

6 August 2014

Senator Vannino Chiti
Chairman of the Committee on EU policies
Senato della Repubblica

Mr Michele Bordo
Chairman of the European Union Policy Committee
Camera dei Deputati

Mr Ioannis Tragakis
Deputy Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament
Chairman of the European Affairs Committee

Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica
Chairwoman of the European Affairs Committee
Latvian Saeima

Ms Danuta Maria Hübner
Chairwoman of the AFCO Committee
European Parliament

COSAC

We are writing to you following the LI COSAC in June. Mr Tragakis, we thank you again for your hospitality and for hosting what was in general a highly successful meeting.

We fully subscribe to the idea that COSAC is an organisation which works best when delegations seek consensus. However, for that consensus to be generated there must be transparency, clarity and equity between delegations. It is clear from the discussions at the chairpersons' meeting at the LI COSAC that the way the consideration of the contribution and conclusions has developed in an ad hoc way over time is now causing confusion. The time may now be opportune, therefore, to review current practice.

We set out our comments and ideas below for the consideration in particular of the Italian Presidency.

Content of the contribution and conclusions

We agree with the views expressed in the chairpersons' meeting that the contribution and conclusions should concentrate on reflecting the themes which will be, or have been, discussed at that plenary session and the side sessions during the COSAC. In this respect there should also be an aim that they will become shorter over time, a development which may also reduce the number of amendments. In general we believe that we should use the full flexibility of the rules and should aim to achieve "broad consensus" on the contribution and if necessary put the matter to a vote (rule 7.5) while at the same time allowing the contribution to "embrace the observations and remarks by all delegations" (rule 7.4). We recognise, of course, that the contribution is non-binding and this should be emphasised more, perhaps.

The "troika text" concept

As the COSAC note on "Voting on contributions at COSAC" states, the Presidency "may incorporate non-controversial amendments" before the meeting and then issue a revised contribution. In our view, while the troika should be able to *recommend* that amendments be adopted, it is not for the troika to *decide* this. All amendments tabled should be given equal weight and treatment. In practical terms, this means that there must be an opportunity for delegations to comment (and vote, if necessary) on all amendments, including those with which the troika agrees.

Order of amendments

To facilitate this, we believe it should be the practice that COSAC examines amendments in the order in which they appear in the text, not in the order of submission. This was successfully demonstrated at the plenary session in Athens and should also be the practice at the chairpersons' meeting. Under this system, if several delegations have tabled amendments to the same paragraph they can be considered one after the other, and delegations also have an opportunity to raise any questions or disagreements with the amendments recommended by the troika.

Voting

In the interests of transparency we believe that where there is disagreement members should be able to call for a vote both in the chairpersons' meeting and in plenary, though we expect delegations to use this sparingly, and agree that it should be at the discretion of the Chair.

Deadlines

We appreciate the work by the secretariat in processing amendments. It is clear that the Presidency team always works under a great deal of pressure to ensure that delegations receive copies of the amendments to review in due time, and we are grateful for this. Our proposals, we recognise, could create additional work on the first day to re-order the amendments. An earlier deadline at the meeting (for example 10.00am on the first day, rather than noon) might be required. Additionally it could be considered to establish a minimum period of time (for example 2 hours) between the distribution of the amendments and the discussion of the text in the chairpersons' meeting.

Programme of speakers

Ensuring that there is a range of speakers, with sufficient weight given to representatives from national parliaments, must be a key priority for the troika over the next few months. We have heard some complaints that over the past few years speakers from the European Parliament and Commission have become prominent in COSAC's agenda. While we welcome contributions from our colleagues from the European Parliament COSAC must retain its primary role as a forum for dialogue and discussion between national parliamentarians, and its agenda and the choice of key note speakers should reflect this. It should be designed to ensure that national parliamentarians have time to engage in proper debate—it is surely not reasonable to expect a parliamentarian to travel thousands of kilometres in order to make a one-minute contribution, when no time-limit is placed on set-piece speeches from the podium. Nor should it be always the case that a representative of the European Parliament gives the key-note speech, and we would welcome an initiative in which the COSAC secretariat could invite national delegations to propose platform speakers from their parliaments on specific topics. The agenda should also give greater opportunity for break-out sessions, in which national parliamentarians can engage in less formal and possibly more fruitful exchanges of ideas and best practice.

Video messages

While on occasion video-conferencing may be necessary in order for COSAC delegations to question speakers who cannot attend in person, we do not believe that playing pre-recorded messages is a valuable use of time in plenary and therefore suggest that such texts may be distributed in writing.

Officials meeting

The meetings of officials held in Copenhagen and Dublin were regarded by those who attended as a useful forum for the exchange of ideas. We propose

that the Italian Presidency consider organising such a meeting in Rome at the end of November during the COSAC plenary.

Conclusion and next steps

Looking forward to that meeting, Mr Chiti, Mr Bordo, we look forward to pursuing these ideas over the coming months.

Best regards,

Mr Miroslav KREJČA

Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Senate of the Czech Republic

Ondřej BENEŠÍK

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

Eva Kjer HANSEN,

Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish Parliament

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM

Chairman of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union of the Bundestag

Mr Peter FRIEDRICH

Chairman of the European Union Questions Committee of the Bundesrat

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK

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

Dominic HANNIGAN

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

Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS

Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

Raymond KNOPS

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

Senator Edmund WITTBRODT
Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Senate of the Republic of
Poland

Mr Paulo MOTA PINTO
Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the Portuguese Parliament

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

Sir William CASH
Chairman of the UK House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee

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