

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LXI COSAC
Bucharest, 24-25 June 2019**

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, and Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

AGENDA:

1. Opening of the meeting of the LXI COSAC

- Welcome address by Mr Florin IORDACHE, Vice-President of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*
- Introductory remarks by Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*
- Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the LXI COSAC

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- Briefing on the results of the meeting of COSAC's Presidential Troika
- Presentation of the 31st Bi-annual Report of COSAC
- Letters received by the Presidency
- Procedural issues

3. Session I – ‘Achievements of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union’

Speakers: Ms Viorica DĂNCILĂ, Prime Minister of Romania; Mr George CIAMBA, Minister-delegate for EU Affairs, Romanian Government; Mr Victor MICULA, Secretary of State, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Romanian Government

Chair: Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*

4. Session II – ‘Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; the future of relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit’

Speakers: Rt Hon. Lord WHITTY, Chairperson, EU Internal Market Sub-Committee, UK *House of Lords*; Mr Luca JAHIER, President, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Chair: Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

5. Session III – ‘The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market’

Speakers: Ms Vanessa DEBIAIS-SAINTON, Head of Unit responsible for Higher Education, European Commission; Acad. Ioan DUMITRACHE, Secretary General, Romanian Academy

Chair: Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

- Debate on the draft Contribution and draft Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

7. Session IV – ‘Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social European Union impact; the role of national Parliaments in fostering the “New Economy” of the EU’

Speakers: Ms Elżbieta BIENKOWSKA, Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission (video message); Mr Ștefan-Radu OPREA, Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, Romanian Government; Mr Remus PRICOPIE, Rector, National University of Political, Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)

Chair: Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*

8. Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening of the meeting of the LXI COSAC

Welcome address by Mr Florin IORDACHE, Vice-President of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, and introductory remarks by Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, and Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, welcomed participants to the LXI COSAC and stated that Romanian Parliament would support the incoming Finnish Presidency, just as the previous Presidencies had supported the Romanian one. He then declared his hope that discussions during the meeting would be successful and help shape decisions about the future of Europe.

Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*, recalled the Chairpersons meeting held in January and the successful work and accomplishments achieved.

Mr Florin IORDACHE, Vice-President of the Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, also welcomed participants to the LXI COSAC, an event that marked the end of the parliamentary dimension of the Romanian Presidency, and highlighted the celebration, this year, of COSAC's thirtieth anniversary. In this respect, he stressed that COSAC had contributed during all this time to better coherence and responsibility of the EU policies and pointed out that COSAC was the oldest and most valuable platform for inter-parliamentary cooperation, an essential tool in overcoming challenges and in meeting citizens' expectations. He also mentioned the tenth anniversary of the Lisbon Treaty, which gave national Parliaments and the European Parliament a more prominent role and better instruments to control European legislation.

Mr IORDACHE then turned to the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council, underlining its ambitious goals and determination to succeed. As such, he declared that results surpassed expectations, recalled the impressive number of legislative files closed during the past six months and stressed that Romania proved to be a consistent, predictable and reliable partner.

Moving to the parliamentary dimension of this Presidency, Mr IORDACHE referred to its agenda, filled with themes and actions of strategic importance for the EU. In this regard, he highlighted defence, external action and security for the European citizens, cohesion, macro-regional strategies and agriculture, economic growth, social and budgetary aspects, as well as debates on the future of the EU. The topic throughout was *Cohesion: a common European value*, a subject that had come up in many workshops and seminars organised by the Romanian Presidency. He particularly mentioned the conference on the future of the EU, which had ended with an important statement about the future European construction: Europe had to be a global actor. Mr IORDACHE then referred to the European Parliamentary Week, which had dealt with economic and budgetary issues, and to the LXI COSAC, emphasizing the utmost importance of its topics. On this occasion, he stressed that international trade was a key issue for the Union's prosperity and for developing relations with external partners, while education and technological progress were described as areas likely to enhance sustainable development and welfare of the future, especially thanks to young people and their innovative ideas.

Before ending his address, Mr IORDACHE stressed that national Parliaments should, more than ever, make themselves heard and engage in the EU decision-making process, particularly in the context of electing new leaders for the EU institutions.

Mr TÎLVĂR then took the floor to welcome the new Chairs, attending a COSAC meeting for the first time, namely Ms Anneli OTT, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*; Mr Igor PEČEK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Slovenian *Državni zbor*; Ms Satu HASSI, Chair of the

Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta*; and Mr Hayke VELDMAN, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*.

Moreover, Mr TÎLVĂR referred to the co-financing mechanism and recalled that the Romanian Presidency had sent letters to Parliaments/Chambers inviting them to contribute. He stated that the Presidency had received 29 response letters, from almost all Parliaments/Chambers. He added that a reminder would be delivered during the COSAC plenary.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chair presented the draft agenda of the LXI COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

2. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- Briefing on the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

The Chair informed participants of the results of the Troika meeting held the day before, during which the Troika had agreed on a compromised text for the Draft Contribution and Draft Conclusions. This had been circulated to delegations the previous evening.

- Presentation of the 31st Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Mr TÎLVĂR invited the Permanent Member of the COSAC secretariat, Mr Kenneth CURMI, to present the 31st Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which was based on Parliaments' replies to the related questionnaire circulated to delegations on 18 February 2019, with a deadline for submitting replies set at 19 March 2019.

Mr CURMI briefly referred to the three chapters of the Report: the first one concentrated on prospects of international trade relations of the European Union and the future of relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit; the second one dealt with the European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market; and the third and final chapter addressed the economy based on innovations, technological progress and social impact and the role of Parliaments in fostering the “New Economy” of the European Union.

The Chair thanked the Permanent Member for the presentation.

- Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received by the Presidency:

- The Chair referred to all the letters received by the Presidency, both before and after the Chairpersons meeting, namely letters from Ms Karin KELLER-SUTTER, President of the EFTA/EU Delegation of the Swiss Federal Assembly; Ms Tamar KHULORDAVA, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, Parliament of Georgia; Mr Fabrice NOTARI, Chair of the Monitoring Committee on Negotiations with the European Union, and Mr Stéphane VALERI, Speaker, Conseil National of the Principality of Monaco; Ms Tone Wilhelmsen TRØEN, President of the Norwegian *Storting*; Ms Aslaug Arna SIGURBJÖRNSDÓTTIR, Chair of the Standing-Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*; and from Ms Blerta DELIU-KODRA, from Kosovo*, regarding participation in COSAC. Following consultation with the Troika, letters of invitation had been sent out. A number of invitation letters were also sent out to other Parliaments.
- Letter from Mr Václav HAMPL, Chair of the Committee on European Union Affairs, Czech *Senát*, asking the LXI COSAC to urge the European institutions into action regarding the exclusion of the Christmas/New Year period from the eight-week deadline for submitting reasoned opinions.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council and to the opinion of the ICJ on the declaration of independence of Kosovo.

- Letter from Mr L'uboš BLAHA, Chair of the Committee on EU Affairs, Slovak *Národná rada*, informing participants about the meeting of the Visegrad countries and Serbia, held in Bratislava on 16-18 June 2019, and sharing conclusions adopted at this meeting.
- Letter from Ms Tamar KHULORDAVA, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, Parliament of Georgia, requesting to discuss the issue of Georgia's security and sovereignty during the LXI COSAC. Mr TÎLVĂR noted that the President had informed Ms KHULORDAVA that the agenda had already been adopted by the Romanian Parliament and also approved at the Chairpersons meeting held in Bucharest earlier that year, meaning that the matter could not be included as a subject during the plenary meeting. Nevertheless, Mr TÎLVĂR stated that Georgian delegation would have the opportunity to take the floor during the debate to raise the topic.
- Letter from Mr Jean BIZET, Chairman of the Committee of European Affairs, French *Sénat*, requesting to discuss voluntary civil security work (in relation to the recent 'Matzak' ruling) during the LXI COSAC. Mr TÎLVĂR confirmed that, at the end of the meeting, during the closing remarks, the matter could be addressed.
- Letters from Ms Mairead McGUINNESS and Ms Danuta HÜBNER, European Parliament, indicating they would not be able to participate to the meeting.
- Letter from Mr Pieter OMTZIGT and Ms Renske LEIJTEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer* inviting delegates for a discussion on transparency in Council.

- **Procedural issues**

The draft text of the Contribution and Conclusions was circulated to delegations on Tuesday, 11 June 2019. Amendments received from delegations by the stipulated deadline were, together with the initial text and a number of compromise proposals elaborated by the Presidency, included in a table and submitted to the Troika.

Following a detailed examination of each proposed amendment, and based on the Presidency's compromise proposals, the Troika drafted a modified text of the Contribution and distributed it among delegations.

The Chair also informed delegations they could submit additional amendments to the Troika compromise text by noon of Monday, 24 June. The compromise text and any new amendments would be discussed during the meeting of the Chairpersons that afternoon.

3. Session I: Achievements of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Speakers: Ms Viorica DĂNCILĂ, Prime Minister of Romania; Mr George CIAMBA, Minister-delegate for EU Affairs, Romanian Government; Mr Victor MICULA, Secretary of State, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Romanian Government

Chair: Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*

Mr TÎLVĂR introduced the panellists and gave the floor to Ms Viorica DĂNCILĂ, Prime Minister of Romania.

Ms DĂNCILĂ started her address by thanking the Parliament of Romania for its support and involvement during the EU Council Presidency and continued by underlining that this Presidency confirmed her Government's commitment to strengthen the European project. In this respect, she referred not only to the hard work in solving pending files and in advancing negotiations on many others, such as the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), particularly in times of European elections and Brexit developments, but also to the Romanian Presidency's concrete results.

On this occasion, she highlighted the large number of meetings organised during the past six months – over 1750, out of which over 60 were at ministerial level – and their positive outcome for the European citizens'

lives. As successfully closed files, she mentioned combatting disinformation and fake news, improving access to information, enhancing data protection and increasing security of identity cards, protecting external border and fighting terrorism, defending consumers, notably with respect to the food quality, as well as ensuring work-life balance, gender equality and equal opportunities for all. Another complex file closed during the Romanian Presidency was that of the energy security, which was pending for many years.

Ms DĂNCILĂ also mentioned the 56 Council conclusions, adopted in May and June 2019, on EU foreign relations, terrorism, climate change, education, regional strategies or industrial policy. At the same time, she underlined Romania's commitment to protect European values and to tackle the real societal challenges. In this regard, she referred to the events organised by the Presidency to combat antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, hate speech and fake news, and expressed the wish that these actions be continued by the following presidencies.

Ms DĂNCILĂ concluded by stating that Romanian Presidency pushed the European agenda forward in an inclusive, cohesive and unitary way, brought citizens a little closer to the decision-making process, and reassured that Romania would continue to support the EU's consolidation, to enhance its policies and to promote solidarity and unity all around it.

Mr TÎLVĂR then gave the floor to Mr George CIAMBA, Romanian minister-delegate for EU Affairs.

Mr CIAMBA thanked all national Parliaments and the European Parliament for the consistent support that, in the end, enabled Romanian Presidency to succeed. He then referred to the intense activity of this Presidency, both on legislative and non-legislative files, and explicitly mentioned it had fulfilled its objectives. In addition, he stated that Romania had acted in an efficient way and, most importantly, as an honest broker.

As regards Romanian Presidency's achievements, Mr CIAMBA declared they were substantial, not only in terms of quantity, but also as far as quality was concerned, despite the general context and challenges: European elections, Brexit developments and negotiations on the future MFF.

In this respect, Mr CIAMBA referred to specific actions taken by the Presidency to ensure free and democratic elections, to counter disinformation and to ultimately preserve EU values. These actions notably consisted of improving electoral legislation, in order to fight the abusive use of personal data in the electoral process, relied on lessons learned from previous experiences, such as the Cambridge Analytica case, and were doubled by non-legislative measures meant to tackle disinformation and to guarantee protection of personal data.

