



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN, 29 - 30 JANUARY 2023

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PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Hans WALLMARK, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Opening remarks by Mr Hans WALLMARK, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*

Mr Hans WALLMARK, Chairman of the Committee on EU Affairs of the Swedish *Riksdag*, welcomed the guests to Stockholm and made the observation that the meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons was the first major event of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Swedish Presidency.

Welcome speech by Dr Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*

Mr Andreas NORLÉN, Speaker of the *Riksdag*, began his intervention by welcoming all the guests to Stockholm and to the Swedish *Riksdag*. He then briefly elaborated on the history of the Parliament and its buildings, mentioning that it became bi-cameral in 1866 and that a decision was made in 1967 to change to a unicameral system.

The Speaker then continued by stating that the Presidency of the Council of the EU was a very significant task for both the Swedish *Riksdag* as well as for the Swedish Government. He elaborated on the Parliamentary Dimension of the Presidency, explaining that there would be eight interparliamentary conferences in total, out of which one would be held in an online format and another one in cooperation with the European Parliament in Brussels. The remaining six Conferences foreseen would take place in person, in the premises of the Swedish *Riksdag*.

Mr NORLÉN highlighted that some of the topics to be discussed in the regular interparliamentary conferences¹ would be, amongst others, economic matters in an uncertain geopolitical context, the single market of the European Union, the work of Europol, and European police cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime. Moreover, he announced that three further conferences of a thematic nature would be organised to reflect on some of the major issues of the EU political agenda. The first would take place in February, in a remote format, to debate the European Green Deal with a focus on the circular bioeconomy, and the path towards a more competitive and resource-efficient Europe. The second was scheduled for April, in Stockholm, and would discuss the Challenges and Opportunities for the EU's Future Energy Supply, dealing with the future energy system in the EU, the competition

¹ The regular and standard Conferences are: COSAC; the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (IPC for CFSP/CSDP), The Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the EU (IPC on SECG), and the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol (JPSG on Europol).

between companies and the pre-conditions for a dynamic and innovative business community and industry. The last of the thematic conferences was scheduled for June, in Stockholm and its focus would be on Democracy in Europe. He added that one of the priorities of the Swedish Presidency was to strengthen the principle of the rule of law in the EU and this conference would aim at providing an opportunity to exchange on that matter. Towards the end of his speech Mr NORLÉN observed that the EU was built on values such as respect, human rights, freedom, rule of law and democracy and that the Union promoted peace and European values. He added that national Parliaments were the pillar stone of each democracy and it was their duty to stand up for those values and ensure a well-functioning Union.

Mr NORLÉN concluded by quoting the famous epic poem *Aniara*, by the Swedish Nobel laureate Harry Martinson, which said that “*There is protection from near everything, from fire and damages by storm and frost, oh, add whichever blows may come to mind. But there is no protection from mankind.*” Therefore, the Speaker observed that it is more important than ever that Parliaments should stand up and form a shield of light to defend democracy.

Finally, he mentioned that, during the previous parliamentary term, the Swedish *Riksdag* had celebrated 100 years of Swedish democracy and that the country would commemorate 500 years as a national sovereign country in 2023.

2. PROCEDURAL AND OTHER GENERAL MATTERS

Adoption of the Agenda of the Meeting

Mr WALLMARK began by welcoming delegates attending the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC for the first time: Mr Niels Flemming HANSEN, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Danish *Folketing*, Mr Vasile DÎNCU, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Romanian *Senat*, Mr Andris SPRŪDS, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee, Latvian *Saeima*, Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Chairman of the European Union Policies Committee of the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*. Afterwards, the Chairman presented the draft agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

Presentation of the results of the COSAC Presidential Troika Meeting

Mr WALLMARK informed the delegations about the results of the Meeting of the COSAC Presidential Troika, noting the approval of the agenda of the Meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons, the approval of the outline of the 39th Bi-annual Report of COSAC and the approval of the draft agenda of the LXIX COSAC.

Draft programme for the LXIX COSAC Meeting

Mr WALLMARK presented the adopted draft agenda of the LXIX COSAC, scheduled to take place in Stockholm between 14-16 May 2023, which had been endorsed by the Troika. He then introduced the four thematic sessions which would be covered during the meeting: the first session would be dedicated to an overview of the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU; the second session would discuss 30 years of the Single Market; the third session would be titled “Towards a green transition”, and the fourth and final session would be dedicated to Ukraine and the efforts toward re-building that country.

Outline of the 39th Bi-annual Report of COSAC

Mr WALLMARK presented the outline of the 39th COSAC Bi-annual Report, stating that the first chapter of the Report would focus on the role of Parliaments/Chambers in the handling of the Fit for 55 package, the second chapter would be dedicated to the role of the Parliaments/Chambers in accelerated decision-making processes in response to crises, and the third chapter would deal with best practices for information exchange between parliaments, including use of IPEX. Mr WALLMARK stated that, based on the approved outline for the 39th Bi-annual Report, a questionnaire would be sent to the delegations no later than 15 February, with replies expected by 16 March 2023.

