



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LXX COSAC

MADRID, SPAIN, 26 - 28 NOVEMBER 2023

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PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Member of the Spanish Senado, and Susana SUMELZO JORDÁN, Member of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, Co-Chairs of the the Delegation of the *Cortes Generales* to the COSAC.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Intervention by the Co-Chair of the the Delegation of the *Cortes Generales* to the COSAC, Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE

Mr LANDALUCE welcomed all the delegations present in Madrid to participate in the LXX COSAC, and also thanked the staff of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* for the work in preparing this meeting. He recalled that the aim of COSAC was to strengthen the role of national Parliaments, as a vehicle to express social concerns and, amongst the different topics that would be dealt with, he focused on the importance of stability and cohesion for the European Union (EU). In relation to Ukraine, he supported the military aid to this country and pleaded that the conflict should not to be forgotten, as European unity was closely linked to the victory of Ukraine.

He further noted that the same unity in relation to the conflict between Israel and Palestine should be kept, adding that civilians were enduring the worst share of the pain. He also mentioned other topics foreseen on the agenda, like the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, in relation to which Member States should be firm regarding their common responsibilities. As to the energy crisis, Mr LANDALUCE noted it gave the EU a unique opportunity to increase the strategic autonomy of its economy. In that regard, he emphasised that the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU was also a unique opportunity to strengthen relations with Latin America, given the close ties between Spain and this region. He then alluded to the fact that the challenges the EU had to face recently, should serve as a learning experience, while simultaneously increasing the feeling of pride of belonging to the EU. He concluded by quoting an African proverb that read as follows: “*If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together*”, expressing his hope that the LXX COSAC would make it possible, by bringing members of Parliament closer to the people and by standing for the rule of law.

Intervention by the Speaker of the Spanish *Senado*, Mr Pedro ROLLÁN OJEDA

The Speaker of the Spanish *Senado* started by warmly welcoming everybody present in the room, including all members of the delegations attending, as well as the staff whose work had made the meeting possible.

He alluded to the recent meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, held on the 17-18 September 2023 in the Spanish *Senado* in Madrid, considering that hosting the LXX COSAC was an immense honour and that the Spanish Presidency had been a positive one for the EU.

Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA recalled that it was precisely in Madrid that the idea of establishing COSAC was conceived in 1989, and mentioned that Mr Manuel DELGADO-IRIBARREN, Legal Advisor to the *Cortes Generales*, was present back then, and he was also attending the LXX COSAC. He then noted that during the more than three decades that had passed, society had evolved and the challenges that the EU had faced were very diverse. In most of the challenges, the involvement of national Parliaments and of the European Parliament had been of great importance, since they had been active participants in finding the solutions for the EU policies.

He mentioned that Europe had continued to deal with many issues and problems in recent times, which should be jointly faced by Member States and candidate countries through dialogue, cooperation and generosity, striving for the common good of Europe. Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA acknowledged that only a strong and united Europe would have a future and be able to retain its leading role in an increasingly globalised world.

Moreover, he referred to some of the remaining challenges of the EU, such as the New Pact on Migration and Asylum that should provide consensual solutions to the latest migration crises and the growing pressure on the external borders of the Union, as recently seen in Lampedusa or the Canary Islands, as well as in other territories in previous years. Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA also mentioned the continued efforts in moving towards a decarbonized society, respectful of biodiversity, with better air quality and environmentally sustainable. He added that much progress had already been made and, even if the EU was not a shining global example, it must continue to lead the fight against climate change, while generating jobs related to the green, blue and circular economy.

He considered Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was about to mark its second anniversary, as an unjustified war in Europe. He highlighted that Europeans must fight together through diplomacy and dialogue, but also with strong political, economic, human and military support to Ukraine, in order to achieve the restoration of peace and the reconstruction of this country. Meanwhile, this conflict was affecting the weakest economies and European citizens, with sharp price increases and food and energy shortages. At that point, he also mentioned other current conflicts, such as the one taking place between Israel and Palestine. On the topic of Open Strategic Autonomy and relations with strategic partners of the Union, such as Latin America, he considered that they should, above all, foster projects and commercial opportunities, as well as progress in areas of mutual interest.

He also mentioned the debates on the priorities of the Spanish Presidency due to be held at the LXX COSAC, emphasising that, barely a month before its end, the work needed to be intensified to achieve the desired results.

Finally, Mr ROLLÁN OJEDA emphasised that, in a moment when Europe had to face such important challenges and uncertainties in an increasingly volatile world, Europeans had to demonstrate that they were capable of developing appropriate responses and

solutions to those challenges. He stressed that Europeans must defend and highlight the shared values and interests that have made possible the enormous success of the EU. Mr ROLLÁN concluded by expressing his confidence in a satisfactory result for the LXX COSAC.

2. PROCEDURAL MATTERS AND MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN opened this session by welcoming two new Chairpersons from national Parliaments who were attending the COSAC Plenary for the first time: Mr Ján FERENČÁK, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Slovak *Národná Rada*, and Mr Edmunds CEPURĪTIS, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the Latvian *Saeima*.

Approval of the agenda of the LXX COSAC

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN then moved on to the approval of the draft agenda of the LXX COSAC as endorsed by the Presidential Troika, which had been previously distributed to all delegations.

Beforehand, the Co-Chair made some clarifications. Firstly, she mentioned that the programme initially envisaged for the LXX COSAC had to be adapted, after early general elections were held in Spain on 23 July and the fact that the new Government had not been formed until the previous week of the COSAC plenary. These circumstances meant that some of the planned keynote speakers could not confirm their participation until the very last minute. Likewise, it had been necessary to accommodate changes in the agenda of some members of the European Commission, whose participation was initially planned.

Secondly, she noted that the Presidency had received a letter from Mr Glenn BEDINGFIELD, Chair of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, requesting to include the latest developments in the Middle East in the agenda of the LXX COSAC. The Troika had deemed that this matter, of undoubted political relevance, could be considered included within the first session dedicated to the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN then submitted the draft agenda of the LXX COSAC to the consideration of delegations, which was approved with no further comments.

Presentation of the results of the presidential Troika meeting

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN informed delegations of the outcome of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC which had taken place the day before in the presence of representatives of the Swedish *Riksdag*, of the Spanish *Cortes Generales*, of the Belgian *Chambre des représentants/Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers* and *Sénat/Senaat*, and of the European Parliament. The agenda included a number of matters, namely the

approval of the draft programme of the LXX COSAC Plenary meeting, the presentation of the 40th Bi-annual Report, and information on letters received by the Presidency.

In addition to the referred topics, the Troika also addressed the proposal for the appointment of a new permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat, since the mandate of Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO was meant to expire on 31 December 2023, and that he would not be seeking a second term. She recalled that, on 27 October, the Spanish Presidency invited delegations to submit nominations for the position of the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, accompanied by the candidate's curriculum vitae, motivation letter and recommendation letter of the supporting Chairperson, with a deadline set to 10 November 2023. The Chair informed that within the deadline, there was one candidacy submitted, namely that of Mr Jakob SJÖVALL from the Swedish *Riksdag*.

The candidate had been invited to attend a brief interview with the members of the presidential Troika of COSAC. After that, the remaining members of the Presidential troika deliberated unanimously on the adequacy of the candidate. Therefore, and in line with the COSAC Rules of procedure (Article 9.3), Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN announced that the Troika would propose to the Chairpersons during the LXX COSAC the appointment of Mr Jakob SJÖVALL from the Swedish *Riksdag* as the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for the period 2024-2025.

Likewise, Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN announced that the Troika had discussed and taken note of a revised draft Contribution and Conclusions, which had been distributed to delegations together with the updated table with all the amendments received, with a new deadline for amendments set for 14h that day, Monday 27 November.

Presentation of the 40th COSAC Bi-annual Report

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN referred to the 40th Bi-annual Report of COSAC, drafted by the COSAC Secretariat on the basis of replies to the related questionnaire circulated to national Parliaments/Chambers on the 20 September 2023, with a deadline for submitting replies on 20 October 2023. Ms SUMELZO thanked the COSAC Secretariat for their work and gave the floor to its Permanent Member, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, to present the Report, after thanking him for this work of systematisation and graphic presentation.

In his presentation Mr DIAS PINHEIRO thanked the Spanish Presidency for its hospitality, and underlined that this was the 20th anniversary of the COSAC Bi-annual Reports, and its 40th edition, numbers that proved it was still a worthy and relevant document. He welcomed the fact that all national Parliaments, and the European Parliament, had replied to the questionnaire, and thanked colleagues in the COSAC Secretariat for their work.

He further recalled that the three chapters of the Report were dedicated to 1. The role of Parliaments in relation to the European goal of Open Strategic Autonomy, topic dealt for

the first time within a Bi-annual Report; 2. The role of Parliaments in handling energy policies, specially renewable sources of energy, in a follow up of the Swedish Presidency 39th Bi-annual Report; and 3. The role of Parliaments when confronted with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, also a follow up from the previous Report. The 40th Bi-annual Report had covered a wide range of meaningful questions that he hoped would prove useful during the debates of the LXX COSAC. As this was his last meeting as permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat, he thanked all delegates for their support, and showed his special gratitude to Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, for having supported him in what had been the most fascinating professional experience of his career. He concluded by wishing the best to the new Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Mr Jakob SJÖVALL.

The main results from the Report were summarised in a [short video clip](#) produced by the Permanent Member and presented at the end of his intervention.

Following the presentation made by Mr DIAS PINHEIRO, the Chair asked if any of the participants would like to make any comments, but there were no further interventions.

Letters received by the Presidency

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN recalled the following letters received by the Presidency requesting invitations to attend the COSAC meetings:

- Mr Benedikt WÜRTH, President of the Swiss delegation for relations with the European Parliament, Swiss *Assemblée fédérale*;
- Mr Masud GHARAHKHANI, President of the Norwegian *Stortinget*;
- Lord Peter RICKETTS, Chair of the European Union Committee, United Kingdom (UK) *House of Lords*;
- Sir William CASH, Chair of the EU Scrutiny Committee, United Kingdom (UK) *House of Commons*;
- Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*;
- Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Chair of the Committee on European Integration of the Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'I*;
- Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI, Chair of the Committee on European Integration, Kosovo *Kuvendi i Kosovës*;
- Mr Arman YEGHOYAN, Chair of the Standing Committee on European Integration, National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia;
- Mr Berna COMA, Chairperson of the Legislative Committee for External Policies, *Consell General*, Principat d'Andorra;
- Ms Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES, President of the Monaco *Conseil national*, and Mr Régis BERGONZI, National Councillor, President of the Commission for monitoring the negotiations with the European Union.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN said that, following consultation with the Presidential Troika of COSAC, invitations had been extended to all the above-mentioned Parliaments to take part in the LXX COSAC.

She also alluded to the letter sent by Mr Glenn BEDINGFIELD, Chair of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, which had been discussed earlier in the framework of the agenda item related to the approval of the programme for the LXX COSAC.

All the letters mentioned were made available on [IPEX](#).

Any other business

There were no interventions in this point of the agenda.

3. SESSION I. SPANISH PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN opened the first session of the LXX COSAC, explaining that, given the political calendar in Spain, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO, could not attend in person and had instead sent a video message to the COSAC plenary, that was projected in the room.

Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO (video message)

The Minister started by underlining the fact that, 34 years after having been created in Madrid, COSAC was back in Spain, in a very special time, during the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. He referred to Spain as a country where parliamentarians played a focal role, as the Parliament offered the instruments to achieve agreements, to find responses to citizens' concerns and the guarantee of living together.

He mentioned that the *Cortes Generales* had helped the Government prepare the Presidency objectives, amongst which a special reference was made to the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit that took place from 24 to 27 July 2023. He continued by condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine, by referring to the crisis in the Middle East, and supporting the enlargement of the EU. Regarding some of the ongoing negotiations, he alluded to the Critical Raw Materials Act, the regulation on Artificial Intelligence, the negotiation of free trade agreements, amongst others, with New Zealand, and the post-Cotonou Agreement, the ecological transition and biodiversity, and the reform of the electricity market.

