



Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

**COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting
Riga, Latvia**

2 February 2015

Report of the Delegation

Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

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Report on attendance at COSAC Chairpersons' Meeting

Riga, Latvia, 2 February 2015

1. The meeting of COSAC Chairpersons under the Latvian Presidency took place in Riga on 2 February. The meeting was chaired by Ms Lolita Cigāne, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian Saeima. The meeting was attended by the Mr. Dominic Hannigan T.D. Chairman of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, and Mr. Séan Kyne, T.D. accompanied by Ms. Bríd Dunne, Clerk to the Committee and Mr. Derek Dignam.
2. The main items discussed at the meeting were procedural and other matters and in particular preparations for the plenary LIII COSAC meeting to be held in Riga on 31 May - 2 June. A presentation was made on the outcome of a 'cluster meeting' held in Brussels in January, on the role of National Parliaments. Policy debates on the Priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and on the Eastern Partnership and Challenges Ahead took place. The main outcomes of the meeting were, the agreement of the draft agenda for the LIII COSAC plenary meeting and the draft outline of the 23rd COSAC bi-annual report.

Procedural Matters

The Chairpersons agreed the draft agenda for the LIII COSAC meeting as well as the draft outline of the 23rd COSAC Bi-annual Report. It was agreed that the 23rd Biannual Report would deal with the issues below and that a questionnaire will be prepared by the COSAC Secretariat to be sent to each national parliament for completion:-

- Energy policy: state of play, challenges and opportunities
 - Future of the parliamentary scrutiny of the EU affairs
 - EU trade policy and the role of Parliaments.
3. The Chairpersons' agreed that the agenda for the LIII COSAC plenary will include debates on the following issues:-
 - State of Play of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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- EU Energy policy: the EU as a Global Actor
 - EU trade policy for the next five years
 - Security concerns in the Middle East and Northern African Regions.
 - Future of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs.
4. The Chair, Ms. Cigāne reported on relevant decisions of the Troika as regards letters received by the Presidency. In response to a letter that had been received from the Dutch Tweede Kamer, the Trioka had invited Mr. René Leegte to report on the cluster meeting held recently in Brussels on the role of National Parliaments. Also, in response to a letter received from the Estonian parliament on a common statement on the events in Ukraine, the Troika supported the initiative, with modifications, which was approved by delegates.
5. Interventions then followed by Mr LEEGTE, Dutch Tweede Kamer, and Lord Timothy Boswell, UK House of Lords, on the ‘yellow card’ and proposed ‘green card’ procedures respectively. Mr. Pomaska, of the Polish Sejm, invited all the Chairpersons to participate in a future meeting on the yellow card procedure to be held in Warsaw.
- **Priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union – *keynote speakers: Ms. Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica, Parliamentary Secretary Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia and Mr. Frans Timmermanns First Vice-President of the European Commission.***
6. Ms. Zanda Kalnina-Lukasevica outlined the three main topics of the Latvian Presidency – ‘Competitive Europe’, ‘Digital Europe’ and ‘Engaged Europe’. Under the topic Competitive Europe, the Presidency aims is to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and promote economic growth. The European Union Fund for Strategic Investments is a top priority for the Presidency. The Presidency would also pay special attention to achieving a fully functioning Single Market and a real ‘Digital Single Market’ particularly focused on better regulation and cutting red tape. She referred to Digital Assembly planned for June in Riga. The Presidency also referred to the launch in February the concept of the ‘Energy Union’.

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In terms of an 'Engaged Europe', she pointed to the need for a united approach in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Related is the revision of the Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership, which is one of the priorities of the Latvian presidency. In relation to Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), she welcomed the European Commission's move towards greater transparency in the negotiations. She called upon National Parliaments to become actively involved in this matter. In the context of the terror attacks on Paris, stressed that the EU had to focus on enhancing cooperation and information sharing, to combat such attacks.

7. Mr. Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission noted that the Latvian Presidency's priorities were in line with the Commission Work Programme (CWP). He stressed the importance of the Juncker Investment Plan for creating jobs and growth and also underscored the need for improvement of the Internal Market and creation of a capital market union. He was convinced that better functioning of internal market would create growth and jobs. He highlighted the importance of foreign policy in the Commissions' agenda, mentioning the turmoil in Ukraine and threats to security from the other side of the Mediterranean. He stated that, while the security agenda was the responsibility of the Member States and not of the EU institutions, the European Commission was nevertheless ready to provide assistance.

