

LXXI COSAC

Brussels, 24-26 March 2024

Draft contribution

The 2019-2024 legislature

- (1) At the end of a European legislature marked by several crises, COSAC wishes to highlight the progress made by the European Union in building a Union that is united, economically solid, ecologically viable, and based on solidarity.
- (2) COSAC recalls the priorities of the strategic agenda for the period 2019-2024, namely: protecting citizens and freedoms; building a strong and dynamic economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair, and social Europe; promoting Europe's interests and values on the world stage. A great deal of progress has been made, but these priorities must continue to be pushed forward.

The 2024-2029 strategic agenda

- (3) COSAC welcomes the establishment of the strategic agenda for the 2024-2029 period and the priority areas proposed by the President of the European Council in his letter of 24 June 2023, namely: consolidating our economic and social base; meeting the energy challenge; strengthening our security and defence capabilities; and deepening our cooperation with the rest of the world.
- (4) COSAC supports the key priorities and necessary measures for a strong, dynamic, competitive, and united Europe as set out in the Granada Declaration of 6 October 2023. These priorities reflect the European Union's current challenges in the following areas: security and defence, resilience and competitiveness, energy, migration, global engagement, and enlargement. In view of Russia's aggression, COSAC underlines the fundamentally deteriorated security situation in Europe and

continued support to Ukraine must be of highest concern during the foreseeable future.

- (5) COSAC recalls the importance of agriculture in Europe, which represents a strategic resource for Member States and for the food autonomy of the European Union. To this end, COSAC considers it essential to reduce the burden on the sector, to strengthen the effectiveness of the Common Agricultural Policy and to promote a more efficient European response to unfair competition from third countries.
- (6) COSAC encourages the European institutions to continue to listen to European citizens, in particular through the recommendations adopted by the Conference on the Future of Europe.
- (7) In terms of consolidating the economic and social base, COSAC stresses the importance of the European Union's resilience and competitiveness.
- (8) To meet the EU ambitious climate goals, COSAC is encouraging the European Union to pursue energy efficiency, energy sobriety, resource efficiency, circularity, decarbonisation, resilience to natural disasters and adaptation to climate change. However, COSAC emphasises that the legislative measures related to the green transition should comply with the EU Social Pillar and ensure the economic and social sustainability, taking into account the needs of workers and businesses.
- (9) Regarding security and defence, COSAC stresses the importance of strengthening the European Union's defence capabilities through investment in its industrial and technological base, inter alia by including SMEs into defence industry supply chains, in order to move towards global competitiveness and Union's readiness in security and defence. In this context, COSAC encourages the EU and NATO to further deepen and broaden their cooperation, and to act together against common security threats as set out in their Joint Declaration of 10 January 2023 with particular attention to Member States most exposed to military threats.
- (10) The EU-NATO and transatlantic cooperation should also contribute to the preparedness and resilience in the economy, the society, and the institutions at all levels in crisis and conflict.
- (11) COSAC notes the publication of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security policy on "A new European Defence Industrial Strategy: Achieving EU readiness through a

responsive and resilient European Defence Industry" (JOIN(2024) 10 final), and the European Commission proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Defence Industry Programme and a framework of measures to ensure the timely availability and supply of defence products ('EDIP') (2024/0061 (COD)), both published on 5 March 2024.

- (12) COSAC supports the idea of European defence bonds to strengthen EU defence capabilities. COSAC also supports the consideration of defence related investments as relevant factor for exclusion from the calculation of the budget targets of the new European Stability and Growth Pact.
- (13) As far as international cooperation is concerned, COSAC encourages the strengthening of relations with actors who promote the values of the European Union, particularly in terms of democracy and the rule of law.
- (14) COSAC supports the enlargement process as a geostrategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. COSAC welcomes finalisation of proposals by the Commission for the draft Negotiating Frameworks with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, subject to the approval by the Council, and calls for working towards opening accession talks with Georgia, in line with the merit-based approach. It urges the candidates for membership to intensify, with the assistance of the European Union, their reform efforts, particularly in the field of the rule of law, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria. At the same time, the necessary reforms must be undertaken to ensure that an enlarged European Union can continue to function effectively in the interests of the citizens of the EU.
- (15) In order to involve the citizens of the EU as much as possible, COSAC insists on the consultation, or possibly participation, of national parliaments in drawing up the strategic agenda.