Mr ALBARES BUENO also focused on social justice, which he considered to be the DNA of the Spanish Presidency, with issues such as women's rights, equality, rights of

disabled persons, problems related to ageing and social and territorial cohesion. He recalled the Informal European Council, held in Granada, on 6 October 2023, dedicated to the EU's Open Strategic Autonomy, and added that the well-being of Europeans went hand in hand with the green transition. He concluded by wishing that the Spanish Presidency could count on the support of COSAC to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

After the video message of the Foreign Affairs Minister, the debate started, with all questions being jointly replied at the end of the session by the Secretary of State for the European Union, Mr Pascual NAVARRO.

During the ensuing debate, 40 speakers took the floor.

Overall, there was a **broad support for the priorities and the achievements of the Spanish Presidency**, especially in files related to the **green transition, the reindustrialisation and the Social Pillar of Europe**. The green transition was specifically mentioned amongst others by Mr Ján FERENČÁK, Slovak *Národná Rada* and Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*. The work of the Spanish Presidency in relation to its different priorities was mentioned under a positive light amongst others by Ms Eliane TILLIEUX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants/Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*, Mr Hans WALLMARK, Swedish *Riksdag*, Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, and Mr MEIMARAKIS, European Parliament. There were also interventions in the opposite sense, by Mr José María SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, and Mr Jorge BUXADÉ VILLALBA, European Parliament.

The **recent terrorist attack by Hamas** against Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent **crisis in the Middle East**, was a topic raised by many speakers, who underlined different aspects of this extremely complicated and sensitive conflict. Ms TILLIEUX asked for a stronger line and a demand for a total ceasefire. Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Cortes Generales* and Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*, both identified Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, recalled the need to respect international law by both sides in the conflict. Mr Glenn BEDINGFIELD, Maltese *Kamra Tad-Deputati*, pointed out the role of one country behind this and many of the conflicts in the current geopolitical landscape: Iran. He then reinstated his request to have this topic included as a new point in the agenda of the LXX COSAC. Another topic mentioned by Mr KARAS, European Parliament, and Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, was the serious need to fight **anti-semitism** at all levels. Finally, the two states solution, Israel and Palestine, was evoked as the only possible solution by several speakers, amongst others Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée Nationale*.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine was, almost two years after its beginning, still a prominent theme in the debate. Different aspects of this war were mentioned, like

the need to avoid forgetting about it, mentioned by Ms TILLIEUX or the fact that EU enlargement should be speeded up in relation to Ukraine, mentioned amongst others by Mr PONS and Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*. Mr Harris GEORGIADES, Cypriot *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, linked this aggression by Russia to other conflicts, like the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Mr HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, also warned of the catastrophic consequences of the eventual defeat of Ukraine and in order to avoid it, he stressed the need to reinforce European defence cooperation. This idea was also mentioned by other delegates, amongst others, by Ms Boglárka ILLÉS, Hungarian *Országgyűlés* and Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*.

Armenia, which participated in a COSAC meeting for the first time, received special attention in the debates, with mentions by several speakers, amongst others, by Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor* and Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, who pleaded in favour of a strong European reaction to the events in the region, given the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Mr Doménec RUIZ DEVESA, European Parliament, thanked the Spanish Presidency for having supported **institutional reforms** within the EU, and referred to the European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2023 on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties.

In the context of the changing geopolitical situation and the lengthy accession process, several delegates expressed support to the **European Union's enlargement**, including delegates from all candidate countries present in the LXX COSAC, amongst others, Ms Etilda GJONAJ, Albanian *Kuvendi*, Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonian *Sobranie*, Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU, Albanian *Kuvendi*, Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos P'arliament'i* and Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI Kosovo¹ *Kuvendi i Kosovës*. On this topic, Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat* stressed the need to consider the accession of the Western Balkans, in order to allow Europe to export stability, not import instability.

The importance and need of the urgent **accession of Romania and Bulgaria to Schengen** was jointly raised by Ms Mirela FURTUNĂ, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor* and Mr Dinko DINCHEV, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*.

Mr Pascual NAVARRO, Secretary of State, answered the questions individually as is accustomed in the Spanish *Cortes Generales*.

In relation to the different files under the Spanish Presidency, he referred to many different priorities. In relation to **social Europe**, in all its dimensions, Mr NAVARRO hoped that substantial progress could be achieved under the Belgian Presidency, before

¹This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

the end of the European parliamentary term in June 2024. Reindustrialization was also considered a key priority, and the adoption of the Critical Raw Material Act was a success that contributed to this aim. The European Pact on Migration and Asylum had also seen advances, as the Spanish Presidency had worked towards a European solution.

Mr NAVARRO explained that the **Spanish Presidency had been present in the European Parliament** this semester, at different levels, and that the Prime Minister was expected to appear before the plenary in December, after having been confirmed in his position.

In relation to the **crisis in the Middle East**, he agreed with Mr KARAS, European Parliament, in the balanced position defended by the last European Council meetings, and announced a new position will be adopted during the European Council meeting in December, before the end of the Spanish Presidency.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine was also tackled by the Secretary of State, who announced that the European Council was about to agree on a new package of sanctions against Russia.

Enlargement was a topic deemed important by Mr NAVARRO. He hoped all files in relation to enlargement could be dealt with and the process continued, in an individualised manner for each candidate or potential candidate. He referred to the specific situation of every candidate country, particularly acknowledged Albania's huge progresses towards accession and encouraged North Macedonia and Kosovo² to solve pending issues, both internally and in their region. In relation to Ukraine, the Secretary of State indicated that the Spanish Presidency would take initiatives to open accession negotiations. On a different note, he referred to the EU association agreement with Andorra, that he hoped would be signed under the Spanish Presidency.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN thanked the Secretary of State for EU Affairs for his detailed answers, before closing the first session of the LXX COSAC.

4. SESSION II. THE PACT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM OF THE EU

Address by the Minister for Home Affairs, Mr Fernando GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ

Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ began his intervention by referring to the new Spanish Government which had taken office the previous week. He said that the present Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU was of particular importance since it was the last full Presidency during the current European legislative cycle. This fact put additional pressure to conclude ongoing negotiations as soon as possible, and files

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

related to internal affairs, and especially to migration policy, were of particular importance in that respect.

Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ stated that migration had historically been associated with positive sentiments and viewed as an opportunity for Europe, but was currently perceived in a negative way. The EU therefore had to come up with realistic solutions to the migration phenomena in line with its shared principles and values. He further said that the EU needed to make sure that migration stopped being a divisive issue in Europe and instead was regarded as an opportunity rather than a problem.

He mentioned that the approval of the Pact on Migration and Asylum was a priority for the Spanish Presidency. He further noted that not everybody could be satisfied but a compromise had to be built upon the principles of a fair sharing of responsibility as well as solidarity between Member States. He also considered that, from a political point of view, and after many years of debate, the approval of the Pact would be an important milestone because it would send a clear message of solidarity.

Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ then described the historical background of the different legislative and operational initiatives which together made up the Pact on Migration and Asylum. He explained that this comprehensive package was presented by the European Commission in September 2020, and aimed to cover all phases of migration processes, as well as the external dimension. It was based on a balance between the principles of solidarity and a fair sharing of responsibility, both enshrined in the EU Treaties. He further noted that the aim of the Pact was to come up with a new comprehensive policy for migration and asylum for the EU, built on previous proposals made by the Commission in 2016, following the 2015 migration crisis.

Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ summarised how the discussions had proceeded over the last few years. In September 2023 a roadmap, stating that the negotiations of all initiatives in the Pact should be concluded before the end of the present legislative cycle, had been signed by the previous, current and incoming Presidencies of the Council as well as the European Parliament. He reviewed progress in the negotiations for the different legislative acts in the Pact, with emphasis on the Regulation on Asylum and Migration, which he viewed as the cornerstone of the Pact, as it was intended to replace the current Dublin regulation that determined which EU Member State was responsible for the examination of an application for asylum.

Although the work was very demanding, complex and politically sensitive, Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ argued that the negotiations had progressed rapidly. He said that work was still to be done, but great efforts had been made in the ongoing trilogues and technical meetings to identify and agree on the most politically challenging issues. The final objective of reaching a political and all-encompassing agreement on the Pact of Migration and Asylum overall during the Spanish Presidency was within reach, Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ argued. He continued by stating that this was a necessity and a need to accomplish, which also was the message

he had conveyed to his colleagues at the last Council meeting of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs held in Luxemburg 19th of October 2023.

As part of a set of final messages Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ stated that a new European legal framework, which provided a better response to challenges posed by migration and asylum, had been debated for more than eight years and the EU was currently in a key moment in time for reaching a definitive agreement on the Migration and Asylum Pact. The aim of the Spanish Presidency, he said, was to reach a final agreement in December, which would allow the incoming Belgian Presidency to make the final technical adjustments required before the end of the current legislative cycle.

In his conclusion he said that this was the right time to reach a final agreement on the Pact, and that the EU could not afford to miss this opportunity, therefore both co-legislators had to compromise and be flexible. The Pact would not be perfect but it should at least be effective, practical, fair and well-balanced. It would provide a better legal framework than the one which currently exists, and provide better responses to the current reality, and in addition it would provide something very important, Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ concluded, as it would send out an unprecedented message of unity in the field of migration.

Address by the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ms Ylva JOHANSSON

Ms JOHANSSON took part in the proceedings online.

In her opening, she thanked the Spanish Presidency for the possibility to address COSAC, and apologised for not being able to take part in person. She agreed with everything minister GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ just had said regarding the Pact on Migration and Asylum, and her address would therefore focus on some additional issues of importance for the overall management of migration which were not formally part of the Pact.

First, Ms JOHANSSON highlighted the need to invest in legal pathways and legal opportunities for people to come to the EU. She argued that in order to prevent illegal arrivals the EU needed to invest in legal opportunities for migration. She referred to the High-Level Conference on legal migration, organised by the Spanish Presidency in Madrid 16-17 November, as an important event in which a number of ideas were outlined on how the EU could work with partner countries on labour migration.

Second, she underlined the need to fight and counter migrant smuggling. The migrant smuggling networks were strong, international and organised in mafia-like structures, and to counter them the Commission had worked on new legislation which she was to present the following day. At the same time a new Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling, initiated by the President of the European Commission Ursula VON DER LEYEN, would meet for the first time in Brussels on the following day.

Third, she highlighted the EU's relations with third countries, and the need for close cooperation. As an example, Ms JOHANSSON mentioned the high-level dialogues on migration and security with Türkiye. To manage migration, close cooperation with partner countries was a necessity, she argued.

Lastly, she commented briefly on the ongoing negotiations on the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Ms JOHANSSON confirmed that trilogue negotiations were ongoing in all remaining parts of the Pact, and that she took part personally in the trilogue meetings. The level of commitment to reach an agreement from the co-legislators was impressive, she noted, and they also possessed a shared understanding of the necessity of making compromises. She referred to minister GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ' earlier statement that a final compromise would not be perfect, but emphasised that it would certainly be much better than the current situation. She outlined some important features of the Pact and mentioned prevention of irregular arrivals, more swift and fair processes, fast return for those who were not eligible for asylum, a proper system for responsibilities and a mandatory solidarity mechanism between Member States.

She concluded by acknowledging the difficulties of reaching a final agreement on all the remaining files in the Pact during the Spanish Presidency, but still considered this objective to be realistic. Lastly, Ms JOHANSSON directed a special thanks to minister GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ and his team for their professionalism, and for all the work they have put into these negotiations.

Address by the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS

In his introduction Mr KARAS thanked the Spanish Presidency for putting the important topic of migration on COSAC's agenda. He said that the debate had clearly shown that Europe was currently experiencing more multiple crises simultaneously than ever since 1945, and that anyone who claimed that these challenges could be easily solved was dishonest. To deny the complexity of these multiple crises was the biggest problem in contemporary political debate and it should be acknowledged that there were no simple answers. He further argued that this complexity must be explained and debated even if it was unpopular and exhausting.

He recalled that, in the past, Europe had achieved more integration in times of crisis, which had made the EU stronger. Until 2015 the EU had learned the right lessons from crises, but regarding migration policy the EU had failed. This failure was not just the fault of the EU institutions, but Member States were also responsible, due to their lack of political will for a European solution, and for their willingness to continue with a non-functional national patchwork.

