

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LVI COSAC
Bratislava, Slovakia, 14-15 November 2016**

IN THE CHAIR: Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Slovak *Národná rada*.

AGENDA:

1. Opening session of the LVI COSAC

- Introductory remarks by Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Slovak *Národná rada*
- Adoption of the agenda
- Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters
 - Information on the results of the Presidential Troika of COSAC
 - Letters received by the Presidency
- Presentation of the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC by Ms Christiana FRYDA, Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat

2. Session 1 - 'State of Play of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union'

Keynote speaker: Mr Robert FICO, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

3. Session 2 - 'Strengthening the role of national Parliaments in the EU'

Keynote speaker: Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President, European Commission

Panellists: Ms Ana BIRCHALL, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, German *Bundestag*

Moderator: Mr Martin KLUS, Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*

Debate

4. Session 3 - 'The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks)'

Keynote speakers: Ms Susan GEORGE, political and social scientist, activist and writer on global social justice; President of the Transnational Institute, Mr Hiddo HOUBEN, EU Deputy Chief Negotiator of TTIP; Director, DG Trade of the European Commission

Panellists: Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, Ms Güler TURAN, Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, Member of the Belgian *Sénat* and Flemish Parliament

Moderator: Ms Brigita SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe; former Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic

Debate

5. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

- Debate on the draft Contribution of the LVI COSAC

6. Session 4: '2016: Energy Union's "year of delivery"'

Keynote speaker: Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union

Panellists: Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Kalle PALLING, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, *Estonian Riigikogu*, Mr António COSTA SILVA, Member of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*

Moderator: Ms Zuzana GABRIŽOVÁ, Editor-in-chief of Euractiv.sk

Debate

7. Session 5: ‘Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration’

Keynote speakers: Mr Robert KALIŇÁK, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the Slovak Republic

Panellists: Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Lucio ROMANO, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs Policies, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*

Moderator: Ms Katarína CSÉFALVAYOVÁ, Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*

Debate

8. Adoption of the Contribution of the LVI COSAC

PROCEEDINGS

1. Opening session of the LVI COSAC

1.1 Introductory remarks by Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Slovak *Národná rada*

Mr Ľuboš BLAHA, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*, opened the meeting and invited the plenary to observe a minute of silence in honour of the victims of the Paris attacks that had taken place on 13 November 2015. He then welcomed the Chairs and Committee members recently elected.

1.2 Adoption of the agenda

The Chair presented the draft agenda of the LVI COSAC, which was adopted without amendment. Ms Lolita ČIGĀNE, Latvian *Saeima*, thanked the Presidency for the possibility given to organise the side event ‘Mobilization of human capital through innovative legislation’.

1.3 Procedural issues and miscellaneous matters

Information on the results of the Presidential Troika of COSAC

On the draft Contribution, Mr BLAHA explained that, after the Troika meeting the day before, a new modified document incorporating proposed Troika amendments, as well as all the amendments received until then, had been circulated. The original text, the amendments and the new modified draft text, he added, were laid out in a table. He announced that further written amendments to the draft Contribution would be electronically accepted until 12pm. He clarified that, in case a delegation did not agree with the compromise text proposed by the Troika and insisted on its amendment as previously submitted, it would be asked to resubmit the amendment in question. The compromise text and any new amendments would be discussed during the meeting of the Chairpersons.

Letters received by the Presidency

The Chair referred to the following letters received by the Presidency:

- Letter from Mr Jean-Charles ALLA VENA, Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Mr Christophe STEINER, Speaker of the National Council of the Principality of Monaco, regarding participation at COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.

- Letter from Mr Pedro AGRAMUNT, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), regarding participation at COSAC. After consultation with the Troika, a letter of invitation had been sent out.
- Letter from Mr Kalle PALLING, Chair of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Estonian *Riigikogu*, regarding the informal consultations of the European Union Affairs Committees of the Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish Parliaments held in Tallinn on 8-9 September 2016.
- Letter from Mr Ondřej BENEŠIK, Chair of the Committee for European Affairs of the Czech *Polanecká sněmovna* on the conclusions of the Meeting of the European Affairs Committees of the Visegrad Group countries held in Velehrad on 3 October 2016.

Regarding the letter from Mr Vannino CHITI, Chair of the Committee on EU policies of the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, he said he would come back to it at the meeting of the Chairpersons.

1.4 Presentation of the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC by Ms Christiana FRYDA, Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat

Mr BLAHA then gave the floor to the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Ms Christiana FRYDA, to present the 26th Bi-annual Report of COSAC. The report consisted of three chapters: 1) The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the European Union and the United States: parliamentary scrutiny of the negotiation process, 2) Energy Union's "year of delivery", 3) Improving the role of national Parliaments.

2. Session 1 - 'State of Play of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union' Keynote speaker: Mr Robert FICO, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic

Mr Robert FICO, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, welcomed the participants to the plenary meeting of the LVI COSAC. He reflected on the Bratislava Summit that was organised in September, which, he added, showed that Slovakia had been a reliable partner. He then mentioned several key priorities for the Slovak Presidency, amongst others the need of an economic strong European Union with a functioning banking and monetary union. In this regard, the trust of citizens was crucial. Furthermore, he reflected on results achieved on the Digital Single Market and Energy Union priorities. When it came to the asylum and migration policy, Mr FICO stressed that it was important to keep in mind the strong relation between economies in the world. Summing up several results of the past months, as well as those expected until the end of the Slovak Presidency, including amongst others, the taxation package, the European Public Prosecutor's office, the Paris Climate agreement and the enlargement policies, he concluded that so far the Presidency, despite all the challenges that arose, could be considered successful.

In the debate that followed, 16 members took the floor. Several focussed on the possible Brexit and its possible causes as well as effects for the EU. It would have an effect on the whole of Europe, as was expressed by Mr Terry LEYDEN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*. He urged to keep a special focus on Ireland as it shared the border with the UK. Ms Colette MÉLOT, French *Sénat* pointed out the new model of relations with the UK and asked what the results of the Bratislava summit were. Meanwhile, Ms Rubina BERARDO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stressing the importance of trust and building confidence as was shown during the Bratislava Summit, pointed out the need for concrete measures, for example to tackle youth unemployment. Mr Karlheinz KOPF, Austrian *Nationalrat*, mentioned the need for the EU to take into account the tremendous changes in society and concerns of citizens, underlining the role of national Parliaments. At the same time, according

to Mr Ignacio SÁNCHEZ, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, the movement for Brexit showed the European Commission had to play a role in order to balance the Council, where Member States were pursuing their own interest.

Another topic mentioned by many was the migration crisis. As the EU was on crossroads and it was clear that safety and security were key elements in solving the crisis, Yiorgos LILLIKAS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, stressed that now the political will to act was needed and asked for full implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, expressed general support for the priorities of the Slovak Presidency, including, amongst others, the progress on enlargement of the EU, a sentiment which was echoed by Ms Elvira KOVACS, Serbian *Narodna skupština*. Mr HÖRCSIK asked the outcome of the referendum in Hungary to be respected; it showed that a mandatory mechanism in tackling the migration crisis was not the right instrument, as having control of the borders should be. Mr Gunter KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, pointed out that solidarity was needed in order to tackle problems, adding that it was not something to call upon only when it served particular interests. Solidarity went, he continued, hand in hand with commitments. According to Mr Luciano BUSSUTIL, Maltese *Kamra tad-Deputati*, the question was whether all embraced the same concept of solidarity, as it was an essential element in the approach to the problem. Mr Malik AZMANI, Netherlands *Tweede Kamer*, asked the Presidency on the progress made on the dossier of migration, as well as on the asylum system.

A few members pointed to the situation in Turkey, expressing their concerns on the situation there. For example, Mr Simon SUTOUR, French *Sénat*, expressed that focus on Turkey was needed, as the country was abandoning core democratic values, while it should respect the rights of minorities. Ms Zehra TAŞKESENLIOĞLU, Turkish *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, stressed that her country had always respected the Rule of Law when taking measures against the coup attack and against terrorists that were acting against democracy.

