

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC
The Hague, the Netherlands, 8 February 2016

AGENDA:

- 1. Opening of the meeting**
 - Welcome address by Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, President of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*
 - Introductory remarks by Mr Malik AZMANI, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*
- 2. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**
- 3. Organisation and co-operation of parliamentary scrutiny on the basis of a case study focussing on EUROPOL**

Key question: How do parliaments scrutinise documents and decisions in practice? How do European Affairs committees and standing committees exchange and cooperate? How are contacts with the European Parliament organised? - Introduction by moderator: Mr Tom DE BRUIJN, former Ambassador of the Netherlands to the European Union from 2003 to 2011 and contribution by Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee, French *Assemblée nationale* and Mr Veli YÜKSEL, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*
- 4. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters**
 - Briefing on the results of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
 - Draft agenda of the LV COSAC
 - Outline of the 25th Bi-Annual Report of COSAC
 - Letters received by the Presidency
- 5. European priorities for 2016 and beyond**

Key focus of the 2016 European Commission work programme – speaker Ms Kristalina GEORGIEVA, European Commission Vice-President for Budget and Human Resources

The Dutch 2016 EU Presidency – speaker Mr Bert KOENDERS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Malik AZMANI, Chair of the standing Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* and Mr Tuur ELZINGA, Chair of the standing Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*

1. Opening of the meeting

- Welcome address by Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, President of the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*
- Introductory remarks by Mr Malik AZMANI, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*

Ms Ankie BROEKERS-KNOL, President of the *Eerste Kamer*, mentioning her long experience as a member of COSAC, stressed the vital role of the Committees on EU Affairs in ensuring that national Parliaments scrutinised effectively EU legislation and in maintaining the political dialogue with Brussels. According to Ms BROEKERS-KNOL, good cooperation among the national Parliaments and with the European Parliament was also vital. She stressed that all parliamentarians played an important role in bridging the gap between EU citizens and EU institutions and in

securing a democratic and transparent EU decision making process, while safeguarding check and balances *vis-à-vis* the national governments, as well as in Brussels.

The President expressed the view that, in spite of all progress made following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, a lot more could be done to improve the cooperation. She underlined that in an EU facing a multiple series of crises, it was essential to stand firm in defending the EU's free, open, democratic society and in protecting the rule of law. She reminded that the COSAC meeting could create the necessary common ground. Concluding, she remarked that the Presidency had decided to upgrade the level of innovation as regarded communication in support of a long tradition of democratic institutions providing a sustainable Europe to future generations.

The Chair, Mr Malik AZMANI, welcomed newly elected representatives to the post of Chairpersons, namely Ms Izabela KLOC, Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Polish *Sejm* and Ms Mette GJERSKOV, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Danish *Folketing*. He said that the Presidency had started by putting the accent on the most important issues that needed to be tackled. In his opinion, the migrants' crisis and the continuous pressure on the EU borders had showed that the EU was confronted to endless challenges and that unity was not always granted. He reminded of the common responsibilities and challenges that called for common positions.

2. Adoption of the agenda of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

Mr AZMANI briefly presented the draft agenda of the meeting. The agenda of the COSAC Chairpersons' meeting was approved without amendment.

3. Organisation and co-operation of parliamentary scrutiny on the basis of a case study focussing on EUROPOL

Key question: How do parliaments scrutinise documents and decisions in practice? How do European Affairs committees and standing committees exchange and cooperate? How are contacts with the European Parliament organised?

Introduction by moderator: Mr Tom DE BRUIJN, former Ambassador of the Netherlands to the European Union from 2003 to 2011

Contribution by Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the EU Affairs Committee, French *Assemblée nationale* and Mr Veli YÜKSEL, *Belgian Chambre des représentants*

Mr DE BRUIJN introduced the session and recalled that the role of national Parliaments in the scrutiny of the EU decision making process had been rather controversial, based on the existence of two separate areas of democratic legitimacy. This situation changed with the Lisbon Treaty and the so called "yellow card". Mr DE BRUIJN recalled how the role of national Parliaments in the EU decision making process was a key element of negotiations for the Dutch after the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. He pointed out that the goal of the following exercise was to discuss how national Parliaments controlled their governments, how they collaborated with each other and with the European Parliament. He explained that the regulation on EUROPOL was a direct result of Article 88 (2) TFEU providing for the Agency's scrutiny by the European Parliament together with the national Parliaments. Mr DE BRUIJN stressed the importance of a proposal from the European Parliament concerning the creation of a joint parliamentary scrutiny group foreseen in Article 53 of the regulation.