He then mentioned Brexit, pointing out the difficulty of this file, in particular because of its uncertainty, but reassured that all legislative measures had been adopted, so that the EU and all remaining Member States be prepared for a potential UK's withdrawal without agreement.

As to the next MFF, the minister-delegate mentioned that, at each General Affairs Council, there was a specific point on the agenda in connection with this topic and that solid bases for the future negotiations were already set up. In this respect, he said the Council had reached common understandings with the European Parliament on 10 legislative proposals and that 12 partial general approaches had been agreed at the Council level.

Mr CIAMBA also referred to the progress made on other important files, such as energy and climate change, strengthening and deepening the Single Market, digital economy, artificial intelligence and industrial strategy, social protection, security and enlargement.

On climate change, he declared that Romania aimed at developing a common approach for a long-term strategy, which takes into account not only environmental ambitious goals, but also proper conditions for a

sustainable transformation of the European economy, as well as each Member State's needs and specificities to ensure a socially fair and balanced transition phase.

On energy, Mr CIAMBA highlighted the adoption of the Gas Directive, which would provide a predictable legal framework and represent an important added value to the Energy Union. He also mentioned the efforts to facilitate reflection on the future European Energy System, meant to enable the best possible transition towards a low-carbon economy.

As regards the Single Market, he reaffirmed Romania's commitment to preserve its integrity and the four fundamental freedoms, while on the future industrial policy he referred to the Council conclusions calling for a comprehensive strategy in line with the digital economy and with the expectations of citizens and companies.

Mr CIAMBA also pointed out essential steps taken to shape the digital single market, notably by adopting Council conclusions on the future of a highly digitised Europe beyond 2020. At the same time, and in order to support the business sector by enhancing its productivity, competitiveness and innovation, Romanian Presidency initiated a dialogue that aimed at creating a powerful European industry based on artificial intelligence.

On social aspects, Mr CIAMBA said the Council had finalised negotiations with respect to the establishment of a European Labour Authority and to the work-life balance for parents and carers, while on security he underlined progress made to strengthen the EU's internal security and to protect its external borders. As these developments were essential for Romania, Mr CIAMBA explicitly referred to the adoption of legislation setting up a standing corps of the European Border and Coast Guard with up to 10,000 border guards. Another progress he mentioned was the IT systems' interoperability in the area of justice and home affairs, which would considerably improve information exchange and security within the EU.

Concerning external threats, Mr CIAMBA highlighted the recently adopted rules allowing the EU, for the first time, to sanction perpetrators of cyber-attacks against the Union or its Member States.

The minister-delegate also referred to enlargement, stressing this was a top priority for Romania. In this respect, he underlined the efforts made to support candidate countries, notably by inviting their representatives to meetings and events organised by the Presidency, by promoting regional cooperation and by encouraging reconciliation between younger generations, particularly from the Western Balkan countries.

In his concluding remarks, Mr CIAMBA pointed out that Romania had acted efficiently and pragmatically, proving courage and consistency in pushing the European project forward.

Mr TÎLVĂR then opened the debate and 24 speakers took the floor. Interventions focussed mainly on cohesion and budgets, European governance, security and enlargement, and they all converged to acknowledge Romanian Presidency's efforts to close so many files.

Many speakers referred to Cohesion Policy and the MFF. Mr Cristian-Silviu BUȘOI, European Parliament, saluted Romanian Presidency's good and intense cooperation with the European Parliament on these topics and Ms Regina BASTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stressed that cohesion was essential not only for Romania, but for Portugal, too. She then argued that defending cohesion was crucial for the citizens' wellbeing, highlighted the need to reduce disparities all over the EU and welcomed the convergence agenda. Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, also greeted the efforts made by the Presidency to increase economic and social convergence within the EU, while Ms Rubina BERARDO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, drew attention to the outermost regions, which faced, in her views, adverse climatic conditions and needed to benefit more from Cohesion Policy in order strengthen their socio-

economic development. Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée nationale*, highlighted the EU's ambitious strategic programmes, but claimed that traditional policies, such as cohesion, should not be forgotten.

Mr Jouni OVASKA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, pointed out that cohesion and MFF would be on the Finnish agenda too, while Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, stressed that Hungary would not accept any cuts in the traditional policies' budgets. He furthermore stated that Cohesion Policy needed additional funding and Ms BASTOS claimed that completing the Economic and Monetary Union and adopting the MFF should be top priorities. In addition, Ms THILLAYE argued that the European budget needed more funds and that Member States should use them more efficiently. Mr Aaron FARRUGIA, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, congratulated Romania for finalising so many legislative files, but deplored the lack of cooperation between Member States on the MFF and the absence of agreement on the euro zone budget. Similarly, Mr Vitalino CANAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, referred to the European budgetary capacity, as a tool to offset imbalances and external shocks in all Member States, stressing it needed financial support.

Speakers addressed the European governance, too. In this respect, Mr HÖRCSIK highlighted the EU's institutional renewal, pointing out that nomination of its future leaders should also take into account geographical criteria. Besides, Mr CANAS asked for a balance between the Council and the European Parliament, based not only on geography, but on political groups as well, stating the *Spitzkandidaten* system was not appropriate in the current circumstances. On the contrary, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, deplored that this system had not worked and warned the European Parliament it was about to lose its credibility and power in relation with the European Council. Ms Maria João RODRIGUES, European Parliament, replied mentioning that designation of the next European Commission president should reflect both majorities in the European Parliament and the Council. She then pointed out that the post-European elections period offered an opportunity to deepen democracy, as these elections delivered a clear message to implement social pillar, invest in the future and address climate change.

As about climate change, Ms BASTOS stressed it needed to remain one of the EU's main objectives. Mr FARRUGIA showed appreciation for the Presidency's efforts to finalise important Energy Union files, but deplored the lack of agreement between Member States with regard to the zero carbon objectives by 2050. He was joined by Lord Robin TEVERSON, UK *House of Lords*, who mentioned the recent European Council's failure to come to an agreement on a carbon neutral EU by 2050. In his opinion, at the UN conference in September 2019, in New York, the EU would not be able to proudly participate and say it had committed to do all the necessary to meet the targets. Ms THILLAYE however underlined the European determination in terms of research, innovation and climate change, and Mr Bernard DURKAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, said climate change was a big challenge for the future. Similarly, Mr OVASKA outlined the importance of finding solutions to the climate change issues, while Mr Lech KOLAKOWSKI, Polish *Sejm*, congratulated Romanian Presidency for having closed the Gas Directive file.