Ms Valeria CARDINALI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, referred to the recent earthquakes in Italy, and while expressing gratitude for the support received, she asked for solidarity and flexibility in applying the rules of the Stability and Growth pact.

In his reply to the questions raised, Mr FICO underlined the importance of the Bratislava Summit, which delivered a roadmap with priorities that needed a follow-up. On the Brexit issue, it was agreed that a new model was needed for the relation between the EU and the UK, with Norway and Switzerland serving as examples. He stressed that there should be no cherry picking politics; the four basic freedoms should not be subject to negotiation.

Mr FICO pointed out that the EU had focussed too much on its own problems and much work was needed in order to achieve the results of the EU2020 strategy. Keeping promises to EU citizens was key when tackling issues like migration. He concluded that the US elections showed that the world differed from how the media pictured it; it was necessary to proceed in a different way. He stressed that solutions in the EU could not be found in picking individual topics like unemployment hoping it would solve everything. National Parliaments played a key role, and closer cooperation between legislative and executive forces was crucial.

In addition to the answers given by Mr FICO, Mr Ivan KORČOK, Plenipotentiary of the Government for the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the EU, replacing Mr FICO who had to attend other urgent obligations, focussed on sustainable migration and asylum policy. As migration

was not new, the real problem was the total loss of border control. The Slovak Presidency relied on three main principles in finding a solution: first, on having functioning control of the EU's external borders; second, on tackling the root causes of migration; and third on using solidarity in an effective way.

He confirmed that a dialogue between the EU and Turkey was needed more than ever before, not only on the EU-Turkey agreement, but also on, for example, topics such as the rule of law and media. Furthermore, he stated that the USA was the EU's closest ally when it came to external issues, and it was necessary for the EU to formulate their interests.

Mr KORČOK concluded by stressing that more than ever there was a need for stronger engagement of Parliaments and for communication with the public.

3. Session 2 - 'Strengthening the role of national parliaments in the EU'

Keynote speaker: Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President, European Commission

Panellists: Ms Ana BIRCHALL, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union, German *Bundestag*

Moderator: Mr Martin KLUS, Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*

After a short introduction by the Chair, Mr TIMMERMANS started with remarks on the situation the EU was facing. He pointed out that the whole world was changing and the EU needed to adapt to these changes. There would be many challenges, including different jobs requiring different skills in the future, he added. Together with these challenges there was a shift in the expectations of EU citizens to which the EU would need to react. National Parliaments, as home to some of the closest elected representatives, should be involved in this process.

Mr TIMMERMANS stressed that the European Commission within its current mandate had been very serious about listening to and visiting national Parliaments over its term. He continued with an example of the latest "yellow card" on the posting of workers, whereby, according to the Vice-president, the European Commission prepared an extensive response tackling the concerns of the national Parliaments, and not merely those concerning subsidiarity, but also with regard to political issues.

When addressing the involvement of Parliaments in the legislative dialogue, he specifically mentioned key tools of a better law making process - external stakeholder input, early stage involvement and REFIT platform of the European Commission. It would be sometimes better to look back and review the existing legislation, which was sometimes forgotten in the process, added the Commissioner. Mr TIMMERMANS tackled the issue of clear responsibility, which would help to communicate the legislative acts to citizens better. The relation between the rule of law, democracy and human rights was key to the functioning of the EU, he stressed. The true essence of democracy was respect for minorities and diversity.

The moderator, Mr Martin KLUS, Vice-chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Slovak *Národná rada*, introduced the panellists and raised a few questions regarding the provisions of the so-called "red card" mechanism, which were part of the void EU - UK deal, the better inclusion of national Parliaments' perspective by the EU institutions and on whether the national Parliaments should follow the Brexit negotiation process in an institutionalised and joint way.

The first panellist, Ms Anna BIRCHALL, Vice-chair of the Committee on European Affairs, of the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, did not see any reason for using the “red card” mechanism, which, according to her, would not make any difference to the role of national Parliaments. It was the attitude which needed to change, taking into consideration the concerns of national Parliaments by visiting and explaining the positions, she added. Ms BIRCHALL expressed her support to the European Commission in its effort and stated that no treaty change was required. She remarked that the actual rejection of the currently triggered “yellow card” on the posted workers directive could result in overall scepticism towards these established procedures.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the German *Bundestag*, as the second panellist, pointed to the differences in working procedures of the national Parliaments, specifying that some had entire departments involved in the EU issues, including an office in Brussels, while some had barely some personnel involved. He raised the question whether the COSAC platform was used to its full potential and suggested that the Presidency should have flexibility on introducing current issues in the programme of the meeting. Mr KRICHBAUM voiced his criticism aimed at delegates reading their written statements, supporting that COSAC should remain a free forum of debate. Developing on working methods, he mentioned that the German *Bundestag* had direct influence on the federal government in relation to EU issues. In relation to questions raised by the moderator, he said that the national Parliaments needed to cooperate more with the European Parliament, mentioning the current case of establishing the scrutiny procedure for EUROPOL. Mr KRICHBAUM mentioned that the national Parliaments were not only intermediaries, but also the guarantors of democratic legitimacy.

Thirty-seven participants intervened in the debate.

Many speakers concentrated on the issue of increasing trust in the EU following the UK referendum. Solidarity was the key to the current challenges, according to Ms Regina BASTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, and there was a need for the EU to act as a leader to recover the trust. Higher transparency in financial area was required, Ms BASTOS added. Mr Gerard GRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, called for a deal with the UK without disturbing the relations and the treaties, as an acceptable solution for all involved. This was supported by Lord Timothy BOSWELL, UK *House of Lords*. Mr GRAUGHWELL urged politicians to be good Europeans in order to fight against populism.

During the Bratislava Parliamentary Summit the loss of confidence was identified, remarked Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, remarked that the loss of confidence was identified during the Bratislava Parliamentary Summit, adding that more signals might be heard in the future, and that it was therefore necessary to draw lessons from Brexit. Unpredictability of the electorate in recent period was identified as a phenomenon by Mr Kamal Izidor SHAKER, Slovenian *Državni Zbor*. The trust in the EU within the post Brexit context was raised as important for Mr Georgios KAROULLAS, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*. In order to bridge the democratic gap, national Parliaments needed to cooperate and work for EU citizens, starting from the beginning of the legislative process, Mr Konstantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, noted.

According to Sir William CASH, UK *House of Commons*, the increase in trust would be needed to overcome the democratic crisis. Mr Jokin BILDARRATZ, Spanish *Senado*, thought that focussing on the interests of citizens rather than those of states, as well as listening to citizens were both required for the EU’s transformation. The citizens would like to see their expectations reflected into actions, said Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, and was supported by Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*. Mr Jaak MADISON, Estonian *Riigikogu*, when referring to

the functioning of the EU, pointed out that in the EU it was only certain political parties and certain countries who were dominating EU politics and that the needs of British people were not reflected. Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, European Parliament, stressed that the desire to build a greater responsibility was present and that the national Parliaments were closer to EU citizens, which could help promote the European issues and make them aware of the importance of EU elections too.

Centralised decision-making process' efforts after the Lisbon Treaty were one of the responsible factors for the current situation, said Mr Tibor BANA, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*. Mr Peter LUYKX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, noted that minorities should be shown respect, but that these in turn had to respect the results of election results, while referring to the EU as a puzzle of identities. The EU would need to be made legitimate to its citizens in order to guarantee its future, expressed Ms Anneta KAVVADIA, *Greek Vouli ton Ellinon*.

A recurring topic was the “yellow card”, the proposed “green card” and a possible “red card”. Some speakers stated that there was no need for another (red) card instrument (Mr BENEŠÍK, Mr KOURAKIS), as it would make the process more complicated (Mr Philippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Sénat*), with one speaker referring to it as a “drama piece” (Mr Miguel TIAGO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*). They would rather see the “green card” explored (Mr KAROULLAS and Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*) as a tool of cooperation between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament (Ms MÉLOT) to boost the EU policies (Mr KOURAKIS); the example of food waste legislation was used as a reference (Ms AUROI).

