

Plenary Meeting of the LXI COSAC

23-25 June 2019, Bucharest

Contribution of the LXI COSAC

1. European Elections

1.1 COSAC welcomes the successful delivery of the ninth European elections, held from 23 to 26 May 2019. COSAC acknowledges the overall turnout in the elections, which for the first time in 25 years, was higher than 50% at the European level.

1.2 COSAC also acknowledges that further collective effort is required to bring citizens closer to the EU decision-making process, thereby achieving an even higher turnout in future elections. To this end, COSAC promotes the deepening of relations between national Parliaments and the newly elected European Parliament, so that the European agenda takes more into account the expectations of the citizens of the EU.

2. Cohesion, a common European value

2.1 COSAC recognizes Cohesion Policy as an important pillar of the European project, and acknowledges its results in terms of investments, economic growth, job creation, social and territorial convergence. COSAC considers that the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework should reflect the EU's long-term development strategy.

2.2 COSAC recalls that Cohesion Policy represents an essential European added value; it is an expression of solidarity, which is based on the regions, puts the citizen at the centre, both as a source of inspiration and beneficiary of European action, and requires adequate and sustainable financing.

2.3 COSAC calls for further efforts at all levels, to reduce disparities across the EU, including the outermost regions, to ensure social development and high living standards, to promote connectivity and digitization, to stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship, to strengthen industrial strategy and to provide a safer and greener environment.

3. Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; future relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit

3.1 COSAC recalls that the EU is currently the largest trading partner with more than 80 countries worldwide and considers that trade is essential to generate wealth as long as it is conducted in open and fair terms.

3.2 COSAC supports the World Trade Organisation's reform in terms of efficiency, transparency and resilience to the challenges of the 21st century; it advocates for multilateralism in relations between States, including in the field of commerce; it denounces unilateral trade measures, which have a negative effect on economic growth and on relations of trust between States.

3.3 COSAC welcomes the EU's efforts to seize new economic opportunities and encourages the European Commission to assess, pursue and negotiate free trade relations with countries and regions of Africa, Asia, North and South America, as well as with Australia and New Zealand.

3.4 COSAC stresses the need for a balanced EU trade policy, which takes into account not only the opening of the Single Market to key world partners, but also the necessity of establishing reciprocity rules, in particular for access to public procurement, of preserving EU social and environmental standards, and of maintaining the competitiveness of European companies in all sectors, including agricultural. Protecting the Single Market is essential and requires to develop tools against dumped and subsidized imports from non-EU countries.

3.5 COSAC also calls to promote, respect and defend European fundamental values, such as democracy and rule of law, human and social rights, and furthermore standards in environment and action against climate change provided by the Paris Agreement on Climate, geographical indications, health, food safety or animal welfare, when negotiating and implementing new trade agreements. In particular, COSAC stresses the need to fight against xenophobia, racism and antisemitism.

3.6 COSAC recalls that the European Commission's competence on trade gives the EU a very strong negotiating stance *vis-à-vis* third countries and pleads, at the same time, for a more inclusive trade agenda that takes into account the views expressed by Member States and their national Parliaments.

3.7 COSAC takes note of the outcome of the negotiations between the EU and Switzerland on the Institutional Framework Agreement and, considering the importance of bilateral relations, invites the Parties to a consensual approach.

3.8 COSAC stresses the importance of transatlantic trade relations and the need to further improve them. In this respect, COSAC takes note of the EU Council's decision stating that the EU should negotiate free trade agreements only with Parties to the Paris Agreement on Climate, declaring obsolete the negotiating directives for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), but authorizing the European Commission to open negotiations with the United States for an agreement on the elimination of tariffs for industrial goods.

3.9 COSAC denounces the systematic practice of unilateral economic and trade sanctions with extraterritorial effects. For this reason, COSAC supports the EU efforts to counter the effects of such sanctions, which affect its unity and competences.

3.10 Inasmuch as the United Kingdom decides to leave the EU, COSAC pleads for privileged post-Brexit trade relations, in the framework of the Withdrawal Agreement and a Declaration on future UK-EU relations, while stressing the need to maintain the Single Market's integrity, the four freedoms' inseparability and the fulfilling, by the United Kingdom, of its financial obligations towards the EU.

4. The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

4.1 COSAC recalls the need for all education and training systems in the EU to keep up with technological progress, to meet the labour market's expectations whilst preserving the intrinsic value of a holistic education, and to prepare younger generations for the highly qualified jobs of the future and for innovation-based entrepreneurship. At the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education and training are essential to enhance prosperity and competitiveness of the European economy and to transform the Single Market into a place where the most innovative companies meet the best-qualified workforce.