On cooperation with National Parliaments, he stressed the need to intensify contacts with national Parliaments and promised that the European Commission would engage in discussions with a number of parliaments as soon as possible on the CWP. He pointed out that Commissioners planned to visit as many parliaments as possible, in particular where there were concerns related to subsidiarity and proportionality issues. He noted that discussions had to be held within the National Parliaments, should the "yellow card" issue be raised. In this context, he noted that the 'confrontational mode' with national Parliaments, on the one hand, and the Commission and the European Parliament, on the other, was now in the past. The idea that the national Parliaments' increasing position was a blow to European integration was also outdated. If the gap between institutions and citizens were to be closed, full engagement of national Parliaments was needed.

8. In the debate which followed, 23 speakers took the floor, including for Ireland, the Chair of the Oireachtas European Union Affairs Committee, Mr. Dominic Hannigan T.D. His remarks addressed the current debt issues in Europe, highlighting that the stability of the

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EU itself could be threatened if, in the context of addressing serious debt problems of member states, favourable treatment was given to any one Member State above another in dealing with its debts. The message must be loud and clear that all Members States would have to be treated the same, to avoid contagion of instability across the EU. The EU is a union of fairness and equality and that must concept must be respected. (**Reference Annex 1:** pages 12- 17 COSAC minutes for full debate).

- **Eastern Partnership and Challenges Ahead - keynote speakers: Mr Urban AHLIN, Speaker of the Swedish Riksdag, Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, and Mr Ostop SEMERAK, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration of the Ukrainian Verkhova Rada**
9. Mr Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish, Riksdag, stated that the Eastern Partnership Policy aimed at ensuring stability and economic prosperity at the Eastern borders of the EU, built upon an understanding that prosperous and secure countries also had prosperous and secure neighbours. He pointed to two key components of partnership; first, it created links and facilitated cooperation between people and second, it helped fight against corruption. Great progress had been achieved in relations within the Eastern Partnership, but only tangible results fully visible to the citizens would ensure its success. Referring to the upcoming Riga summit in May, he said, it would have to address several challenges: assessment of progress made to date, and renewal of the commitment to the partnership from both sides. He urged parliamentarians to ratify those Association Agreements already on the table before the Riga summit, namely, those with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.
10. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Edgars Rinkevics, pointed out that the overall priority was a balanced ENP, with critical challenges both in the South and in East being addressed (such as immigration, terrorism etc.). He noted that the Eastern partner countries had opted for different paths: Belarus and Armenia were members of the Eurasian Union; Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine had signed Association Agreements with the EU, aiming at deeper cooperation, whilst Azerbaijan maintained specific bilateral relations. In relation to Ukraine, the minister stressed the need to deliver on the assistance programmes. He addresses the other key aspects of the deliverables of the Riga Summit - the programme of mobility and loosening of visa requirements, as well as the cooperation in the field of energy. He also reiterated that the freedom of media was crucial in any

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reform process, thus a proper attention had to be devoted to this aspect. He stressed the key role of parliamentary cooperation as both the European Parliament and the National Parliaments had developed solid levels of partnership and contacts, which helped Eastern partners further develop their democratic systems and political rights.

11. Mr. Ostap Semerak, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration of the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, expressed his gratitude for the solidarity and support shown to Ukraine. He quoted the Latvian example as one to be encouraged by in terms of implementing necessary reforms and making the prospects of EU integration real. He stated that the best answer to that Russian aggression was a successful Ukraine and this goal should be reached by implementing reforms. He referred to tax and budget decentralisation, lowering the level of state expenditure, fighting the shadow economy and corruption in that context. At the same time, Ukraine must find ways of ending the war. He called upon all countries to provide humanitarian support and urged all National Parliaments to speed up work towards ratifying the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine, so as to complete this process before the Riga Summit.

12. In the following debate, 13 speakers took the floor including for Ireland, Mr. Dominic Hannigan, TD who stated that Ireland had always been a strong supporter of the Eastern Partnership and recently ratified the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which was an important step given the current crisis in Ukraine. He fully supported the declaration on Ukraine adopted by the Chairpersons of COSAC, expressing the hope that important measures would also be taken during the Riga Summit in May. (**Reference Annex 1** pages 18 – 23 COSAC minutes for full debate).

13. The meeting concluded with closing remarks by the Chair.



Dominic Hannigan T.D.
Chairman

16 December 2015.

Annex 1

Draft MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC Riga, Latvia, 2 February 2015

AGENDA:

- 1. Welcome address by Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE, Speaker of the *Saeima* of the Republic of Latvia**
Introductory remarks by Ms Lolita ČIGĀNE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian *Saeima*
- 2. Adoption of the agenda of the Meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC**
- 3. Procedural and other matters**
- 4. Priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and Prospects for the European Union after the Election of the New European Commission - keynote speakers: Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, and Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights**
- 5. Eastern Partnership and Challenges Ahead - keynote speakers: Mr Urban AHLIN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, and Mr Ostap SEMERAK, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration of the Ukrainian *Verkhova Rada***

PROCEEDINGS

IN THE CHAIR: Ms Lolita ČIGĀNE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian *Saeima*.