The disappointment with the most recent “yellow card” was voiced by Mr Jarosław OBREMSKI, Polish *Senat*, and Ms Izabela KLOC, Polish *Sejm*, who mentioned the defence of workers' rights of only eleven countries in the revision. Empathy in this case was required, said Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká Sněmovna*; he appreciated the attitude of the European Commission, though the answers to the “yellow card”, according to him, were vague.

As to the COSAC meetings and the cooperation among Parliaments, according to Ms Åsa ROMSON, Swedish *Riksdag*), Mr Anne MULDER, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, and Mr MADISON, the cooperation between the national Parliaments could be further improved. Ms ČIGĀNE thought that reviewing practices in COSAC and introducing debates on hot topics, as well as listening to colleagues' opinions could help in this improvement. Tackling the frequency of COSAC meetings, Mr Yves POZZO DI BORGO, French *Sénat*, said that this platform deserved more frequent meetings given the importance of national Parliaments' voice. The lack of sharing best practices and differences in opinions among Parliaments and governments should be tackled when aiming at intensifying the dialogue with Parliaments, said Ms KARAMANLI.

According to Mr Giovanni MAURO, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, the European Commission should allow more room for national Parliaments when dealing with the migration issue. Extending the deadline from eight weeks to 10 weeks when reacting to the legislative proposals and sending these back to national Parliaments was suggested by Mr Stefan SCHENNACH, Austrian *Bundesrat*, who together with Mr SUTOUR voiced their concerns in relation to the delegated acts and trilogues. These, according to Mr SUTOUR, should be subject to scrutiny by national Parliaments and thus provide more transparency.

Mr MULDER suggested organising so-called Brussels days for national parliamentarians by the European Commission, which would enhance the dialogue. The need for more meetings of national Parliaments was supported by Mr SHAKER.

Domestic arrangements regarding the work of the committees of European Affairs and scrutiny mechanisms had the potential to improve the role of national Parliaments according to Ms ČIGĀNE. This was echoed by Ms Anne-Mari VIROLAINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, giving Finland's example, where the government after the Council meetings referred back to all stakeholders involved; that could be arranged nationally, she added. Mr PRETZELL added that national Parliaments should demand their right for information. Mr GRANT invited the parliamentarians to control their ministers better.

Mr Dorin Silviu PETREA, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, remarked that a new communication strategy for the EU was needed, including frank speech, admitting past mistakes; he stressed that the national Parliaments were those to lead this initiative to tackle arguments of populists. The rule of law and democracy were listed as important elements in overcoming the current situation, said Mr Johannes HÜBNER, Austrian *Nationalrat*; no cherry picking should be possible, he added in the context of the UK and Swiss referenda.

In response to the remarks and questions, Vice-president TIMMERMANS expressed the view that the institutions needed to be re-calibrated. Often, he said, it was not easy to find a balance in between; some Parliaments expressed support, and others were against specific legislative initiatives, while the governments within the Council were mostly supportive. Commissioner THYSSEN's visit to national Parliaments, he said, aimed at responding to the concerns. In relation to the "red card", the Commissioner expressed that this would lead to the end of the community method and the qualified majority and would make the process fully inter-governmental, which would eventually result in loss of national Parliaments' influence. He called for mutual understanding. The Vice-president informed that he would push for more visits of commissioners in national Parliaments over the next year to address specific topics. Despite the loss of trust, citizens' support for policies was evident, and that should be the starting point for moving on with the debate.

Better communication between the European Commission and national Parliaments was needed, expressed Ms BIRCHALL in following up on questions from the audience, making a special reference to the "yellow card". She underlined the existence of a task for parliamentarians and Parliaments to regain trust from EU citizens and the new communication strategy could help to perform such task. Following up on the second round of questions and remarks from the audience, Ms BIRCHALL expressed her full support for the so-called Brussels day(s) for national parliamentarians and for more COSAC meetings. Referring to the "yellow card" procedure, she reflected that it would be better to suspend the legislative procedure while having a dialogue with national Parliaments, since the current situation might result into feeling that the voices were not being heard. She suggested that the proposals for discussions be collected and sent to the Maltese Presidency in order to have a rich debate on the topics in question.

Mr KRICHBAUM stressed that there was a need to understand national Parliaments' members, since they did not have the leverage over the European Commission that the European Parliament had. According to him, the loss of trust and confidence resulted from a perception of globalisation's impact; it would be up to the national Parliaments to make sure the globalisation would not be at the expense of citizens. To prove this, the principles of social Europe should be implemented in trade treaties, he added. In addition, Mr KRICHBAUM reflected on the need for strong commitment of politicians taking inspiration from the situation after the WWII. He added that tackling terrorism and improving security required a unified approach that would be better than a weakening one-by-one approach, which might be a preferred option by Moscow.

4. Session 3 - ‘The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP): a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States (and its challenges, opportunities and risks)’

Keynote speakers: Ms Susan GEORGE, political and social scientist, activist and writer on global social justice; President of the Transnational Institute, Mr Hiddo HOUBEN, EU Deputy Chief Negotiator of TTIP; Director, DG Trade of the European Commission

Panellists: Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, Ms Güler TURAN, Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs, Member of the Belgian *Sénat* and Flemish Parliament

Moderator: Ms Brigita SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe; former Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic

Mr Hiddo HOUBEN, EU Deputy Chief Negotiator of TTIP, Director at DG Trade of the European Commission, recalled that negotiations were launched in 2013 on the basis of a unanimous and public mandate from the EU Member States. In addition, this mandate was followed by two resolutions of the European Parliament. He recalled the fact that trade was one of the funding policies of the Union and insisted on the fact that for both negotiating parties the goal was to establish the highest standard agreement. Mr HOUBEN also pointed out that, compared to earlier similar agreements, the normative aspect in TTIP was a new element. Concerning the regulatory cooperation, he declared that the aim of the European Commission was to increase the standard of protection between the two economies. He admitted that differences would remain in a few areas like food standards, chemicals etc. On the current state of play, Mr HOUBEN reminded that, although more than half of the technical work had been done and although it was possible to reach an overall stable and conclusive document before the end of the Obama administration, the difficult part was about to start. Pointing out that trade policy ought to become a genuine EU policy, developed by all actors of the EU, he expressed the wish of the European Commission to facilitate a transparent debate based on facts. Closing his initial remarks, Mr HOUBEN reminded the audience of the coming adjudication of the EU Court of Justice about the scope of trade policy and about the competences of the EU, and stressed the fact that the entire exercise of the TTIP negotiations had been conducted under the oversight of the Council and the European Parliament. Nevertheless, he admitted that the role of trade had changed and that it was fair to accept that the national Parliaments played a role in the definition of these kinds of treaties. Furthermore, he recognised a change of perspective on trade, whereby in the 20th century trade policy was about protection of producers, while in the 21st century the accent was more on protecting consumers. Mr HOUBEN concluded by saying that the case for openness of economy and free trade, that had helped reduce inequalities between countries, had to be won again by better mastering globalisation.

The second keynote speaker, Ms GEORGE, presented what she called a brief ‘Decalogue of reasons’ to oppose the ongoing TTIP negotiations, while stressing that the reason behind it was not opposition to the concept of free trade. She named as first reason secrecy stating that the EU had begun negotiating with a mandate whose authors were unknown and stressed that most information came from leaks. She then referred to the enormous presence of transnational corporations in the negotiating process: 93 % of meetings involved them. Ms GEORGE continued that the EU study, supposedly backing the negotiations, was flawed quoting economist Jeronim Capaldo of TUFTS University who, using a different economic model, concluded that the agreement would lead to the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, considerable loss of labour income and of financial stability.