Letters received by the Presidency

Mr WALLMARK referred to the following letters received by the Presidency requesting invitation to attend the COSAC meetings and stated that it was a pleasure to welcome them:

- Lord Charles KINNOULL, Chairman of the European Union Committee, UK *House of Lords*;
- Mr Masud GHARAHKHANI, President of the Norwegian *Stortinget*;
- Mr Benedikt WÜRTH, President of the Swiss delegation for relations with the European Parliament, Swiss *Assemblée fédérale*;
- Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Icelandic *Althingi*;
- Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Chairwoman of the Committee on European Integration of the Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'I*;
- Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI, Chairwoman of the Committee on European Integration, Kosovo² *Kuvendi i Kosovës*.

² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Finally, the Presidency and other Troika members had received a letter from Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chairman of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*, proposing to add an item to the agenda of LXIX COSAC to discuss how to improve the rules of ethics and transparency governing the activities of the European institutions. Mr WALLMARK informed Chairpersons that the proposal of Mr RAPIN had been discussed during the Troika meeting, and it was considered that the topic was interesting and that the Presidency would be open to having a broad discussion on ethics and transparency, which are key issues for all Parliaments. Therefore, the Presidency and the Troika had agreed to convene a videoconference on the matter, possibly in April, organised in the same format as the previous informal exchanges held by former COSAC Presidencies and with the intention of inviting the European Commissioner responsible for these issues to participate. This would allow for an exchange of views between national Parliaments and the European Parliament on these issues.

Finally, Mr WALLMARK also mentioned a letter sent by Ms Satu HASSI, Chairperson of the Grand Committee of the Finnish Eduskunta, addressed to the COSAC Chairpersons, to inform them that she would not be running in the upcoming elections in Finland, scheduled for April 2023. Therefore, the current Chairpersons' meeting would be the last COSAC meeting she would attend and Mr WALLMARK took the opportunity to thank Ms Satu HASSI for the excellent cooperation during the last few years, giving her the floor for a brief statement, in which she highlighted the role of COSAC as an interparliamentary forum, wishing that it can continue to thrive in the strengthening of interparliamentary cooperation.

Any other business

Mr WALLMARK mentioned that two items should be addressed within this section. The first concerned the fact that a decision was pending at COSAC regarding the old COSAC website (and the cosac.eu domain), that was still active even though the content had long since been migrated to IPEX (www.ipex.eu) and the previous website was no longer being updated. He gave the floor to the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, to explain further.

Mr DIAS PINHEIRO started by recalling that the Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the EU had outlined the purpose of establishing IPEX as the “one stop shop” for interparliamentary exchange on EU affairs and documents, including hosting the information related to all interparliamentary Conferences. Furthermore, COSAC had expressed its support for the IPEX platform to host the COSAC website, merging the two environments, specifically the Conclusions of the LVIII COSAC held in Tallinn, in December 2017, of the LIX COSAC, held in Sofia, in June 2018, of the LX COSAC, held in Vienna, in November 2018, and of the LXII COSAC, held in Helsinki, in December 2019.

Mr DIAS PINHEIRO noted that while the migration of the data was being done, the information pertaining to COSAC was accessible on both platforms, i.e. the COSAC

website (cosac.eu) and IPEX. After the official launch of IPEX Version 3, in October 2021, this transitional period was over and the merging had been successfully concluded, with all the relevant information available on the IPEX platform. He added that the existence of two websites had a financial cost, since the payments for the domain and the hosting of cosac.eu were still being paid for every year, and a cost in terms of quality of the information, since the cosac.eu website, although it was obsolete and no longer updated since 2019, was still active and could easily be found via any web search engine. Mr DIAS PINHEIRO summed up by stating that, consequently, a decision needed to be taken by COSAC regarding this matter, and it was proposed that the Swedish Presidency would include a paragraph on this issue in the Conclusions of the upcoming LXIX COSAC Plenary, noting that the COSAC.eu website/domain no longer needed to be active and, therefore, there was no need to renew its yearly subscriptions. The COSAC Secretariat would be tasked with implementing that decision, effective in 2023.

Mr WALLMARK informed the Chairpersons that the Troika adopted the recommendation made by the COSAC Secretariat.

On another topic, Mr Hans WALLMARK reminded the Troika of the procedure for co-financing the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat and the costs of running of the office of COSAC, which would be initiated for the coming two years (2024/25). He alluded to point 9.5 of the Rules of Procedure of COSAC, which reads *"the cost of seconding the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat to Brussels and other necessary technical costs of the COSAC Secretariat are jointly borne by parliaments wishing to contribute. The amount and terms of payment under the co-financing procedure are defined in an agreement concluded amongst the participating parliaments. The Secretariat is hosted by the European Parliament in its offices in Brussels."*

The current co-financing period was running from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023, covering the usual two-year period, and was co-financed by all Parliaments. Therefore, and to ensure the continued co-financing for the post of Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, the Swedish Presidency would launch the procedure to renew the current co-financing agreement for the period from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025. For that purpose, a letter would be sent by the Presidency to all Parliaments/Chambers in the beginning of February, in order to collect the necessary letters of intent and gather the required threshold for the enforcement of the agreement to fund this post.