In the social and economic areas, speakers pointed out not only developments made so far, but also challenges ahead. As such, Mr VIGENIN welcomed the adoption of the work-life balance Directive and the establishment of a European Labour Authority, while Mr BUȘOI underlined progresses had been made with regard to the Single Market, industrial policy and digitalisation. Mr KOLAKOWSKI, on the other hand, referred to the mobility package stating that, even if the European Commission had presented it as a cornerstone for strengthening the Single Market, things were moving in the opposite direction and new administrative barriers emerged. He also reminded that the road transportation played an important role in the EU's economy and called for sustainable solutions to improve working conditions for the drivers and to stimulate this sector's development. Ms BASTOS highlighted the need to make more efforts to face digital age and Mr FARRUGIA saluted the adoption of legislative files in the fields of capital markets,

digital single market and consumers' rights. Mr Gerard CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, mentioned that protection of intellectual property as well as banking, financial and manufacturing systems were priorities for Ireland and Mr DURKAN added digitalisation to this list.

Participants also referred to defence, security and migration. In this respect, Mr BUŞOI, Mr FARRUGIA and Mr. DURKAN highlighted important recent achievements made in the cyber security area, while Mr CRAUGHWELL referred to the cyber space war, pleading for a common European approach in security and military defence technology. He then called to create an independent European intelligence agency. Ms Eleni STAVROU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, reminded that Schengen Area was a major accomplishment in the European integration process and argued that open internal borders depended on effective protection of the external ones. On this occasion, she particularly appreciated the efforts made by the Romanian Presidency to secure them. Mr HÖRCSIK stressed the need to increase security budgets and pointed out that, since protection of the EU's external borders was a top priority, Hungary supported the amendments to the FRONTEX Regulation. Ms BASTOS suggested that migration and the fight against terrorism be dealt with in common, and highlighted in this regard the need to tackle populism, racism and xenophobia. Mr İmam Hüseyin FILIZ, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, underlined that Romania was a reliable strategic partner for Turkey and pointed out his country was committed to consolidate its partnership with the EU on security and economic cooperation. He furthermore welcomed the prioritisation of migration and expressed hopes that the upcoming presidencies would follow the same path. Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, highlighted the close cooperation between his Chamber and the Romanian ambassador in Rome and then reiterated Italy's wish to reinforce external borders and tackle trafficking of human beings.

On the Cyprus-Tukey tensions, Ms STAVROU stated that, being the only EU country with occupied territories, Cyprus had great expectations from the common defence and security policy. On the other hand, Mr FILIZ pleaded for a settlement, arguing it would definitely increase security and prosperity in the entire Eastern Mediterranean region, but highlighted that transposing bilateral issues across the whole EU might not help. Mr CRAUGHWELL considered, however, that such bilateral problems, as well as expansion to the Western Balkans, should be resolved before any enlargement takes place. Mr OVASKA, at the end, mentioned that security, migration, enlargement and external relations would be on the Finnish agenda, too.

Referring to the enlargement process, Mr KOLAKOWSKI and Mr FARRUGIA highlighted Romania's good results in the Western Balkans stability process, and Mr HÖRCSIK showed that Montenegro and Serbia were making good progress to become EU members. He also underlined that accession negotiations with Macedonia and Albania should have started, and that the EU needed Western Balkan countries not only for historical reasons, but also for geographical and economic purposes. Mr VIGENIN underlined the importance of good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, and praised Bulgarian and Romanian presidencies for keeping a European perspective in the Western Balkans. He also welcomed the latest achievements in strengthening the EU's commitment in the Black Sea region. Mr Anne MULDER, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, advocated for serious discussions about enlargement and pointed out that, when Romania joined the EU, it was not quite ready for accession. In this respect, he mentioned the Coordination and Verification Mechanism, created to help in fighting corruption and organised crime, and wondered when Romania would meet recommendations made under this Mechanism. Mr Terry LEYDEN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, praised the ambassador of Romania to Ireland for the excellent cooperation and pointed out that, irrespective of Brexit, the EU should continue to expand. He declared himself impressed by Montenegro's work and eagerness to join the EU and saw in this country a stabilizing force in the Balkans. At the end, Mr LEYDEN highlighted Ireland's support for enlargement to the Western Balkans, showing that enlargement generally brings prosperity.

Mr Slaven RADUNOVIC, Montenegrin *Skupština*, insisted the EU should strengthen its internal stability and unity, and ultimately its global actor position. He underlined the importance of democratising Western Balkans and pleaded for concrete support in implementing all crucial requirements and reforms. Mr Dragan SORMAZ, Serbian *Norodna Skupština*, indicated that integration process of the Western Balkan countries was slowing down, pointing out that North Macedonia and Albania had not received candidacy, while Serbia was unhurriedly opening new chapters (two instead of five). He furthermore deplored the attitude of Pristina to impose a 100% tax on products coming from Serbia, stressing his country had fulfilled all relevant obligations stated in the EU guidance, and urged parliamentarians to solve these issues for the sake of stability in the region. Ms Rudina HAJDARI, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, spoke about the candidacy status and reminded that, after two positive recommendations from the European Commission, Albania was still facing problems in opening accession talks. She also mentioned results achieved by her country in terms of justice, institutional strengthening and fighting corruption, claimed that opening accession talks would deepen these democratic reforms, and called on France and the Netherlands to support Albania. Mr FILIZ greeted Romanian Presidency for assessing the enlargement perspective, as an element to enhance domestic and international security, while Ms Blerta DELIU KODRA expressed commitment towards the EU integration process and pleaded for a Council decision on visa liberalisation. At the end, Mr OVASKA confirmed that enlargement would be on the Finnish agenda, too.