Enumerating other reasons, Ms GEORGE declared that trade was not the core of the agreement, as it was essentially about investments. While she declared that she was generally in favour of

abolishing trade tariffs, she stood in favour of high tariffs in the field of agriculture to protect the EU farmers from the power of the American agriculture scale. She also mentioned the issue of geographical indication as a tossing point, claiming that only 13% of the EU geographical indications were recognised by the US. She justified her opposition, mentioning also the Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system according to which corporates could sue States if the corporation could claim that its interests expectations, present or future, were not respected or jeopardised by State decisions or action. According to her, the International Court System adopted in the recent CETA agreement with Canada was the same and did not represent an improvement. She subsequently declared that, when it came to the regulatory cooperation, the vagueness of the part hinted more to a bill of rights of corporations. She insisted that as far as rights of workers, environment laws, etc. the documents produced thus far contained no binding elements. She stated that taking away from the legislator the capacity to regulate, the capacity to adjudicate from the judiciary was a concrete threat to democracy. Ms GEORGE also indicated that, if the negotiations on TTIP went through, there would be an increase in global warming due to unlimited exploitation of fossil fuels. To conclude, she recalled the self-organised citizen initiative supported by 3.5 million EU citizens from 23 EU Member States opposing TTIP.

The moderator of the debate, Ms Brigita SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe; former Minister of Finance of the Slovak Republic asked the panellists to react to the keynote speeches, in particular on the issue whether it was right to conclude that TTIP negotiations encountered at this stage only technical problems. Also, she asked if, after the outcome of the American Presidential elections, it would be correct to say that TTIP was dead, while for sure the CETA was not.

The first panellist, Ms Danuta Maria HÜBNER, Chair of the EP Committee on Constitutional Affairs, said that, if it was up to the Americans to decide whether to go on negotiating, the decision to pause for a while and reflect would be a mutual decision. She conceded that Trump's declarations were not in favour of trade agreements, but she stressed that he was not the only player. Other players were the business community, the research community, etc. Commenting on the CETA agreement, she said that, although the European Parliament's consent was scheduled in December, the lack of clarity concerning the value of many Member States' additional declarations may mean that the vote would be postponed. She concluded admitting that all institutional players had failed to show to EU citizens that globalisation was made for them. She reminded that the last public debate on trade in general was carried out during the 90s. To her, the current crisis had the positive effect to have made the debate to take place again.

The second panellist, Ms Güler TURAN, Belgian *Sénat*, also declared that her criticism was not due to opposition to free trade, which had actually improved the conditions of hundreds of millions of people, but due to the lack of transparency that reigned in the TTIP negotiations. She expressed the opinion that the corporate-driven globalisation was out of control, therefore causing the crumbling support to trade agreements in Europe. The recent Walloon opposition to CETA was, according to her, motivated by the civil society's concerns. She appealed for a new start for trade agreements in the context of a different kind of global economy with ambitious standards against corporate interests.

Thirty-three Parliamentarians took part in the debate.

In the first round of interventions, participants criticised the TTIP negotiations by mentioning the issue of transparency and the risks linked to the ISDS system (Mr Stefanos STEFANOOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*), the fact that the agreement was just a favour to corporates (Mr BANA),

the unreliable numbers that supported the negotiations and the unwillingness of the European Commission to accept that things had changed (Ms AUROI), and the undemocratic nature of the agreement (Ms Anneta KAVADDIA, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*).

Among those who clearly supported the free trade negotiations with the US, many saw the agreement as a strategic step for the EU member States. Some insisted on the necessary balance that the ambitious project must seek, in order to insure a high level of regulatory cooperation, coherence with other EU policies in terms of geographical indications and food standards (Ms Maria de la Concepción DE SANTA ANA, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*). Others stressed the need to show the benefits that the agreement negotiated in transparency would bring to the EU citizens, which was an important task also for the national Parliaments (Ms BIRCHALL). Mr Mats LUDSTRUM, Finnish *Eduskunta*, regretted the loss of pace in the negotiations and stressed that the lesson of the CETA debacle should not be wasted. He insisted that public concern had to be taken into consideration. He underlined the risk that negotiations could be blocked with a view to increasing their bargaining power. Mr Svein Roald HANSEN, Norwegian *Stortinget*, stressed that TTIP would have an impact on the single market and that it was imperative to ensure that no barriers would result between the EU and the EFTA countries. Ms KARAMANLI stressed that it was necessary to ensure that the increase in trade between the EU and US would not lead to decrease of trade among EU Member States. She also put accent on the need to reinforce safeguards on EU standards. Ms Colette MÉLOT, French *Sénat*, underlined the fact that by signing such an agreement the EU and the US would recognise that they were on equal foot. She underlined also the role of national Parliaments in the adoption of the agreement. She insisted that the agreement should not be used to grant extraterritoriality to the US legislation. Mr Börje VESTLUND, Swedish *Riksdag*, fully supported fair trade relations, because they were in line with democratic principles. He stressed that, due to the negotiations, there was an improvement in transparency, standards and other key objectives of the EU citizens. He stated that the dispute settlement scheme had still to be developed in order to reassure the EU's concerns.

Mr Bastiaan VAN APELDOORN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, recognised that the TTIP was a controversial subject. He asked whether Ms GEORGE's Decalogue applied also to CETA and wondered if the TTIP would be defined as a mixed agreement. The need to grant full transparency was voiced also by Mr Maximos CHARAKOPOULOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*. Mr Dominik TARCZINSKY, Polish *Sejm*, wondered what the EU would do in case the USA did not change its stance on the issue of public procurement. He blamed the lack of transparency entirely on the Commission.

Reacting to the first round of interventions, Mr HOUBEN highlighted that, although President Trump had made a number of protectionist statements, he never mentioned TTIP. He further stressed that the EU would be reviewing its position according to the official US statement when it came. According to him, national Parliaments were free to give their respective governments whatever indication concerning the mandate of negotiations and that would have an influence in the process itself. He replied to critical remarks made, among others, on transparency, communicating with citizens, secret negotiations, lowering standards of protection mentioning the publicity of the mandate, the oversight of both the Council and the EP, the publicity of the EC position at every stage of the negotiations, and the reading rooms. Commenting on aspects of trade on agriculture, he stressed that the EU had a net surplus in trade with US. As far as the geographical indications were concerned, Mr HOUBEN underlined that it was something the EU could obtain through negotiations. He also stressed that only by negotiating with the US, could the EU promote trade of its own products and services. Concluding, he underlined the difference of nature of the International Court System, which represented a clear improvement compared to the ISDN.

Ms HÜBNER first stressed the high degree of protection in terms of the EU standards (labour, food safety, geographic indications, public procurement at all levels, SME) the CETA agreement represented. She went on underlining that the alternative to the EU-US TTIP agreement would be a number of bilateral agreements. As far as the transparency of the negotiations, she recalled that the Chief Negotiator was auditioned by the EP Committee on International Trade before and after each round and all documents were made public. In her opinion, the ICS was an achievement, as well as a result of some Member States and of the EP.

Ms TURAN made a short recollection of the recent CETA events referring also to the provisional entry into force of some parts of the agreement with Canada. She continued stressing that people opposing TTIP were not supporting trade barriers, but were fighting against the democratic deficit of the process. She voiced the fear that within TTIP as it looked like at that moment, some procedures would make the voice of Parliaments irrelevant. She nevertheless acknowledged that transparency had somewhat improved.

Ms GEORGE warned against believing in a bucolic picture of Canada. She claimed that US corporates were ruling Canada's economy and could use CETA to sue the EU governments. Elaborating about the principle of mutual recognition, she declared that this implied the end of the precaution principle. She again referred to different economic models according to which the agreement would provoke a contraction of wages. Her opinion was that the EU citizens ought to pay special attention to their services which, unless listed specifically, would risk being privatised. Concluding on the publicity of the mandate, she insisted that it had been leaked and that the name of the authors were not known.