Open strategic autonomy: competitiveness and resilience

- (16) As stated at its meeting in Madrid, COSAC considers the issue of open strategic autonomy to be one of the key elements of the European Union's current and future work towards a sovereign Europe that is more resilient by sustaining its long-term competitiveness, basing it more on innovation.
- (17) COSAC reaffirms the need for the Union to strengthen its economic and industrial base, as well as the resources and capabilities necessary to ensure its strategic autonomy and cooperation with partners in an increasingly competitive and complex world, without abandoning its social market economy and the advantages of an open global economy.
- (18) COSAC welcomes the fact that the concept of open strategic autonomy, initially more closely linked to security and defence, now makes economic sense. The recent conclusions and declarations of the leaders during the year 2023, several of which were made under the Spanish Presidency, contribute to this. The Resilient EU2030 document presented at the informal European Council in Granada also contributes to this.

Ukraine

- (19) COSAC reiterates the statements made at its meetings in Prague, Stockholm, and Madrid strongly and unequivocally condemning Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal invasion of Ukraine, its war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as the accomplice role of Belarus in conducting it, and the temporary occupation and attempted annexation of parts of Ukrainian territory, which constitutes a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter.
- (20) COSAC reiterates its demand for the immediate and unconditional cessation of Russia's illegal military actions, the withdrawal of all its forces and military equipment from Ukrainian territory, within its internationally recognised borders, and demands the immediate cessation of the use of force or any other form of aggression against Ukraine.
- (21) COSAC once again expresses its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia within their internationally recognised borders, as well as Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence against Russian aggression.
- (22) COSAC calls on the European Union and its Member States to continue to provide strong political, diplomatic, economic, military, technical, and humanitarian support to Ukraine and its people for as long as necessary to put an end to Russia's war of aggression and to restore Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. As far as military support is concerned, COSAC supports the idea of continuing military assistance through bilateral channels the European Peace Facility and also through supplies from partners outside the European Union, in particular by speeding up the supply of missiles and munitions as part of the initiative to supply one million artillery munitions and air defence systems to protect the Ukrainian people and their critical and energy infrastructures. This does not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.
- (23) COSAC supports Ukraine's efforts to build a self-sufficient defence industrial complex, in particular by significantly strengthening defence industry cooperation with EU Member States.
- (24) COSAC stresses the importance of maintaining unity and strengthening international cooperation to ensure Ukraine's victory in its struggle against the Russian Federation's war of aggression.

- (25) COSAC reiterates its appreciation and support for European and international efforts to restore, recover and rebuild Ukraine. It calls on the EU institutions and Member States to accelerate efforts to use frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.
- (26) COSAC welcomes the diplomatic efforts made to ensure the broadest possible international support for the fundamental principles and objectives of the Ukrainian peace formula. It underlines its support for the implementation of the peace formula and for the organisation of a World Peace Summit, recalling that a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine must be based on full respect for its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders. Achieving this objective would make a significant contribution to strengthening international peace and security.
- (27) COSAC welcomes the recent adoption by the European Parliament and the Council of the regulation establishing the Ukraine Facility, following the European Council's agreement on the revision of the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework. The Ukraine Facility will support Ukraine, its recovery, and its path towards EU membership, with up to €50 billion in grants and loans provided over the years 2024 to 2027.
- (28) COSAC considers it necessary to hold the Russian leadership and their accomplices fully accountable for the war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as for the massive damage caused by its war, and all those who participated in or committed war crimes or other serious crimes, and fully supports the International Criminal Court's investigation in Ukraine, as well as all other initiatives aimed at preventing such crimes from going unpunished, including the creation of an international criminal tribunal to try the crime of aggression against Ukraine and the establishment of a future compensation mechanism.
- (29) COSAC expresses its full support to the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes, and calls on all Member States to sign it.
- (30) COSAC supports measures to weaken Russia's ability to wage its war of aggression, including sanctions adopted by the European Union, and calls for their full and effective implementation and for intensified efforts, in cooperation with partners, to