Being a major topic, Brexit was not absent from debates. Mr HÖRCSIK and Mr DURKAN declared support for a UK's orderly withdrawal, showing it would be in everybody's interest. In addition, Mr DURKAN underlined the EU had a role to play and stressed that Member States should stay united. On the other hand, Ms THILLAYE mentioned that, in her opinion, Brexit was an opportunity to rethink the way budgetary funds were used and to reassess unanimity in the Council, as a prerequisite for a way forward.

Mr GIGLIO VIGNA and Mr OVASKA also referred to the EU values, the first one by saluting Romanian Presidency's efforts to promote and defend them, and the second by outlining their importance in finding solutions to the challenges ahead.

For the final remarks, Mr TÎLVĂR gave the floor to Mr Victor MICULA, Secretary of State to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Romania, who declared having realised, by listening to the debate, that priorities put forward by the Romanian Presidency coincided with the agendas of many national Parliaments. In this respect, he stressed that their support clearly helped Governments to find agreements in the Council and to close so many legislative and non-legislative files, which ultimately enabled Romanian Presidency to succeed. Mr MICULA also paid tribute to the European political families, who contributed to successful trilogues with the European Parliament.

In the end, Mr MICULA thanked the Parliament of Romania for backing the Government's activity on both content and logistics, not only during the Presidency, but during the preparation phase, too.

4. Session II: Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; the future of relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of "Brexit"

Speakers: Rt Hon. Lord WHITTY, Chair of the EU Internal Market Sub-Committee, UK *House of Lords*; Mr Luca JAHIER, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

Chair: Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

Lord WHITTY, Chair of the EU Internal Market Sub-Committee of the UK *House of Lords*, regretted the United Kingdom's still-unclear position in relation to Brexit. He stated that, as the UK *House of Lords* delegation to COSAC did not include any members from the governing Conservative Party, the views expressed might not correspond with those of the UK's Government. Lord WHITTY also noted that,

considering the EU's determination not to change the existing deal, as well as the probable reluctance of both the UK *House of Commons* and the UK future Government to accept the deal, a withdrawal governed by the negotiated deal seemed unlikely.

Lord WHITTY stressed the importance of the Irish border in the context of a UK withdrawal, underlining that an open border was a prerequisite for supporting the Irish peace process. He argued, however, that it would be difficult to establish this within the rules of both the EU and international trade, noting that the issue had become a point of serious contention, partly because the solution offered in the withdrawal agreement was that either Northern Ireland or the UK as a whole would continue regulatory alignment with the EU. He pointed out that the issues arising from the Irish border question represented one of the premises on which the EU and the UK would agree on a free trade agreement and that, as of now, a close alignment with the EU had more support in the UK than a model which would imply greater divergence. Finally, he underlined the need for diplomacy between the EU and the new UK Government and called for adjustments on both sides, warning that a disorderly withdrawal would be damaging for both the EU and the UK, and was therefore to be avoided.

Mr Luca JAHIER, President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), analysed the EU's position in the field of international trade. In this respect, he noted that the European Economic Area, one of the largest in the world, was one of the success stories of the EU, contributing to a remarkable increase of European wealth and to the Europeans' ability to work abroad. He commended the EU's potential to determine the global economic and social agenda by means of international trade agreements, noting that the Union had concluded 39 trade agreements with 69 countries. Mr JAHIER stressed that the EU had an important role in enhancing and developing new trade practices and in promoting better social and environmental standards in the world. He underlined the importance of speaking with one voice, and emphasised the role of civil society in promoting environmental issues and social inclusiveness. Furthermore, he argued that adhering to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should become an overarching strategy for the EU.

Mr JAHIER also called for a constructive way to manage Brexit through reinforcing connections between civil society groups. He pledged, on behalf of the EESC, to commit to strengthening civil societies and invited the European Commission to cooperate closely to this end.

During the debate that followed, 29 parliamentarians took the floor. In their interventions, parliamentarians expressed their support for close relations between the UK and the EU and reiterated a need for unity among the remaining 27 Member States. Participants also called for a solution that would support the Irish peace process and would not compromise the EU Single Market principles. There was also a broad agreement that the EU should play a more important role along with the other global economic powers, and the need to remain united in supporting the multilateral trading system was stressed throughout.

A number of parliamentarians underlined that, despite the challenges, it was important to ensure a favourable business environment throughout the Brexit process. Mr Heribert HIRTE, German *Bundestag*, called for more detailed regulation on future financial relations and for enhancing mutual trust based on legal consent on the markets. Mr Anne MULDER, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, pointed out that, in the no-deal scenario, tariffs could not possibly be avoided, while Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, said that the already unpredictable economic environment would be further complicated if the UK did not contribute to the EU budget in case that no such agreement was reached.

Mr Martin KLUS, Slovakian *Národná rada*, called for the EU to prepare for the worst-case scenario and urged colleagues to take into account that many UK citizens did not wish to leave the EU. Ms Imren MEHMEDOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, and Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIC, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, also underlined the need to protect citizens' rights as a priority. Mr Terry LEYDEN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, considered the extension period until the end of October inadequate to find a solution,

making a new extension likely necessary. Mr Gerard CRAUGHWELL and Mr Bernard DURKAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, both argued that a further extension would increase economic instability and insecurity without bringing any added value to the negotiations.

Several parliamentarians stressed that the EU should promote social, environmental and climate standards and called for ambitious trade agreements in this regard. Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, suggested that, as the EU's climate standards were already sufficiently strict, the EU should focus on ensuring similar standards were achieved in third countries. Others, such as Mr Renhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Nationalrat*, stressed the need for the EU to ensure it remained at the forefront of economic development by, for instance, focusing on digitalisation. Similarly, Ms Anneli OTT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, suggested that the EU should update rules on digital trade in order to facilitate SMEs' access to the market. Mr Nicos KETTIROS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, underlined the need to ensure transparency in international trade negotiations and stressed the role of national Parliaments in this process. In a similar vein, Mr Bastiaan Van APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste kamer*, urged the European Commission to include a public consultation in all future trade negotiations.