Mr KARAS expressed his satisfaction with the fact that the European Parliament and the Council had been negotiating on the Pact on Migration and Asylum since March, and he appealed to the Member States to agree on the Pact before Christmas. He further welcomed that both minister GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ representing the

Council, and Commissioner JOHANSSON, had expressed hope for the Pact to be approved during the Spanish Presidency.

Mr KARAS outlined the four core elements of the reform: harmonised registration and screening to avoid double work and inefficiencies; efficient asylum procedures at the EU's external borders to differentiate between refugees and labour migrants; a solidarity mechanism to relocate asylum seekers fairly within the EU; and a new crisis and force majeure regulation intended to address situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum in the EU. With the new Pact in place, Mr KARAS noted, a system and a common set of rules would be established in the EU that distributed responsibilities and tasks more fairly, and would also function in times of crisis. He considered this would be a huge step forward, but acknowledged that, for the future, much more was needed and listed some main points.

First, the protection of EU's external borders must become an EU competence, organised, supervised and financed by the EU. Second, the EU's external borders must be identical to the Schengen border. Third, the EU needed common and uniform asylum procedures for legal migration. Fourth, the EU needed to separate between asylum migrants and labour migrants. Fifth, and in the long run, the EU needed a strong and coordinated migration, integration, education policy and asylum management. All this could be done, Mr KARAS argued, and an agreement of the present Pact on Migration and Asylum under the Spanish Presidency would be a first good step.

In his closing remarks, Mr KARAS stated that in order to achieve common goals we had to work together and expressed his optimism for the future.

In the following debate close to 50 speakers took the floor.

Many of the speakers underlined the **need of approving the Pact on Migration and Asylum as soon as possible**, amongst others, Mr Pere Joan PONS Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Mr Domenec RUIZ DEVESA, *European Parliament*, Ms Karin BROUWERS, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, *French Assemblée nationale*, Mr Beppe FENECH ADAMI, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, Ms Maria Emília APOLINÁRIO Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr Vlad Mircea PUFU, Romanian *Senat*, Ms Maria Emília APOLINÁRIO Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr Dimtris KOUVELAS Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*.

Mr Rihards KOLS, Latvian *Saeima* and Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER, German *Bundestag* on the contrary argued that today was **not the right time for the EU to agree on a Pact on Migration and Asylum**.

The **EU's need for migration** e.g., to address labour market needs and to tackle the EU's demographic problems was raised by Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr RUIZ DEVESA, Ms Nathalie OLIVEIRA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas: Dáil Eireann* and Mr Burhan KAYATÜRK, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*.

The instrumentalization of migration and the use of migrants to destabilise the EU was raised by several speakers including Mr Heikki AUTTO, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Mr Arminas LYDEKA, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Mr KOLS, and Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*.

The need for an increased focus in the debate on **the root causes to migration** was raised by Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*. The necessity for the EU to have a migration policy **based on fairness, dignity and which assured protection for people in need** was raised by Ms Latifa GAHOUCHE, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, Ms Eva BIAUDET, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Ms Eirini DOUROU, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, and Mr Lavdrim KRASHI, Albanian *Kuvendi*.

The argument that **migration policy** mainly should be a **responsibility for national governments** was raised by Mr Bruno NUNES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, who together with Mr KLEINWÄCHTER also argued that **voters should be consulted on migration issues** specifically.

After the debate minister GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ was invited to close the session and thanked all participants, which he thought clearly had shown that migration was a complex issue, and rather must be seen as a phenomenon rather than a problem.

He noted that most speakers had called for an immediate agreement on the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which mainly concerned the internal dimension of migration policy, noting that previous Presidencies, as well as the current Spanish Presidency, had worked hard to conclude negotiations. He reiterated that flexibility and compromises were needed, and the possibility of reaching a final comprehensive agreement on the Pact was an opportunity which could not be missed. A “jumbo” trilogue was to take place on 7 December, and Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ expressed high hopes and huge expectations on reaching a final political agreement at that meeting, and made a final appeal for flexibility.

Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ referred to the debate and noted that even if the different regulations and instruments in the Pact, in principle, only concerned the EU’s internal migration and asylum management system, many participants had debated the external dimension. He agreed on the importance of the external dimension of the EU’s migration and asylum policy, and said that the EU must continue to work with countries of origin and transit countries to counter irregular migration, and to fight migrant smuggling. He further noted that people first and foremost left their home countries because of climate change, hunger, conflicts and wars, and not because of the EU’s migration rules and procedures.

In the closing remarks, he thanked all the previous Presidencies and the negotiation teams in the different EU institutions involved for their work, which made him relatively optimistic regarding a final political compromise on the Pact in the coming weeks. It was an opportunity the EU could not miss, Mr GRANDE-MARLASKA GÓMEZ concluded.

5. SESSION III. ENERGY CRISIS AND GREEN TRANSITION

Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, co-Chair of the Delegation of the Spanish *Cortes Generales* before the COSAC, opened the session by introducing the topic and two keynote speakers.

Address by the Member of the European Parliament and Rapporteur on the State of the Energy Union, Mr Nicolás GONZÁLEZ CASARES

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES started by thanking COSAC for the invitation to speak about the energy transition and crisis amongst members of national Parliaments, since it was important to know the views in different Member States. He noted that the energy crisis came about in a context marked by the COVID-19 pandemic and, notably, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As Russia was the main supplier of gas to Europe through gas pipelines, cutting European imports had limited the capital flow reaching Putin's hands, but it had also resulted in an important increase of the price of gas in Europe. He acknowledged that while some countries were more dependent on Russian gas than others, all European countries were impacted and had to look for alternative gas suppliers and other sources.

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES highlighted the links between the energy crisis and the green transition, recalling that the Green Deal started in 2019 with the proposal for the European Climate Law and the Fit for 55 package, which focused on the reduction of carbon emissions and the fight against climate change. The goal of reducing emissions by 55% by 2030 was the reason why many new legislative pieces have been proposed or amended, including the renewable energy directive, the energy efficiency directive, the carbon border adjustment mechanism and the decarbonization of land- maritime and aerial transport. Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stressed that it was important that Member States translated these directives into national legislation to ensure their implementation.

Furthermore he recalled that measures such as lowering heating in buildings across Europe have shown that Europe was capable of reducing gas consumption by 10%. Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES referred to the high energy prices for both citizens and governments, and noted that the reduction of energy demand was overall a positive development, but that some of it came at the expense of a reduction in industrial demand, putting the productive sectors at risk. Following the critical moment faced in the winter of 2021-2022, the EU had to speed up the energy transition, by amongst others launching the REPowerEU initiative. In his capacity as rapporteur for the proposal for a regulation to improve the Union's electricity market design³. Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stated that all the actors in the negotiations were working together to reach an agreement by the end of the year, and have this officially adopted before the June 2024 European elections.

³ COM/2023/148 final. Full report available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2023-0255_EN.html

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES then outlined the main objective of this reform of the electricity market: to reduce the volatility of electricity prices by using tools that can be useful in the medium and long term, such as the promotion of renewable energy sources, which had the lowest cost in the market and would be translated into the price of the electricity paid by consumers. He noted that different tools were being used for lowering the electricity prices for consumers, and that the regulation would also facilitate sharing energy between individuals, companies and public institutions that produce their own energy and other consumers.

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stressed that the concern for consumers and attention to the social dimension of the energy crisis was guiding this reform. In fact, he reminded that in Europe more than 40 million people suffered from energy poverty, had trouble paying for their electricity bill, and struggled to heat their homes in winter. He also underlined the importance of adapting the definition of energy poverty to the specific contexts of different EU Member States.

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES noted that the energy transition and the fight against climate change required decisive and united actions, and called for creating alliances with European citizens in order for them to understand the benefits of renewable energy.

Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES concluded by stressing that climate change was one of the most important common challenges, warning about the risks posed by discourses that denied or minimised its impact, and stressed the need for Europe to show a committed political position in the fight against climate change. On the eve of the COP28 climate conference, he stressed the importance of multilateral solutions and for Europe to lead the world and become the first continent to be climate neutral by 2050.

Address by the member of the German *Bundestag*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM

Mr KRICHBAUM opened his intervention by agreeing with Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES in pointing out that Russia's aggression against Ukraine was a game changer not only for security, but also in terms of energy. He added that the COVID-19 pandemic also had a great impact on energy prices. These events had pushed the EU to ask itself how it could remain internationally competitive, and what conclusions could it draw from its dependency on fossil fuels.

Mr KRICHBAUM noted that many EU Member States had already seen the impact of climate change with terrible floods, heatwaves and droughts which were having a negative effect on agriculture and on society at large. For example the reduction of the flow of water in France last summer, which posed a problem for the cooling water in nuclear power stations. Furthermore, beyond the European borders, there were large areas in Africa that suffered from desertification and were no longer able to feed their populations. If there were no living conditions and jobs in Northern Africa, there would be a migration towards the North, Mr KRICHBAUM added. The EU needed to act, as this could have a direct impact on it. He quoted figures showing that Germany

represented only 1% of the global population, but produced 2% of the global carbon emissions.

While the context was different in each Member State, all of them had great potential for promoting renewable energy, expressed Mr KRICHBAUM. For instance, he noted that Sweden produced 60% of its energy from renewable sources, Denmark, Iceland and Finland were all above 40% in their share of renewable energy use. He then pointed to other relevant examples across Member states. Spain had fixed a goal of meeting 48% of its energy needs, and 81% of electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030. Denmark significantly increased its renewable energy production by 49 wind turbines. Portugal had a large potential for solar power. The Netherlands had invested in swimming solar panels and in nitrogen. Austria was strongly invested in the production of renewable energy, and major hydropower initiatives were taking place. On the other hand, energy transport and interconnection were also essential, noting that Romania had made huge progress and would soon be a net exporter of energy. Mr KRICHBAUM stressed in relation to this, the need for Romania to be a member of Schengen.

Mr KRICHBAUM noted that all of these examples were chosen to illustrate how the energy crisis, and the high energy prices could in fact be seen as an opportunity to advance the renewable energy transition, notably by investment in critical infrastructure including electricity grids and connections. Looking to other energy sources, such as nuclear, he noted that Germany had made the mistake of transforming the energy debate into an ideological one. While no energy source could be perfect, nuclear energy was effectively CO₂ neutral. He acknowledged that it was the disposal of nuclear waste that had not been perfected. He considered that wind, solar and hydro energy were not necessarily the cheapest energy sources, but had the great advantage of reducing energy dependency, which was essential in the pursuit for open strategic autonomy.

Mr KRICHBAUM stressed the necessity for long-term strategies, for taking responsibility and for investing more in research for alternative energy sources, notably nuclear fusion. He took the opportunity to stress, in his 35th COSAC, the importance of the role of national Parliaments to discuss matters on energy in COSAC, but also to plead to continually insist on direct implementation of these directives.

During the ensuing debate, 42 speakers took the floor.

Multiple speakers made the **connection between the green transition and other factors**. Ms Eliane TILLIEUX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants/Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*, and Mr Pietro LOREFICE, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, stated that the link between the green and digital transition was essential. The social and economic aspects of the green transition could not be ignored, stated Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, Mr LOREFICE, Ms Eirini DOUROU, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, and Mr Claude KERN, French *Sénat*. Ms Matilda ERNKRANS, Swedish *Riksdag*, and Mr Gilles VANDEN BURRE, Belgian *Chambre des représentants/Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers*, linked the green transition with migration challenges. The

droughts, forest fires and other impacts of climate change were one of the root causes of migration. These climate-induced migrations needed to be avoided, they underlined.

During the debate, numerous members mentioned the **need for cooperation among EU Member States**. Mr Doméneç RUIZ DEVESA, European Parliament, referred to the system agreed for Spain and Portugal in which there was a decoupling of gas and electricity prices. He stated that this could be a useful tool for the whole of the EU, and called to put in place shared systems and strategic reserves to tackle the energy crisis and shortages. Mr Edmund CEPURĪTIS, Latvian *Saeima*, Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée Nationale*, Mr Péter BALASSA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Chrisis PANTELIDES, Cypriot *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Mr Vlad Mircea PUFU, Romanian *Senat*, Mr João Paulo REBELO, *Portuguese Assembleia da República* and Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, underlined in their interventions that coordination among Member States was necessary and common grids should be installed with collective investments in common infrastructure. Mr PANTELIDES gave the example of the connection between Cyprus, Greece and Israel. Mr PUFU added that there was a need for more coordination in nuclear energy, whilst Mr REBELO stressed that solidarity was also key. Mr Hårek ELVENES, Norwegian *Stortinget*, stated that closer cooperation with Norway would help the energy question.