Ms AUROI first gave a short historical review of the procedure in the French *Assemblée nationale* where the first action concerning EUROPOL was a resolution adopted in June 2003 advocating parliamentary scrutiny over the Agency by an organ composed both of national and EU

parliamentarians and mentioned different initiatives undertaken by various organs of her Chamber. Ms AUROI underlined the constant cooperation with other committees of the *Assemblée nationale*, with the European Parliament, as well as with the French *Sénat*.

In the course of her exchange with Mr DE BRUIJN, Ms AUROI mentioned that, when drafting a resolution, the Committee on European Affairs worked with two rapporteurs, one representing the majority and one the opposition, stressing that the work was based on striking a compromise. She underlined that her Committee constantly solicited the attention and support of other Committees' members in raising awareness on EU legislation; in this way, the European Affairs issues fed the national debate. In addition, she mentioned the question time with the government, referring namely to specific questions addressed before certain meetings of the Council of the EU to specific ministers and not only to EU Affairs ministers. Furthermore, she mentioned the adoption of a resolution, prior to the December European Council meeting, presenting the Chamber's views on the Council's agenda. Finally, she informed the participants about the joint meetings held between the French *Assemblée nationale*, the French *Sénat* and the French Members of the European Parliament.

Concerning the role of national Parliaments in relation to the Interparliamentary Conference under Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (IPC SECG) and the fiscal compact mechanisms, Ms AUROI stressed that whenever there was a dialogue between MPs and MEPs and European issues were not left exclusively to the Executive bodies, the representatives of the citizens showed attention to all subjects at all levels. As far as the IPC SECG and fiscal compact procedures were concerned, she stressed the sensitivity of these to national Parliaments as they related to national budgets and the way national Parliaments contributed to EU actions. She underlined that the rules that had recently been put in place allowed the national representatives to discuss with relevant Commissioners and ministers and to raise issues at the right time during the European semester. She pointed out that the creation of a Parliament for the Eurozone would allow more transparency to the citizens and would be an improvement as far as democracy was concerned, without side-lining the European Parliament.

Mr Marc ANGEL, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, mentioned that one session of the forthcoming EU Speakers Conference would be dedicated to the role of national Parliaments and the scrutiny of EUROPOL. He also stressed that, like the Committee on EU Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale*, the Committee on Foreign and European Affairs, on Defence, Cooperation and Immigration invited the Luxembourg Members of the European Parliament to its meetings on Monday mornings and encouraged them to participate in the meetings of other standing committees. He stressed that this interconnection was very important.

On behalf of the European Parliament, Ms HÜBNER congratulated the Presidency on the choice of topics, which not only were fundamental issues, but also highlighted best practices. She underlined that the joint work of national Parliaments and the European Parliament on EUROPOL would be important because in the future there would be many other issues that would require a similar approach. She pointed out that it was now up to the European Parliament and to the national Parliaments to do what was still to be done to make the joint scrutiny committee operational. She concluded expressing her hope that the first report submitted by EUROPOL to parliamentary scrutiny would show more Member States sharing information among them. That, according to her, was the fundamental point in solving the problems faced.

Mr Veli YÜKSEL first elaborated on the way the EU file was dealt with at the different levels of the Belgian institutions. He stressed how important EUROPOL was as an EU Agency in the context of the current terrorist threats and how the scrutiny of it was as important as its functioning. Referring to instruments of scrutiny, he referred first to the Federal advisory committee on

European Affairs of the Belgian Parliament, pointing out that, as was the case in France, the Federal Committee held debates before and after European summits with the Belgian Prime Minister concerning the priorities and the input of the government as well as concerning the outcomes of each Summit. Mr YÜKSEL indicated that Belgian members of the European Parliament, as well as members of the Belgian regional parliaments, could join these debates. He then explained the role of so-called Euro-promoters selected at the beginning of every new legislative term by every standing Committee of the Parliament, who were responsible for following all debates and decisions at EU level falling under the remit of each Committee, for following the implementation of national legislation and for acting as a go-between the Belgian Parliament and the EU institutions. He added the different Committees' regular scrutiny function.