3. FIRST SESSION - WHAT CAN THE EU DO IN THE AREA OF ORGANISED CRIME?

Ms Ylva JOHANSSON, European Commissioner for Home Affairs

Ms JOHANSSON started her intervention³ by recalling the beginning of the war in Europe one year earlier and at the same time underlining Europe's strong unity, commitment and support for Ukraine. She mentioned some of the latest tragic events that had happened in the neighbourhood or in Stockholm, including shootings with child victims and explosions. Ms JOHANSSON admitted organised crime was one of the biggest threats of our time. She considered that, while the President of the Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir PUTIN, was the greatest external threat to the EU, organised crime should be seen as the biggest internal threat. She expressed her concerns about the rise of right wing terrorism next to the strongly persistent jihadist threat, also mentioning the recent case of successfully foiling a far-right terrorist plot to overthrow the government in Germany. The Commissioner added that the terrorist threat level in Sweden was currently at level three (elevated threat), also due to last year's knife attack in Vetlanda where several people were wounded.

Then she mentioned the murder of her former colleague, Ms Ing-Marie WIESELGREN in Gotland, who was stabbed to death during a political meeting in Almedalen. Ms JOHANSSON continued by mentioning last year's statistics in Sweden: 90 bomb attacks and 388 shootings, as well as very recent tragic killings of children. She noted that these attacks and organised crime itself were undermining the EU's foundation, society, economy and trust.

She observed that security was perhaps the most important glue supporting cohesion in society and that very few people could ensure their safety on their own, while the majority relied on society and the police. She also touched upon various discriminatory reasons for not feeling safe in today's world and proceeded to cite some statistics on organised crime, specifically the fact that 80 percent of criminals in the EU were engaged in the legal economy, 70 percent of them operating in at least three different countries, and that 60 percent of the organised criminal groups in Europe were engaged in corruption, which could be seen at all levels (police, customs, ports etc). Ms JOHANSSON added that the criminal groups were becoming more and more professional and international and that their structures were similar to multinational businesses with different kinds of suppliers, one dealing with threats, another one active in money laundering, logistics, killings and smuggling. They have also increased their level of violence, instead of using threats or beatings, they were proceeding directly to killing the person.

Ms JOHANSSON went on to emphasise that after five years of negotiations there was a very strong need for an agreement at EU level on new legislation on e-evidence. Organised criminal groups were increasingly present online and digital evidence was

³ Full speech available at [Speech at the meeting of the COSAC chairpersons on organised crime | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/press/press-articles/2022/05/10/speech-at-the-meeting-of-the-cosac-chairpersons-on-organised-crime).

found in almost all cases. She underlined the importance of cooperation between national police and Europol in the successful case of cracking down on Encrochat, Sky ECC, ANOM and Trojan Shield. She also mentioned the upcoming case in the European Court of Justice on Encrochat evidence which would be crucial for this area.

Moreover, Commissioner JOHANSSON stressed the need for Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to process all the data. She emphasised the relevance of the Europol's new mandate in order to be able to facilitate and support national police in their investigations. She mentioned the decision of setting up a dedicated high-level expert group on access to digital evidence and data needed for law enforcement after discussions led by the Swedish presidency.

She reported on the successful police cooperation between Europol, the Spanish, French, Belgian, Dutch and United Arab Emirates police that had led to cracking down on the cartel responsible for one third of the cocaine in the EU. This type of cooperation was, according to her, absolutely necessary and should be strengthened, and that was the reason why the European Commission had proposed a new Police Cooperation Code. Moreover, a proposal for a regulation on automated data exchange for police cooperation (known as Prüm II), which was also pending decision by the co-legislators, aimed at facilitating searches in cases where there had been previous hits in another Member State regarding a specific person. Concerning the drug routes, she said that the port of Antwerp was at that moment the main point of entry into the EU for cocaine entrance. The Commissioner also mentioned the importance of following the routes of money and also added that young people were increasingly recruited into the drug trafficking gangs to earn quick money. Another legislative proposal on the table she mentioned and that was very much needed, was the envisaged new directive on Asset Recovery and Confiscation of assets, also for the cases without convictions.

On legislation concerning the EU's privacy and security, she highlighted the importance of finding the right balance between both. The law enforcement authorities were lacking tools online in comparison to the offline world, and the EU had to find the right balance in legislation to move forward in this area.

Ms JOHANSSON then provided some figures on child sexual abuse, namely that, according to the Council of Europe, one child out of five was a victim of sexual violence in one way or another. There were around 20 million reports of online child sexual abuse reported to the police to investigate. Moreover, she mentioned that according to those reports, the younger the children, the worse the violence, and that half of the pictures and videos shared were of babies and toddlers. In many areas of child sexual abuse online, being part of the group also meant the obligation to produce so-called new material.

The Commissioner highlighted the fact that many internet companies were being very cooperative in this fight, since in the past ten years they had been detecting this material and reporting it to Europol or other police organisations, which was truly one of the best-functioning ways to rescue children. As regards legislation, she underlined that, in

private communications, only the detection of malware was allowed thanks to legislation from 2020 and that there was only temporary legislation running until summer next year concerning the sexual abuse of children. After that, the EU would be left with no means to fight these horrific crimes, since companies would not be allowed to see and hence detect these ongoing abuses of children.

For that reason, Ms JOHANSSON then alluded to the proposal for sustainable legislation in that field, allowing detection in private communications only in very specific cases, and after a risk assessment carried out in conjunction with a court decision. This could be done only when using specific approved technology, and under those circumstances it would not only be allowed, but it would also bring an obligation to carry out the detection to protect children. She concluded her speech by acknowledging that the EU was a regulatory superpower in the protection of privacy online. However, and while the EU had legislation that always allowed for detection of malware, also in encrypted communication, which was accepted by everyone, it needed to be emphasised that the vulnerable people and children who are victims of sexual violence needed to be better protected.