1. Welcome address by Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE, Speaker of the *Saeima* of the Republic of Latvia

Introductory remarks by Ms Lolita ČIGĀNE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Latvian *Saeima*

Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE welcomed the Chairpersons and referred to the Latvian Presidency's commitment to the call for more parliamentary involvement in the EU's decision-making. She mentioned the situation in Ukraine, as dire and grave as never before in the post-World War II era, and expressed her satisfaction with the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council to continue economic sanctions and to enlarge the list of targeted persons. She noted that European political leaders had recognised Russia's role behind rising armed escalation in the Eastern Ukraine and pointed out, among others, that the killing of civilians was a war crime and that the EU's moral obligation was to maximise all efforts leading to so-called People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk being called in their real names – terrorist organisations. She urged the EU and its Member States to put all efforts to support Ukraine that faced not only military aggression, but also so many socio-economic problems.

Ms Ināra MŪRNIECE identified the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), with its Eastern and Southern dimensions, as a priority of EU's external relations. She added that in the Riga

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Eastern Partnership Summit, a strong signal reaffirming long-term EU strategic support based on the differentiation for the neighboring countries should be sent. She concluded by quoting the Declaration on the 'New Narrative for Europe', presented last year by artists, scientists and intellectuals: Europe as a political body must deploy fully its "soft power" not only across the continent, but also beyond its borders to make it a respectful and respected international partner, promoting a new global model of society based on ethical and sustainable values.

Ms ČIGĀNE welcomed the Chairs to the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC and especially the Chairs elected during the last year and Mr Malik AZMANI, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, attending the COSAC meeting for the first time. The Chair recalled the historical value of the Latvian Saeima's main building which had witnessed many events that had proved significant and decisive for Latvia throughout time. She referred to the Latvian Presidency's clear commitment towards achieving tangible and durable results, but also noted that the tragic events in Paris, along with the renewed violence in the East Ukraine and the attacks on civilians in Mariupol, underscored both the uncertainty of events and the fact that we must be ready for any challenges.

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

Ms ČIGĀNE presented the topics and the keynote speakers of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC. The agenda of the meeting was adopted without amendment.

3. Procedural and other matters

Ms ČIGĀNE briefed the participants on the results of the Presidential Troika meeting held the previous day. She first presented the draft programme for the Plenary Meeting of the LIII COSAC, which would focus on three main issues: the EU Energy Policy; the EU as a global actor: EU Trade Policy for next five years; Future of the Parliamentary Scrutiny of EU Affairs. Ms ČIGĀNE informed the participants that the Presidential Troika had decided to support the request of the Chairpersons of South European Parliaments to include also the topic of security concerns in the Middle East and North African Regions. The Chair proposed to insert a session on this topic on the first day. Answering to Mr Philippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Chambre des représentants*, the Chair clarified that it would be a formal lunch session and that the topic would be addressed also in the relevant sessions of the upcoming Interparliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT, Polish *Senate*, asked to add the topic of the Eastern Partnership in the agenda of the meeting of the LIII COSAC. Ms ČIGĀNE pointed out that this subject had already been included in the COSAC Chairpersons meeting and that it would be addressed also in the Interparliamentary Conference for the CFSP and CSDP and in the Eastern Partnership Summit, which would be held in Riga at the end of May. She added that the outcome of the discussions of the Eastern Partnership Summit would be addressed under the session on the state of play of the Latvian Presidency during the LIII COSAC meeting and that a reflection on the topic in the final COSAC documents would be more than welcome.

Ms ČIGĀNE presented the outline of the 23rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC, which had been approved by the Presidential Troika. She announced that the questionnaire would be

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distributed in about two weeks' time and that the deadline for the replies would be the 23rd March 2015.

Ms ČIGĀNE then reported on relevant Troika's decisions as regards the letters received by the Presidency.

The Chair informed the participants that, in response to the letter received from Mr Malik AZMANI, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, the Troika had agreed to invite Mr René LEEGTE to report shortly on the informal meeting on the role of national Parliaments organised by the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* on 19 January in Brussels. She added that, after that meeting, the Presidency had sent a letter to Mr Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, suggesting further exploration of how to enhance the political dialogue, to which Mr TIMMERMANS had already answered.