Ms ERNKRANS, Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Ms DOUROU and Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish Houses of the Oireachtas: *Dáil Eireann*, stressed that **citizens and the most vulnerable groups could not be left behind**. Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, added that the energy transition needed to be just and green. Mr Franc BREZNIK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, and Mr VAN APPELDOORN welcomed the ambitious agreement on the due diligence directive to reduce energy poverty. Mr Pim WALENKAMP, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, noted that the solutions and obligations derived from the energy transition needed to be kept affordable and feasible in order to not ignore the needs of groups such as the elderly, disabled, SMEs and farmers.

Furthermore, several speakers, including Mr CEPURĪTIS, Mr Ó MURCHÚ, Mr HOFREITER, Mr Ján FERENČÁK, Slovak *Národná rada*, Mr LOREFICE, Ms DOUROU, Mr Stefanos PARASTATIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Dimtris KOUVELAS Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, stressed the importance of **creating new policies with renewable energy in mind**, and to focus more on these renewables. **Green hydrogen energy** was mentioned as a solution in the green transition by Ms TILLIEUX, Mr Firmino MARQUES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, and Ms Emma NOHRÉN, Swedish *Riksdag*. Mr Alessandro CATTANEO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, pointed out that some directives under the Fit for 55 package were too rigid and ideological. Mr Pieyre-Alexandre ANGLADE, French *Assemblée Nationale*, pointed out that a combination of saving energy, promoting nuclear energy and renewables was necessary to succeed in the transition. Mr KERN also pointed out the need to balance nuclear and renewable sources, whereas Mr Matt LÖFSTRÖM, Finnish

Eduskunta, referred to the balance between coal and nuclear energy. Mr Vladimír ZLÍNSKÝ, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, stressed that there should be more focus on researching the potential of nuclear fusion. Mr FERENČÁK mentioned that there was a new focus on geothermal energy in Slovakia, as a renewable energy source.

Different speakers tackled the subject of **climate change**. Mr Jorge BUXADÉ VILLALBA, European Parliament and Mr BREZNIK warned against green idealism. Mr BUXADÉ VILLALBA claimed that the **green transition was being pushed through by elites** and this risked alienating citizens, while Mr BREZNIK made a call for “green realism” in the measures to be adopted. Mr Ó MURCHÚ, Mr HOFREITER, Mr VANDEN BURRE, Mr WALENKAMP and Mr LOREFICE noted the signals of unprecedented weather already being felt, and the clear scientific evidence to claim that climate change was a present challenge that needed to be tackled. Mr HOFREITER stressed in particular the situation around the Mediterranean, with droughts, forest fires, heat waves and the collapse of fishing populations. Mr VANDEN BURRE emphasised that the citizens need to be informed about the challenges and measures adapted, and Mr WALENKAMP seconded this by stating that the confidence in the government should be restored.

The **geopolitical context of the energy crisis** was mentioned by the majority of the speakers, including Mr ANGLADE, Mr BREZNIK, Mr FERENČÁK, Ms DOUROU, Mr KERN, Ms Denitsa NIKOLOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Mr PUFU, Mr PARASTATIDIS, Mr Ismail Emrah KARAYEL, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, Mr ELVENES, Mr Peter RICKETTS, United Kingdom *House of Lords*, Mr David SONGULASHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada* and Mr Roman BĚLOR, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*. Mr ANGLADE and Mr BREZNIK made the connection between the war in Ukraine and the ecological disasters. Mr ANGLADE stressed that the war had forced the **EU to become more independent** and this was coupled with ambitious climate change goals. Ms NIKOLOVA and Mr BĚLOR added that Bulgaria and the Czech Republic had acted quickly to become independent from Russian gas. Mr PUFU indicated that Romania now used a mix of solar, maritime and nuclear energy. Mr KARAYEL warned of the implications of the conflict in the Middle East for energy supply to Europe. Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE asked for sanctions against Russia's nuclear agencies.

Ms DOUROU, Mr PONS and Mr MARQUES noted that in the debate of the green and energy transition, **local solutions and decentralisation** were important. Mr KERN added that respect for the specificities and decisions of individual Member States was an important matter.

Continued efforts to advance the green transition were needed, stated Mr Adi GROSS, Austrian *Bundesrat*, and Mr VANDEN BURRE. Many members of national Parliaments also stressed the importance of **investments**, including Ms Marietta KARAMANLI,

French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr PLAKIOTAKIS, Mr VANDEN BURRE, Mr LOREFICE, Ms DOUROU, Mr PARASTATIDIS and Mr LÖFSTRÖM.

Other subjects were mentioned in the debate. Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER, German *Bundestag*, noted that due to the EU green deal some products had become more expensive, and this resulted in being dependent on non-green alternatives. Mr LÖFSTRÖM focused on the decarbonisation of shipping. Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, pointed out, on the same matter, that ports of Southern Europe risked losing competitiveness, which would be a loss of the strategic position and potential for the EU. Mr FERENČÁK and Ms NOHRÉN referred to the COP28 meeting that was taking place in Dubai from 30 November through 12 December 2023. Ms NOHRÉN noted that the Paris goals would not be attained with the current policies. Mr Arman YEGHOYAN, Chair of the Standing Committee on European Integration of the national Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, stated that Armenia was at the centre of the global turmoil and presented the “Crossroads of Peace” project, with which the country wanted to be a bridge between East and West, North and South.

In his final remarks Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stressed that the challenges of the climate crisis should be tackled. He referred to the situation in North Africa, which was facing temperatures of 50°C and more, while noting that the Spanish city of Sevilla had also reached 47°C last summer. The fight against climate change and the energy transition made it necessary to decarbonize the EU’s energy systems. Furthermore, Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stated that if business proceeded as usual, there would be steps taken back instead of forward. With these new opportunities the EU should be ambitious and play a leading role.

In response to the question on renewables and hydrogen energy, Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES stressed that the new energy sources should be clean. However, he also acknowledged that heavy industries, such as the steel industry, could face some challenges in changing to clean energy sources.

Furthermore, Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES rectified some statements made by other speakers. As to claims made by some speakers during the debate on the fact that the EU imported more Russian gas than before the invasion of Ukraine, he dismissed them as false information spread by populist sources. In total there was a reduction of 45% of Russian gas, since most of it was being imported via pipelines (e.g. the Nord Stream) which were no longer being used. However, he did note that the imports of liquified natural gas had increased, even though these represented a small share of the total gas used. The dependency of the EU on Russia had decreased considerably, he stated, through the use of more renewable energy, hydrogen and biogas, which meant the EU was shutting down the imperialist wishes of the Russian President, Mr Vladimir PUTIN.

Replying to the statement that the EU green deal proposals were ideological, Mr GONZÁLEZ CASARES emphasised that the position of the European Parliament was

instead pluralistic, since it was the product of a long debate and reflected the stances and compromises reached among seven political groups.

On nuclear energy he stated that technological neutrality was an important principle, but the goal should be to become climate neutral. Every Member State should be free to choose their mix of energy supply, but reducing the usage of coal and other carbon-intensive fossil fuels was important.

In his final remarks Mr KRICHBAUM emphasised the innovations and strength in technology that had been achieved so far. He also noted that, for industry and some raw materials CO₂ was actually necessary. He also called for more research by Member States on the energy transition and technologies such as carbon capture and storage.

Mr KRICHBAUM noted the remarks on the energy dependency of Russia and the way Russian oil and gas reached Europe through third countries. He stressed that this continued dependency on Russian fossil fuels through imports via intermediary countries should be avoided.

The alternatives for energy were possible, but more expensive, stated Mr KRICHBAUM. He stressed the importance of having this debate to pave a road towards the green transition. He concluded by stating that Europe could only demonstrate its worth in crisis, integration and innovation.

6. MEETING OF THE COSAC CHAIRPERSONS - DISCUSSION ON THE CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE LXX COSAC

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN informed the Chairpersons of the procedure regarding the adoption of Contribution and Conclusions by the LXX COSAC, recalling that the drafts of both texts had been circulated to all delegations on 14 November. Since then, the Presidency had received amendments from Parliaments/Chambers within the set deadline of 20 November. Following the discussion during the Troika meeting on 26 November, all Chairpersons had received a modified document with the support of the majority of the Troika, as well as the amendments tabled until the deadline of 14:00 on 27 November.

Moreover, the Chair noted that the Presidency had tried to accommodate most of the amendments in the compromise text distributed ahead of the meeting, provided they were not contradictory with the original draft or addressed matters which were beyond the agenda of the LXX COSAC. The purpose of the Presidency was to try to keep the text balanced and susceptible of reaching consensus amongst delegations.

Ms JORDÁN explained the voting system, reminding participants that each Parliament had two votes with the vote split for bi-cameral Parliaments. Moreover, and as stipulated by Article 7.5 of the Rules of Procedure, “*COSAC shall seek to adopt contributions by*

broad consensus. If this is not possible, contributions shall be adopted with a qualified majority of at least 3/4 of the votes cast. The majority of 3/4 of the votes cast must at the same time constitute at least half of all votes.”

Following some debate, especially on the Middle-East and on an amendment from the Italian delegation on better law-making at the EU level, including a very small number of votes, the draft Conclusions and an amended text of the draft Contribution of the LXX COSAC were agreed.

Finally, the Chair Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN recalled that the term of office of the incumbent permanent member of the COSAC Secretariat, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, was set to expire on 31 December 2023 and the Presidency had been informed that he will not apply for a second term.

He informed the participants that the Troika had met with the only candidate for the position, Mr Jakob SJÖVALL from the Swedish *Riksdag* the previous afternoon and, as per Article 9.3 of the Rules of Procedure, had unanimously decided to recommend him to the COSAC Chairpersons for appointment. In the absence of any objection, Mr SJÖVALL's appointment for the period 2024-2025 was confirmed.

The Chair also congratulated Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, the outgoing Permanent Member, for his work, dedication and professionalism in the COSAC Secretariat during the 2022-23 term, not only in supporting the Presidencies but also all the national Parliaments.

7. SESSION IV. SITUATION IN UKRAINE AND RELATIONS WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

Address by Admiral Juan Francisco MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ, Secretary General for Defence Policy

Mr Juan Francisco MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ reminded that almost two years had passed since the start of the cruel invasion of Russia in Ukraine and he noted that, in Spain, the feelings on the conflict were mixed. Firstly, there was sadness for the unjust pain which the people of Ukraine were suffering and also for the victims which were increasing every single day. Secondly, there was admiration for the reaction of citizens, of the government and of the armed forces of Ukraine, which from the very first day clearly stated that Ukraine was an independent, sovereign country. Thirdly, there was a feeling of pride, because Europe had been capable of achieving unity supporting the aggressed and sanctioning the aggressor, even though this had led to sacrifices and scarcity for Europeans.

Ukraine was currently forging its way towards a new future, and Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ cautioned that such rebirths usually only follow after a period of pain and uncertainty. If Europe continued its support, Ukraine might achieve this rebirth soon. At the moment, Ukraine had to make huge efforts in order to keep working as a country, due to the brutal military conflict. Reconstruction would be difficult, but the Ukrainians knew that the doors of Europe would never again be closed to them.

He referred to the difficult period that Spain went through between 1977 and 1986, even though the process was not as tragic. Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ noted that the process which led to the accession to the European Communities was demanding, but helped change the country into a more modern and prosperous one. He expressed his belief that Ukraine was also going to benefit from a similar path.

Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ emphasised that Ukraine was going to be a pioneer of European modernity, and that, on its way, it would also discover its own potential. The role of defence would be extremely useful in working towards this change: the armed forces were basically a reflection of the society that they serve. The exemplarity of the armed forces had always been a catalyst for true change, because it united citizens around a project which was vital to all. This would be very important for Ukraine when it came out of this armed conflict.

He mentioned that Spain was very proud of its support to Ukraine, since it had welcomed refugees, supplied military material training, provided basic and specialised training for 3000 Ukrainian soldiers, taken care of wounded people in military and civilian hospitals and given training in international (humanitarian) law. To show one of the ways in which Spaniards had welcomed Ukrainians, Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ played a short voice message that he had received from a small community of nuns who were welcoming refugees, people suffering from cancer and young children fleeing the conflict.