block any attempt to circumvent these sanctions. It welcomes the adoption of the 13th sanctions package on 23 February 2024 aimed at further restricting Russia's access to military technologies such as drones, and at adding new companies and individuals to the list of companies and individuals participating in Russia's war effort.

- (31) COSAC condemns the military, material, and other support that certain countries and proxy forces continue to provide to Russia's war against Ukraine and urges them to cease these actions.
- (32) COSAC reiterates its strong condemnation of the deportations and illegal transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to Russia and Belarus, a crime for which the International Criminal Court issued an international arrest warrant against the Russian President on 17 March 2023, and calls on these countries to guarantee their immediate and safe return.
- (33) COSAC condemns Russia's deliberate attacks on Ukrainian civilian and critical infrastructure, including grain export facilities, as well as actions to impede freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, which show that Russia continues to use food as a weapon, thereby endangering global food security. COSAC welcomes Ukraine's decisive action to open an alternative sea route to maintain grain exports following Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. COSAC supports all efforts to facilitate the export of grain, particularly to the poorest countries in Africa and the Middle East, and to increase the capacity of EU solidarity corridors and other Ukrainian grain export routes. It is also important to promote the resilience of agriculture in Africa.
- (34) COSAC condemns the attempt by the Russian Federation to illegally annex the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia. It also condemns the organisation of presidential elections in the temporarily occupied territories. The results of these illegal elections will be null and void. COSAC takes note of the serious and ongoing deterioration of the political conditions in Russia manifested among others by the death of Alexsei Navalny and a presidential election characterised by a lack of conditions for free and fair elections.

- (35) COSAC condemns Russia's politically motivated persecution of EU citizens. It invites the Commission and the High Representative to take the necessary steps to prevent the execution by third countries of arrest warrants issued by Russia in such cases.
- (36) COSAC reiterates its condemnation of the inhumane detention and death of Alexsey Navalny, and the peaceful demonstrations in his memory, as well as the holding of elections without the minimum requirements of international organisations, in particular the Council of Europe and the OSCE.
- (37) COSAC reiterates its support for the ongoing accession process of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to the EU, based on the fulfilment of the conditions required for the enlargement process in accordance with the European Commission's enlargement package for 2023. COSAC reaffirms its support for the need to advance on the accession to the EU of the Western Balkans countries, in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria.
- (38) COSAC supports the European Council's focus on security and defence in its conclusions of the 1st of February 2024, including the need for Europe to increase its overall defence preparedness and further strengthen its defence industrial and technological base.