Mr YÜKSEL then explained that, due to Belgium's complicated institutional structure, the Federal Parliament first checked whether each issue fell under its competence or not. If yes, Mr YÜKSEL continued, the adequate committee would draft a text on the specific legislative initiative; if not, the issue would be dealt at the level of the regional parliaments according to their own instruments and traditions. EUROPOL was deemed a federal competence. Mr YÜKSEL mentioned the recommendation of the EU Affairs Committee of the Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, including its reference to the Belgian system of oversight of Law enforcing agencies. He explained that the Belgian oversight system was based on a special committee which he considered to be a good example for the parliamentary scrutiny of EUROPOL.

Nine Members of Parliament intervened in the following debate.

Ms Ana BIRCHALL, Romanian *Camera Deputa ilor*, explained that the latest version of the EUROPOL regulation addressed most of the concerns of the Romanian Parliament, adding that Romania contributed substantially to the activities of EUROPOL and INTERPOL. She welcomed the joint parliamentary scrutiny by the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. She drew attention to the importance of bringing the EU closer to its citizens by having a closer dialogue and cooperation between national Parliaments and the EU institutions.

Referring to their respective federal systems, Ms Olga ZRIHEN, Belgian *Sénat* and Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, underlined that that the various levels of governance had to be taken into account, in particular the regional level. Considering the fact that the establishment of EUROPOL also had an impact on regional and local levels, both considered that support for such measures should be as broad as possible at every level of governance. They concluded that it was necessary to include the Committee of the Regions to the work.

Furthermore, Mr SCHENNACH expressed his view that COSAC was not yet working as it should; national Parliaments needed to identify the most important proposals and to join forces in order to make the instruments available more effective and to conjunctively face up the European institutions. Referring to EUROPOL, he stated that confidentiality was not the most important issue; the question was how to get more effective.

Lord BOSWELL, UK *House of Lords*, stated that consultation with different actors was essential to the legislative process. He welcomed the position of the British government to strengthen and to improve EUROPOL's capacities. The EUROPOL regulation must ensure the democratic legitimacy through a specific structure, particularly because this would be the basis for any future joint parliamentary structure. He welcomed the adoption of a structure for the Interparliamentary Conference under Article 13 of the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union and expressed his hope that the EU institutions would find an agreement on the regulation in spring. He then appealed for cooperation between national Parliaments, which he considered as being an effective tool to increase scrutiny over the executive.

Referring to a practice in the Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, Mr ANGEL explained that the audition of the national representatives of EUROPOL in the competent committees had proved its effectiveness. Mr YÜKSEL regretted that this practice was not common in his Parliament. In his view, an effective scrutiny of EUROPOL meant the establishment of a specific permanent control system providing for clear rules and guidelines on the scrutiny of EUROPOL's activities.

Ms AUROI explained that the resolution adopted by the French *Assemblée nationale* did not foresee the creation of a whole new structure but an extension of the Committee on Civil liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament with a view to including national parliamentarians when dealing with questions in relation to EUROPOL. This joint committee would be convened by the Chair of the European Parliament's LIBE Committee and the Chairperson of the competent committee of the national Parliament holding the Presidency; it would be evenly represented and would ensure democratic scrutiny of EUROPOL. She added that confidentiality had to be maintained. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, also underlined that previous joint committee meetings organised by the LIBE Committee proved to be very fruitful and enabled national parliamentarians to express their views.

Mr Paolo TANCREDI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, highlighted that political dialogue had improved considerably, however national Parliaments' contributions should be better integrated into the work of the European Parliament. He called for the establishment of specific provisions for the scrutiny of EUROPOL's activities, including the frequent convening of meetings. In his view, Article 53 of the draft regulation did not provide enough clarity; the role of the specialised body still needed to be defined. He specified that this body should be composed of members of national Parliaments and the European Parliament, and that it should be decided whether it should be a new interparliamentary body or whether it should be based on the model of one of the existing interparliamentary bodies. He suggested that COSAC should analyse this question and come up with a common position.

Concluding the debate, Ms AUROI highlighted that COSAC was still the primary interparliamentary structure to hold debates such as the one on EUROPOL. She sustained that COSAC should continue the discussion on the structure of EUROPOL and in particular on Article 53, underlining that it was important to avoid the creation of unwieldy structures. Mr YÜKSEL added that the democratic legitimacy implied the control of the institutions created. He concluded that one way to bridge the gap between the citizens and the EU institutions was to step up democratic control over European agencies.