Mr Johan OLSSON, Head of National Operations Department, Swedish Police Authority

Mr OLSSON began his intervention by saying that, in the past year, Sweden had faced a tragic record in fatal shootings, resulting in 60 deaths. However, when it came to organised crime, he added that all law enforcement counterparts in Europe were struggling with the problem. He said that Sweden's situation was not isolated but connected to other Member States and that the common fight against organised crime was more essential than ever. He noted that organised crime's influence on democratic society was unacceptable and it had become a common challenge for the EU, stressing that the Union was already doing many things to combat it.

He mentioned specifically two things on the EU's agenda, starting with the interoperability package that was currently in the implementation process. From his operational point of view, better use of biometrics was absolutely necessary. Secondly, he very much welcomed the comprehensive and digital entry exit system at the external border which was much needed. He added, however, that the system should also cover the EU's own citizens.

He further pointed out the existence of a digital world where products, services and social interactions existed as much online as in the real world. In this regard, Mr OLSSON continued by saying that thanks to having access to relevant data, the police had been able to crack down not only field operators, but also on leading criminal actors, the masterminds of the crimes. He also recalled the need for law enforcement to be active in the online world. The obligation to provide safety and justice did not end in the physical world. To ensure the same rights to online victims, law enforcement needed

adequate tools and legislation. He underlined that criminals were well established and very active on the same social media used by the citizens including their children, and that the criminals were actively committing offences such as grooming, money laundering, drug trafficking, fraud or sexual abuse. He pointed out that the criminals in today's world were free to use an abundance of electronic communication services with different rules applied to different operators and often under the protection of an encrypted system developed by established corporations. He stressed that this situation made it very difficult for law enforcement authorities to prosecute such crimes. He pledged for legal and solid tools to access data from communication channels that would enable the police to prosecute crimes committed when using encrypted communication services.

Mr OLSSON emphasised that to handle all the challenges of the online world law enforcement authorities needed artificial intelligence to share the substantial amounts of electronic evidence. He also stated that the law enforcement authorities were subject to national and EU regulations that were observed and respected and these authorities also needed scrutiny for which they were ready. He reiterated that with such limited access to information in the digital world, the authorities were in fact unable to bring results and ensure safety. In the subject of sexual abuse online, he underlined that respect of personal integrity was essential, but at the same time, the victim's right to personal integrity needed to be ensured. According to him, it was necessary to put in place a system for EU law enforcement authorities to access criminal material on digital platforms. The success of cracking down on Encrochat, Sky ECC and ANOM would not have been possible without European cooperation and the support of Europol. He added that the common platform for cooperation among Member States law enforcement authorities offered by Europol was invaluable. He continued by saying that Europol needed to focus on its core business of supporting Member States in investigations in criminal intelligence cases. Mr OLSSON summed up by saying that the EU was an important and essential actor in combating organised crime and that the need for balanced regulation of the digital world was one of the main challenges for law enforcement today.

Ms Anna Karin HILDINGSON BOQVIST, Secretary General, ECPAT Sweden

Ms HILDINGSON BOQVIST started her contribution by presenting ECPAT Sweden as a children's rights organisation that was also active in preventive actions such as influencing public opinion, working with companies, government agencies and other organisations. ECPAT Sweden was using three main operational activities: a hotline used for reporting abuse of children, an online phone line to support children and another corresponding line for parents and adults. The organisation was strong in understanding the world of children living online and offline thanks to annual surveys carried out with almost 15 000 children and youth respondents. She emphasised this was necessary to be aware of the constantly changing online world of child's exploitation.

Ms HILDINGSON BOQVIST underlined that child sexual abuse and exploitation was a global, transnational crime which was very often perceived as organised crime. She continued by giving information on the latest modus operandi of abusing boys. In general, more girls were blackmailed and in more brutal ways, she noted, but boys had recently been exposed in different ways. They were threatened with having their pictures spread unless they paid money to the perpetrators. The starting point in the boys' cases was a contact which they believed was a credible girl over Snapchat or Instagram, the boys exchanged their naked pictures and then the perpetrator started to make threats that the pictures would be sent to his friends and family unless he paid a large sum of money. When the victims were unable to pay, they were forced to become part of the chain and bring new potential victims to the “girl“ perpetrator. In many cases, there was no other abuse except for the extortion for monetary gain. Ms HILDINGSON BOQVIST also mentioned the exploitation methods of raping gangs, who force their victims to hide drugs or to engage in other criminal activities to avoid further dissemination of the pictures or videos of rapes committed. In that regard, she urged for a holistic approach to combat these crimes. She said that unfortunately there was no one-win single solution.

She identified three main components in the prevention field, which were: i) a focus on the children themselves; ii) a focus on adults as parents or closest counterparts; and iii) a focus on technologies. Particularly, technologies were often abused but they could also be part of the solution in the fight against sexual exploitation of children.

In connection with this, she said the majority of abusive materials were stored somewhere in Europe and that the platforms and internet providers were not shouldering enough of the responsibility to remove abusive material and to ensure that it was never even published on their platforms. She emphasised that the Regulation intended to combat abuse of children mentioned by Commissioner JOHANSSON was incredibly important to ensure that the EU could have a holistic approach towards child sexual exploitation online. She added that civil society perceived the proposal for regulation only as one part of the solution helping to detect child vulnerability. She concluded her intervention by saying that there was unfortunately still a lot more to be done to combat this type of organised crime.