She also mentioned the letter received from Mr Kalle PALLING, Estonian *Riigikogu*, proposing a draft for a common statement on current events in Ukraine. The Chair informed that the Troika supported the initiative and had modified the initial draft, in order to make the statement more in line with the results of the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council of 29 January 2015. The Chair gave the floor to Mr PALLING who explained his initiative, particularly referring to the recent escalation of violence in Eastern Ukraine, and accepted the new formulation. In the absence of any objection, the common statement was approved.

Mr LEEGTE, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, who had chaired the informal meeting in Brussels on the role of national Parliaments, presented the main conclusions of the meeting on the Commission Work Programme (CWP) and the "yellow card" procedure. In his introduction, Mr LEEGTE mentioned that national Parliaments were seeking a way to play their role with the instruments provided by the existing treaties and that they were able to work together with the European Parliament on priorities to improve the quality of EU policies.

Concerning the CWP, he concluded that national Parliaments should select their priorities and share them, possibly in the COSAC meetings. To this end, some tools were identified, among which an overview table of Commission proposals on which national Parliaments could mark their priorities, and the appointment of a "champion" parliament in charge of leading the follow-up. The table, he said, should be sent to the European institutions by 1st April. Parliaments could express their support to prioritising a certain proposal or could withdraw support at any time. He also underlined the role of the COSAC Secretariat, IPEX and the cooperation with the European Parliament. Referring to proposals not included in the CWP, Mr LEEGTE underlined the need to consider an *ad hoc* procedure, suggesting, among others, the use of the meetings of the network of Representatives in Brussels to identify priorities, the possibility of appointing a "champion" Parliament, as well as of sharing information.

Concerning the "yellow card" procedure, the Parliaments/Chambers participating in the cluster of interest meeting had considered forming an informal working group of willing national Parliaments with a broad mandate to explore the possibility of improving the "yellow card" procedure and of extending the 8-week period to 12 weeks within the current Treaties. The working group should present its conclusions to the meeting of the LIII COSAC in Riga. Mr LEEGTE informed that the Polish Parliament had offered to be the "leader" in the

informal initiative on the "yellow card" procedure and that the Dutch Parliament would send a staff member in order to support the work.

Lord Timothy BOSWELL, Chair of the EU Select Committee of the *House of Lords*, presented his working paper on the "green card" procedure thanking the Presidency for making the "green card" one of the topics to be explored in the Bi-annual Report and discussed at the meeting of the LIII COSAC. He stressed that the "green card" was not a revolutionary procedure, but a modest addition to the existing political dialogue. He noted that it was not intended to take away the responsibilities of national Parliaments' Committees for scrutiny or influencing the actions of their own Governments in Council, nor to undermine the Commission's right of initiative, nor to challenge the existing role of the European Parliament, nor to lead to a flood of new legislation, nor to bind national Parliaments or Governments. He noted that the cluster of interest meeting suggested there was strong consensus for further exploring the idea of a "green card". Lord BOSWELL suggested a practical approach, encouraging colleagues to give consideration to issues they would like to be seen taken forward as a "green card" and share their thoughts with other Parliaments. In this way, at the COSAC plenary meeting a small number of "popular" proposals could be identified and a first "green card" could be issued within the year. He encouraged national Parliaments to consider how to better express their collective voice and interest, without rushing the procedure, but preserving momentum.

In the following debate, Mr Richárd HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, welcomed the informal meeting conclusions on the CWP and mentioned the fruitful debate on this topic, which, for the first time, had been held in the COSAC meeting during the Hungarian Presidency.

Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, noted that the "green card" initiative was included in a resolution of the *Assemblée nationale* on the CWP. She considered the procedure an interesting idea and mentioned the decarbonised economy as a possible interesting issue.

Mr Agnieszka POMASKA, Polish *Sejm*, invited all Chairpersons to participate in a future meeting in Warsaw on the "yellow card" procedure.

Mr Marc ANGEL, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, said that he would join the informal working group on the "yellow card" procedure and announced that Luxembourg's Presidency would continue the debate on the "green and yellow cards".

4. Priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and Prospects for the European Union after the Election of the New European Commission - keynote speakers: Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, and Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights

Ms Zanda KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA, Parliamentary secretary of the Ministry of Foreign affairs of the Republic of Latvia, estimated that national Parliaments could step up their involvement in the EU law-making process, thereby ensuring both closer involvement of the citizens they represented and better cooperation with the European Parliament, as well as with the European Commission.