According to Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ, Spain had tried to be faithful to its commitment within the Ramstein group (Ukraine Defense Contact Group - UDCG).

Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ expressed his concerns regarding the image of NATO in the Western world, following the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the evacuation of Kabul, which might be seen as a lack of perseverance. Today, there were also doubts as to how NATO could persevere in Africa. However, as soon as NATO withdrew, there was a void which was immediately filled by other groups who did not share our values, such as terrorist groups, mafias or countries like Russia.

The EU was facing a period of reflection and reconfiguration, as it needed to find its place in this new world order, stated Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ. This was the reason why it was essential to make progress on the “Europe of defence”. The EU was a project of progress and peace, perhaps one of the most successful stories in recent history. The fact that a Europe of defence was inherent to the project of the Union, was a difficult message to transmit and there was still some resistance. Ukraine was going to help us

overcome this resistance. The common European project needed to be turned away from our individual opinions: we should talk about what united us and not so much of what separated us.

Europe was confronted with a crucial moment regarding its future: the Europe of defence was an essential contribution to the world it wants to live in, because a bipolar order (United States vs. Russia and China) would take the world back to the darkness of the Cold War. As a faithful ally of the United States, as a partner in NATO, and as true advocates of international law, the EU should act as a moderator, introducing modern standards and using an integrated approach. If Europe did not want to become irrelevant, it needed to be united. Even though this would require sacrifices, Europe needed to show solidarity in order to have a better and more attractive future. It was very important to integrate Ukraine quickly, but without compromises, because after all, the war in Ukraine had been a catalyst towards uniting Europeans and achieving a common goal.

Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ concluded by expressing his conviction that Ukraine would achieve an internal and international situation of dignity, freedom and welfare that would be much more attractive than what Putin had in mind.

Address by the Chairperson of the Committee on EU Policies of the *Italian Senato della Repubblica*, Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA acknowledged the previous speaker's remarks, which were a clear indication of Europe's common understanding, commitment and political will to face the Russian aggression. He also highlighted the extraordinary unit of purpose that all the EU Member States and international partners showed in support of Ukraine. He added that there could be no just peace without the entire Ukrainian territory returning under full control of the Kyiv government: within its internationally recognised borders and in full respect of its own sovereignty and integrity. What was currently happening in the world was the clear consequence of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, because when the rules of peaceful coexistence failed, when the rules of international law collapsed, violent outbreaks multiplied. That was why helping Ukraine defend itself was the only way to defend the EU's common interests and values.

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA pointed out that President Vladimir PUTIN had found a close associate in President Aleksandr LUKASHENKO, from Belarus, who was also responsible for all the acts committed in Ukraine. He also expressed his best wishes to the Belarusian opposition leader, Ms Sviatlana TSIKHANOUSKAYA. He also stated his support for Belarusians, fighting for their own freedom, hoping that Belarus may also join the European community in a not-so-distant future.

The five regions under Russian military control in the Ukrainian territory, which had been seized with brutal force, were a deep wound for Kyiv's sovereignty. They showed just how blatant and unforgivable the Russian crimes were: these regions had been

inflicted immense damages and suffering, with serious crimes against humanity, abduction of children, weaponisation of migration, ill-treatment of political prisoners, persecution of dissidents, attacks on the religious freedoms and on minorities. Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA condemned the referendums which had been held under the occupation of the Russian invaders, recognised as null and void by the international community. These territories must return in full to Ukraine and must remain a clear evidence and symbol of the Ukrainian victory and of the Russian defeat.

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA confirmed Europe's unwavering commitment to support and promote the 10-point peace plan presented by President Zelensky, which was the fundamental linchpin of the international discussions for a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. It was important to move forward decisively in promoting and implementing a full respect of sanctions against Russia and against all persons that have committed crimes and inflicted damages. The LNG exports to and through European Union Member States must also be resolved quickly.

The deliberate attacks against Ukrainian grain storage and export facilities, but also the weaponization of migration, were crimes against humanity, which had an impact on the global order. Europe must have the capacity to seriously show that it was willing to resolve this criminal attitude. The deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia and Belarus, and their subjection to "Russification" and indoctrination, should be treated as international crimes.

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA pointed out that the Russian Federation was the leader in all these crimes, and that the compensation of damages must be assured from the Federation and its leaders. In this perspective, the revenues of frozen assets should be directed to support Ukraine and be used to compensate for the inflicted damages.

Regarding the ongoing military operations, Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA stressed that Kyiv needed further military aid that should address its needs in terms of air defence, training, ammunition and winter equipment. With the winter approaching, it appeared more important to guarantee a real air coverage for the population, but also in order to safeguard infrastructure as much as possible.

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA then quoted President Biden, saying that "*Hamas and Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common: They both want to completely annihilate a neighbouring democracy*", and that "*history has taught us that when terrorists don't pay a price for their terror, when dictators don't pay a price for their aggression, they cause more chaos and death and more destruction.*" Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA recalled the need to strengthen, at European level, all measures possible to prevent and combat external interference, including through disinformation and the widespread use of new technologies. Russia, but also China and Iran, were engaging in these activities in a structured and sophisticated way. This was extremely important, in view of the next election to the European Parliament.

Last but not least, Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA expressed his satisfaction with the proposal that the European Commission had made to the European Council for starting the enlargement negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova, and for granting candidate status to Georgia. With that regard, he highlighted the importance of what was achieved by Ukraine that far, notwithstanding the terrible tragedy its population was suffering and the difficulties its Government was facing. In fact, Ukraine had shown an exemplary willingness and capacity to implement most of the seven main chapters which were requested to Kyiv, with the three remaining chapters being close to implementation. He also alluded to the other countries which had obtained candidate status, were working seriously to get into the European Union, but were still awaiting for the opening of negotiations.

Address by the Chairperson of Ukraine's European Union Integration Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE started by expressing her gratitude towards the Spanish Presidency for keeping Ukraine high on the European agenda. She also reminded everyone that Ukraine was commemorating the 90th anniversary of the Great Famine, called Holodomor, which was the genocidal attack of the Soviet authorities in the 1930's on Ukrainian people, trying to erase them from the map of the world for their spirit, and for their desire to be Ukrainian. If Europe had not turned a blind eye and had taken action to punish the Bolshevik regime the same way it punished the Nazi regime, the situation might have been different today. The Russian Federation was at present continuing exactly what they did in the 1930's. Ukraine was grateful to all the parliaments of the countries that have decided to commemorate the Holodomor and recognise it as a genocide against Ukrainians and wished that all European countries would step up to acknowledge this historic truth.

Ukraine had shown the world its courage, its bravery, its resolve and its incredible resilience, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE stated. Ukraine was fighting for something that everyone in Europe believed in, which was freedom of choice, democracy, the right to build a prosperous country based on the rule of law within its recognised borders and where dignity of each person was recognised. She then gave a few examples of the vicious and brutal attacks by the Russian Federation, including the launch of an Iskander ballistic missile on a small village where people had gathered to mourn the death of a soldier, and the attack on a postal service terminal in another small village. Russia had indeed restarted its attacks on energy infrastructures and civilian residence buildings.

In one night, 76 attack drones had attacked Ukrainian cities, 66 of them targeting Kyiv. Fortunately, the air defence forces were able to take down 98% of the drones, thanks to the weapons and air defence capabilities provided by other countries. Whilst being sincerely grateful, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE asked to increase the quality and the quantity of the delivered materials. Only the full mobilisation of resources and capabilities of the free world would lead to defeat Russia. This defeat was imperative, because Ukrainians were dreaming of focusing exclusively on recovery, on

reconstruction, on transformation, on European and Euro-Atlantic integration and on social, economic and environmental policies.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE warned that freezing of the conflict, allowing Russia to regroup and attack with new force, or trading Ukrainian territory for so-called peace in Europe, would never lead to anything close to lasting and sustainable peace in Europe and around the world. The EU pledged to provide Ukraine with one million shells over the year, which, for an economic giant of that type, was possible. But Ukraine needed more of everything: radio-electronic equipment, drones, demining equipment, tanks, long-range missiles, artillery pieces, Howitzers, planes, etc.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE again expressed her gratitude for the support, but asked to step up the efforts in the Member States. Fear and hesitation were feeding Russia, which was not only attacking Ukraine militarily, but was also attacking European countries in different ways: by weaponizing migration, by misinformation campaigns, by supporting radicals that were already gaining ground in some of the older European states, etc. Russia would readily allocate additional efforts and resources to further fuel radicals, destroying the unity and monolithic nature of Europe.

Ukraine was grateful to all the allies that are part of the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance for confirming that its future is inside NATO, but recalled that time was ticking in the lead-up to the Washington Summit in July 2024. Whilst Ukraine was ready to do its homework to transform its procedures and its approaches in order to be compatible with NATO countries in all senses, it also needed the allies to be courageous enough to take the decision and invite Ukraine into NATO, already in Washington next year. Giving Russia a signal that Ukrainian membership was impossible during wartime would only encourage the Russian Federation to continue this war endlessly. Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE emphasised that taking a robust decision meant showing strength, unity and power.

Granting candidate status to Ukraine towards EU membership was definitely a historic, even tectonic, decision, she added. The recent positive report and recommendation of the European Commission confirmed Ukraine's success in transforming the country along the European Commission's recommendations, despite having to fight this brutal, barbaric war for survival. Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE underlined that transforming the EU not only into an economic giant, but also into a geopolitical giant, would be realised by the soon-to-come decision of the European Council. She expressed her hope that every single national government would take another historic decision in December 2023, by opening up the possibility for accession negotiations to all other aspiring nations.

To conclude her opening address, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE called on the Member States to join Ukraine on its difficult and lengthy journey, building together a free, prosperous, democratic and strong Europe. Europe was not helping Ukraine out of

charity or pity, it was making a serious investment in its own security, enabling a free, whole, peaceful, and united Europe and appealing to other parts of the world.

During the ensuing debate, 44 speakers took the floor.

Besides an **unwavering support towards Ukraine**, two themes were addressed by a majority of speakers, namely the necessity to **step up Europe's defence production** and the importance of **accelerating enlargement**.

Mr Hans WALLMARK, Swedish *Riksdag*, referred to a recent Swedish report which stated that **Russia is a nationalistic, imperialistic power** which is moving back to Stalinism. If Russia did not lose this war, it would be rolled out to other countries. This view was shared by Mr Kim VALENTIN, Danish *Folketing*, who said that there could only be peace if Ukraine won the war.

Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, warned that Europe before or after the war would not be the same. He expressed his support for **accession of the Western Balkans** as well, supported in this by Mr Luis Jesús URIBE-ETXEARRIA APALATEGUI, Spanish *Cortes Generales*. Mr Alessandro CATTANEO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, confirmed that the Western Balkans were proceeding with courageous reforms and that this presented an opportunity, from a geostrategic point of view. The Russian aggression had made it clear that there was an interdependence between the southern shores of the Mediterranean and the European Union regarding migration flows, energy, trade, etc. Europe needed to **set up common policies** in these areas **supported by sufficient resources**.

Another important point made by Mr PONS, was that enlargement should go hand in hand with the **deepening of the EU project**, making sure we have a very **strong civil society**. This point was supported by Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, who stated that the methods and processes towards this deepening could be addressed during the upcoming Belgian presidency of the Council of the European Union. Mr Didier MARIE, French *Sénat*, added that Europe needed to ask itself how it could welcome these new countries in the best possible conditions, for them and for itself.

Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, shared these concerns and called for an **internal reform of the EU**. He emphasised the importance for both future and present Member States to adhere to the principles laid down in Article 2 of the EU Treaty, which stated that the Union was founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy and equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Europe should not only ask Ukraine to make reforms with regards to the rule of law, but also make its own reforms and guarantee present and future enforcement of rule of law principles. The road ahead was long, so we should not only intensify our efforts, but we should also manage our expectations.