In the ensuing debate, 19 parliamentarians took the floor. The majority of speakers commended security as a very well chosen priority of the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council, and further elaborated on the need to enhance and deepen the transnational cooperation of law enforcement authorities, while at the same time supporting Europol as the key actor in facilitating collaboration between national police in transnational investigations (Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat/Senaat*, Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato*, Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA, Polish *Senat*, Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, Ms Jorida TABAKU, Albanian *Kuvendi*, Ms Ine Eriksen SØREIDE, Norwegian *Storting*). Many Members called for sound European policies or/and the adoption of an

appropriate legal framework at EU level to combat organised crime, since it had transferred several of its activities to the online world, including sexual abuse of children and cyber-attacks (Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA, Polish *Senat*, Mr Andris SPRŪDS, Latvian *Saeima*, Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*).

In their interventions, Members emphasised that future legislation should strive to find the right balance between safeguarding citizens' fundamental rights and their security (Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Ms Danuta JAZŁOWIECKA, Polish *Senat*, Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*). Two Members raised the topic of transparency and corruption in political institutions, and both emphasised the need to ensure that citizens could trust parliamentarians and politicians. Therefore, all possible investigations should be facilitated (Mr Jean-François RAPIN, French *Sénat*, Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*).

In that regard, Mr RAPIN French *Sénat*, mentioned his proposal to add the topic concerning transparency and ethics to the draft agenda of the plenary of LXIX COSAC. The topic of migration also resonated among speakers including the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the organised crime of migrant smuggling, the fight against illegal migration and the protection of the external borders of the EU. Overall emphasis was put on the need to finalise the migration and asylum package which should be strengthened regarding the internal and external threats the EU was facing (Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA, Italian *Senato*, Mr Anti POOLAMETS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Andris SPRŪDS, Latvian *Saeima*, Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, Ms Boglárka ILLÉS, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIČ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*).

Another issue raised by Ms Boglárka ILLÉS, Hungarian *Országgyűlés* and Mr Ştefan MUŞOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputatilor* was the future enlargement of the Schengen area regarding Romania and Bulgaria, which they both supported. Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon* warned about connections between external and internal threats that had their roots in the Kremlin. He talked about the connection between Russian President PUTIN and organised crime, and specifically about the connection between drug trafficking from Venezuela via Turkey (controlling two main migration routes) with the help of Russia which aimed to undermine EU democracies as well as making money. He also mentioned recent cases of Koran burnings in Europe by far-right groups, as actions that should be seen as part of the overall strategy of the Kremlin to undermine the stability of the EU. He asked Commissioner JOHANSSON to elaborate on these matters. Some of the interventions (Ms Dubravka FILIPOVSKI, Serbian *Narodna skupština*, Ms Rrezarta KRASNIQI, Kosovo⁴ *Kuvendi i Kosovës*) summed up progress made in the field of organised crime on their countries' paths to integration in the EU.

⁴ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

After the debate, the keynote speakers made their final remarks. Ms JOHANSSON commented on the future accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the Schengen Area, which according to her meant greater security for the EU. She also touched upon the migration and asylum package that needed to be adopted by 2024, adding that the current Swedish Presidency, as well as the incoming Spanish and Belgian Presidencies, would have this important topic on their agenda.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, she said Russian President PUTIN did not want to destroy only Ukraine but also the European Union, or at least destabilise and divide it, adding that he feared the EU because of its democracy, freedom, and prosperity. The EU should not be naive and needed to be aware of the fact that he was financing political parties in the EU and outside the EU, orchestrating cyber attacks against the EU's important infrastructure and putting many resources into disinformation towards the EU, and also its neighbourhood. She concluded by saying that the geopolitical role of the EU in the world was more important than ever and that security should go hand in hand with the situation.

In his final remarks, Mr OLSSON emphasised the importance of Europol's role in combating organised crime, as the most effective law enforcement authority in the EU. This effectiveness was also enhanced by the fact that it was a platform, which gathered all the national law enforcement authorities working together.

Finally, Ms HILDINGSON BOQVIST reiterated the importance of both public and private sector cooperation. She also emphasised that children's access to justice was a crucial factor in combating sexual abuse. Furthermore, she added that well-resourced support for children was needed from law enforcement authorities and society. She ended by noting that the key to helping the victims was to create a stable, supporting environment with which they could relate in such situations.

4. SECOND SESSION - PRESENTATION OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE SWEDISH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL

Keynote speaker: Mr Christian DANIELSSON, State Secretary to the Minister for EU Affairs

Mr DANIELSSON started by thanking the organisers for the opportunity not only to present, but also to discuss, the priorities for the Swedish Presidency with such a distinguished audience.

Being one month into the Presidency one could conclude it had been intense so far, Mr DANIELSSON noted. He mentioned a few important events which had already taken place: the European Commission's college had visited Kiruna in the very north of Sweden; in mid-January the Prime Minister had presented the Presidency priorities in the European Parliament; the Minister for EU Affairs had also taken part in Plenary sessions in the European Parliament, and several ministers had presented the Presidency's ambitions in different Committees in the European Parliament. The Government had also engaged closely with the Swedish *Riksdag* to reach consensus and common ground on the Presidency's priorities, but also on how cooperation should be carried out during the Presidency, Mr DANIELSSON added. A strong Presidency required solid support at home and national Parliaments played a vital role for democratic processes in the EU. Mr DANIELSSON stated that in Sweden the Committee on EU Affairs was central to the coordination between the Parliament and the Government, highlighting that this cooperation and close partnership was highly valued by the Executive.

