



Press Release

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Conclusion of the LVII Plenary Session of COSAC

On 29 and 30 May 2017, the LVII COSAC gathered over 250 delegates to discuss issues of common concern and exchange best practices on promoting increased parliamentary participation in European affairs. The agenda of the meeting organised within the framework of the parliamentary dimension of the Maltese Presidency comprised five main sessions, which were addressed by a number of distinguished guests.

During the first session on Reflections on the Maltese Presidency of the Council, Minister for Foreign Affairs George Vella highlighted that taking over the Presidency of the Council of the EU for the first time was an important milestone, a huge challenge, and great responsibility for Malta. The six priority areas identified by Malta were: Migration, Security, Neighbourhood, the Single Market, Maritime, and Social Inclusion. Minister Vella explained that in 2017, the Council made significant strides towards control and management of borders, documentation, and the entry-exit system, with the Malta Summit and Declaration on the external aspects of migration providing an important tool and plan of action. With regard to security, the Council adopted a Directive on combating terrorism, and a Directive on the fight against fraud to the financial interest of the Union.

Economic stability and political realities of neighbouring states constitute an important element for the development of a prosperous region, and the Maltese Presidency attaches particular importance to this element. In fact, Minister Vella explained that the enrichment of synergies between the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Union for the Mediterranean, and the 5+5 Western Mediterranean contribute to bridge differences and close the gap between the EU and its immediate neighbours. With regard to the maritime sector, the Maltese Presidency focused on furthering the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, especially with the expansion of the Blue Economy.

Furthermore, Council Conclusions on International Ocean Governance, together with the related Joint Communication, have successfully put forward a more coherent, comprehensive, and effective EU policy to improve the international ocean governance framework, and to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of oceans. The single market was another area of great success. Minister Vella explained that the Council worked hard on tackling corporate tax avoidance, by closing down hybrid-mismatches with the tax systems of third countries. The Council has also worked on the review of the Emissions Trading Scheme, and on establishing a mechanism for the exchange of information between Member States and third countries in this sector. On social inclusion, Minister Vella informed the delegates about conclusions on the European Solidarity Corps and on High Quality Education, as well as on enhancing the skills of women and men in the EU labour market, and on the protection of the rights of the child, which were adopted.

Attachments: photos

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In Session II on the role of national parliaments in the future of the EU, First Vice President of the European Commission Mr Frans Timmermans spoke about the need to increase transparency at EU level, and to ensure that national Parliaments take control of the tools available to them to carry out parliamentary scrutiny of EU policies and activities. Furthermore, First Vice President Timmermans also called on national Parliaments to step-up dialogue with the European Commission. During this session, Ms Mairead McGuinness, First Vice-President of the European Parliament and Ms Marina Berlinghieri, Member of the European Union Policy Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, also addressed members present. Ms McGuinness highlighted that national Parliaments should be at the core of European Union decision-making, and how it is imperative for national Parliaments to bridge the divide between the EU and their respective constituency. Ms Berlinghieri elaborated further on the need to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens, and to ensure that euro-scepticism is collectively countered. Ms Berlinghieri underlined the necessity to improve synergies between national Parliaments and the European Commission, and to further promote constant dialogue.

Session III focused on the outcome of the UK referendum. Keynote speeches from Mr Michel Barnier, Chief negotiator for the Preparation and conduct of the negotiations with the United Kingdom, and Ms Danuta Hübner, Chair of the Committee on the Constitutional Affairs, presented the European Union's institutional approach for Brexit. Mr Barnier emphasized that in spite the regrettable decision by the UK to leave the EU and possible resentment by some members of the European fora, the European Commission is committed to not take a punitive approach towards the UK. Furthermore, Mr Barnier emphasized that European citizens will be placed at the forefront of the discussions. From a European Parliament perspective, Ms Hübner highlighted that the European Parliament remains strongly committed to be a key actor during the negotiating process of the UK exit from the EU. Furthermore, Ms Hübner explained that the role of national Parliaments is of utmost importance, and central to ensure that European citizens have a direct voice in European Union decision-making processes, thereby ensuring a better implementation of the democratic principle

The afternoon session of the LVII COSAC on Monday, 29 May 2017 addressed issues and opportunities linked to the Blue Economy, and the need to create a sustainable EU Integrated Maritime Policy. For this session, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Mr Karmenu Vella was invited to speak on the potential of the Blue Economy, and on the innovative opportunities for all. Speaking on the European Agenda for blue growth, Commissioner Vella highlighted the importance of ensuring access to finance, enhancing skills and qualifications through the Blue Careers Initiative, and further promoting regional cooperation. From the perspective of national parliaments, Mr Toomas Vitsut, Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee of the Estonian Riigikogu, and Ms Danielle Auroi, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly, gave a presentation on their national maritime policy in relation to the European Integrated Maritime policy.

On the third and final day, the LVII COSAC addressed the topic of migration, more specifically the need to combat human smuggling and trafficking, and establishing a human and effective return and readmission policy. Keynote speakers for this session included Minister for Foreign Affairs George Vella, Member of the European Parliament Ms Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz, and Vice-Chair of the Committee on EU Policies Mr Lucio Romano. During his address, Minister Vella explained that the migration phenomenon is presenting three key challenges related to: (i) the emergence of new routes, (ii) an increase of young unaccompanied migrants and (iii) the mutating business model.

Minister Vella recognised that cooperation with third-countries, especially within a return and readmission portfolio, is an important and strategic approach to ensure that migration is managed in a more efficient and humane manner. Furthermore, Minister Vella highlighted the need to promote legal migration, and step up information campaigns in countries of origin and transit, thus providing concrete information to prospective migrants. Ms Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz explained that the year 2017 is important, and should be the year Europe develops a harmonised migration policy guided by the principles of ethics, human rights, and human dignity. Highlighting the need to promote legal channels for migration and thus effectively act as a deterrent for smuggling, Ms Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz quoted the Canadian model as a possible example of well-managed migration. Mr Lucio Romano provided a detailed account of the recent visit to hotspots in Pozzallo, Sicily, by a COSAC delegation on 5-6 May 2017 to enhance awareness of MPs from Member States on the challenges of migration.

In his concluding remarks, Speaker of the House of Representatives and chair of the LVII COSAC Anglu Farrugia thanked the members of the presidential Troika of COSAC, i.e. the Slovak, Estonian and European Parliament delegations, for their cooperation throughout the Presidency, especially in the run up to the LVII COSAC. This was organised in spite of the unexpected dissolution of Parliament on 1 May 2017.