The European Parliament is an important voice for European citizens and plays its part extremely well. But national parliaments and the European Parliament each have their own distinct roles, and they have a joint responsibility to ensure that the European Union becomes truly accountable and democratic.

Effective involvement of national parliaments is fundamental to ensuring accountability, and legitimacy, for the actions of the European Union. A stronger and more direct say for national parliaments in European decision making will encourage national MPs to engage more in European affairs and to take responsibility for policy output. National ownership of European decisions is vital for increasing citizens' faith in European policy solutions.

It is generally agreed that national parliaments have an important role in scrutinising their national governments in European Affairs, and another as guardian of the subsidiarity principle. Scrutiny procedures must be continuously reviewed and improved. Likewise, improvements in the subsidiarity and proportionality procedures are indeed needed.

Meanwhile, there is a growing consensus among national parliaments who find that their role in European affairs must go beyond monitoring the principle of subsidiarity and national scrutiny. National parliaments must play a more pro-active role in European decision-making.

To this end a number of proposals have been put forward by the Dutch Tweede Kamer, The UK House of Lords and the Danish Parliament.¹ These proposals are all designed to respond to questions such as:

How can we design a democratic framework that matches the European Union's increased role and powers regarding economic governance while still respecting the prerogatives of national parliaments? How can national parliaments contribute actively to the good functioning of the EU? And how can we ensure that European citizens do not consider themselves alienated to the European decision-making?

These questions could be among the topics addressed by the proposed working group.

We wish you every success in your new responsibility as Commission President.
Please accept the assurance of our highest consideration.

Best regards,

Eva Kjer HANSEN,
Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament

Raymond KNOPS
Chair of the standing committee on European Affairs of the Netherlands House of Representatives

Allan WIDMAN
Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Swedish Parliament

Lord Timothy BOSWELL OF AYNHO
Chair of the EU Select Committee of the UK House of Lords

¹ Tweede Kamer: *Democratic legitimacy in the EU and the role of national parliament. A position paper of the Dutch House of representatives.* November 2013
Folketinget: *Twenty-three recommendations to strengthen the role of national parliaments in a changing European governance.* January 2014
House of Lords, European Union Committee, 9th report of session 2013-14: *The Role of National Parliaments in the European Union.* March 2014

William CASH

Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee of the UK House of Commons²

Dominic HANNIGAN

Chairman of the joint Committee on European Union Affairs of the Irish Oireachtas

Richárd HÖRCSIK

Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Hungarian National Assembly

Edmund WITTBRODT

Chairman of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Polish Senate

Gediminas KIRKILAS

Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Lithuanian Seimas

Radu Bogdan TIMPAU

Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies

Anca Daniela BOAGIU

Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian Senate

Miroslav KREJCA

Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Czech Senate

Ondrej BENESIK

Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs of the Czech Chamber of Deputies

Karlheinz KOPF

Chairman of Standing Subcommittee on European Union Affairs of the Austrian National Council

Edgar MAYER

Chairman of the EU Committee of the Austrian Federal Council

Zanda KALNINA-LUKASEVICA

Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian Saeima

Josef HORVAT

Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Slovenian National Assembly

Janvit GOLOB

Chairman of the Commission for International Relations and European Affairs of the Slovenian National Council

² The United Kingdom doesn't have a written Constitution, but has its own Constitutional Arrangements, which differ from the other 27 EU Member States.

PEĐA GRBIN

Chairman of the Committee on the Constitution, Standing Orders and Political System of the Croatian Parliament

Averof NEOFYTOU

Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs of the Cypriot House of Representatives

Danielle AUROI

Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the French National Assembly

Simon SUTOUR

Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the French Senate

Lubos BLAHA

Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Parliament of Slovakia

CONTRIBUTION OF THE LI COSAC

Athens, 15-17 June 2014

1. European Elections

1.1 COSAC welcomes the successful conduct of the 8th European elections, held from the 22nd to the 25th of May 2014. Although the average turnout in the elections was higher than expected and there were "Spitzenkandidaten" to address European issues during the election campaign, COSAC expresses its concern about both the poor turnout in certain member states and the rise of extremism and xenophobia, as reflected in the results; it therefore urges the respective governments, political parties, as well as the European institutions to reflect on their share of responsibility for these phenomena and act promptly in order to tackle them.