Mr DANIELSSON noted that Sweden was taking over the Presidency of the Council of the EU at a time of historic challenges, and in particular, Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine with all of its consequences, primarily in Ukraine but also throughout Europe. This would continue to dominate the European agenda, and therefore, this would be the top priority for the Swedish Presidency, Mr DANIELSSON stated. Ukraine was fighting for its survival as a nation, and for the security and lives of its citizens, but they were also fighting for our freedom and fundamental values. The European unity across institutions, bodies, and Parliaments when it came to supporting Ukraine was a true achievement. A key task for the Swedish Presidency would therefore be to maintain this unity and not let the Kremlin divide the EU, Mr DANIELSSON argued. Consequences linked to Russia's illegal aggression had affected European economies and its energy supply, and business and households were under hard pressure, said Mr DANIELSSON. He added that, as a Union and as Member States, they had to deal with these parallel short-term crises, but at the same time stay firm regarding the long-term efforts to take forward the green transition and make the EU one of its frontrunners.

In this context, Mr DANIELSSON said the Swedish Presidency would advance the work in the Council of the EU and in negotiations with the European Parliament based on four priorities:

1. Security
2. Competitiveness
3. Green and energy transition
4. Democratic values and the rule of law

In short, the aim of the Swedish Presidency was to make Europe safer, greener, and freer, Mr DANIELSSON stated.

On the first priority, **security**, Sweden would do its utmost to maintain a firm EU position on Russia, Mr DANIELSSON said. The pressure on the Kremlin through sanctions should be maintained, as well as holding Russia accountable for breaches of international law. As an example, the Swedish Presidency would carefully look into how frozen Russian assets could be re-used to finance reconstruction following the destruction of Ukraine. Furthermore, European support to Ukraine must continue in all forms, politically, economically, militarily, and in humanitarian terms, Mr DANIELSSON argued. As unity was a precondition for much of the EU's assistance, it would therefore be a central task for the Swedish Presidency to maintain that unity.

In addition, the EU's internal security needed to be strengthened, with better border surveillance and increased police cooperation, Mr DANIELSSON argued. Since organised crime did not stop at national borders, neither should the EU's efforts to fight it. Moreover, the Presidency should continue the work regarding the negotiations of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, building on the progress already achieved under the French and Czech Presidencies. In parallel, work must be done on the short-term challenges arising from irregular migration in particular coming through the Western Balkans route. The external dimension would have a natural place on the Council's agenda in February, Mr DANIELSSON said.

The second priority was **competitiveness**. Today, the conditions for companies and industries to invest and grow in Europe were not as favourable as in many other parts of the world, Mr DANIELSSON argued, since Europe had failed for a long time to address this. The Single Market worked well for goods, but was not as well adapted for a global environment built on flows of data and services. At present, the EU's response to the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was a natural focus. On the one hand, the EU should welcome the ambitious green objectives of the Biden administration, and it should be recalled that just a few years ago the biggest EU concern was the US withdrawal from the Paris agreement. But at the same time the EU needed to address the parts of the IRA that could have negative effects on the EU's industries, and further engagement with Washington was needed to minimise those negative consequences. The Swedish Presidency expected the Commission to propose measures ahead of the European Council in February, bearing in mind that any short-term measures to mitigate the consequences of the IRA must be complemented by a long-term perspective. The ambition for the Swedish Presidency was to set out the direction for the next decade with a focus on how to boost European competitiveness and productivity, and close the growth gap between the EU and its competitors, notably in Asia and but also the US.

The Swedish Presidency was working on a competitive compass, covering a few key dimensions. Among other things the EU needed to step up on research and development, and get more serious about better regulation, Mr DANIELSSON argued. The EU also needed to accelerate the green and digital transition of its economies, and the Swedish Presidency would therefore make sure that the EU's long-term competitiveness would be on the agenda for the European Council in March. The 30-year anniversary of the Single Market would serve as a useful starting point of such a discussion, Mr DANIELSSON said, along with a competitiveness strategy, in response to an invitation from the European Council in December last year for the European Commission to bring one forward. A competitive economy was also a prerequisite for the green and digital transition and for the EU to be prepared for future crises, he said.

On the third priority, the **green and energy transition**, Mr DANIELSSON stated that climate change was one of the major global challenges of our time, and the EU was one of the world's most important climate actors. This meant it needed to lead by example, delivering on ambitious climate goals while showing that this could be combined with growth and competitiveness. As regards the Fit for 55 package, Mr DANIELSSON stated that the European Parliament and the Council had made several important agreements under previous Presidencies, but there were many important files still to be agreed. This was the case especially in the area of energy. The task for the Swedish Presidency was to reach the finish line for the whole Fit for 55 package. It was a priority for the Swedish Presidency, but Mr DANIELSSON noted that the Presidency did not have any illusions that it would be easy. On the subject of energy, both energy security and energy prices would be important issues to handle during the Swedish Presidency. More fossil free energy with high security of supply was needed, which included renewable energy but also nuclear energy, keeping in mind the right of every Member State to decide on its energy mix. Work would also begin on the new reform of the EU's electricity market design as soon as the Commission's proposal was presented, Mr DANIELSSON pointed out.

