

Plenary Meeting of the LXI COSAC

Bucharest, 23-25 June 2019

Contribution of the LXI COSAC

1. European Elections

1.1 COSAC welcomes the successful conduct of the ninth European elections, held from 23 to 26 May 2019. COSAC warmly greets the turnout in the elections, which for the first time in 25 years, was higher than 50%.

2. Cohesion, a common European value

2.1 COSAC recognizes Cohesion Policy as a fundamental pillar of the European project, and acknowledges its significant results achieved in terms of economic growth, job creation, social and territorial convergence.

2.2 COSAC recalls that cohesion policy is an expression of solidarity, which places the citizens at the centre, both as source of inspiration and as beneficiaries of the European action, and pleads for its adequate and sustainable financing.

2.3 COSAC calls for increased efforts at all levels, in order to close development gaps across the EU, to ensure social development and high living standards, to promote connectivity and digitization, to stimulate entrepreneurship, to strengthen industrial policy and to provide a safer and greener environment.

3. Prospects for international trade relations of the European Union; future relations between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the context of Brexit

3.1 COSAC recalls that the EU is currently the largest trade partner for more than 80 countries worldwide and considers that trade is essential to generate wealth as long as it is conducted in open and fair terms.

3.2 COSAC supports the World Trade Organisation's reform in terms of efficiency, transparency and resilience to the challenges of the 21st century.

3.3 COSAC welcomes the EU's efforts to seize new economic opportunities and encourages the European Commission to assess, pursue and negotiate free trade relations with countries and regions from Africa, Asia, North and South America, as well as with Australia and New Zealand.

3.4 COSAC stresses the need for a balanced EU trade policy, which takes into account not only the opening of the Single Market to key world partners, but also the necessity to preserve the EU social and environmental standards, along with the competitiveness of European companies. Protecting the Single Market is essential and requires to develop tools against dumped and subsidised imports from non-EU countries.

3.5 COSAC also calls to promote, respect and defend European fundamental values, such as democracy and rule of law, human and social rights, environment, geographical indications, health, food safety or animal welfare, when negotiating and implementing new trade agreements. In particular, COSAC stresses the need to fight against xenophobia, racism and antisemitism.

3.6 COSAC recalls that the European Commission's competence on trade gives the EU a very strong negotiating stance *vis-à-vis* third countries.

3.7 COSAC stresses the importance of transatlantic trade relations and the need to further improve them, and welcomes the EU Council's decision authorising the European Commission to open negotiations with the USA for a free trade agreement on industrial goods.

3.8 Inasmuch as the United Kingdom decides to leave the EU, COSAC reiterates the need to maintain the Single Market's integrity and pleads for privileged post-Brexit trade relationships.

4. The European Education Area as a driving factor for reshaping and strengthening the Single Market

4.1 COSAC recalls the need for all educational systems in the EU to keep up with the technological progress, to meet the labour market's expectations and to prepare young generations for the highly qualified jobs of the future and for innovation-based entrepreneurship. At the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education is essential to enhance prosperity and competitiveness of the European economy and to transform the Single Market into a place where the most innovative companies meet the best-qualified workforce.

4.2 COSAC acknowledges the national and regional competences in terms of education and pleads for enhanced coordination between the EU, its Member States and all relevant federated entities in order to build an inclusive, flexible and comprehensive education environment in line with the requirements of the digital era and the new technologies.

4.3 COSAC considers that a high and comparable level of education and digital skills, all across the EU, the mutual recognition of diplomas, as well as a common

framework to facilitate recognition of the digital certifications, are fundamental for strengthening and deepening the Single Market.

4.4 While welcoming the efforts undertaken to create a European Education Area by 2025, COSAC invites the European Commission to give a new impetus to the lifelong-learning framework, notably by elaborating communications and by supporting the action plans of the involved European agencies, and stresses the need to finance research in pedagogy.

4.5 COSAC calls for renewed actions to favour mobility, youth employment and youth entrepreneurship, notably by addressing the school-to-work challenges and by adapting the training and education systems to the digital era and the artificial intelligence.

4.6 COSAC pleads for promoting STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), for involving the business sector's participation to the digital education, at all levels, and for fostering the public-private partnerships in the high technology fields of education, such as air and space sciences or quantum computers.

4.7 COSAC invites national and regional Parliaments to identify and exchange best practices in order to develop flexible and harmonised education systems and to adapt the European Education Area to the digital and technological developments.

5. Economy based on innovation, technological progress and social impact; the role of parliaments in fostering the new economy of the EU

5.1 COSAC stresses the need to ensure proper legislation, able to follow and drive innovations throughout the whole digital and technological era, based on transparent political dialogue and on economic, social, legal and bio-ethical assessments.

5.2 COSAC considers technological progress and artificial intelligence as crucial for the Single Market, providing a significant advantage to the European economy in the global competition context, and therefore requiring a common and harmonised legislative approach.

5.3 COSAC calls on the European Commission to treat technological progress and artificial intelligence as top priorities during its next mandate, to encourage, perform and accelerate all necessary consultations in these fields, and to come with adequate proposals in order to avoid any gaps between the new technologies and the legislative framework.

5.4 COSAC considers that technological progress and artificial intelligence should work for the people, and not against the people; they should be mastered, affordable, and their use should be wise, cohesive and transparent, in full compliance with individual and collective rights and obligations.

5.5 As technological progress and artificial intelligence bring both risks and advantages, COSAC recalls the need to ensure that they entirely meet the citizens' expectations and asks for comprehensive measures to mitigate their impact on the labour market and to diminish their intrusive nature. Special attention should be given to the rights of users', consumers' and workers', social security contributions, as well as to the new professional qualifications and the next industrial strategies.

5.6 COSAC considers that subsidiarity and proportionality checks are still relevant when regulating new technologies, and calls on Parliaments and European Commission to encourage and finance the value chains across the EU, to foster social and political dialogue, and to boost confidence in new technologies.

6. Subsidiarity and proportionality

6.1 COSAC reaffirms its solid interest in further developing the subsidiarity and proportionality control mechanisms and wishes that the EU institutions continuously improve the application of these two principles, as they confer increased democratic legitimacy to their actions.

6.2 COSAC calls on national and regional Parliaments to harness the full potential of the subsidiarity and proportionality scrutiny procedures and to support the improvement of political dialogue with the European institutions, thus enhancing transparency of EU policy making and bringing people closer to the EU.

6.3 COSAC calls onto the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council to swiftly reach an agreement on excluding the Christmas, New Year and Easter holidays from the eight-week period to submit reasoned opinions.

6.4 COSAC welcomes the European Commission's Communication "*The principles of subsidiarity and proportionality: Strengthening their role in the EU's policymaking*", particularly those measures concerning the common understanding of subsidiarity and proportionality, as well as a greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the EU policy-making process. COSAC also welcomes the achievements of the Subsidiarity Conference held in Bregenz, on 15-16 November 2018, during the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council.

6.5 COSAC acknowledges that the EU faces many challenges, in terms of economic development, unemployment, migration, security or climate change, and therefore supports a more effective implementation of the existing legislation.

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