The Middle East

- (39) COSAC reiterates the statements made at its meeting in Madrid and expresses its support for the firm declaration of condemnation of Hamas adopted, by consensus, by the European Council at its meeting on 15 October 2023 and reiterated on 26 October 2023, for the attacks committed by this terrorist organization in various parts of Israel.
- (40) COSAC insists on Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with and within the limits imposed on it by international law and international humanitarian law. It reiterates its call on Hamas to immediately release all hostages without any preconditions.
- (41) COSAC also urges Israel to stop its disproportionate military response, which has resulted in the death of civilians on an unprecedented scale. COSAC recalls the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice in its Order of 26 January 2024, which create international legal obligations. International law must be the only valid compass in this conflict.
- (42) COSAC reaffirms the importance of ensuring the protection of all civilians at all times, in accordance with international humanitarian law. It condemns the October 7 massacres committed against Israelis civilians including the systematic sexual and gender-based violence against women. It deplores all loss of civilian lives from both sides, with the majority of them being women and children. COSAC recalls that the International Court of Justice, in its order of 26 January 2024, considered that a real and imminent risk of irreparable harm being caused to the rights that it has deemed plausible and therefore indicated certain measures to be implemented to protect these rights.
- (43) COSAC condemns the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and particularly in Rafah, where the UN is warning of the risk of widespread famine. COSAC calls for continuous, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and for aid to reach those in need through all necessary measures, including safe humanitarian corridors and an immediate humanitarian pause leading to a sustainable ceasefire to meet humanitarian needs. COSAC also expresses its strong support for Operation "Amalthia" delivering much needed humanitarian aid to Gaza through a maritime route from Cyprus. COSAC underlines that the International

Court of Justice has demanded that the State of Israel take "immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance" in Gaza in its order of 26 January 2024.

- (44) COSAC stresses that international humanitarian law states that hospitals, medical supplies and civilians inside hospitals must be protected, and at the same time must not be used for military operations, also according to Article 8 of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. COSAC further stresses that International law also states that hospitals should not be used to shield military objectives from attack. Hospitals must also receive the most urgent medical supplies immediately, and patients in need of urgent medical care must be evacuated safely. In this context, it urges Israel to exercise the utmost restraint to ensure the protection of civilians.
- (45) COSAC is also concerned about the increase in violence against the Palestinian civilian population in the West Bank, for which 2023 has been the deadliest year since UN records began.
- (46) COSAC reiterates the need to avoid regional escalation and to engage with all relevant partners in this regard, including the Palestinian Authority. COSAC deplors that the Palestinian Authority has to this day not condemned the October 7 attacks. COSAC strongly condemns Iran-controlled Hezbollah for having fired since October 8 some 5,000 missiles against Israel, forcing some 80,000 Israelis to flee their homes, becoming internally displaced. In view of the dramatic situation in Gaza, all appropriate diplomatic and economic levers must be envisioned with regard to both parties to the conflict.
- (47) COSAC is ready to contribute to relaunching a political process based on the two-state solution, living side by side in peace and mutual security. It welcomes diplomatic initiatives for peace and security and supports the forthcoming international peace conference.
- (48) COSAC stresses the crucial role of UNRWA's work, both with regard to the humanitarian response in Gaza as to the general stability in the region. It calls on UNRWA to continue its cooperation in addressing the allegations that a few of its staff members were involved in the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023.
- (49) COSAC welcomes the launch of the maritime security Operation Aspides under the common security and defence policy, as a necessary step to address the maritime

security situation from the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden also contributing to ensure the freedom of navigation in the wider European and Indo-Pacific area.

Gender policy and the representation of women and men in parliament

- (50) COSAC welcomes the promotion of transparency within democratic institutions through statistics on the representation of women and men, regular evaluation of gender equality policies and reporting on progress. According to the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), gender equality in the European Union reached an average of 70.2 points in 2023. This means that the Equality Index has exceeded 70 points for the first time, showing a growth of 1.6 points since 2022. The increase in the European Union's overall score is the biggest year-on-year rise since the first edition of the Index in 2013.
- (51) COSAC also points out that according to the EIGE, in 2023, the proportion of women in the national parliaments of the European Union has risen to 33 points (idem 2022 and 2021).
- (52) COSAC welcomes the declaration of the presidency of the trio of Member States holding the consecutive presidency of the Council of the EU (Spain, Belgium and Hungary) on gender equality, adopted on 26 and 27 February 2024 at the informal meeting of EU gender equality ministers, and that the issue will also be addressed in the European Commission's report on the rule of law.
- (53) COSAC calls for the European Commissioner for Equality to publish an annual report on the representation of women in decision-making bodies. This report could be the subject of an exchange of views in national parliaments. Indeed, COSAC stresses the need to promote gender equality and the active participation of women in decision-making processes, as well as in national parliaments.
- (54) COSAC considers that the structures and functioning of national parliaments should be more gender-sensitive. It refers to the EIGE toolboxes that can be used to make an institution more gender-sensitive, in particular by means of a self-assessment, a rating system or an interpretation of a parliament's gender sensitivity. Taken together, these steps make it possible to objectively measure the policies and interventions aimed at strengthening equality between women and men in a parliament.
- (55) COSAC notes that, based on the replies to the Questionnaire for the 41st COSAC Bi-annual Report, in most of the national parliaments of the European Union, women