The fourth priority was **democratic values and the principle of rule of law**, which Mr DANIELSSON argued was the core of the EU. In fact, independent courts and responsive democratic institutions were necessary to ensure trust between Member States and the deep legal, political, and economic cooperation that exists within the EU. If citizens' rights were to be protected everywhere across the Union and the Single Market were to function, the rule of law needed to be upheld, Mr DANIELSSON continued. During the Swedish Presidency, country-specific discussions in the Council were to continue with five Member States; Slovakia, Finland, Belgium, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic. He also referred to the Article 7 procedures which were to be continued in Council during the Swedish Presidency, saying they would include additional hearings and updates from the European Commission on the state of play, depending on how the situation evolved. In June, the Swedish Presidency also planned to organise a symposium with the aim of taking a closer look at the tools at their disposal and discuss how the rule of law could better be upheld in the EU at all levels.

Mr DANIELSSON concluded by promising the Swedish Presidency would work around the clock to make the EU safer, greener and freer.

First speaker: Mr Othmar KARAS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament

In his introduction, Mr KARAS thanked the Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, Mr NORLÉN, and the Chairman of the EU Affairs Committee, Mr WALLMARK, for hosting the meeting of the COSAC Chairpersons in Stockholm. He also congratulated the Swedish Parliament for its excellent contribution to the Swedish Council Presidency programme following the motto “a greener, safer and freer Europe” which was going to address the challenges the EU was facing.

Mr KARAS noted that, when discussing the programme of a Presidency, there was usually a tendency to delegate matters to others, and, by doing so, expect them to turn things into practice. However, Mr KARAS considered that a Presidency programme concerned everybody. Therefore, the programme of the Swedish Presidency should be embraced as a shared endeavour by all Parliaments, since they were all affected by the challenges at stake. He alluded to the many different competences which exist in the EU and also to the way they were so closely interwoven (e.g., majority votes, unanimity, political competences) and, finally, to the fact that the level of political will about the EU also differed across Member States. However, Mr KARAS pointed out that if the debates only focused on discussing competences and who was in charge, citizens might turn away from Europe. Moreover, reducing the debate to a power struggle of competences would hamper the chances of gathering the majorities needed to implement all the proposed agendas.

He continued by saying that, first and foremost, Europe needed unity, resolution, and political will to act together. For that reason, Mr KARAS considered that 2023 should not be a year of polemicising, populism or nationalistic confrontation, but a year of European unity. He pointed out that Europe was, more than ever before, confronted with multiple crises. In fact, the war in Ukraine had shattered many of the foundations the EU had taken for granted in past decades, and Ukraine should be supported in every domain.

But at the same time, Mr KARAS acknowledged that a debate was needed about the security of the EU, alluding to the Swedish application for NATO membership. Mr KARAS also referred to the Strategic Compass, which he argued could be a good foundation also for national Parliaments, because there were increasing efforts to bolster security and defence policies in the EU, including the will to establish a European Defence Union. Therefore, he advised, all policies in national Parliaments and national Governments should be in line with the goal of the Strategic Compass, as it was the blueprint for the security debate in Europe.

Turning to the issue of asylum and migration policy, Mr KARAS said it was clear that the progress achieved by the EU had been insufficient. The proposed solutions had not

been implemented so far, because of a lack of political will. Mr KARAS continued by saying that unless the Pact on Asylum and Migration was adopted this year, support for extremist and anti-EU forces would increase in next year's election to the European Parliament, but also in coming national elections.

He then turned to the energy price crisis, referring that the EU needed to reduce dependencies, but also to reform the energy markets as well as finally adopting the Fit for 55 package. In his view, this was essential in order to stand united in the fight against climate change and to put measures into practice, since these two issues were closely related.

Mr KARAS acknowledged the existence of different opinions regarding the Conference of the Future of Europe (CoFE), but argued that the results of the Conference must not be ignored. From his perspective, this was a question of credibility, but it was also linked to how the EU as a community was capable of acting together. Mr KARAS also made a link between the implementation of the results of the outcome of the CoFE and the strengthening of liberal democracies, which he argued were under pressure both internally and externally. Neither democracy nor parliamentarism were self-evident anymore and they should be appreciated, defended and fought for, beyond national and ideological borders. He added that this task was a shared responsibility for all parliamentarians, as representatives of the citizens.

Mr KARAS concluded by saying that these challenges should be embraced with more courage for action, for greater seriousness, and for unity. He considered that the political debate needed seriousness and honesty, and referred to the former President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who once said that Europe was not a boxing ring, but a place where Europeans were trying to shape history rather than being shaped by history. Mr KARAS considered that the priorities of the Swedish Presidency could only be put into practice if everyone was ready not to fight each other but to shape history with more honesty, responsibility, and vision. He therefore noted that the national Parliaments and the European Parliament were key to ensuring the political majorities needed to implement the shared political goals. He concluded by saying that putting the priorities of the Swedish Presidency into practice was key to making the EU stronger, greener, digital and more competitive.

In the debate which followed, 34 speakers took the floor. There was general support for the Swedish Presidency priorities as presented by State Secretary DANIELSSON.