In his concluding remarks, Mr JAHIER argued that, without trust between the UK and the EU, agreeing on mutually beneficial relations in the future would be difficult. He also underlined the role of the EU in promoting a multilateral international order, and expressed his hope that the EU and China could find a common ground in defending multilateralism.

In his concluding remarks, Lord WHITTY said that the future UK Government would most likely seek adjustments in the withdrawal agreement by introducing limits on the Irish backstop mechanism, noting, however, that such a solution would be politically difficult to achieve in the UK and Ireland and also in the EU. He highlighted that it was difficult to see how an agreement could be reached by November considering the current institutional situation both in the UK and in the EU. Finally, he expressed his hope that the EU would continue to place its values at the centre of its trade agenda.

5. Session III: The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

Speakers: Ms Vanessa DEBIAIS-SAINTON, Head of Unit responsible for Higher Education, European Commission; Acad. Ioan DUMITRACHE, Secretary General, Romanian Academy

Chair: Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*

Ms Vanessa DEBIAIS-SAINTON, Head of Unit responsible for Higher Education at the European Commission, referred to the EU's ambitious goal to build a European Education Area by 2025, with the aim of enabling all young people to receive the best education and training, and to find jobs across the continent. This aim encompassed the following objectives:

- promoting time spent abroad to study and learn as a standard;
- recognising school and higher education diplomas across the EU;
- ensuring that knowledge of two languages, in addition to one's own mother tongue, became the norm;
- ensuring access to high quality education for everyone, irrespective of their socio-economic background;
- ensuring people develop a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, as well as of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity;
- promoting lifelong learning, including a new quality framework for early childhood care.

Ms DEBIAIS-SAINTON stated that this goal had to be implemented in line with Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty, which states that the Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while

fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

She emphasised that education had never been as high in the EU political agenda as it was currently. She referred in particular to the European Commission's proposal to double funding for Erasmus to €30 billion within the next long-term EU budget for 2021-2027, expanding funding not only for higher education but also for vocational education, school pupils and apprenticeships within the scope of the Programme. She also referred to the efforts to develop European Universities, by establishing networks of existing universities to boost cross-border cooperation and by promoting innovation and excellence, thus bolstering competitiveness. Finally, she pointed out that while artificial intelligence and digital technology could contribute to innovative and inclusive pedagogies they could also create a skills gap that education systems should address. In this regard, she stressed the importance of master's degrees on artificial intelligence, early computer literacy, investments in IT infrastructure and in the quality of schools and teachers' training.

Acad. Ioan DUMITRACHE, Secretary General of the Romanian Academy, referred to the paradigm shift in the education system and policy. He referred to the need of a holistic approach to the challenges of the new industrial revolution that represented the digital society. Hence, the importance for education to meet these new needs! In view of keeping Europe's competitiveness, he argued in favour of digital literacy and smart education as the new paradigms in the education area.

Twenty-six parliamentarians took the floor in the ensuing debate. In their interventions, parliamentarians expressed their support for the European Education Area, while stressing the Member States' responsibilities in this area.

Mr Dan BARNA, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, underlined the need to invest in education that is adapted to the digital technology. Ms Ivelina VASSILEVA, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie*, favoured the developing of a European Education Area based on cooperation among Member States. Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, stressed the link between competitiveness and education, and underlined the importance of the national level. Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, was of the view that subsidiarity should be respected in matters relating to education. Ms Alexandra ANSTRELL, Swedish *Riksdag*, as well as Ms Elena TESTOR, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, underlined their support to this process towards a European Education Area, naming it as a high priority. Ms Riina SIKKUT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, referred to the achievements of Estonia as a digital state and called for flexible systems in education.

Mr Andrej RAJH, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, called for education system to take into account the new economy and services and the digitalisation and decarbonisation of the economy.

Mr Gerard CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, expressed full support to the European Education Area, in particular to the programmes for apprentices, language learning support and microcredits. Lord Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, praised the trusted brands that were ERASMUS and Horizon 2020 programmes and called the UK to associate with them in the future, in case of Brexit.

Ms Sabine THILLAYE, French *Assemblée Nationale*, as well as Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, expressed their support for the European Education Area and, in particular, to the Erasmus+ programme. Ms Marina BERLINGHIERI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, referred to the raising Asian economic dominance, hence the need to reinforce strategically the European model *via* education systems.

While Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, referred to the wide support, throughout Hungary, to the Commissioner in charge of education, Mr Tibor NAVRACSICS, some members noted the impact of education policies on society. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIC, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, stressed that, in a

fast changing labour market, lifelong learning systems should be available to all and paid particular attention the training of teachers. Mr. Paulo SÁ, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, as well as Mr Igors PIMENOV, Latvian *Saeima*, regretted the negative effects of the Fiscal Compact limits in terms of public deficits, on public education investment. Mr Nik PREBIL, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, highlighted the importance of young generations for the stability in Europe and Ms Pia KAUMA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, stressed it was important to fix the problem of mutual diplomas recognition, while acknowledging that the EU had no legislative powers over education. Mr Markus SELIN, Swedish *Riksdag*, underlined the need to avoid gender inequality and to support the promotion of women and girls in technology.

Mr Tarmo KRUUSIMÄE, Estonian *Riigikogu*, raised the issue of adequate student accommodation and its financing. Mr Jaroslaw OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*, expressed his support for teacher mobility and reminded that education was subject to the subsidiarity principle.

In her replies, Ms DEBIAIS-SAINTON stated that the principle of subsidiarity was not questioned, and assured that the European Education Area project, fostering cooperation and coordination, was in line with Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty. She emphasised that investment was key and expected main decisions on investment to be agreed at the EU jumbo Council (Economic and Financial Affairs + Education) meeting on 8 November 2019. Referring to the student housing issue raised by Mr KRUUSIMÄE, she stated that this was indeed an issue and agreed that more support should be provided not only to Universities, but also to local councils. Finally, she fully supported the issue raised by Mr SELIN, stressing the need to promote women and girls in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) studies and research.