In the second round of interventions, support for the ongoing negotiations was expressed by Mr SHAKER, who informed COSAC that the TTIP was object of many debates in his country, and who stated that the outcome showed the need for the EU to press for the highest transparency possible. His opinion was that this objective had been reached. Similar support was voiced by Mr PALLING. Mr Dorin-Mircea DOBRA, Romanian *Senat*, stressed that for the EU, the transatlantic relations were the most important ones and that they must be consolidated. He underlined the fact that in the coming years the EU had the opportunity to play a leading role at the global level in such negotiations. Mr Jukka KOPRA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, expressed full support to the EU negotiators. He stressed that the citizens had to be taken into account and that the institutions should explain the negotiations to them. Ms Antonia COSTA SILVA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, stated that for Portugal the agreement was a priority, but should be discussed at length to avoid negative impact. She concluded indicating the need to ensure a coherent fight against tax heavens. Ms Kate GREEN, UK *House of Commons*, stressed that the EU had the opportunity, through the negotiations, to improve the protection of social standards. For Mr GRANT, the TTIP was the biggest ever test for the EU institutions. Mr Richard KOLS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, reminded everyone that some 30 Trade agreements had been negotiated and concluded by the EU in the same format, including with countries like Vietnam, and none had raised opposition. He insisted that a mandate had been given unanimously by the governments of the Member States to the Commission and that the Commission was working within the framework traced by the treaties. Mr KRICHBAUM recalled that free trade agreements always brought benefits to the EU. For him, it was in the EU's paramount interest to achieve the end of negotiations; he denounced such a harsh debate at this point as a sign of growing anti-Americanism. Mr Hannes WEININGER, Austrian *Nationalrat*, blamed the lack of honesty and courage of the politicians when answering to the citizens.

On the opposite side, Mr Franc TRČEK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, expressed the view of the minority of his Parliament mentioning the democratic deficit of TTIP. He also stressed that many local administrations opposed these agreements. Ms Oudekki LOONE, Estonian *Riigikogu*, expressed her gratitude to Ms GEORGE and invited everyone to refrain from optimistic messages. For her, the TTIP was about making life easier for multinationals. Mr KOURAKIS stressed how every day social unrest was growing. He affirmed that for SMEs the benefits of the agreement would be minimal, while there would no longer be any obstacle for the growth of multinationals. He stated that under the proposed framework they would no longer be accountable.

Ms Idoia VILLANUEVA, Spanish *Senado*, pointed to clear signs of the growing distrust in the EU project amidst the trouble experienced by the transatlantic trade agreements. Mr Marc ANGEL, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, considered the TTIP a process facing a slow death. Mr PRETZELL expressed his adhesion to the views of Ms GEORGE and thanked her for her work. Mr Igor PIMENOV, Latvian *Saeima*, wondered if the TTIP could really contribute to the competitiveness of SMEs, and if it could have beneficial influence for EU Member States. A final critique came from Mr Gerard CRAUGHWELL, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, who condemned the process of negotiations initiated by faceless people. He indicated that the EU agriculture could be destroyed because of the agreement. He also stressed the limitations of access to the reading rooms.

In the final response to all interventions, Ms TURAN stressed that norms that were under discussion had immediate implications for the lives of all. She acknowledged that trade agreements were very important, especially those with US and Canada and underlined that the EU had to seize the opportunity to strengthen its values. Although recognising the US as very important partners, she recalled the equal importance of other partners and other international norms like the ones of ILO. Finally, Ms TURAN agreed that the European Commission had a mandate, but insisted on Parliaments' duty to always take a good look at the content of negotiations. Balanced trade agreements were the objective of the Union, according to her.

Ms HÜBNER recalled the procedure that had led to the mandate. She recalled that all EU actors were involved and reminded the national Parliaments of their obligation to scrutinise their governments when the mandate was being defined. She praised the ICS which would be composed by judges appointed by the parties and she rejected the idea that the right to regulate was under threat.

Mr HOUBEN expressed his appreciation for the rich and deep debate. He stressed that it was important to define together how relations with national Parliaments would be structured in the future as far as trade was concerned. He recalled the looming adjudication of the EU Court of Justice concerning the competences in the field of trade. He recalled the legal framework as indicated by the treaties according to which the main responsibility in terms of scrutiny was the EP.

Finally, Ms GEORGE also expressed her appreciation for the quality of the discussion and the alertness of the national Parliaments.

5. Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC

The Chair informed that all delegations had received a table with the original draft text of the contributions circulated on 31 October 2016, the amendments submitted by delegations before the meeting, a modified compromise text following the Troika's meeting the day before, as well as new amendments submitted by the deadline of 12pm that day. A discussion as to the procedure of

examining the amendments and as to whether each of these should have been discussed and put to a vote followed. In this context, the Chair reiterated the guidance that had already been given by the Presidency according to which only amendments that were resubmitted on the modified compromise text by noon were going to be examined. The guidance was accepted as a compromise by the delegations. Following an animated debate and voting in cases of controversy, an amended text of the draft Contribution of the LVI COSAC was agreed.

As to the letter from Mr CHITI, the Chair reiterated that it would be difficult for any national Parliament to organise such a visit outside the territory of its own country. He proposed that the Italian Parliament organise such a visit, which could be administratively supported by the COSAC Secretariat, clarifying that the latter could provide e-mail contacts. In response, Mr ROMANO acknowledged that it was not feasible to organise such a visit under the Slovak Presidency.

6. Session 4: ‘2016: Energy Union’s “year of delivery” ’

Keynote speaker: Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the European Commission for Energy Union

Panellists: Ms Danielle AUROI, Chair of the European affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Kalle PALLING, Chair of the European Affairs Committee, *Estonian Riigikogu*, Mr António COSTA SILVA, Member of the European Affairs Committee, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*

Moderator: Ms Zuzana GABRIŽOVÁ, Editor-in-chief of Euractiv.sk

Addressing the LVI COSAC, Mr Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ, Vice-President of the EU Commission, hailed the new energy being poured into the partnership with national Parliaments, citing more than 400 visits and meetings with national Chambers. The Energy Union was built on concrete proposals that required implementation at the national level, and this was a process that could be facilitated by national Parliaments.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ welcomed the Paris ratification and agreement, thanks to European efforts in the fight against climate change, adding that European diplomacy had helped make this possible. He noted that the fact that reserved countries like China and the US proceeded with ratification much earlier than expected was also very positive.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ referred to the proposal to lower greenhouse gas emission from non-ETS sectors like transport, and talked about how to reduce low-carbon mobility in Member States, by working closely with cities and mayors who had proved themselves useful allies in this regard. This had resulted in a global covenant of mayors: more than 7,000 high representatives of cities working together.

The Vice-President stressed the importance of energy security, which was why it was the first pillar of the Energy Union. In this regard, he referred to legislation on security of supply; a new strategy for Liquid Gas; efforts towards efficient heating and cooling systems; as well as more transparency in commercial contracts and inter-governmental agreements.

Solidarity was another important aspect, and Mr ŠEFČOVIČ appealed for stronger regional cooperation in times of emergency, with contingency plans in place, and welcomed efforts to come up with ways how the regions could help each other in such situations. This solidarity had to be manifest to ensure a smooth energy transition so that people struck by energy poverty were not forgotten.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ briefly described some of the elements of this “jumbo package”, starting firstly with energy efficiency and new standards by which to measure the energy performance of buildings whereby smart buildings were to be part of this new economic structure and transformation in Europe; smart financing for smart buildings, linked to the European Fund for Strategic Investment, and offered to all those who would like to restructure buildings. Secondly, he mentioned eco-design and eco-buildings, which were bound to lead to huge savings. Thirdly, he referred to the package concerning new electricity market design, with renewables better integrated into the system and a regional and close-border approach adopted, linked with a new directive on renewables and a new role of Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER). This, he said, was the agenda for the end of the year.

On the other hand, 2017 marked the year of implementation: the year in which each government was to work on energy governance and climate plans, and discussions on how they wanted to fit in this energy union and respect the commitments signed up for in Paris. Mr ŠEFČOVIČ summarised the upcoming year as basically the coordination of 27 energy plans.

The moderator, Ms Zuzana GABRIŽOVÁ, Editor-in-chief of Euractiv.sk, welcomed the panellists, and invited them to talk about the most pressing issues in the area of energy and climate in their respective countries.