The **withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine** was also indicated as a priority for Mr VAN GOIDSENHOVEN. Belgium had thus worked, together with the Netherlands and Denmark, towards the delivery of F16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA APALATEGUI, Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, Mr MARIE, Mr Marko PAVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, Mr Peter RICKETTS, United Kingdom *House of Lords* and Mr Matt LÖFSTRÖM, Finnish *Eduskunta*, all supported the idea of **increasing Ukraine's offensive tools and ammunitions**, not only the defensive ones. Mr HOFREITER and Mr Rihards KOLS, Latvian *Saeima*, warned that Russia's war economy was working very intensely, and that Europe should speed up its munitions production. If Europe would commit 1% of its GDP to support Ukraine militarily, we could see the tables turned around and we could then really say “*until Ukraine is victorious*” instead of the words “*as long as it's necessary*”.

Mr Ján FERENČÁK, Slovak *Národná Rada*, stated that his country **would not participate in the supply of military attack equipment** to Ukraine at the governmental level. The Slovak government will however not prevent commercial initiatives in which entities of the Slovak defence industry participate.

Mr Chrisis PANTELIDES, Cypriot *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, called on Europe to see the new reality in which we live. He also addressed the need to **improve our capacity of defending the interests of the European Union**, as well as defending our citizens. In the past, Europe had turned a blind eye to the authoritarian models and systems of Russia, and more recently with regards to Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Third countries would need to prove their respect for democracy, human rights and for their neighbouring countries, if these were to aspire to become members of the European Union.

Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA APALATEGUI, noted that the **victory of Ukraine was a matter of security for all Europeans**. The integration of Ukraine would be a strong political and strategic signal for the EU. The speaker also made the case for **enlargement towards Moldova and Georgia**. Mr Kim VALENTIN, Danish *Folketinget*, found that enlargement to 35 would only work if everyone was a little more generous and looked a bit beyond their own backyard.

Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, expressed his concern that the **rehashing of the conflict in the Middle East** could go in the favour of the Russian interests, a viewpoint supported by Mr Vasile DÎNCU, Romanian *Senat* and Mr MARIE. Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS called on everyone to **condemn the barbaric attacks from Hamas**.

However, if we found the protection of human rights so important in Ukraine, **we could not sit idle to the number of victims, children, killed by the Israeli defence forces in Gaza**. Mr İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Mr CAPOULAS SANTOS took note that the **demand for equal treatment** was not made clearer in the draft Contributions of the LXX COSAC. Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas: Dáil Eireann*, Mr Burhan KAYATÜRK and Ms Zuhar Karakoç DORA, Republic of Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, and Mr Åsmund AUKRUST, Norwegian *Storting*, stated that there was **no need for double standards**, calling out Netanyahu's Israel for its war crimes. Mr PLAKIOTAKIS and Mr Ó MURCHÚ warned that the military operation in Gaza, although unrelated to the Ukrainian war, needed to be addressed by the EU and the West in a way that would **not alienate a large proportion of the global south**, which attached more importance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr DÎNCU supported the concept of a **Europe of defence** as mentioned by Admiral Juan Francisco Martínez Nuñez in his opening address. This was really a question about the future of the European project: Europe without solidarity would no longer be Europe.

Amongst others, Mr FERENČÁK, Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Ms Luisa RÕIVAS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, Mr KARAYEL and Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'I*, confirmed their country's support of the **sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders**. The primary concern was to ensure that the war on the territory of Ukraine ended and did not **escalate into a larger conflict**. This concern was shared by Mr HOFREITER, who therefore asked to **put more pressure on governments**. Mr KRICHBAUM added that if Putin got his way in Ukraine, he would be moving on to Georgia and to Moldova.

Mr FERENČÁK finally pointed out that Slovakia's support would focus on defence equipment and on the humanitarian and development field, and highlighted that the Slovak Republic had significantly helped almost one million refugees from Ukraine, representing almost 20% of the Slovakian population.

Mr Niels Flemming HANSEN, Danish *Folketing*, warned that the war in the Middle East should not draw attention away from Ukraine. Both Mr HANSEN and Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*, expressed their concern with the **tendency that some countries had shown recently to withdraw their military support**. If more countries, or even the United States of America would follow suit, Russia would get bigger and bigger, and Europe smaller and smaller. Humanitarian support was necessary, but it was military support that would win the war.

Mr Heikki AUTTO, Finnish *Eduskunta*, and Mr RICKETTS advocated for an **increase of sanctions** against Russia, **their more effective implementation and the avoidance of evasion** through third countries. EU countries had more than 200 billion dollars' worth of funds from Russia. These **funds had to be used to support Ukraine now and during the reconstruction**. Ms Radvilė MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Ms Vladimíra MARCINKOVÁ, Slovakian *Národná rada*, and Mr Vadym

HALAICHUK, Ukrainian *Verkhovna Rada*, looked forward to adopting the **twelfth sanctions package**.

Mr Ioannis PLAKIOTAKIS mentioned Greece's support for the establishment of alternative routes to **facilitate export of Ukrainian grain and other agricultural products**. The ports of Thessaloniki and Alexandroupoli, which were situated in the northern part of Greece, could offer gateways for supplies and goods to and from Ukraine. A similar stance was taken by Romania: Ms Mirela FURTUNĂ, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor*, announced they would continue to assist in the solidarity lanes and to increase the transit to Romanian ports, while taking into account the legitimate needs and demands of Romanian farmers and producers.

Mr Ó MURCHÚ underlined that Ireland understands what occupation was, and the importance of self-determination. Europe, when it comes to these international conflicts, had to **be absolutely sound on international law and humanitarian law for all**.

Ms MORKŪNAITĖ-MIKULĖNIENĖ reminded everyone that history tended to repeat itself and that for half of Europe, the war didn't end in 1945. Half of Europe experienced the very same things that Ukraine was currently experiencing.

Mr Fernand KARTHEISER, Luxembourg *Chambre des députés*, gave a brief overview on the origins of the Ukrainian conflict and concluded that **Western countries had a share of the responsibility in this conflict**. Europe must therefore promote peace negotiations rather than a new Cold War. Peace in Europe was indivisible and must be built on the basis of the Istanbul principles.

Ms FURTUNĂ focused on the support that was given by the Romanian population, especially the women, towards their Ukrainian neighbours. Romania fully **supported the Ukrainian peace formula** as the way to a fair, lasting and sustainable peace.

Ms MARCINKOVÁ asked how it was possible to have someone around the table during the conference who was an ally of Putin and who went against the main goal of Europe, which is peace? **Stronger measures should be taken against those leaders who sabotage and weaken the role of the EU globally** and damage its image in the world. People in these countries had to realise and learn that they had elected leaders that damaged their countries. Ms MARCINKOVÁ stated that the **EU was also at war with Russia**: a hybrid, economic and political war which Europe would win, she believed.

According to Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Bulgaria remained at the forefront of efforts to assist Ukraine in any way possible until all those responsible for the crimes, violations and abuses committed against them are brought to justice. Bulgaria **welcomed the recently adopted enlargement report of the European Commission**, which recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and granting Georgia candidate status.

Mr Stefanos PARASTATIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, congratulated the people of the countries mentioned in this report for their efforts and their dedication to the goal of integration. He also pointed out that, as important as it was for candidate countries to produce results in terms of reforms, it was also important for the European Union to **provide the rights and advantages to them according to their progress**. The enlargement process was indeed a source of concern and controversy within the European Union. However, it is crucial to send the right message to the citizens, so as not to provoke a sense of futility as has largely happened in the case of the Western Balkans. Moreover, **the accession path of each country must be based on the progress it makes and the achievement of specific goals**. Greece did not agree to fast track procedures: the rules should be the same for everyone. Mr HALAICHUK pointed out that Ukraine was not looking for shortcuts, it just did not want to fall into the trap of endless negotiations as the Western Balkan countries had done. The procedures were clear and the *Verkhovna Rada* is currently focusing on the implementation of European legislation.

Once Ukraine had won the war, Mr VALENTIN highlighted, it would be a **huge task to build up the country again** and to rediscover peace in Europe. Mr RICKETTS mentioned that the City of London would be important in mobilising private finance for that reconstruction. However, in order to unlock that, Ukraine needed to work with the EU on the issue of corruption.

Mr Pietro LOREFICE, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, noted that the European Union had not really called for a request to start peace negotiations and encouraged the countries to try and **use diplomatic channels in the best possible way** to put an end to the conflict. Mr HALAICHUK replied that Russia was not looking for a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. In fact, Russia had been manipulating public opinion, sabotaging international organisations and raising their defence budget to over 120 billion dollars.

Mr KOLS also talked about **the notion of war fatigue** that was echoing in political corridors in Europe. If fatigue had clouded the judgement of nations at pivotal moments in history, we would not have the Europe we are cherishing today. Ukraine stood at a critical juncture, facing **the threat of frozen conflict**, which it refused to accept, and so must Europe.

Mr PAVIĆ announced that the Croatian Parliament in June recognised the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people and went on to list the numerous actions Croatia had undertaken to support Ukraine on its way towards reconstruction and European membership.

Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, admitted that military aid for Ukraine raised the question of the whole nature of European defence. Some said it served to consolidate the American defence industry, but she thought Europe needed to look at this as something that actually supports some fundamental principles, not least in

the light of enlargement. Europe had been born out of a war, with the idea of ensuring peace and the rule of law, so it really needed to do some serious thinking about its own defence now.

Ms KOVÁCS highlighted the latest European Commission report recognised the progress Serbia made in aligning with the EU common foreign and security policy.

Mr KAYATÜRK admitted that his country was hugely dependent on Russian trade, especially in the field of natural gas and petroleum. Türkiye had however always been against the occupation of Ukraine and of Crimea by Russia.

Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU, Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, warned that Russians were trying to destabilise the Western Balkans region in order to gain influence. When Albania asked to accelerate the process of accession of the countries in the region, it was not asking to avoid the fulfilment of the requirements. Becoming a member of the European Union was no longer a matter of standards, it was a matter of security.

Mr KARAYEL highlighted the fact that Türkiye had been working very hard to support Ukraine, facilitating high profile prisoner exchanges, launching and successfully implementing the Black Sea initiative and hosting peace talks. He was supported in his views by Ms DORA, who stressed that Türkiye did not see Europe's interests separately from its own national interests in this ongoing crisis. She reminded everyone of the fact that Türkiye, having deep rooted relations with the European Union and being the second largest military force in NATO, was a versatile partner and an important actor in the fields of trade, tourism and defence industry.

Mr AUKRUST announced that in February 2023, Norway had launched a 5-year programme to support Ukraine, representing 7.5 billion euros in military support, humanitarian aid and civil support for the rebuilding of the state.

Mr RICKETTS noticed that one of the consequences of Putin's war in Ukraine had been to bring the UK and EU closer together on security affairs.

Ms Fjolla UJKANI, Kosovo⁴ *Kuvendi i Kosovës* drew parallels between Ukraine's current struggle and Kosovo's own journey towards peace and democracy. These painful experiences had strengthened Kosovo's resolve to contribute to a united, secure and prosperous Europe, Ms UJKANI called to acknowledge the aspiration of countries like Kosovo, sharing a similar journey towards peace, democracy and European integration.

Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, stressed the efforts the Czech Republic had made with regards to Ukrainian war refugees, mentioning this obviously had consequences for the educational system, healthcare, social system, housing, etc. He also drew the attention to the **kidnapping of Ukrainian children by the Russian**

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

Federation and their forced “russification”, a phenomenon on which the Czech Chamber of Deputies had adopted a resolution.

Mr Zdenko COSIC, Bosnia and Herzegovina *Parlamentarna skupština*, thanked everyone who advocated for the accession of his country to the EU: joining the Union would mean having a security framework for all the countries of the Western Balkans.

Ms RÕIVAS emphasised that talking about a ceasefire would not bring the Ukrainians back their territory. She also pleaded for accession talks to start as soon as possible, preferably before Christmas this year.

Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonian *Sobranie*, noticed that the European Union had rediscovered the art of transforming a crisis into an opportunity for integration: leaving Ukraine between Russia and the European Union was unthinkable and Ukraine would eventually be a part of the EU. However, the EU was only complete with North Macedonia and the other Western Balkan countries, as well as with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

Ms BOTCHORISHVILI reminded her colleagues that what they saw in Ukraine was a continuation of Russia's aggressive policy that had been used in Georgia for more than thirty years. Georgia still continued to face Russian occupation. Questions could be asked if today would be different if the EU and NATO would have acted differently in the past. We could not change the past, but we could act today to change our future. Ms BOTCHORISHVIL expressed her hope that the EU Council decision in December will lay ground for a real implementation of Georgia's sovereign choice and a real enlargement policy of the European Union.