1.2 In this regard, COSAC welcomes the expressed will of the Heads of EU states to place growth and job creation on top of their priorities, together with pursuing further progress in the area of freedom, security and justice and coping with the major challenges of climate change and energy efficiency and security.

2. Economic Governance – Deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)

2.1 COSAC reaffirms its conviction that deepening of the EMU, through the introduction of policies dealing with the insufficiencies revealed after the outburst of the crisis, is of utmost importance. In this context, an integrated financial framework with a fully - fledged banking union, with effective supervisory, resolution and deposit guarantee mechanisms at a European level, coupled, as necessary, by a genuine fiscal and economic union is seen as a natural next step to the budgetary coordination framework already in place.

2.2 Consequently, COSAC welcomes the political agreement reached during the Hellenic Presidency of the Council, on the Single Resolution Mechanism, as well as the completion of the agreement on the Single Resolution Fund. These agreements shall play a vital role towards the conclusion of a Banking Union, which will help ensure financial stability, minimise the cost of bank failures on European citizens, restore the markets' confidence in the European banking sector and allow banks to resume supply of credit to the real economy and thus pave the way to growth.

3. Freedom, Security and Justice

3.1 COSAC calls on the European Council to adopt the Strategic Guidelines in the field of Justice and Home Affairs regarding the legislative and operational planning, building upon the progress already achieved in the context of the Stockholm Programme; COSAC underlines the significance of the principle of solidarity and responsibility in the designation of the Guidelines and stresses the need for full implementation and enforcement of existing instruments in the area of freedom, security and justice in order to improve the quality of life of European citizens.

3.2 COSAC is of the opinion that special attention should be attached to the sensitive issue of migration flows management and the integration of legal immigrants in EU societies with a view to urging European responses to the present and upcoming challenges; to this end, proposals put forward by the Task Force Mediterranean, should be given a concrete follow-up taken into account, as sea routes of migration are the most frequently used and at the same time linked with significant human losses. COSAC stresses the need for initiatives aimed at implementing the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility as laid down in Article 80 of the TFEU in the fields of mutual recognition of national decisions on asylum, pooling of reception places at EU level to face possible situations of crisis and particular pressure, contingency planning and crisis management.

4. EU maritime policies

4.1 COSAC underlines that sea and maritime activities present an inexhaustible source of growth and prosperity for the whole of Europe. It therefore welcomes the joined-up effort undertaken by the European Commission, the External Action Service, the Hellenic Presidency and the Member-States to develop a holistic, cross sectorial strategy in order to promote and safeguard this potential, namely the EU Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS); it is convinced that the EUMSS should consist of both internal and external aspects of maritime security, promote global solutions in dealing with challenges at the European level and make good use of all existing EU tools and structures in the maritime security domain, including CSDP missions and operations.

5. Ukraine

5.1 COSAC welcomes the holding of Presidential elections in Ukraine and notes with satisfaction the high turnout of the Ukrainian people and the clear resolve of the Ukrainian authorities to hold genuine election procedures, largely conforming to international commitment.

5.2 COSAC reiterates strong support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and condemns the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. COSAC strongly supports sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all European countries and believes that there is no place for any separatist activities and provocations aiming at changing borders in Europe of the 21st century, without due democratic procedure.

5.3. Actions of Russian Federation are inconsistent with its existing commitments and obligations including the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act and the Budapest Memorandum. Crimea Peninsula must be reintegrated with the state of Ukraine in order to bring back stability in Europe.

5.4 COSAC calls Russian Federation Council to rescind its decision of 1st of March, 2014, allowing the use of force against the neighbouring country.

5.5. COSAC stresses that in the current situation it is essential that Russia takes real steps to defend the border of Russia-Ukraine in order to prevent the flow of terrorists and arms to Ukraine.

5.6 COSAC is confident that the quality of the Presidential elections provides the new President of Ukraine with the legitimacy to establish an inclusive dialogue with all citizens and work in order to guarantee the unity of the country while respecting the diversity of Ukrainian society; it calls on the European Union to work closely together with the new President of Ukraine and support him in pursuit of de-centralisation and constitutional and structural economic reforms in order to ensure political and economic stability in the country. Moreover, COSAC welcomes statements by the Russian Federation pledging respect for the elections outcome; it therefore urges the Russian Federation to cooperate with the new legitimate President, to commit to a peaceful and constructive dialogue towards de-escalating tensions and to withdraw armed forces from the Ukrainian border.