The first panellist, Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, referred to the COP 22 conference taking place in Marrakech to which she was attending. She said that, while the EU shaped the decision making in Paris, she wanted to see more solidarity and integration at the EU level. Ms AUROI stressed that the EU was the leader in the global fight against climate change, and lauded the added value of joint European steps and the several priorities of the EU energy policy. It was important to ensure an energy system which was more efficient and yet resulted in less pollution; reduce the carbon footprint; integrate the energy market; and to have a transition to alternative and renewable energy sources in a more efficient manner. To this end, Ms AUROI stated that the EU had to increase its investing. Turning her attention to Parliaments of third countries, Ms AUROI was pleased that the Indian delegation had been convinced to sign COP 21.

The following panellist, Mr PALLING said that the EU had to become connected, open and smart for a competitive Europe. This would bring new growth and opportunity to business with a well-functioning energy union. The latter could not do without free market and quality connections, however. Mr PALLING admitted that efficient energy security and use of resources were not easy to achieve, but were the key to success, as were digital solutions and the greater involvement of consumers.

Mr PALLING continued by recalling that Tallin was taking over the Presidency from Malta, and it intended to put focus on energy issues, including an integrated energy market, investments and energy interconnections to eliminate energy islands and ensure supply. Mr PALLING called for a wider choice for consumers by opening energy markets, as was the case in Estonia, which also provided cheaper energy solutions when compared to other Member States. Referring to efforts toward establishing an interconnected market in Estonia, Mr PALLING said that Estonia had achieved a lot for the benefit of the country, but also for the region and the EU as a whole, citing cables between Finland and Estonia, the Baltic connector, and a similar connection with Latvia as examples. Mr PALLING stressed that an interconnected energy market should be on everybody’s agenda.

The final panellist, Mr António COSTA SILVA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, said that talking about energy meant talking also about social justice and peace in Europe, and that energy was a crucial precondition for peace, the importance of which was often forgotten. Mr COSTA SILVA said the energy union was important for security and economic growth, and helped in the fight against climate change, providing important coordination and balancing out the energy market, and making Europe stronger and more independent, while also increasing its influence in the fight against fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy sources.

Mr COSTA SILVA said Portugal had achieved a lot in this regard, increasing the share of renewables to 20% in 2015. Nevertheless, the overall objective was much higher and more ambitious. The country was now trying to make use of solar and hydro energy. Portugal also increased its export of energy from 3 to 7%, mainly to Spain. Mr COSTA SILVA said it was important to improve connections with Spain and improve the energy grid, noting however that the surplus energy not exported to other markets meant high storage costs for the country. Mr COSTA SILVA said that interconnectivity was highly important since only 10% of produced energy was being transported over the border, and in the case of Portugal this could only be done with Spain. It was crucial to become less dependent on Russia, mainly in terms of natural gas, but there were no specific deadlines for improving the interconnections on the peninsula.

In the ensuing debate, 24 speakers took the floor.

The importance of energy interconnectivity was stressed throughout the debate by a number of Members, while energy security, and the need to ensure a guaranteed, cheap, safe and secure energy supply, was also a recurrent issue mentioned by several speakers, including Mr Bojan KEKEC, Slovenian *Državni svet*; Mr Rainer ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*; Mr Christian PETRY, German *Bundestag*; and Ms BIRCHALL. The latter also called for a decrease in dependence on unstable and unpredictable third countries.

In this regard, Mr Angelos VOTSIS, Cypriot *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, suggested tapping the potential of natural gas resources inside the EU, and both he and Mr CHARAKOPOULOS welcomed the possibility of Cyprus becoming a regional energy hub. Mr VOTSIS additionally referred to violations of Cyprus' exclusive economic zone and to harassment of hydrocarbon prospection by Turkey and invited the EU to intervene in order to prevent a violation of international law and unnecessary tension in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Gazprom was also brought up during the debate by Mr MADISON, who called for sanctions against the company, and Mr Michal STASINSKI, Polish *Sejm*, who called it a political tool in the hands of Russian leadership to leverage Russian policy interests in the EU.

Mr STASINSKI, along with Mr Domagoj Ivan MILOŠEVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, highlighted the importance of investing in and taking full advantage of energy storage.

A number of Members talked about efforts towards a cleaner economy. Ms KLOC said decarbonisation should not be left as an ideological project on the margins, and Mr SCHENNACH said energy efficiency had to be given greater importance, given its immense impact on the economy, and went on to highlight the importance of e-mobility. The need for renewable sources was referred to by some speakers, with Mr SCHENNACH and Mr MILOŠEVIĆ identifying solar energy and hydro energy, respectively. Finally, Ms Asa ROMSON, Swedish *Riksdag*, said Sweden wanted to see more bio-economy in the energy union, while also noting the importance of smart grids.

Mr Piotr APEL, Polish *Sejm*, contributed to this subject from another point of view, urging the EU and its Member States to sign international agreements which proposed greener measures on the global scale, and thus ensure that trading partners adopt similar measures.

A couple of speakers, including Mr Zoltán TESSELY, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, referred to the special needs and characteristics of different countries, in particular those on the periphery. In this vein, Mr Arto PIRTTILAHTI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, and Mr Piotr WACH, Polish *Senat*, both asked for recognition of forestry in counterbalancing emissions. Some Polish Members (Ms KLOC, Mr WACH, and Mr APEL) stressed Poland's dependence on the coal industry and the jobs that it created.

Social issues and questions of fairness and energy justice were also touched upon by some Members, with Mr KOURAKIS, and Mr António CARDOSO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, both calling for solidarity, whereas Mr Franc TRČEK, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, explicitly referred to the fight against energy poverty and price dumping.

With regard to countries outside the Union, Ms TAŞKESENLIOĞLU said Turkey had great potential thanks to its geopolitical advantage and played an important role in the transportation of energy throughout the region, whereas Mr Dominik TARCZYNSKI, Polish *Sejm*, accused Germany, which, he stressed, bought energy from Russia, of setting unacceptable policies in the field of energy.

In her replies, Ms AUROI referred to energy injustices and said that subsidies to assist in building insulation and transition were in place in France and were important to ease the transition. She asked the Commission whether any measures against price dumping were in place.

Ms AUROI said that certain Member States wanted to have direct negotiations with Russia and wanted even more Russian natural gas to come to Europe: a more integrated market would enable the EU to answer the demand in a joint and united voice.

Ms AUROI asked the Commission how much money was needed to invest in energy union, and how much would be saved thanks to smart buildings.

As for renewable energy sources, she was concerned because some sources were preferred over others, and sometimes this applied pressure on certain sources. Ms AUROI also referred to the need to cooperate on carbon economy in order to come up with an attractive price of carbon in order to support fulfilment of targets.

Mr COSTA SILVA said it was clear that Europe spoke with a multitude of voices and this was a good sign as it showed a diversification of points of views. He added that one could not adapt everything to everyone though, and common ground had to be found. In this regard, it was necessary to adopt a long list of measures guaranteeing energy efficiency throughout the EU.

Mr COSTA SILVA warned against a one-size-fits-all solution, proposing instead measures which fit different regions with their specific characteristics.

Mr PALLING said that investments in interconnections should be taken care of by the EU and then this would invite private investment. He stressed that when all the states were connected together, the gas and energy market would become wider, and this meant economies of scale and cheaper

prices. He expressed disbelief at how the EU was not putting a penalty on Gazprom after certain things (like closing supply) and going against rules and procedures. He claimed that Russia and Gazprom were using energy as a weapon and this had to be punished. He described Nord Stream 2 as a project to cut out some countries, and insisted that the EU should not let that happen.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said France was serving as a good example and inspiration when it came to transition to renewable sources. The EU needed to have appropriate interconnections - an internal energy market to allow energy to flow freely through Member States, and thanked Estonia and Baltic States for their cooperative efforts. He said it was important that we were creating a market between Nordic and Baltic countries which could serve as a model for the rest of Europe.

Referring to Mr COSTA SILVA's comments on energy poverty, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ admitted it was of the utmost importance to find a proper balance through energy efficiency and energy design whereby consumer could be empowered, but added that the onus mostly lay on the national authorities. These also had to prepare a new generation with new skills with which to enter this new energy market.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ also referred to the Commission's efforts to ensure that Caspian gas was in Europe before 2020, and promised more innovative carbon capture storage methods. As for energy efficiency, he claimed that a 1% gain in energy efficiency translated into 2.6% less imported gas.