A majority of national Parliaments' representatives, including among others, Mr Pieyre-Alexander ANGLADE, French *Assemblée Nationale*, Mr Anton HOFREITER German *Bundestag*, and Mr Andris SPRUDS Latvian *Saeima*, stressed the need for continued EU unity and support for Ukraine by with all means available and warned that the current Russian regime wanted to redefine the European security and democratic order. Several speakers, including Ms Danuta JAZLOWIECKA, Polish *Senat* and Mr Giuliomaria TERZI DI SANT'AGATA Italian *Senato*, highlighted the need to bring the

Russians responsible for war crimes in Ukraine to justice. Ms Ivanna KLYMPUSH-TSINTSADZE, Ukraine *Verkhovna Rada*, expressed her deep appreciation for all the military, financial, and political support Ukraine had received until that moment. At the same time, she underlined the need for continued sustainable and urgent delivery of weaponry, as well as continued pressure on Russia in order to ensure victory over authoritarianism.

The need for the EU to stand up to its founding values and institutional order was highlighted by several speakers including Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, Ms Eliane TILLIEUX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, and Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*.

Enlargement policy, and the need to make progress with it for the stability and prosperity not only for the countries concerned, but also for Europe as a whole, was highlighted by many national Parliaments' representatives including among others, Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIC Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*; Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Ms Boglárka ILLÉS Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, Ms Jorida TABAKU Albanian *Kuvendi i Shqipërisë*, Mr Davor Ivo STIER, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*; and Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgia *Akartvelos P'arlament'i*.

The importance of giving priority to the EU's common migration policy was mentioned by some delegates, including Ms Ria-OOMEN-RUIJTEN, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*; and Mr Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*. Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, made a reference to what he labelled a persisting geostrategic *naiveté* of Europe, giving the example of authoritarian regimes using migrants to put pressure on the EU.

Some speeches specifically looked forward to the coming COSAC plenary debate in May on the Single Market, including Mr Christian BUCHMANN, Austrian *Bundesrat*. On this topic Mr Pieyre-Alexander ANGLADE, French *Assemblée Nationale*, pointed to the need to defend and protect Europe's industrial sovereignty. Mr Jean-Francois RAPIN, French *Sénat*, highlighted the need for increased focus on electronic and computerised trade where he argued the present rules needed to be reviewed.

Several speakers raised the issues of sustainable transition and energy security as key areas for Europe, in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine, including Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, who stated that the green transition was not just about industrial policy but also about security policy. Mr Bojan KEKEC, Slovenian *Državni svet*, argued for the creation of a regulatory body that could intervene in cases of emergency with abnormal energy prices.

Several national Parliaments' representatives, including Mr Anti POOLAMETS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, and Mr Vytautas GAPŠYS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, highlighted their support for Finland and Sweden's applications for NATO membership. Mr Andris SPRŪDS,

Latvian *Saeima*, called for EU-NATO cooperation to be strengthened and made more efficient. With reference to the present blocking of Finland and Sweden's process of joining NATO Mr Rubén MORENO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, highlighted different forms of indirect pressure towards the EU and argued that the EU should defend its security, safety, and leadership in the world. Mr Peter KMEC, Slovak *Národná rada*, argued that new tools were needed for the EU to face new internal and external threats, and the concept of the EU's strategic autonomy should therefore be developed further.

Mr DANIELSSON concluded the session by thanking the Chairpersons for a rich and interesting discussion, and for all the support that had been expressed in the debate for the Swedish Presidency priorities. The first and foremost priority would be continued support to Ukraine and maintaining unity. He especially referred to contributions in the debate that had called for increased efforts to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Mr DANIELSSON confirmed that the Swedish Presidency would be a very strong supporter of setting up the necessary structures to that end, in cooperation with other organisations, and with Ukraine. In addition, he said that the Presidency would make efforts to advance work in the Council regarding the use of frozen Russian assets for the reconstruction of Ukraine. Mr DANIELSSON also confirmed that the Presidency would be committed to advancing work on the Pact on Asylum and Migration, acknowledging that many immediate challenges regarding migration also needed to be addressed. He also confirmed the decisiveness of the Swedish Presidency to advance to the extent possible the process of Romania and Bulgaria joining the Schengen area. In conclusion, he reminded everyone present that the role of the Presidency was to drive the EU's legislative agenda forward, and noted that the Swedish Presidency had 305 open dossiers on the table, which would need considerable effort.

5. CLOSING REMARKS BY MR HANS WALLMARK, CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON EU AFFAIRS OF THE SWEDISH RIKSDAG

Mr WALLMARK proceeded to the end of the meeting, thanking all participants for the very interesting and constructive debates. He also mentioned three specific wishes for the coming months leading to the COSAC Plenary meeting in May: the first being that Europe would become as strong and successful as it deserved to be, and that was the reason to celebrate the single market - only through stable economies could the EU thrive; the second wish was that Sweden and Finland should become members of NATO, and in that connection he thanked all the Member States that had already ratified this accession; thirdly, and referring to the book of Ukrainian poetry "*Under Ukrainas öppna himmel - Röster ur ett krig*" (Under the open sky of Ukraine: voices from a war), recently translated to Swedish, Mr WALLMARK wished that a free Ukrainian sky could be possible again soon.

Mr WALLMARK then closed the meeting.