5.7 COSAC expects that the contracts regarding gas supplies from Russia to the European Union will be fully respected. Following the Ukraine crisis, COSAC considers that energy efficiency and security has risen to a top priority for the European Union. In this regard, COSAC urges the Commission and the Member States to explore ways for financing energy efficiency measures and curbing energy demand, as well as to engage in further developing an EU energy security strategy.

5.8 COSAC welcomes the decision to sign the Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova on 27 of June 2014 and expects the concurrent signature of the remaining chapters of the Association Agreement with Ukraine. COSAC notes the special role of EU national parliaments and European Parliament in the process of ratification of these agreements and invites them to send a strong message of support to the Eastern partners by ensuring smooth ratification process.

6. Democratic Accountability

6.1 COSAC points out that the twofold democratic legitimacy of the Union, as a union of citizens and of Member States, is embodied, in the EU legislative process, by the European Parliament and the Council, in the context of co-decision process and underlines the role of subsidiarity checks performed by national Parliaments; stresses that legitimacy and accountability must be properly ensured at national and EU level by the national parliaments and the European Parliament; recalls the principle, set out in the Conclusions of the December 2012 European Council meeting, that throughout the process, the general objective remains to ensure democratic legitimacy and accountability at the level at which decisions are taken and implemented.

6.2 COSAC notes that the economic recess and its impact, such as high unemployment, combined with reduced social spending and downgrading of living standards have proved critical for the diminishing popularity of the European Union. COSAC is, in this regard, of the view that the EU's democratic credibility has been challenged over the past five years, as the need to swiftly address the effects of the economic and financial crisis and to coordinate fiscal policies has led governments or Council formations such as the Eurogroup to delegate competencies to the European level, partly lacking parliamentary control.

6.3 Moreover, COSAC notes with regret that macroeconomic adjustment programmes were not characterised by sufficient democratic legitimacy and accountability, as stated by the vast majority of respondents in the Bi-annual Report. COSAC stresses that, in the future, genuinely democratically accountable institutions should be primarily involved in designing and implementing such programmes in order to guarantee transparency and political ownership.

6.4 COSAC reaffirms the willingness of national Parliaments to engage in a public debate over the European institutional architecture in the context of the existing Treaties. COSAC strongly believes that ways to achieve democratisation of the decision making process should be explored without putting into question the community method. In this respect, powers vested by the Treaties to the European Parliament should be fully exercised and its cooperation with national Parliaments should be further developed.

6.5 COSAC welcomes the agreement reached on the Regulation on the statute and funding of European Political Parties and Foundations.

6.6 Five years after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the consequent appointments of the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, COSAC congratulates Mr. Herman Van Rompuy and Lady Catherine Ashton.

6.7 COSAC expresses the hope that cooperation between the European Council and the European External Action Service and EU Parliaments will continue unhindered and will be further exploited and developed, both bilaterally as well as in the context of interparliamentary cooperation.

6.8 COSAC taking into account the widespread mistrust of citizens towards the European institutions, strongly supports the democratic participation of EU citizens in the legislative procedure, under the European Citizens' Initiative and encourages a more active involvement of the European Parliament in its follow up.

6.9 COSAC is convinced that EU institutions must work together constructively taking into account the election results and the message conveyed by the European citizens when appointing the heads of the main institutional bodies, as envisaged in the TFEU.

7. Addressing the Social Deficit in the EU

7.1 COSAC notes that the deep economic recession in the euro area and the on-going European sovereign debt crisis have placed the debate on the social dimension of the EMU high on the European political agenda. In this respect, COSAC stresses the need for a horizontal integration of the social dimension into EU policies and within the framework of the European Semester. COSAC strongly supports social dialogue and the active participation of competent social partners in shaping more effective and targeted EU policies.

7.2 COSAC calls the European Institutions to respond to citizens demands for protection against the intense global competition; COSAC considers that the high standard harmonisation of social and environmental rights, as well as the fight against fiscal fraud should become a priority in the European agenda.