Turning his attention to Chinese competition and Chinese dumping, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ stressed that Europe needed to be better equipped for this new world: trade defence instruments allowing the EU to act much faster had been on the table for three years, and this process had to be sped up.

On Gazprom, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said the EU was investigating it for some time, but admitted that it was not an easy matter. Nevertheless, he identified three areas under investigation.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ agreed that Nord Stream 2 was an extremely polarising project, but it was difficult to comment without all parameters and details available. He stressed that preserving the transit route through Ukraine remained a top priority. Nonetheless, he stressed that such project, once proposed, would have to respect all EU laws and core principles.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ hailed the newly found wealth in gas reserves in Cyprus, which could serve as a fuel to a smoother energy transition. Referring to Finland, Sweden, he said bio-mass was important for Nordic countries, and looked forward for ways to use bio-mass in a sustainable way, in particular by working with the UN for a more scientifically based assessment, especially when it came to how to calculate the impact of forests in fighting climate change.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ was not as pleased with the energy cost being 3-4 times higher than the US, and blamed the system of low wholesale prices but high consumer prices, adding that part of the debate on energy transition should be about how to tackle this problem.

Mr ŠEFČOVIČ touched briefly on the reform of the ETS system and the preparation of the car industry for E-mobility amidst strong calls coming from the Netherlands and Germany in favour of electric modes of transportation.

Turning to the US elections, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said it was important to find a solution to climate change on a global level, and was optimistic because even big businesses supported this fight.

Concluding, Mr ŠEFČOVIČ said the energy union was really about the new economy and how to create the new backbone for the economy of the 21st century. He was looking forward to visit national Parliaments and go through the energy policy with Members of Parliament.

7. Session V: ‘Securing the external borders of the EU in the context of irregular migration’

Keynote speakers: Mr Robert KALIŇÁK, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the Slovak Republic

Panellists: Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Lucio ROMANO, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs Policies, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*

Moderator: Ms Katarína CSÉFALVAYOVÁ, Vice-Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Slovak *Národná rada*

Opening his speech, Mr Robert KALIŇÁK, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of the Slovak Republic, made reference to the period when Slovakia together with other countries were joining the Schengen zone. For the successful external border protection, according to the Deputy Prime Minister, it was important to defend internal security within the Schengen area and to actively prevent illegal migration. To achieve this, Mr KALIŇÁK identified two key elements. The first one concerned technical considerations and human resources. The second one had to do with high quality readmission agreements and here Mr KALIŇÁK stressed the need to cultivate sound relations with third countries, referring to the re-admission agreement with Ukraine as an example of such agreement, which worked perfectly.

A successful return policy could work as the main tool when fighting illegal migration and serve as a demotivation for illegal migrants, he continued, explaining that those who were not subject to persecution would think twice before travelling if they knew that a good return policy was in place and that they would be returned back to their country.

Mr KALIŇÁK also emphasised the need to have a top quality asylum policy, and recalled cases when a change in political stance in a third country led to automatic asylum status to certain people in that country, which then caused additional linked problems as they later came in great numbers to the European countries.

Mr KALIŇÁK questioned the current practice, which seemed to favour those who could afford the trip to Europe leaving the most vulnerable behind. Furthermore, this did not augur well for the recovery of countries like Syria in the longer term. Finally, he also stressed the need to distinguish between migrants and pinpoint real asylum seekers.

Finally, with regard to the integration process and past mistakes made, Mr KALIŇÁK said that this was far from perfect in some European cities, which were indiscriminately facing large number of migrants.

The moderator, Ms Katarína CSÉFALVAYOVÁ, introduced the panels and asked for their comments on the keynote speech delivered by Mr KALIŇÁK, in particular referring to European cooperation in this field, and future steps to be taken.

Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, said that Brexit and migration were the two main challenges currently faced by the EU. These would challenge the stability of the whole union if no common priorities were set, as

countries still had to cope with the unprecedented pressure. Mr HÖRCSIK said that Member States with large sections of land or sea borders should be given special status and have their specific needs considered. He welcomed the protection of the Bulgarian border with Turkey, but noted that a common framework about interoperation of migration should have been created. Furthermore, it should have been clarified whether the Union was dealing with a temporary phenomenon or a permanent one which would last for decades. Mr HÖRCSIK further noted that Hungary had spent 60 million euros in the last one and a half year on border control. He stated that the protection of the common external border should be regarded as a matter of common concern, and that Hungary considered the protection of its external border as a symbol of and exercise in solidarity.

The following panellist, Mr Lucio ROMANO, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs Policies of the Italian *Senato*, said the Union and its Member States needed to focus not only on external borders as this was insufficient, but also on international diplomatic access to countries of origin on the level of development and financial aid in order to secure economic and social comfort for the people and encourage them to stay in their own countries. According to Mr ROMANO, it was about limiting the inflow in order to guarantee democratic principles being safeguarded in the countries of origin. He invited colleagues to visit the refugee camps and witness first-hand the desperate situation, while also stressing that the issue of unaccompanied minors represented a serious challenge in its own right.

Mr ROMANO asserted that the UN needed to be more involved; and that it must work closely with the interim government in Libya, and ensure more discussions with international partners. He added that migration flows must be controlled at the start of the journey, and that solidarity from other EU countries was needed. Mr ROMANO stressed the fact that migrants invested not just money, but also hope in EU, and it was therefore imperative to interact and put in place a major level of integration. Finally, Mr ROMANO pointed out that migration was also a huge burden on the budget of the hosting country.

The ensuing debate saw 32 speakers taking the floor.

A predominant and recurring point continuously emphasised by most speakers was the management of borders, and in this regard a number of suggestions were proposed. Ms MÉLOT and Mr Tomislav SAUCHA, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, highlighted the importance of securing the external borders of the Union. Ms MÉLOT also suggested increasing the cooperation of enforcement agencies, and, on a similar note, Mr Veli YÜKSEL, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, emphasised the importance of exchange of information, as well as the use of EUROPOL.

While Ms Marietta KARAMANLI, French *Assemblée nationale*, also stressed the significance of proper border management, she also underlined the importance of having an EU-Turkish agreement, whereas Mr Maximos CHARAKOULOPOULOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, said it was critical to put pressure on Turkey so that it respect the agreement with the EU. On the other hand, Ms TAŞKESENLIOĞLU pointed to the unfair share of the burden carried by Turkey, while also alluding to deepened cooperation with the EU and commitments to control the migration flow.

Solidarity and enhanced cooperation was another point that featured heavily during the discussion, with Ms KARAMANLI, Mr SAUCHA and Ms KAVVADIA explicitly expressing their support for solidarity. Mr SAUCHA also appealed for assistance to the countries of origin, in order to tackle the problem at its source. Ms MÉLOT made her case for increased cooperation and joint effort between Member States in tackling the crisis, while also pointing out that the European Parliament should be engaged in the ongoing discussions.

Mr SAUCHA and Ms Dušica STOJKOVIĆ, Serbian *Narodna Skupština*, both emphasised the importance of keeping the Balkan route closed. Mr SAUCHA, together with Ms KAVVADIA, Mr CHARAKOULOPOULOS and Mr Anastasios KOURAKIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, also noted the importance of the coastal guard in protecting external maritime borders. The latter also pointed out the restrictions faced by coastal Member States on maritime borders and law, as well as the humanitarian dimension of the crisis.

Other issues brought up during the debate concerned the costs incurred by Member States afflicted by the migratory pressures and the sales of firearms which exacerbated these pressures (Ms KARAMANLI), the radicalisation in Member States and possible return of radicalised citizens from Syria (Mr YÜKSEL) and the importance of distinguishing between different types of migrants, and especially between refugees fleeing war and persecution and economic migrants (Mr MADISON).