Mr AZMANI summarised the main points expressed during the debate stressing that effective scrutiny needed to be exercised early by all instruments available, stressing the practice of appointing a rapporteur or "EU promoter", using parliamentary debates for controlling national governments' positions during question time and adopting resolutions as a valuable instruction to the government. He emphasised the need to exchange points of views between national Parliaments and the European Parliament, as well as among national Parliaments themselves both at the regional and the EU level.

4. Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

- **Briefing on the results of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**
- **Draft agenda of the LV COSAC**
- **Outline of the 25th Bi-Annual Report of COSAC**
- **Letters received by the Presidency**

Mr AZMANI briefed the participants on the results of the Presidential Troika meeting organised the previous day and presented the draft programme of the LV COSAC meeting in June. Mr AZMANI proposed to focus the debates on practical constraints and cooperation between national Parliaments and/or the European Parliament (e.g. use of rapporteurs) and to explore confirmed or promising methods for improving parliamentary scrutiny. The second point on the agenda concerned the practice, tools and instruments available to the national Parliaments in the field of the protection of the rule of law. He mentioned that a short session on the state of play on the instruments currently available to the national Parliaments ("yellow and green cards") was foreseen. Another proposed item would be a session on parliamentary diplomacy focussing on relations with third countries and their parliaments. The session on the work of the European Court of Auditors together with the use of their reports by national Parliaments and the session on migration were envisaged as last points in the meeting in June. Mr AZMANI assured that, in case of further developments of other issues (e.g. Brexit), these would be taken into account when drafting the final programme.

The participants were informed about the outline of the 25th Bi-annual Report, consisting of three chapters: 1) parliamentary scrutiny of the EU legislation, 2) the role of national Parliaments in upholding the rule of law and 3) the parliamentary diplomacy. He announced that the questionnaire would be distributed by the 29 February 2016 and that the deadline for replies was set for the 29 March 2016, urging the participants to respect the deadline.

Finally, the Chair reported on the Troika's decisions as regards the letters received by the Presidency.

Ms HÜBNER, expressing her support to the agenda of the June meeting, proposed to add a point concerning the decision of the European Parliament to amend the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage serving as the basis for the European elections for 40 years. She wanted to know whether the national Parliaments would be interested in entering into a dialogue with the European Parliament. Mentioning the complexity of this procedure requiring unanimity in the Council, ratification by the national Parliaments and an absolute majority in the European Parliament, she explained that the aim was to give the European citizens equal rights by harmonising the threshold, the level of information on the EU issues and to align the dates of elections in the Member States. She added that the European Parliament was prepared to have an exchange/dialogue either in the COSAC, which could add to the importance of COSAC, or within another framework.

Mr AZMANI responded that this question could be further explored during the LV COSAC meeting or during the Slovak Presidency.

There were three reactions from the audience.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, stressed that the political topics should not be avoided and referred to the migration crisis and the situation in Ukraine. Moreover, he added that COSAC should not focus on institutional questions only, but should also discuss policies. He concluded by appealing to the delegations to give more trust to the Troika and keep the number of amendments to the contributions and conclusions reasonable.

Mr BIZET, French *Sénat*, pointed out that the energy questions together with the information technologies were at the very heart of the EU's economic development, in particular the Single Market and were important for reconciling the citizens with the EU institutions. Ms Lolita IG NE, Latvian *Saeima*, appreciated that the Presidency would organise a thematic conference on these topics and informed that the Latvian committee on EU affairs had issued a statement reviewing the energy policies and valued the debate which was ongoing in the European

Parliament. She added that there were some points of concern, especially regarding the project Nord Stream II.

Mr AZMANI, referring to the draft programme of the LV COSAC already presented, responded that the topic of energy proposed, as well as migration and human trafficking, would be dealt with during thematic conferences organised under the Dutch Presidency. The topic of energy would also be addressed during the Slovak Presidency.

5. European priorities for 2016 and beyond

Key focus of the 2016 European Commission work programme

Speaker: Ms Kristalina GEORGIEVA, European Commission, Vice-President for Budget and Human Resources

The Dutch 2016 EU Presidency

Speaker: Mr Bert KOENDERS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

In his opening remarks, Mr ELZINGA pointed at the overview distributed to the participants resuming the scrutiny priorities of some national Parliaments based on the Commission's Work Programme (CWP) and encouraged the rest of the national Parliaments to undergo the same exercise in order to perform subsidiarity checks or other form of scrutiny. Sharing priorities was an important step towards influencing the EU decision-making and enhancing the scrutiny of governments in the meetings of the Council of the EU.