are in the minority, not only as members of parliament, but also in positions of responsibility and in the parliamentary administration.

- (56) COSAC welcomes the fact that a majority of national parliaments already organise specific arrangements for members and/or staff with children, such as breastfeeding facilities, childcare or the possibility of following meetings online. It encourages the necessary legislative or regulatory measures to be taken to ensure a balance between private and political life, regardless of gender.
- (57) COSAC welcomes the fact that almost one in two national assemblies has a specific committee to deal with gender issues or deals with these issues within one or more other committees.
- (58) COSAC also welcomes the fact that national parliaments are drafting and adopting action plans on gender equality, as well as guidelines for gender-sensitive and gender-neutral language.
- (59) COSAC welcomes the active promotion of gender equality in all spheres of political life through the balanced representation of women and men in decision-making bodies, political organs and positions of responsibility. It recognises that gender equality can only be achieved through proactive actions and targeted policies aimed at eliminating structural and cultural barriers that limit women's participation in political life.
- (60) COSAC supports the introduction of concrete measures to ensure equitable access to political office by promoting gender parity in electoral lists, candidacies and appointments to political positions.
- (61) COSAC calls for the gender dimension to be taken into account, in all areas, when drafting and implementing legislation and when drawing up budgets.
- (62) COSAC encourages the elimination of discrimination and obstacles to women's political participation through the adoption of promotion and mentoring policies and reinforcing access to political training. This may include the creation of networks and platforms enabling women to share their experiences, help each other, and strengthen their collective voice.
- (63) COSAC encourages the fight against gender stereotypes in politics by promoting a diverse representation of women and men, valuing their skills and ideas, and encouraging their active participation in political debates and decision-making. It is

necessary to reject all forms of discrimination, sexism or harassment in politics and to work towards the creation of safe, respectful, and inclusive political environments for all individuals.

- (64) COSAC calls for equal and meaningful participation of women and men at all levels of governance by encouraging their presence in decision-making bodies, committees and consultative bodies. In addition, gender balance in parliamentary delegations on missions abroad should also be encouraged.
- (65) COSAC welcomes the collaboration between parliamentary institutions and with civil society organisations, research institutes and gender experts to strengthen knowledge, exchange good practice, and improve policies on gender equality in politics.

The future of democracy and the rule of law in Europe

- (66) COSAC notes that in recent years the rule of law has been called into question in some Member States and stresses that the rule of law and democracy are the foundation of the European Union and that the rule of law must be fully respected by all Member States and the EU, as well as candidate countries, as it ensures the effective application of Union law and plays a crucial role in the functioning of the Union.
- (67) COSAC recognises the important role of parliaments to promote a stronger European culture of the rule of law and welcomes the fact that the European Commission's annual report on the rule of law contains recommendations to all Member States, urging them to implement the necessary rule of law reforms.
- (68) COSAC wishes to encourage contacts between the European Commission and governments/parliaments to organise reforms, when necessary, aimed at improving the rule of law in the Member States. In this context, COSAC recommends that national parliaments examine the annual report in committee and/or plenary session, drawing on the expertise of an independent national institution specialising in the rule of law and democracy.
- (63) COSAC believes that regarding the rule of law, all Member States should be judged in the same way. The fundamental principles and values of the European Union are non-negotiable, and the rule of law should be better protected, in particular by applying the conditionality mechanism and reflecting on the extension of extending the concept of the rule of law to social rights, and by strengthening guarantees with regard to gender equality within the Union. Furthermore, COSAC considers that the regulation on conditionality linked to the rule of law is of the utmost importance to protect the EU budget. COSAC also wishes to strengthen the section devoted to the difficulties encountered by civil society organisations in the European Union.
- (64) COSAC believes that promoting the rule of law is synonymous with a better life for European citizens. COSAC wishes to stress the importance of the European Citizens' Initiative as a central instrument of participatory democracy in the European Union. A strong culture of the rule of law and citizen involvement is essential. An annual