Mr LÖFSTRÖM made the case for a swift Swedish integration in NATO, which would only increase security in northern Europe.

The session was concluded with a short intervention by all three keynote speakers.

Mr MARTÍNEZ NUÑEZ expressed his gratitude for the debate and for having been able to listen to the positions expressed by parliamentarians from so many different countries. He agreed with the general remarks that were made and reminded everyone of the fact that Europe was not a fortress: it was open, and it had been built by rounds of accession. Europe was built on values, and bridges should be built around it to avoid closing in on itself.

Mr TERZI DI SANT'AGATA concluded with two remarks. First, noting there was a certain consensus between all Member States that enlargement was a fundamental element to overcome the challenges that Europe would face in geopolitical terms, but also in terms of defending its values and its identity. Second, highlighting how Finland had proven, with the fast closing and effective monitoring of its borders, that fast and integrated measures could be taken to counter the weaponisation of migration by Russia.

Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE pointed out that peace talks were possible only with those who had at least a shadow of respect towards international order, towards promises or towards signed documents. Ukraine was a neutral and non-aligned state when Russia attacked in 2014, meaning it had nothing to do with Ukraine's European or Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

With regard to European integration and the EU's enlargement, Ms KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE expressed the hope that this historic decision would be followed through upon by the European Council. Ukraine was working cross party to really deliver on its responsibilities and on the conditions it received. It was not an easy job, but Ukrainians were very focused on becoming, step by step, a strong, prosperous and dynamic country inside the European Union. Ukrainians knew that the EU would become much stronger, much more appealing and much more prosperous with their country being part of it.

8. SESSION V. OPEN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA

Mr José Ignacio LANDALUCE CALLEJA, Member of the Spanish *Senado*, opened the session by welcoming the speakers.

Address by Mr Juan FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO, Spanish Secretary of State for Ibero-America and the Caribbean and for Spanish around the World

Mr Juan FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO began his address by introducing the concept of Open Strategic Autonomy, adopted by the European Council in October 2020, and which was one of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. In fostering Open Strategic Autonomy, the European Union must redouble its efforts to strengthen multilateralism and establish political and trade relations with regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Fostering relations with this region had been a priority for Spain on the previous occasions in which it held the Presidency, and there was a feeling that relations between the EU and LAC had not been sufficiently attended to in recent years, he stated.

Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO provided various statistics to highlight the importance of the LAC region. He noted that the EU was the largest foreign investor in the region, with a total investment stock of almost EUR 700 billion. Europe was LAC's third largest trading partner and bioregional trade has grown by 40% between 2018 and 2022, reaching 369 billion euros. The EU was the largest development aid donor in LAC, providing the region with around 4 billion euros in Official Development Aid per year. Latin America had also a large potential for production of renewable energy, and had large reserves of natural resources. It held 66% of the world's lithium reserves, a critical material, which the EU imported almost exclusively from China. The region was also home to 60% of the global biodiversity, 50% of primary forests, 14% of global food

production and 20% of the world's agricultural land. The region, he stressed, also shared important EU values, such as the commitment to democratic development. Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO also emphasised the important human links between the EU and the LAC region, with 6 million European citizens living in Latin America and 8 million Latin American citizens in the EU. He also noted that 13.000 professional and student exchanges had taken place in the past eight years through mobility programmes such as Erasmus +.

Despite these important links other actors, such as Russia, were making inroads in the region and competing with the EU. Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO acknowledged that Latin America's position on Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine was a complex and somewhat ambivalent one. Countries had condemned the invasion but this had not been an active condemnation: no sanctions against Russia had been adopted by the region, nor had Latin American countries delivered weapons to Ukraine. The subject of Ukraine was, he noted, one of the most difficult ones during the recent European Union - Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC) Summit, held in Brussels in July 2023, particularly due to the position of Nicaragua - the only country that did not support the common declaration adopted.

Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO noted that China also had a growing presence in Latin America and was deepening its relations with countries in the region. That was visible, for example, in growing trade relations - China offered rapid conclusion of trade agreements - increasing Chinese investments in South America, high-level visits, the use of "vaccine diplomacy" during the COVID-19 pandemic and diplomatic efforts to isolate Taiwan in LAC. As a result, a certain re-orientation of diplomatic activity towards the Pacific by Latin American countries was visible. This, he highlighted, had led to a "geopolitical awakening" of EU's interest in Latin America in 2023, with various high-level visits and, notably, the EU-CELAC Summit, attended by 48 Heads of State and Government, and the first one organised since 2015. The summit, he noted, could be considered a success: a political declaration was agreed, including the institutionalisation of political dialogue through future biennial EU-CELAC summits - the next one scheduled to take place in Colombia in 2025. The establishment of permanent coordination mechanisms, a EU-CELAC 2023-2025 roadmap detailing a series of ministerial meetings to take place in the near future were also agreed.

Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO highlighted the importance of deepening economic and trade relations with the LAC region in order to reduce the EU's dependence and to diversify the sources of energy and raw materials. In particular, he noted the political push given during the summit to the modernised agreements with Mexico and Chile - the latter one being ready for signature. Intense work was also taking place to advance the agreement with Mercosur. He also noted that the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) was unblocked and signed during the Spanish Presidency. Among other priorities Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO highlighted the need to promote the ratification of the EU-Central America agreement: the concrete proposal for investments contained in the EU Global Gateway

strategy, which would dedicate 45 billion euros in investments to Latin America and the Caribbean - with Spain contributing 9 billion euros of the total; the adoption of the first EU-Latin America Digital Agenda: as well as the signature of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) on energy matters signed between the EU and Argentina and Uruguay, and the MoU on global value chains and critical raw materials signed between the EU and Chile.

In conclusion Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO listed some of the challenges ahead and highlighted the need for the EU to work with Latin America not only at the continental level, but also sub-regionally - establishing work programmes with the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Pacific Alliance, Mercosur and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) - as well as bilaterally, with summits with strategic partners such as Brazil or Mexico, and extending political dialogues with all other countries. Agreements to expand political consultations were signed with Ecuador, Salvador and Honduras in the margins of the EU-CELAC Summit, he noted. All of this, Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO stated, highlighted the renewed interest in reinforcing EU relations with Latin America, which can contribute to promoting the EU's Open Strategic Autonomy. This, he stressed, was a task which did not end with the Spanish Presidency but was a long-term endeavour to which the EU needed to continue devoting important efforts.

Address by Mr Carlos MALAMUD RIKLES, Senior Analyst at the Real Instituto Elcano

Mr MALAMUD RIKLES stressed the central place which the Latin American region occupied in the priorities of the Spanish Presidency, as was the case in the previous Presidencies held by the country. He emphasised that, in the current political situation, Latin America should remain an important topic in the EU's foreign relations agenda, due to various factors, notably the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While the war against Ukraine had underlined the capacity of the EU to react united against Putin's aggression and destabilising efforts, it had also highlighted the distance which separated Europe from the "Global South". The quest for Europe's Strategic Autonomy thus required a renewal of the continent's alliances. It was in this process that Latin America - a region described by Mr José Manuel ALBARES BUENO, Spain's Minister for Foreign Affairs, as the most "Euro-compatible" region - could play a pivotal role. Latin America was however also a diverse and fragmented region, and there was a growing presence of geopolitical actors such as China or Russia, but also other countries such as Iran, Türkiye or India. He highlighted the main success of the Spanish Presidency: the organisation of the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels, the first since 2015 and which opened the possibility for reinforcing relations between the two continents. He underlined that the EU should combine bilateral relations with Latin American countries and continent-to-continent relations through CELAC.

Mr MALAMUD RIKLES underlined the importance of Latin America for the global economy, as a continent with numerous resources that would be key for the green transition, such as lithium, as well as a large potential to generate renewable energy, and important biodiversity and freshwater reserves. The growing interest in Latin America had led the Real Instituto Elcano to publish its report “*Por qué importa América Latina?*” (*Why does Latin America matter?*)⁵ coinciding with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU. Mr MALAMUD RIKKES stressed that Latin America was the only region in the world that was pursuing its economic development through democracy and respect for human rights, and not through authoritarian governments. He also alluded to the region’s commitment to democratic economic development as a distinguishing feature that should be emphasised in global discussions. While China’s presence in the continent had increased substantially in the past two decades, he noted, there were still numerous areas in which the EU continues to be the main external actor in the region. He further stressed that the EU should have a presence in Latin America for its own interests and not to balance or compete with China.

Mr MALAMUD RIKKES then discussed two concrete elements addressed in the Real Instituto Elcano report. Firstly, the proposal for the creation of an EU-LAC Trade and Technology Council to steer continental relations and find common answers to common challenges. This would be similar to the ones which the EU has established with the United States or India, and would cover discussions on topics such as energy and food security, health, digital governance, global value chains, renewable energy, migration or the fight against transnational organised crime.

The second topic highlighted by Mr MALAMUD RIKKES, and through which the EU could send a clear signal of the importance of revitalised EU-LAC relations, would be the conclusion of the EU-Mercosur agreement. This agreement would be an important boost for Latin America’s economic prospects, and would allow the EU to position itself as the dominant economic actor in Latin America, he said. If the Mercosur agreement was concluded, the EU would have free trade agreements with countries representing 94% of Latin America’s GDP (compared with 34% for the United States and 14% for China). He noted that the Mercosur agreement would deepen not only integration between the EU and Mercosur, but also regional integration in Latin America, as it would interconnect various existing trade agreements in the continent, and harmonise different regulatory frameworks related to digital processes, or customs procedures. Mr MALAMUD RIKKES underlined that the EU-Mercosur agreement could result in a free trade area covering one billion people, and would lead to 70% increase in trade between the EU and LAC, and 40% increase in intra-regional trade in Latin America. This agreement would have mutually beneficial impacts as the economies of Latin America and the EU are complementary: the former could contribute natural, agricultural and energy resources, while the latter would provide capital and technologies.

⁵ Available at:

<https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/informes/informe-elcano-32-por-que-importa-america-latina/>

Mr MALAMUD RIKKES concluded by noting that, should the Mercosur agreement not be agreed under the current Spanish Presidency, it may be more difficult to do so under successive Presidencies of the Council of the EU. This failure to close the agreement would be a strategic mistake and would not only potentially endanger regional integration in Mercosur, but also send a negative signal to other potential trade partners with whom the EU is currently negotiating trade agreements.

During the ensuing debate, 18 speakers took the floor.

All speakers emphasised the importance of **strengthening the European Union's Open Strategic Autonomy** to confront the numerous geopolitical challenges it was currently facing and the vulnerabilities revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic and by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Along others, Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie* and Mr Jonas JARUTIS, Lithuanian *Seimas* all emphasised the **strategic importance of the European Union's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean** in supporting the goal of Strategic Autonomy, and also welcomed the revitalised agenda and upgraded policy framework of EU-CELAC relations.

Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, Mr Didier MARIE, French *Sénat*, Mr Luis Jesús URIBE-ETXEBARRIA APALATEGUI, Spanish *Cortes Generales* and Ms Cinzia PELLEGRINO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica* all stressed that Open Strategic Autonomy is crucial for the **EU to be an active geopolitical actor amidst the growing competition**, particularly between the US and China. The speakers also emphasised that Strategic Autonomy could help **reduce Europe's dependence on countries such as Russia and China**. Strengthening **trade relations with Latin America and the Caribbean** was thus essential to diversify the European Union's supply of energy sources and of critical raw materials, as underlined by Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Mr HOFREITER and Mr MARIE. The potential benefits of deepening these trade relations were further boosted by the complementarity between the European and Latin American economies, noted Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA APALATEGUI.