In his replies, Mr DUMITRACHE reminded participants that the next generation of young people would work in a digital economy and society. He therefore insisted on the need to orientate education towards the economy' digitalisation, which represented the new industrial revolution, referring in particular to artificial intelligence, robotics and other related technologies.

6. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

Debate on the draft Contribution and draft Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

Mr TÎLVĂR informed participants that the draft Conclusions and Contribution had been circulated on Tuesday 11 June 2019. Since then, the Presidency had received amendments from national Parliaments 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. Referring to the guidance with regard to adopting the Contribution and the Conclusions, he underlined that, in those cases where amendments had not been resubmitted on the Troika text, it was considered that consensus was reached.

Mr TÎLVĂR explained the voting system, reminding participants that each parliaments had two votes with the vote split for bi-cameral parliaments.

Following some debate, including one vote, the draft Conclusions and an amended text of the draft Contribution of the LXI COSAC were agreed upon.

7. Session IV: Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social European Union impact; the role of national parliaments in fostering the “New Economy” of the EU

Speakers: Ms Elżbieta BIENKOWSKA, Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission; Mr Remus PRICOPIE, Rector, National University of Political, Studies and

Public Administration (SNSPA); Mr Ștefan-Radu OPREA, Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, Romanian Government

Chair: Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*

Mr TÎLVĂR introduced the session, presented the panellists and asked the audience to watch the video message sent by Ms Elżbieta BIENKOWSKA, European Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs.

After apologizing for her absence, Ms BIENKOWSKA pointed out that today's economy was changing with increasing speed, meaning that the EU and its Member States needed to be agile to keep abreast.

She then illustrated her statement with three scenarios. As a first example, she referred to the need for creating jobs to replace lost ones. National Governments, education systems and businesses had to make sure that people were able to acquire the necessary skills.

Secondly, she pointed out the importance of adopting and leading the technological change by pulling resources across Europe in order to build critical mass, which was why the European Commission was helping to establish a closer cooperation between Member States and industrial partners in strategic value chains, so that the success of the battery initiative could be built on. In this context, Ms BIENKOWSKA underlined the European Commission's decision to follow a similar approach for other strategic value chains, such as connected, clean and autonomous vehicles, low carbon industry and hydrogen technologies and systems.

As a third and last example, Ms BIENKOWSKA referred to sustainability and to the importance of moving to a low carbon economy, addressing the impacts on environment and fighting climate change. She stated that, if Europe could lead that change, it would lead to more and better jobs for the generations to come and be a chance for our future well-being and for our competitiveness. She concluded by stressing that answering those challenges was not about top-down decisions, made in Brussels, but rather about dialogue and discussion, about joint commitments and joint efforts of industry, EU institutions, national and regional authorities, and especially national Parliaments.

Mr Remus PRICOPIE, Rector of the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), commenced his speech by highlighting the different angles from which innovation and competitiveness could be approached. He stated that competitiveness was first about acknowledging the need to have skilled workforce and then investing in its education. In this respect, he mentioned that digitalisation was one of the main components in the current Romanian GDP.

He recalled that definition of education had never changed, being personal development, citizenship and labour market, and claimed that, if people did not look at it in an appropriate way, mistakes would happen. Mr PRICOPIE then pointed out that changes had occurred in education during the last decades, from a purely national approach to a more global one, but underlined that respecting national education systems was valuing diversity, tradition and history.

Even so, he highlighted that dialogue between Member States, *via* programmes such as Erasmus+, could ensure competitiveness and quality, and emphasised that Bologna Process, at its twentieth anniversary this year, enabled to speak of a common space of education, larger than the EU.

Mr PRICOPIE concluded by stating his belief that the next European Commission would place education higher on its agenda and by hoping that results of the European University project would only mark a promising beginning.

Mr Ștefan-Radu OPREA, Romanian Minister for Business Environment, Trade and Entrepreneurship, began his address by presenting an update and one of the Romanian Presidency's achievements regarding

trade, namely concluding negotiations and signing the Free Trade Agreement and the Investment Protection Agreement between the EU and Vietnam. He stressed that, through these instruments, European values could also be exported, showing, in this respect, the example of ratification, by the Vietnamese part, of all International Labour Organisation provisions. The minister then called for national Parliaments to follow the calendar agreed with the Vietnamese part, in order to ratify the Investment Protection Agreement.

Mr OPREA also emphasised the importance of innovation and the decisive role of national Parliaments in economy. He stated it was important to have a balanced amount of regulations, to protect the European citizens' rights, and to allow, at the same time, creativity to thrive.

Referring to the recent New Economy developments, he pointed out two initiatives put forward during the Romanian Presidency. At first, Mr OPREA mentioned the proposal to revise the Small Business Act, so to include digitalization in its principles in order to bring SMEs on a competitive threshold. Secondly, he underlined the importance of start-ups for the development of digital market and creative industries. In this context, and in order for them to remain European, he stated it was necessary to create a monitoring mechanism able to select start-ups with potential, by using existing networks such as the network of incubators, and then to use InvestEU funds or attract venture risk capital to capitalize these start-ups.

Although he claimed the EU must ensure that innovation takes place in Europe, Mr OPREA immediately named a practical obstacle to this: the current fragmentation of legislation, which is generally hampering innovative companies in their development.

In the ensuing debate, thirty-one participants intervened.

Some speakers considered the questions of education and innovation as crucial. Ms Alina TEIȘ, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, stressed the economy's competitive advantage consisted of innovation, highly skilled workforce and knowledge. She then mentioned that a knowledge-based economy needed a stronger support for education both at national and European level. Ms Kathy RIKLIN, Swiss *Assemblée nationale*, stated that education and innovation were the main factors behind a prosperous economy and society. She pointed out that Switzerland was a leader in innovation, with a high position in international rankings. Ms Renske Maria LEIJTEN, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, articulated her conviction that education should change and adjust for the modern economy 4.0.