Ms Kristalina GEORGIEVA explained that the CWP comprised 10 priorities and 23 components which reflected the challenges the EU was facing. The top priority had been the European agenda on migration, where Ms GEORGIEVA mentioned the steps taken in the last months, notably the establishment of hotspots in Greece and Italy. For this year, the most important proposal was linked to the European Border and Coast Guard, where the European Commission was counting on national Parliaments' help. This would, according to the Commissioner, allow strengthening the response and improving the common asylum system.

The European agenda on security, jobs, growth and investment remained one of the top priorities. Ms GEORGIEVA mentioned the European Fund of Strategic Investment which had brought the impact of 50 billion € over the past six months, and in this area, the digital and energy market strategies would be crucial to broaden and strengthen the internal market. Improving the conditions for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups would be part of the plan to boost the Single Market; other initiatives in the area included the action plan on VAT and fair, efficient and growth-friendly corporate taxation. She underlined that other priorities focussed on completing the banking union, building a capital market union to finance the real economy and creating the European pillar of social rights. In the social pillar, the Vice-President said, a lot of progress was expected during the Dutch Presidency.

Ms GEORGIEVA reflected briefly on the sustainability driven externally by the Agreement of the United Nations on the sustainable development goals and the Paris agreement and internally by the EU action plan for the Circular Economy, appreciating the effort of 16 Parliaments/Chambers which had participated in the joint opinion on food waste.

She gave an account of external challenges and the latest European Commission's activities in this area, amongst those addressing the conflicts with help of international partners in Syria, Libya, Ukraine, renewing the European neighbourhood policy and contributing to the new global strategy

on foreign and security policy. The challenges, she mentioned, required the institutions to work together in order to prioritise in the legislative process.

Ms GEORGIEVA touched upon the awaiting revision of the multiannual financial framework, where the flexibility to face the current challenges would be needed. She appreciated the approach of the European Parliament to have such flexibility granted. The revision would require unanimity in the Council of the European Union. Protecting the unity of the Union in these difficult times would play an important role in this revision. The discussions should build upon the principle of multiple objectives for the same money.

In order to make efficient use of resources and to be accountable to the citizens, the concept of the budget focussed on results would include increasing the leveraging impact of the budget, improving indicators, simplifying delivery and improving transparency.

The Vice-President concluded her speech informing that there was ongoing discussion on the shift towards the genuine own resources.

Mr Bert KOENDERS, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, gave a short overview of previous COSAC meetings organised by the Dutch Presidencies contributing to democratic legitimacy, accountability and relations between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament.

Mr KOENDERS described that the many political conflicts nurtured instability at the EU borders and threatened the fabric of European cooperation. Dialogue and readiness to make compromises were crucial for the debate on the future. He expressed the willingness of the Dutch Presidency to leave the Union in a better shape. He stressed the fact that in many countries there was little support for deeper and further integration and citizens were becoming unconvinced of the ability of the EU to tackle the current problems.

Unity and firm solidarity with countries under pressure were crucial to tackle the migration crisis, he added. He stated that there was a lack of sense of urgency in implementing the agreements made on registration, identification and fair distribution. He suggested that this situation was affecting the relations between Member States, was impacting solidarity and the functioning of the Schengen zone. In order to revert this situation, the confidence and support of the European citizens needed to be regained.

Besides the migration and international security, Mr KOENDERS stressed that the Presidency would continue to promote a deeper and fairer Single Market, a more transparent digital market and a fairer internal market in terms of equality of the pay for the work across the EU. According to Mr KOENDERS, the effective governance in all Member States, structural reforms for economies and budgets were vital to the foundation of a strong European Monetary Union.

Mr KOENDERS added that, within the 2030 Climate and Energy Package, the Dutch Presidency would mainly discuss the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) revision and would continue working on other pillars of the Energy union.

Mr KOENDERS stressed the importance of connections between the Member States and the institutions, between the EU and its citizens, between the national Parliaments representing 500 million Europeans, European Parliament and the European Commission. According to Mr KOENDERS, it was crucial to maintain balance between effectiveness and democratic legitimacy, as well as between doing things at national level and tackling problems at European level when a common solution was needed.