4.2 Given the legal framework of the Treaties, COSAC acknowledges the national and regional competences in terms of education and training, and recommends enhanced coordination between the EU, its Member States and all relevant federated entities in order to build an inclusive, flexible, comprehensive and high-quality education environment, in line with the requirements of the digital era and new technologies.

4.3 COSAC considers that a high and comparable level of education and digital skills, across the EU, as well as a common framework to facilitate recognition of the digital certifications, are fundamental for strengthening and deepening the Single Market.

4.4 While welcoming the efforts undertaken to create a European Education Area by 2025, COSAC invites the European Commission to give new impetus to the lifelong-learning framework, notably by promoting communications and by supporting the action plans of European agencies, and stresses the need to finance research in pedagogy.

4.5 Whilst respecting the Member States' responsibility to shape their respective education systems, COSAC calls for action to support vocational training, mobility, youth employment and youth entrepreneurship, notably by addressing the school-to-work challenges, by developing Erasmus for apprentices and by adapting training and education systems to the digital era and emergence of artificial intelligence.

4.6 COSAC advocates for STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), for greater involvement of the business sector in digital education, at all levels, and for fostering the public-private partnerships in the high

technology fields of education, such as air and space sciences and quantum computers.

4.7 COSAC invites national and regional Parliaments to identify and exchange best practices to develop flexible, inclusive and high-quality education and training systems and to adapt the European Education Area to the digital and technological developments, notably by building on the European University project, which encourages the development of bottom-up networks of universities across the EU.

4.8 COSAC invites national and regional Parliaments to follow the EU discussions on education, training and culture, and to encourage their respective Governments to keep these topics high on the agenda.

5. Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social impact; the role of Parliaments in fostering the new economy of the EU

5.1 COSAC stresses the need to ensure legislation that is able to follow and drive innovations throughout the digital and technological era, based on transparent political dialogue and on economic, social, legal and ethical assessments.

5.2 COSAC considers technological progress and artificial intelligence as crucial for the Single Market, providing a significant advantage to the European economy in the global competition context and therefore requiring a common and harmonised legislative approach, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

5.3 COSAC calls on the European Commission to treat technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence as top priorities during its next mandate, to encourage, perform and accelerate all necessary consultations in these fields, and to present adequate proposals that avoid any gaps between the new technologies and the legislative framework.

5.4 COSAC considers that technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence should work for the people, and not against the people; they should be mastered, affordable and trustworthy, and their use should be wise, cohesive and transparent, in full compliance with individual and collective rights and obligations.

5.5 As technological progress and, in particular, artificial intelligence bring both risks and opportunities, COSAC recalls the need to ensure that they entirely meet the citizens' needs and asks for comprehensive measures to mitigate their impact on the labour market and to diminish their intrusive nature. Special attention should be given to the rights of users, consumers and workers, to the social security contributions, as well as to the new professional qualifications and the new industrial strategies.

5.6 COSAC considers that subsidiarity and proportionality checks are also relevant when regulating new technologies, and calls on Parliaments and the European Commission to encourage and ensure fair financing of value chains across the EU, to foster social and political dialogue, and to boost confidence in new technologies.

6. Subsidiarity and proportionality

6.1 COSAC reaffirms its solid interest in further developing the subsidiarity and proportionality control mechanisms and wishes that the EU institutions continue to improve the application of these two principles, as they confer increased democratic legitimacy on their actions.

6.2 COSAC invites Parliaments to harness the full potential of the subsidiarity and proportionality scrutiny procedures, in accordance with the Treaties, and to support the improvement of political dialogue with the European institutions, thus enhancing transparency of EU policy making and bringing people closer to the EU. In this regard, COSAC expresses the wish that the new Presidents of the European Commission and the European Council make democratic accountability and transparency of EU decision-making a core value of their important work.

6.3 COSAC calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament and the EU Council to swiftly reach an agreement on excluding the Christmas, New Year and Easter breaks from the eight-week period to submit reasoned opinions.

6.4 COSAC welcomes the European Commission's Communication "*The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking*", particularly those measures concerning the common understanding of subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as a greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the EU policy-making process. COSAC also welcomes that the topic was discussed at the Subsidiarity Conference held in Bregenz, on 15-16 November 2018, during the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council. COSAC reiterates the importance of inviting national Parliaments and the European Parliament to actively take part in discussions on how to strengthen the role of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the EU's policymaking.

6.5 COSAC calls for an ambitious approach to strengthen the national Parliaments' role in the EU policy-making process, during the new institutional cycle.

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