



## PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION



### **Background Note**

#### **Session 2**

#### **New Working Methods within COSAC**

#### **COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting**

Paris, 14 January 2022





## **Session 2**

# **New Working Methods**

## **within COSAC**

### **1. The findings**

COSAC is the forum for dialogue and in-depth cooperation between national parliaments and the European Parliament, whose irreplaceable role has been enshrined in the treaties by the Treaty of Lisbon. Through its ability to adopt contributions and submit them to the European institutions, it is potentially a source of proposals on subjects of interest to European citizens, of whom the national parliaments and the European Parliament are the representatives, in a national framework for the former, and a European framework for the latter.

It is possible to improve the efficiency of its work. At COSAC meetings, debates on agenda items generally give rise to short successive speeches without the following participants being able to react to the speeches and exchange with each other. Questions are addressed to the speaker who answers them in general terms, due to lack of time. The contributions adopted could gain in substance if they were based on more in-depth collective reflection upstream. Finally, in general, the work of COSAC lacks visibility vis-à-vis the media and the general public.

### **2. A proposal: the creation of working groups**

The COSAC Rules of Procedure state in article 2.6 that “COSAC may decide to set up a working group to study a particular issue linked with the activities of the European Union. Such a working group shall also be set up, if deemed necessary, by an absolute majority of the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs of the national Parliaments and of the representatives of the European Parliament. The Chairperson of the Committee for Union Affairs of the Presidency Parliament shall act as the Chairperson of the working group. The secretariat of the Presidency



Parliament shall provide the secretariat for the working group assisted by the COSAC Secretariat”.

The establishment of working groups would have several advantages. It would make it possible to:

- **give more substance to interparliamentary cooperation and more visibility to the work of COSAC** by offering the opportunity to several of its members to work together over time on a subject related to the Union's activities to identify possible points of agreement and reflect the diversity of views on this subject and to synthesise this work in the form of a final public document;
- **promote a better understanding of the differences in approach between national members of parliament** of the Member States on specific European subjects;
- **better structure the organisation of debates during COSAC plenary meetings.** The chairperson(s) of a working group could in fact be the first speakers in a debate on the agenda to present the summary of the work of the working group and possibly, if another speaker was planned to open the debate, question this speaker on this basis. They could benefit from a right to follow, reengaging with the speaker if they do not answer the questions with enough precision. The other COSAC members could then intervene in the debate and in turn pose questions to the chairs of the working groups and / or, where appropriate, to the speaker.

### **Themes of the working groups**

On the occasion of the French Presidency of the Union, **two working groups** could be set up on matters to be identified, possibly in conjunction with those selected for the COSAC biannual report, in order to benefit from the comparative information collected by this means.

The French presidency has retained three key messages in its motto: recovery, strength and a sense of belonging.

This theme of belonging is of particular importance for COSAC because it brings into play the links which unite its members and which justify the effort of cooperation and integration which the Member States agree to, and which is



unprecedented by its objectives and the resources committed. The Member States each have a history, identity and culture containing a strong European component and also have important national specificities. These elements must be respected and also be part of a common framework.

The French Presidency is therefore proposing to address the issue of membership from a parliamentary point of view in two ways through working groups on:

- **the role of national parliaments in the European Union.** National parliaments are indeed an important institutional vehicle for expressing and consolidating the sense of belonging. The purpose of this working group would be to provide a comprehensive overview of the way in which national parliaments perform their duties of monitoring the European policy of their governments and the activity of the European institutions. It would also be to analyse how national parliaments exercise a collective role at European level and how this role could be improved;

- **the place of European values at the heart of the feeling of belonging.** Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, as supplemented by the Treaty of Lisbon, sets out the values on which the Union is based, namely respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Respect for these common values is a key element of our collective contract and for mutual trust between member states; it is the basis of membership of the European Union and a necessary condition in order to meet the objectives of the European construction, among which the completion of the common market and the creation of a European area of freedom, security and justice. The purpose of this working group would be to analyse the achievements and the difficulties encountered by the Member States in conforming to these values while respecting their national identity.

### **Composition of working groups**

Each national parliament would be invited to appoint a maximum of two members from its European Union Affairs Committee(s) to represent it on each working group. The European Parliament could also be represented by a maximum of two of its members.



The total for each working group would thus be a maximum of 56 members of parliament.

### **Chairing of working groups**

In accordance with COSAC regulations, each working group must be presided over by the chair of the body specialising in Union affairs of the Parliament holding the Presidency.

### **Secretariat of the working groups**

The secretariats of the working groups would be provided by the secretariats of the European Affairs Committees of the National Assembly and of the French Senate, with the support of the permanent secretariat of COSAC.

### **Group working method**

Each working group would organise hearings, which could take the form of round tables (representatives of European institutions or national governments, national or European experts, members of the European Parliament...), and exchanges between its members. The choice of the persons to be heard would be made by the chair of the working group, on the basis of the suggestions of the members of the group.

Members of the working group who so wish may present **short contributions presenting their point of view in writing or orally**.

The work of the working groups would be conducted **in English and French and by videoconference**.

### **Conclusions of the working groups**

The work of each working group would be concluded by the preparation of a report, the purpose of which would be:

- **to provide an exhaustive overview of the points of agreement between the members of the working group but also of their differences in approach**. The purpose of the working group reports is not to develop a single approach on a given subject: it is to highlight what unites the 27 but also the diversity of points of view on subjects that concern all the Member States, the shared understanding of



the differences alone enabling progress to be made in defining a common base and in strengthening mutual trust;

**- to make proposals to COSAC members that could later be incorporated into contributions submitted to COSAC.** By setting up working groups, COSAC could thus better assert itself as a force for proposals.

The final report of each working group would be drawn up by the group chair and submitted to the working group members for consideration before the final version is circulated to COSAC members.

### **Timetable for establishment and work of working groups**

If the Chairpersons' Meeting on 14 January 2022 agreed to launch the establishment of these working groups, a letter could immediately be sent to the committee chairs of each parliament proposing that they appoint their representative(s) for the working groups.

The composition of these groups could be established by/at the end of January 2022.

The working groups could hold their first meetings in February 2022 before the COSAC plenary meeting in early March 2022, when a progress report on their work would be presented by their chairs.

The work of the working groups would continue after the COSAC plenary meeting.

Each working group should adopt its final report and transmit it to the members of COSAC by the end of the French Presidency in the first half of 2022.