7.3 COSAC expresses its satisfaction over the first signs of a recovery in economic activity in the European Union throughout 2013, in terms of both productivity and competitiveness. However, it underlines that the continued pursuit of unbalanced fiscal consolidation policies is recognised as ineffective and prolonging the economic crisis unnecessarily as well as impeding recovery in employment prospects. The goal of long-term fiscal consolidation needs to be matched with measures to boost demand and stimulate growth.

8. Rethinking the European employment Strategy

8.1 COSAC notes with great concern that labour market conditions have continued to worsen over 2013, emphasising the unprecedented high level of youth unemployment across many EU countries, the increasing persistency of unemployment and the deterioration in the quality of employment (i.e. involuntary temporary and part-time employment, in-work poverty, informal work, job and wage polarisation); it therefore deplores the limited capacity so far of the EU to address the failures and disparities in labour markets so as to effectively resolve the problem.

8.2 COSAC welcomes the EU key initiatives to tackle youth unemployment (Youth Employment Package, Youth Guarantee, Youth Employment Initiative) and urges the European Commission to further step up efforts in order to create better and more, employment opportunities for the youth of Europe, taking under consideration particularities in the implementation of its initiatives, such as the case of poor rural areas. Regarding the effective implementation of the Youth Guarantee, COSAC considers that the involvement of all government levels and a regular and structured cooperation with stakeholders (i.e. public and private employment services, enterprises, trade unions, youth organisations) are required, the proper articulation between the national support systems to youth employment and the 'European Youth Guarantee'.

8.3 COSAC encourages EU Parliaments' active involvement in the efforts towards tackling youth unemployment by contributing in the designation of the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan and scrutinising its implementation. In this regard, it urges Parliaments to engage in interparliamentary dialogue not only between them, but also between them and the European institutions.

8.4 COSAC welcomes the adoption of European Union Work Plan for Youth for 2014-2015 by the Education Council; it is of the view that policy-making should take into account young people's conditions and needs. To this end, it encourages enhancement of a structured cross - sectoral cooperation in youth policy, further evolution of social dialogue and increased active participation of young people to the development and implementation of policies affecting them. COSAC emphasises the importance of ensuring youth policy input into the European Semester and into Europe 2020 Strategy.

8.5 COSAC acknowledges the significance of entrepreneurship for the EU economy, in particular in Small and Medium Sized enterprises (SMEs) as a source of economic growth and job creation. In this regard, it encourages the promotion of policies that facilitate business start-ups, especially in emerging and cutting – edge technologies and young entrepreneurs in accessing finance and support services and strongly supports the development of entrepreneurial education and culture (i.e. through traineeships, exchange programmes, information and support services) to facilitate the effective integration of young people into the labour market.

8.6 COSAC draws attention to the worrisome trend of high unemployment rate of young adults, aged 25 – 34. COSAC acknowledges that young adults should benefit from youth labour market programmes or retraining to improve their skills and employment prospects. Therefore it calls on the Commission to take up concrete and imminent initiatives in order to facilitate such actions and introduce specific measures for this age group.

9. The female capital against the backdrop of the economic and financial crisis

9.1 In the follow – up of the work of the Women’s Forum held under the Lithuanian Presidency, COSAC notes with great concern that the austerity policies to address the financial crisis are resulting in severe reductions in social services and job security. COSAC draws attention to the fact that the impact of such policies on women's economic independence as well as on their working and living conditions, is negatively affecting the balance of work and family life, while undermining, at the same time, their equal opportunities in the labour market.

9.2 COSAC underlines that the current economic and financial crisis, which has fuelled a social crisis, should not jeopardise progress achieved in the promotion of gender equality, reproductive health and rights.

9.3 COSAC notes that, although the Strategy for equality between men and women 2010-2015 has been introduced as the main tool to support gender equality in the implementation of the EU2020 strategy, the share of the burden shouldered by women has in fact become heavier.