conference on the state of the rule of law in the EU should be organised with the involvement of citizens.

- (65) COSAC also believes that strengthening democratic values requires recognition of the role of national parliaments. In line with the Report on the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe, that the European Parliament should have the right of legislative initiative and that the EU should review the mechanism allowing national Parliaments to assess whether new legislative proposals at the European level do not intrude on their legal competences and to be granted the possibility to suggest a legislative initiative to the European level. If an EU-citizens' initiative can ask the European Commission to take action, a similar power should be conferred on national parliaments. In this way, the green card initiative, which could be formalised, is a step towards strengthening the rights of parliamentarians and their participation in the European legislative process. COSAC calls on the European Council to follow-up on the implementation of the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe and to examine the proposals set out in the European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2023 on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties (2022/2051(INL)) and reflected in the Annex thereto in line with its obligation under Article 48 (3) of the Treaty on European Union.
- (66) COSAC welcomes the Action Plan for European Democracy, the negotiations on the creation of a European body to deal with ethical issues, as well as the new regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, which represents a step forward in the fight against disinformation by promoting media independence and pluralism, and by giving the European Union a greater role in cyber security, and in the fight against corruption that is to be strengthened in all areas.
- (67) COSAC stresses that the values and principles enshrined in the EU Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union must be all the more protected now that the European continent is plunged into a context of war. COSAC invites the EU institutions and the Member States to launch an open debate on the establishment of a qualified majority vote for the activation of the Treaty on the European Union in order to react in the event of serious and persistent violations of the fundamental values of the European Union by a Member State. COSAC looks

forward to the outcome of the Council's discussions on the importance and strengthening of the rule of law in the context of future enlargements.

Access to information on the Council's decision-making process

- (68) COSAC encourages the Council to take all possible measures to ensure access to information for national parliaments throughout the legislative process and takes note of the Council Secretariat's decision to suspend access for national parliaments to the delegates' portal and calls for a dialogue with a view to a concerted solution.
- (69) COSAC wishes to emphasise the importance of Articles 4 and 12 of the Treaty on European Union and Protocol (no. 1) to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.
- (70) COSAC takes into account the European Parliament resolution of 17 January 2024 on the implementation of the Treaty provisions relating to national parliaments (2023/2084(INI)), stating that the active involvement of national parliaments in European affairs and the enhanced scrutiny of national governments by national parliaments are essential to ensure the democratic accountability and legitimacy of the institutional system of the European Union, stressing that parliamentary scrutiny can be facilitated by greater transparency within the Council and that, in addition, access to documents of the other EU institutions enables national parliaments to exercise appropriate scrutiny.
- (71) Taking into account a request for greater transparency made by a large majority of the presidents of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs, COSAC calls on the Council to ensure access to information for national parliaments in a manner consistent with the above-mentioned resolution.
- (72) COSAC reminds that the accountability of national governments to national parliaments as acknowledged by Article 10(2) of the Treaty on European Union is the keystone of the role of national parliamentary chambers in the European Union. It considers that national parliaments are partners in maintaining the EU institutional balance.
- (73) COSAC invites the Council Secretariat to consult with national parliaments and national governments on ways to increase security of information sharing efficiently.