A number of speakers outlined the importance of green economy and technological innovation. Ms Åsa WESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, stressed the need to keep a strong EU legislation on environment and climate, in order to drive investments and innovation in the field of green economy. Ms Pia KAUMA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, highlighted that green economy represented an important opportunity for European companies. Ms Maria STRÖMKVIST Swedish *Riksdag*, addressed the challenges deriving from climate change. However, she pointed out that there was a new market for new products and new solutions to reduce gas emissions. Ms Aslaug Arna SIGURBJORNSDOTTIR, Icelandic *Althingi*, also stressed out that technological innovation would play an important part in combating climate change. Lord Robin TEVERSON, UK *House of Lords*, emphasised that the New Economy would be a decarbonised one and underlined that the green economy was creating skilled, well payed and regionally dispersed jobs, and stimulating SMEs to grow. Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta* pointed out the need for a paradigm shift from a fossil-based economy to a fossil free friendly climate circular economy. Ms Virginija VINGRIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, underlined the need to implement circular economy's goals both at national and European level.

The issue of supporting research and innovation through investments was also brought up during the debate. Mr Igor PEČEK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, underlined that Slovenia ranked high when it came to research on robotics and that Slovenian companies would benefit from bigger investment in artificial intelligence. He then added that future development should be presented to the public and that national Parliaments could

play an important role in this respect. Some speakers argued that sufficient funding for research and innovation should be made available in the next Multiannual Financial framework (Mr António GAMEIRO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*; Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*; Ms Urve TIIDUS, Estonian *Riigikogu*; Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, Mr Angelos VOTSIS, *Cyprus Vouli ton Antiprosopon*), while others built on the need to provide investment through European programmes, especially Horizon (Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS, *Cyprus Vouli ton Antiprosopon*; Lord Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*; Mr İmam Hüseyin FILİZ, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*; Mr Adam KALOUS, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*).

Several speakers addressed the challenges resulting from technological innovation and digitalisation. Ms Gabriela CREȚU, Romanian *Senat*, pointed out that the fourth industrial revolution was causing radical and different changes, destroying borders, reducing States' capacity to tax and regulate, and creating a cyberspace where classical democracy and institutions do not have control. In her views, there was no sovereignty and control on Big Data and, in order to save democracy, there was urgent need to find solutions and political adequate responses to the fourth industrial revolution. Mr Andrej RAJH, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, stated that digitalisation and information of societies not only brought solutions, but also problems. He continued by saying that there were many social challenges that could only be addressed if Europe stayed together, strong and united. Mr Andrzej CZERWINSKI, Polish *Sejm*, emphasised the need to manage the innovative technologies and to meet the challenges of the future, pointing out that diversity was a great opportunity for the whole EU.

Ms Berta CABRAL, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, mentioned the outmost regions and further declared that without cohesion there could be no Union, while Ms Maria JOÃO RODRIGUES, European Parliament, stated that the Parliaments should start defining a European way to drive the digital revolution, according to European values, namely by respecting basic social rights and access to social protection. She further added the need for a strong innovation policy to develop artificial intelligence and ultimately to provide better public goods in health, education, urban management and energy transition.

A number of speakers also outlined their own countries' strategies in research and innovation. Mr Virgilijus PODERYS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, underlined that Lithuania had made the biggest progress in the EU when it comes to promoting innovation, encouraging science and business cooperation and improving the innovation ecosystem and business environment, and mentioned the importance of the 2030 road map for digitalising Lithuanian industries. Mr Elias MYRIANTHOUS, *Cyprus Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, mentioned the strategy for decentralised blockchain technologies and the need to smoothly implement them at national level, while Mr Jon Steindor VALDIMARSSON, Icelandic *Althingi*, informed participants about the new policy introduced in Iceland, based on several main pillars: creating a positive mind set towards star-ups, innovation and research, investing directly in star-ups and innovation to ensure open access to markets worldwide, providing supportive general framework for business, and increasing skilled human resources. Mr Adam KALOUS, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, mentioned the 2019-2030 Czech innovation strategy, called "Country for the future", through which investments into artificial intelligence would increase, as well as into digitalisation of Government, administration and polytechnic education.

In his concluding remarks, Mr OPREA highlighted the quality of the debate and the substance brought by the various interventions. He also noticed the key issues raised by the speakers, such as cohesion, citizens' rights and protection of personal data, which he described as most coveted wealth that all world giants were battling for, circular economy, high-level education and training, social protection, and environment. He underlined that all these were European values, which help the EU to stay competitive, adding that further efforts need to be done in order to export them.

Mr OPREA pointed out that innovation and changes were happening very rapidly – hence the name of "disruptive technologies" – and insisted on the fact that technologies could not develop without political

commitments and responsibility. In this respect, he finished his address by asking if politicians were ready for these transformations.

8. Adoption of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXI COSAC

The texts of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXI COSAC were unanimously adopted with no amendment.

Mr TÎLVĂR gave the floor to a couple of speakers for some closing interventions.

Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, referred to his letter sent to the Presidency, treating the subject of voluntary civil security work (in relation to the recent ‘Matzak’ ruling). In this respect, he highlighted possible negative consequences of the interpretation offered by the Court of Justice of the European Union in the ‘Matzak’ case, and the ongoing political dialogue with the European Commission. Mr BIZET expressed his wish for continued engagement with the European level on this topic, as civil society constitutes a subject which is important for national Parliaments and citizens, and a reform was needed to guarantee a “right of initiative” for national Parliaments in this field.

Ms Satu HASSI, Chair of the Grand Committee of the Finnish *Eduskunta*, informed participants of the COSAC Chairpersons meeting to be held in Helsinki on 21-22 July as well as the plenary meeting to be held in December, and mentioned all participants to these meetings would be welcomed. She informed them about elections in April and the five-party coalition Government which was formed in June. In addition, she mentioned that the Finnish Presidency Programme would be published the following day and divulged that, amongst other things, it stressed climate change and the rule of law, as well as multilateral international cooperation.

She congratulated the Romanian Presidency and expressed her gratitude for its work.

Mr TÎLVĂR then thanked everyone involved in ensuring the meeting a success, including the COSAC Secretariat, the interpreters and the Parliamentary staff, and closed the conference.

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