9.4 COSAC deplors the fact that gender mainstreaming has an insufficient or non-existent profile in the EU2020 agenda and the European Semester; it therefore deems necessary that gender perspective is incorporated in the elaboration of the EU 2020 targets, in particular those related to employment, Research and Development, energy, education and poverty and becomes a reality.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE LI COSAC**Athens, 15-17 June 2014****1. The Bi-annual Report**

1.1 COSAC welcomes the 21st Bi-annual Report prepared by the COSAC Secretariat and warmly thanks the Secretariat for its excellent work. The Report provides extensive and useful information on the future of COSAC, on interparliamentary cooperation and in particular on cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament and examines how social and employment related policies can be better monitored, coordinated and scrutinised at the European and national level. It also explored ways to enhance democratic legitimacy and accountability in national budgetary, fiscal and economic policy in the framework of the European Semester and focused especially on the issue of parliamentary scrutiny over the "Troika's" (European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund) working methods in cases of countries under macroeconomic adjustment programmes.

2. The Future of COSAC

2.1 COSAC welcomes the diversity of ideas expressed by a large majority of EU Parliaments in relation to its future development with a view to adapting to the evolving landscape of interparliamentary cooperation.

2.2 COSAC notes that EU Parliaments largely expressed the view that both policy and institutional issues should be included on the agenda of future meetings. In this respect, COSAC encourages future Presidencies to take into consideration the proposals submitted by the Parliaments in the Bi-annual Report. COSAC welcomes the call for developing further exchanges of information and best practices on the subsidiarity principle checks in the framework of COSAC following the issuing of two "yellow cards". Furthermore, it takes particular notice of the mechanisms put forward by the majority of the Parliaments and primarily the discussion in COSAC meetings of the European Commission's response to a "yellow card" and deplores the peremptory override of the EPPO yellow card by the Commission despite the threshold being reached and passed by national Parliaments.

2.3 COSAC acknowledges the importance attributed to networking between members of Parliament and therefore supports, amongst others, initiatives that enhance closer cooperation between Members on specific issues of common interest, such as formal and informal meetings of members of Parliaments. Recalling that parliamentary cooperation should be open and inclusive, COSAC welcomes the inaugural meeting of Chairpersons of Committees of European Union Affairs of Parliaments of the EU South, as well as the continuation of existing regional meetings. To facilitate this networking, the COSAC secretariat will digitally distribute - and regularly update - an overview of the contact details of the Chairs of the standing Committees for European Affairs of the national Parliaments.

3. Cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament

3.1 COSAC notes with satisfaction that interparliamentary cooperation appears to be a generalised practice involving the majority of EU Parliaments. It stresses, however, the need for further improvement of interparliamentary meetings held at the premises of the European Parliament and organised by the Presidency Parliament in the Member States to meet the concerns expressed by a large majority of EU Parliaments.

3.2 COSAC recognises the importance of further enhancing cooperation between national Parliaments and the European Parliament by fully exploiting the provisions envisaged in the Lisbon Treaty. More specifically, it considers that there is significant room for improving interparliamentary cooperation, especially at the level of informal dialogue. In this regard, COSAC appreciates the recent *ad hoc* initiatives taken by the European Parliament (namely inviting rapporteurs or specialised members of national Parliaments on specific topics/draft proposals for discussion in Committee meetings in the European Parliament; inviting members of national Parliaments to hearings in the European Parliament; inviting members of national Parliaments to Committee enquiries in the European Parliament). COSAC strongly supports the continuation and further development of such initiatives, as well as the positive response to national Parliaments' requests for any form of dialogue on specific EU issues with Members of the European Parliament.

4. Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation

4.1 COSAC stresses that a large majority of EU Parliaments considers that there is a need to update the Lisbon guidelines for interparliamentary cooperation, mainly to take into account the establishment of new interparliamentary fora. Therefore, COSAC encourages future Presidencies to submit a working document based on the replies to the COSAC questionnaire as a useful input to future EU Speakers Conferences in relation to a possible reflexion on the update of the Lisbon guidelines.

5. Democratic legitimacy and accountability in the budget process

5.1 COSAC is of the opinion that national Parliaments and the European Parliament must ensure the democratic legitimacy of the Economic Governance in the E.U. and further enhance their functioning and role on their respective competences. COSAC takes particular interest in the proposals submitted by national Parliaments in order to enhance their participation in the process, identifying political dialogue as a very effective tool in this process between the national Parliaments and relevant stakeholders and forms of interparliamentary cooperation, and in particular the Interparliamentary Conference under Article 13 of TSCG.

5.2 COSAC welcomes the initiative taken by the European Parliament to launch an inquiry into the role and operations of the Troika with regard to the Euro area programme countries.

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