The Open Strategic Autonomy goals of fostering open trade relations, **diversifying the origin of key resources** and **reducing the European Union's dependence** on unreliable external suppliers should all contribute to strengthen the **resilience** and competitiveness of the European economy, as well as promoting its **reindustrialisation**, as underlined by Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer* and Mr Ján FERENČÁK, Slovak *Národná rada*. Other speakers also noted other key sectors that need to be made more resilient in the quest for European Open Strategic Autonomy. Thus, Mr GIGLIO VIGNA underlined the need to build **cyber resilience**, while Ms Latifa GAHOUCI, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat* stressed the need for the EU to protect its citizens in a challenging global context and noted, *inter alia* that the **EU's health and food systems needed to be resilient to future shocks** as well as sustainable. Mr VIGENIN noted the importance of strengthening the European Union's single market and reindustrialisation and further

noted that Russia's war or aggression against Ukraine had made clear the need to also reinforce the EU's **defence capabilities**, including boosting its military production base and developing joint capabilities.

Various members, including Ms PELLEGRINO, Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas: Dáil Eireann* and Mr Jorge BUXADÉ VILLALBA, European Parliament called on the European Union to establish fair and balanced trade relations with Latin America, not predatory ones. The **EU-Mercosur trade agreement** was mentioned by various speakers. Ms PELLEGRINO called for the Mercosur agreement to be concluded as soon as possible, also to counteract China's growing influence in the region. Various other speakers expressed, however, their **reservations** towards the conclusion of this agreement. Mr VAN APELDOORN noted the important concerns that existed in the Dutch Parliament regarding this agreement, notably on the need to ensure that concluding this agreement did not result in unfair competition for European producers, nor dilute agricultural standards in the Union. He also expressed concerns regarding the impact of the agreement in food security and Amazon forest. Because of this, he noted, the Dutch parliament was opposed to concluding this agreement, which would not contribute to Strategic Autonomy but rather create new vulnerabilities for European farmers and citizens.

Mr MARIE acknowledged the geopolitical importance of the Mercosur agreement but also noted that the European Union should not make excessive concessions in the name of reaching an agreement quickly. He called for negotiating a balanced agreement, with ambitious social and environmental standards, and to prevent unfair competition, particularly regarding agriculture but also in relation to public procurement. Mr MARIE also underlined that the political and trade agreement with Mercosur should be ratified by the national Parliaments of all EU Member States as a democratic guarantee. Mr José María SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, noted that his political group was not positive on the Mercosur agreement as they considered that it was necessary to give preference to European goods in order to protect Spanish agricultural producers. Mr Bruno NUNES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República* noted that concluding the Mercosur agreement could have a negative impact for European companies by lowering social and economic standards.

Mr URIBE-ETXEBARRIA APALATEGUI stressed that it was important for the **EU to define its geopolitical role** by promoting its values, whereas Ms GAHOUCI emphasised the importance of European unity, strength and freedom in pursuing Strategic Autonomy. Ms PELLEGRINO, Mr FERENČÁK and Mr Magnus BERNTSSON, Swedish *Riksdag* also highlighted the need to work with like-minded allies in favour of stronger, rules-based, multilateralism.

For their part, Mr SÁNCHEZ and Mr BUXADÉ VILLALBA warned about the **authoritarian character and the negative influence for democracy** in the region of countries such as Cuba, Venezuela or Nicaragua, as well as the current Brazilian and Colombian presidents. Mr NUNES also noted the authoritarian character of some of the

countries in Latin America, and further noted the support for Russia's position in the invasion of Ukraine held by some Latin American countries. Beyond economic relations, Mr BUXADÉ VILLALBA highlighted the need to bring historic links between the European Union and Latin America to the fore, whereas Mr GIGLIO VIGNA noted the important human connections given the large number of Italian migrants and their descendants, particularly in South America.

Mr FERENČÁK noted that advancing the European Union's **enlargement process** was also an important element that could contribute to the promotion of Open Strategic Autonomy. This point was noted by İsmail Emrah KARAYEL, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, while he also regretted that Türkiye was not being considered in current discussions around the enlargement process. Mr BERNTSSON and Mr JARUTIS called for continued support for Ukraine to defend the multilateral order and to reduce Ukraine's dependency on Russia. Mr JARUTIS further noted the need to be aware that some LAC partners were supporting Russian arguments in calling for a ceasefire in Ukraine and stressed the need to resist disinformation.

Burhan KAYATÜRK, Türkiye *Büyük Millet Meclisi* noted the deepening political relations between Türkiye and Latin America, a region which had a growing presence in the global stage. These extensive relations meant that closer relations between the European Union and Türkiye could have a multiplier effect in developing the EU's goal of Strategic Autonomy.

In his replies, Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO welcomed the different interventions, all of which, he noted, had made clear the importance of advancing the European Union's Open Strategic Autonomy, and the key role which Latin America could play in this. It was essential to establish links with partners that shared the EU's interests and aspirations, and that was the case in Latin American countries that believed in the democratic process but also wanted strong institutions, the rule of law and a vibrant civil society. The region, Mr FERNÁNDEZ TRIGO also highlighted, had important aspirations in terms of economic development and prosperity. This required establishing fair economic and trade relations, and not only seeing the continent as a source of raw materials. Economic cooperation between the EU and Latin America needed to promote decent, formal working conditions, reinforcing health systems - in a continent that was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, he stated. It was important for the EU to use not only development aid, but also investment and trade in order to support Latin American countries, so that their populations could aspire to a better living standard in their countries and not be forced to emigrate.

In his replies, Mr MALAMUD RIKLES began by addressing the interventions made in reference to the Mercosur trade agreement, and noted that these showed certain protectionist tendencies towards an agreement that has been under negotiation for the past 20 years. He acknowledged that such reticence to the trade agreement was also present in Latin America. In his opinion, some of the European opposition to the agreement with Mercosur was based on a number of misunderstandings. For example,

he noted that cereal production in Mercosur was very efficient due to the use of technologies; this means that competition from these producers should be seen as fair competition. When it came to the environment, Mr MALAMUD RIKLES noted that the largest causes of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest were illegal mining and illegal logging, not the extension of agricultural land. In his view, the key question for the Mercosur trade agreement, which he considered had been repeatedly undermined by protectionist interest, was what would be the cost, not of concluding the agreement, but of not concluding it. With regards to China, Mr MALAMUD RIKLES noted that this country had an important commercial presence in South America, but it did not have the same weight in other critical areas such as investments, finance, military relations, or tourism and human exchanges.

Mr MALAMUD RIKLES concluded by stating that Latin America and the Caribbean should not be seen as a continent to exploit, but a continent with which the European Union had had deep historical relations. Lastly, he noted that Latin America was not Europe, but its own continent, and what, while being very “Euro-compatible” as he had noted in his introductory address, Latin American countries had gained their independence from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth century.

Mr LANDALUCE CALLEJA thanked all participants and closed the session.

9. CLOSING SESSION: ADOPTION OF THE CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE LXX COSAC

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN alluded to the texts of the Contribution and Conclusions of the LXX COSAC Meeting, as discussed and endorsed by the Chairpersons the evening before, which were distributed to all delegations beforehand and were adopted by consensus with no amendment presented during the Plenary.

She then informed all delegations that, according to Article 9.3 of COSAC Rules of Procedure, the Chairpersons had appointed, upon recommendation from the Presidential Troika, Mr Jakob SJÖVALL from the Swedish *Riksdag*, as Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat for the period 2024-2025. The Chair wished him success in his new role.

The Chair also expressed her gratitude to Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, from the Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, the outgoing Permanent Member, for his work in the COSAC Secretariat during the 2022-23 term.

The Chair gave the floor to Ms Eliane TILLIEUX, Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European affairs, Belgian *Chambre des représentants/Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers/Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*, and Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, as incoming Presidency of COSAC in the first semester of 2024

Ms TILLIEUX started by thanking the Spanish Presidency for an excellent and interesting meeting. She then alluded to the parliamentary dimension of the coming Belgian Presidency, informing that the first event would be the meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons on 14 and 15 January 2024, which would take place in her home town of Namur. She added that, like Spain, Belgium would also be organising a number of interparliamentary conferences in cities other than the capital, aiming to introduce delegations to the beautiful cities of Belgium, but also to bring Europe closer to its citizens.

Furthermore, she informed that the themes of the meeting of COSAC Chairpersons would be the priorities of the Belgian Presidency, the European pillar of social rights and the future of the EU after the European elections of 2024, namely in the context of future enlargements and how could the EU work effectively if new countries would join by the end of the decade.

Mr VAN GOIDSENHOVEN also thanked the Presidency for a very interesting COSAC meeting and informed delegations that the LXXI COSAC would take place from 24 to 26 March 2024 in Brussels. He acknowledged that this meeting would take place halfway through the Belgian Presidency, but the fact that the European elections and federal and regional elections in Belgium will take place on the same day, has forced the Belgian Parliament to schedule all interparliamentary meetings to the first half of the Presidency's semester.

He further noted that for the first time in its history, the COSAC Plenary would be taking place in the buildings of the European Parliament, thanking its President, Ms Roberta METSOLA for the cooperation.

Regarding the topics to be addressed during the Plenary meeting, and given that the Belgian Presidency comes at the end of the European legislature, the first session would take stock of this term of office and the prospects offered by the Council's new strategic agenda. Secondly, the issue of gender policy and the representation of women in Parliaments would also be addressed. The third session will be devoted to Open Strategic Autonomy, with a particular focus on competitiveness and resilience. Finally, the last topic to be covered would be the future of democracy and the place of the rule of law.

Mr VAN GOIDSENHOVEN noted that the Belgian Parliament was looking forward to welcoming delegation to the meetings of the parliamentary dimension of the Belgian Presidency.

Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN took the floor to emphasise the liveliness of the debates and exchanges held during the LXX COSAC, highlighting the key role played by parliamentarians across the EU, as the ones who are closer to citizens, in building and shaping European democracy.

She then referred to the good cooperation with different Parliaments in preparing for the Spanish Presidency, expressing her pride for the work done in the current semester. The Chair further noted the challenging times that Europe and the world were going through, underlining the unwavering support shown to Ukraine. Finally, she mentioned the many tasks ahead for the EU, highlighting that union and cooperation amongst Parliaments was crucial to face them. Ms SUMELZO JORDÁN also extended her gratitude to the staff who assisted in the organisation of the LXX COSAC.

The final intervention of the meeting was given by Ms Francina ARMENGOL SOCÍAS, Speaker of the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, who started by referring the five thematic sessions held at the LXX COSAC and noting that they corresponded to several of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU and of the work programme of the European Commission for 2024. She also alluded to the fact that conflict in the Middle East was also debated at the LXX COSAC, given its key relevance, even though it was not initially envisaged.

She thanked all the Parliaments for the debates and exchanges on these issues, calling for their continued efforts to find the necessary compromises to tackle the common challenges. With that regard, she recalled the Global Conference on strengthening Parliaments to enhance democracy⁶, held in León from 30 June to 1 July 2023, which set the objective of adopting a Charter on Modern Parliamentarism for an effective democracy, following an initiative of the First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Othmar KARAS. Ms ARMENGOL SOCÍAS then mentioned that this Charter should be adopted during the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments (EUSC), due to be held in Palma de Mallorca on 21 April 2024.

She further noted that the debates on the issue of Open Strategic Autonomy were to be continued, in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine which posed the biggest challenge to European security since the Cold War. In her view, this had exposed some challenges but also brought unity and the strengthening of NATO, with the accession negotiations of Finland and Sweden. Moreover, discussions on the progress of the reform of the EU's economic governance were also foreseen, in the framework of the green and digital transitions and to face new priorities, namely in terms of defence spending. Other issues, like institutional reform, the challenges brought by artificial intelligence, the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and gender equality were also to be discussed. For that reason, Ms ARMENGOL SOCÍAS announced that on the eve of the EUSC, a summit of women Speakers of Parliaments would be held.

Furthermore, she alluded to the ongoing discussions on the Pact on Migration and Asylum and on the conflict in the Middle East due to be held when the Spanish *Cortes Generales* would take over the Presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean, from 2024 to May 2025.

⁶ Available at <https://parleu2023.es/en/eventos/global-conference-on-strengthening-parliaments-to-enhance-democracy/>

Finally, she expressed wishes of success for the incoming parliamentary dimension of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU. She recalled that the Spanish Presidency would be the last full Presidency of the current legislative term and that the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments would take place a few weeks ahead of the elections for the European Parliament. She thanked all the contributions received so far and also further inputs in the coming months, which would allow the Spanish Presidency to prepare a few common conclusions to be addressed to the Council ahead of the next institutional cycle on behalf of national Parliaments.