Ms Francisca PERREIRA, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, insisted on the EU dimension of any action aimed at protecting external borders. She stressed that the EU had to give power to the agency and insure the continuity of Schengen. Mr Angelos VOTSIS, Cyprus *Vouli ton antiprosopon*, underlined that one had to disconnect terrorism from migration, because the two phenomena were not necessarily linked. He insisted that more integrated efforts were needed to fight irregular immigration and trafficking, as well as the roots of the phenomena. Saluting the decision on the coast guards, he invoked an immediate implementation of the joint EU-Turkey statement. Mr BANA declared that the EU was under unprecedented migratory pressure and that the EU had to prevent terrorists from abusing the right to protection for asylum seekers. He concluded claiming that Hungary had taken the right decision by building a wall to protect the EU external borders. Mr Svetlen TANCHEV, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, underlined the high pressure that Bulgaria was facing on the EU external borders. He stressed that, though not a member of the Schengen area, Bulgaria had acted as a *de facto* member. He added that his country was actively supporting the entry-exit system.

In his reply, Mr HÖRCSIK underlined that one of the most crucial problems for the EU was protecting the external borders, which implied the question of solidarity and security. According to him, the solution was to be found in a joint effort implicating origin, transit and destination countries. He also appealed for a stronger effort of the EU as far as the external dimensions of the problem. He affirmed that the scarce implementation of Council decisions concerning relocation and resettlement for the benefit of Italy in Greece was a sign of the inadequate nature of the measures.

Mr ROMANO underlined the cultural diversities, disputes and divides that the issue of migration had demonstrated. Nevertheless, he said he was sure that it was possible to find a joint approach. To that end, he insisted that it was necessary to change the methodology in facing the problem. He stated that barriers and fences would have no effect on the phenomena we were facing. He insisted on the need to developing partnership with countries like Senegal or Nigeria as the only way to solve the problem, which was a global problem, at the origin.

Mr KALIŇÁK replied to the first interventions by assuring that he understood how crucial it was to share the burden and expenditures that countries like Italy and Greece were sustaining. He insisted on the need to help each other in an effective way and stressed that the current system of relocation had failed. He expressed the opinion that the EU needed to have a frank discussion to find a functioning model of relocation and it would need to be supported by all Member States. He regretted that on some serious issues a lot of time had been wasted before coming to action, like it

had happened with the PNR. On the other hand, he praised the timely initiative of the EP, Commission and Council on the coast guard. He stressed that serious gaps were still affecting not only communication among intelligences of the Member States, but also communication between intelligence and police of the same states. Concerning the origins of the flows of illegal migration, he condemned the military interventions in the Middle East area. Finally, he stressed the importance of seeing Schengen as a continuity, a compact where no isolation could be tolerated. He concluded that the accession of all Member States was a priority for the security of the EU.

In the second round of interventions, Mr Pol van den DRIESSCHE, Belgian *Sénat*, indicated that the readmission agreements had improved the situation as far as the flows of migrants were concerned. In spite of that, he advocated the need to strengthen the EU control capacity and the need to pursue programmes for the integration of refugees. Ms BIRCHALL stressed the importance of securing the EU external borders and indicated the essential role of FRONTEX. She also underlined the Romania and Bulgaria's role.

Mr Detlef SEIF, German *Bundestag*, put the accent on the global dimension of the migration crisis. He advocated a more efficient use of the EU resources and the need to target countries of origin and tackle the problem at its roots. He insisted that EU funds had to be allocated to support the decisions taken concerning migrants and refugees. Mr Dominik TARCZYNSKI, Polish *Sejm*, spoke of floods and avalanches of migrants submerging the EU and the need to stop the crisis. Mr AZMANI underlined the need to respect one another and to try to understand those countries that had difficulties in accepting migrants. He stressed that it was necessary to avoid increasing nationalism. On the other side, he called for understanding and support towards countries that faced the highest migratory pressures. He indicated that agreements with African countries could be of help. Mr Reiner ROBRA, German *Bundesrat*, recognised that Germany was fully dependent on the neighbouring EU countries as far as security of borders was concerned. He invoked higher level of efficiency in the EU return policy. Mr Francis ZAMMIT DIMECH, Maltese *Kamra-tad-Deputati*, regretted that securing the external borders of the EU was presented as the only aspect of the migration crisis and pointed to many other aspects of the issue, including relocation. He condemned not sharing the burden and the responsibilities entailed. He invoked in this respect a policy reflecting the EU values and an EU without curtains. Ms LOONE denounced the hypocritical approach to an economic phenomenon like migration and pointed to the fact that the origin of the crisis was the corporates interests benefitting from low salaries. Mr Christian PETRY, German *Bundestag*, acknowledged the importance of external borders control and called for adequate funding and personnel. He also accused the countries opposing relocation and resettlement of not making enough efforts to retain the migrants. Mr HÜBNER spoke of a civilisation conflict with some 45 millions of people from Africa trying to come to the EU. He accused the EU of inviting them to come by financing rescue operations and resettlements. Mr BENEŠÍK stressed the need to fight traffickers that made huge amount of money with the migrants. He called on all to do their utmost to keep Schengen alive and unified. Mr PETREA stressed the need to secure the best cooperation in data and information sharing among the EU. He renewed the request for immediate access of Romania to Schengen and called for a stronger support to FRONTEX. Mr GRANT regretted that the Member States had left two (Italy and Greece) to face alone the problem. He also insisted on the efforts made by Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Mr PRETZELL welcomed the change of attitude of the German Government as far as the migration crisis was concerned. Mr Atis LEJIŅŠ, Latvian *Saeima*, regretted that the newly created agency had not been established earlier to prevent the current crisis for fear of losing sovereignty. He stressed the need of readmission agreements with countries not only from Africa.

In his final reply, Mr HÖRCSIK referred to an existing clear strong will to find a common solution for the current crisis. He invited the Commission to take further steps for a secure EU and invited everyone to look for solutions in the countries of origins and in the countries at war.

Mr ROMANO recognised that the positions were different, but welcomed that the EU Member States were debating and at the EU level were building bridges, which was the duty of leaders and of all humanity. He stressed that the solution depended on a bigger show of goodwill from all and a fair share also of the negative consequences of being members of the EU.

Mr KALIŇÁK saluted the importance of the debate. He stressed the need to fight against abuse of the right to access and protection as the crucial way to an effective migration policy. For him, only a successful return policy could ensure that the EU had a functioning asylum policy for those who were really persecuted. He also listed the prevention of criminality, responsibility in the external action and readmission policy, like the one that Spain had enacted, as priorities for the EU in the field.

8. Adoption of the Contribution of the LVI COSAC

Mr BLAHA mentioned that the first draft of the LVI Contribution, which had been sent to the delegations before the meeting, and the amendments submitted to the text were discussed by the Troika. The Presidency, following the Troika meeting, submitted a revised compromise text allowing the possibility to table new amendments. A modified text was presented and approved by the Chairpersons the day before.

The text of the Contribution of the LVI COSAC was adopted, as amended by the Chairpersons.

Mr BLAHA informed the delegations that two declarations had been submitted following approval at the Chairpersons meeting. First, a declaration on recent earthquakes in Italy submitted by the Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, which was open for signature by individual Members at the foyer of the premises. Second, a declaration on the recent situation in Turkey, jointly submitted by the German *Bundestag*, French *Assemblée nationale*, French *Sénat*, UK *House of Lords*, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Swedish *Riksdag*, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Danish *Folketing*, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Luxembourg *Chambres des représentants* and Italian *Senato della Repubblica*; in relation to this, the delegations were asked to submit their intention to join the declaration by email to the Presidency by the end of the day. The Chair stressed that only this electronic form would be taken into consideration and therefore the list in the foyer for this declaration should be disregarded.

Mr BLAHA gave the floor to Mr BUSUTTIL, who informed the delegations about the upcoming COSAC Chairpersons' meeting in Malta on 22-23 January 2017 and the LVII COSAC on 28-30 May 2017. A short video about the Maltese Presidency was screened.

Finally, Mr BLAHA thanked all the delegations for participating in the meeting, as well as the meeting's organisers.