Mr KOENDERS added that the role of national Parliaments in the EU had not evolved the same way as for other players. Therefore, he believed that their role could be expanded through the enhanced use of the "yellow" and "orange" cards and through the structured dialogue with the European Commission; through involving Parliaments in the process of determining the Member States' position in the Council and, lastly, via interparliamentary cooperation.

Mr KOENDERS expressed that the New Settlement for the UK would be followed with interest, since it was important for the whole of the EU. He highlighted that the instrument of a "red card" would strengthen the role of the Parliaments in the EU decision-making process and would increase the Union's democratic legitimacy.

He concluded with remarks on increasing transparency to improve public confidence and help national Parliaments exert influence in EU policy making and control their governments. To that end, he said the Presidency would push for the register of delegated acts and a database on the state of play of different legislative files, expressing his hope that the Interinstitutional Agreement on better law-making would be signed into law soon.

In the debate which followed, 22 speakers took the floor.

Many of them addressed the topic of migration. Amongst others, Ms AUROI, Mr YÜKSEL and Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, expressed the view that solidarity was needed to tackle the problems relating to the migration crisis. Mr KOURAKIS added that Greece was ready to work with the European institutions while solidarity on financial level, on capacity building and financial support was also needed.

Mr José Ignacio SANCHEZ, Spanish *Cortes Generales: Congreso de los Diputados*, focussed on the situation in the south-eastern part of Europe. He pointed out that there was a domino effect; the restrictive policies in Northern Europe may make the situation worse for the people waiting at the borders. Therefore, the EU needed to work with Turkey, not threaten Greece and help Serbia. Mr Kamal Izidor SHAKER, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, specifically mentioned the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece, for which extra resources should be made available. Stopping the illegal migration there would be of benefit for the Schengen system and, consequently, no strict border control would be needed in the whole in the Western Balkans. Mr İbrahim DI LI, Turkey *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, expressed that a lot of refugees were coming to Turkish borders with only limited resources available. He expressed his concern that the crisis could further hurt Europe and asked what measures the Dutch Presidency had in mind to tackle this topic.

The issue of border control was raised by many members. Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, mentioned the control of common borders as the most important aim. He stated that it was a Member States' competence and any EU action was complementary to national measures. Ms Ana BIRCHALL, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, associated this topic to the threat of terrorism and the fight against radicalisation; she stressed the importance of implementing recent legislative proposals, among them those on smart borders. Mr Dominik TARCZYŃSKI, Polish *Sejm*, underlined that Poland had the biggest external border. He mentioned that current measures in Poland were about the security of citizens. The important issue to resolve was the distinction between immigrants and refugees.

Ms IGNE asked the European Commission and the Dutch Presidency what further steps they would take to move forward on the issue of the EU border control and coastal guards. Secondly, she asked how to move forward on the visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine, as it was important for stabilisation in the region.

Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, urged to think about the idea of Schengen when discussing migration. When failing to protect the borders in the EU, he believed Schengen, one of the cornerstones of the EU, to be at stake. Ms Nadia GINETTI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, added that the Schengen system must be continued, but at the same time border control must work. She asked the European Commission to play its role of guarantor of the treaties and implementation of existing rules.

Mr Ramón Luis VALCÁRCEL SISO, European Parliament, asked the Dutch Presidency when the EU would have a real common asylum and refugee policy. The European Commission had not yet received a mandate from Council to draft a comprehensive policy. At the moment, the EU was forced to improvise with the various partial legislative packages. As a result, he said, the EU citizens were ever more exasperated and the EU had a humanitarian deficit because of the failure to act.

Ms Regina BASTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stated that since 2008 the EU had had several crises. There was the financial crisis, and now the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism. As the social crisis remained, she asked the European Commission how support, also on financial level, was offered.

Some members expressed their support for the current priorities of the European Commission and the Dutch Presidency. Ms AUROI highlighted the need, after COP21, to work on Energy issues, like the Energy Union. Ms BIRCHALL added that every Member State should be able to set its own Energy mix. She further added the relevance of the European Eastern Partnership to stay on the agenda.

Some parliamentarians gave their point of view on the steps that were made in their countries in the enlargement process. Mr Aleksandar SENIC, Serbia - *Narodna skupština*, referred to the recent start of negotiations on chapters between the EU and Serbia. He urged for larger support to the reforms in the Western Balkans, as he felt that a clear perspective on membership was a factor of stability in the region. Ms Marija ATOVI, Montenegro - *Skupština Crne Gore*, expressed Montenegro's commitment to the enlargement process. Ms Majlinda BREGU, Albania - *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, referred to a COSAP meeting of countries of the Western Balkans, where it was agreed to send a proposal to the secretariat of the Berlin Process to involve the Parliaments in its process. Ms Arta DADED, Albania - *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, pointed out that the countries in the Western Balkans had made contributions to the security issues and so they were part of the common challenges.

Ms Anniken HUITFELDT, Norwegian *Storting*, stressed the source of instability in the Middle East that was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Referring to the issue of settlements in occupied territories, she stated that violations of international law should not be tolerated and that double standards should be avoided when it came to addressing the acts either of Russia or of Israel.

Lord Timothy BOSWELL, UK *House of Lords*, welcomed the European Commission's slim down work programme and the businesslike tone set by the Dutch Presidency. He asked the European Commission to offer some perspective on the future when it came to the initiative to further ensure that national Parliaments had a strong voice in EU decision-making.

Sir William CASH, UK *House of Commons*, explained the reasons why there was a referendum in the UK, namely because of the lack of trust in democratic legitimacy. The treaties' architecture could not provide the closeness of the EU citizens that was needed. Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, replied that it was also the task of parliamentarians to explain Europe better. He

stressed that there was a task to accomplish, as Europe was needed as a solution to many problems like the ones of migration and terrorism. Participation of every Member State therefore was needed.

In her response, Ms GEORGIEVA expressed the wish to work together with national Parliaments. She referred to the "yellow card", to the developments on the "green card" which provided the European Commission with useful views from national Parliaments and also to the "red card" as recently proposed by Mr Donald TUSK, President of the European Council. She explained the idea of the "red card" and mentioned that the European Commission was very willing to advice and provide support for Mr TUSK's ideas. She also mentioned that national Parliaments had 12 weeks to express their subsidiarity concerns to issue such a card simply because there were no treaties parameters on this.

Furthermore, she expressed the view that, when it came to the enlargement process, the economies would benefit from it and further reform would be supported. She added that financial support for EU Member States to tackle the social crisis was available through different programmes, which targeted, among others, youth employment and SMEs.

On the topic of migration Ms GEORGIEVA stated that it was important to get the whole picture of what was happening in the world. A combination of violent extremism, climate change and population growth in parts of the world caused the huge flows of refugees. The process of displacement had no signals of abating very soon. Therefore, EU policy should focus on tackling the root causes of migration and it should take into account the capability to protect the EU's external borders. This way a distinction could be made between genuine asylum seekers, economic migrants and terrorists. She said that required work on all fronts. First, she mentioned the significant investments in fragile areas and in the region; secondly, the need to protect borders and to manage asylum in the EU in a more harmonious way; and, finally, the need to show solidarity and to save the Schengen zone.

Mr KOENDERS, first focussing on terror and insecurity, said it was important to implement current rules and measures. This did not mean there was no vision; the main focus had been clear. Tackling radicalisation, but also ensuring prevention and repression were key elements in this field. He stressed the complexity of these issues and the need to work on several of them at the same time.

The Council and the European Commission were looking into the topic of cybersecurity, as it was a very specific type of threats. Cooperation with all actors, including the private ones, involved was needed.

On the Israel and Palestinian issues, he agreed that it should not be forgotten even though the attention was now mainly on the migration crisis and countries like Syria. On enlargement, he expressed the view that all efforts must be judged on their merits, the pace of negotiation was not time-based. It should be about being strict and fair. On the question on visa liberalisation, he also mentioned two elements that should be balanced; fostering engagement on the one hand and applying strict conditions on the other.

Migration was a very complex dossier, Mr KOENDERS explained. There were multiple factors involved that were interconnected that called for work in the region, support and effective cooperation. He called on national governments and Parliaments to carry out their promises on external border control, stressing that that was a priority of the Dutch Presidency and emphasising that solidarity, as well as assistance in implementation of current rules and measures were needed.

Concluding the debate and the meeting, Mr ELZINGA referred to the discussion of EU scrutiny within Parliaments and as part of interparliamentary cooperation. In addition, he mentioned the

review of the CWP and the priorities of the Dutch Presidency presented in the meeting's second session. All that had to be seen also as a thorough preparation of the LV COSAC meeting of June 2016. He then, also on behalf of Mr AZMANI, thanked all those who made the meeting a success.