Ms KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA outlined three main priorities of the Latvian Presidency: Competitive Europe, Digital Europe and Engaged Europe. Under the topic Competitive Europe, she noted the wish of the Presidency to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and promote economic growth. The European Union Fund for Strategic Investments was a top priority for the Presidency. She pointed out the need to foster the investment in Europe and stated that the conditions for investments had to be improved by strengthening the internal market, launching the Energy Union and working on the Digital Single Market (DSM).

Ms KALNIŅA - LUKAŠEVICA underlined that the Presidency had paid special attention to achieving a fully functioning Single Market and true DSM, particularly focused on better regulation and cutting red tape. She also mentioned that the Presidency, together with the European Commission, had launched on 6th February the concept of the Energy Union and stressed the need for an energy policy based on solidarity, trust and security, a better integrated energy infrastructure, more efficient governance and sustainability.

On Digital Europe, she expressed the need to work on developing an effective DSM, pointing out that security and trust in the digital environment were a cornerstone for its development. The Digital Assembly in June in Riga would be one of the steps to that end.

Ms KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA stressed the wish of the Presidency for more engaged and globally responsible Europe; she pointed out specifically the need for a united approach towards Russia's aggression in Ukraine. She reminded the decision of the Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council on sanctions, which had to remain in place until Russia delivered on its commitments.

Ms KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA mentioned the revision of the ENP as one of the priorities of the Latvian Presidency and pointed out that, while the Presidency was focusing on the East, specific attention had to be devoted also to the issues of importance to the Southern neighbours.

She also noted that the Central Asia Region was also an important part of the Latvian Presidency's priorities, especially the work on the revision of the EU's Central Asia Strategy.

Expressing the Council's strong commitment to intensifying the work on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), she welcomed the European Commission's move towards greater transparency in the TTIP negotiations, including making TTIP texts available to the public. Ms KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA called upon national Parliaments to become actively involved in this matter.

Ms KALNIŅA-LUKAŠEVICA noted that the terrorist attacks in Paris had brought an additional priority for the Latvian Presidency, namely, internal security of the EU. She stressed that the EU had to focus on enhancing cooperation and information sharing, cooperation to reduce the supply of illegal arms, strategic communication, identification of travel routes of terrorists, namely, moving towards a European Passenger Name Record (EU PNR) framework. She expressed the conviction that the negotiations with the European Parliament on the EU PNR system had to start as soon as possible.

Ms KALNIŅA- LUKAŠEVICA concluded pointing out the need for joint engagement of national Parliaments, the European Parliament and the European Commission in making

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better regulation and principles of subsidiarity and proportionality an integral part of the EU legislative system for the benefit of all citizens of Europe.

Mr Frans TIMMERMANS, First Vice-President of the European Commission for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, noted that the Latvian Presidency's priorities were in line with CWP. Among others, he stressed the importance of Jean-Claude Juncker's investment plan (Juncker's investment plan) for creating jobs and growth and the need for increased investments. He pointed out the challenge of the investment gap, where Juncker's investment plan was a helpful tool.

He stated that, while the security agenda was the responsibility of the Members States and not of the EU institutions, the European Commission was nevertheless ready to provide assistance. He referred to the statement of the EU Interior Ministers, asking the European Commission to be more active and to support Members States. He stressed the need for improvements in the Schengen system. Mr TIMMERMANS expressed his conviction that the Commission was going to negotiate with the European Parliament on an EU PNR agreement.

The Vice-President also underscored the need for improvement of the Internal Market and creation of a capital market union. He was convinced that better functioning of internal market would create growth and jobs. He pointed out the need for labour mobility within the EU and also from the outside, stressing however that there was no support for labour mobility, if there were no right policies on asylum and other aspects of migration.

Mr TIMMERMANS mentioned that the DSM was very important, and that a lot would be gained if we were successful in enacting legislation for data protection, adding that the European Commission had to work closely with the European Parliament on this.

Mr TIMMERMANS highlighted the importance of foreign policy in the Commissions' agenda, mentioning the turmoil in Ukraine and threats to security from the other side of the Mediterranean.

On cooperation with national Parliaments, Vice-President TIMMERMANS stressed the need to intensify contacts with national Parliaments and promised that the European Commission would engage in discussions with a number of Parliaments as soon as possible on the CWP. He pointed out that Commissioners had to visit as many Parliaments as possible, especially if there were still concerns related to subsidiarity and proportionality. He noted that discussions had to be held within the national Parliaments, should the "yellow card" issue be raised. In this context, he noted that the confrontational mode in which national Parliaments, on the one hand, and the Commission and the European Parliament, on the other, were in the past, as well as the idea that the national Parliaments' increasing position was a blow to European integration were gone. If the gap between institutions and citizens were to be closed, full engagement of national Parliaments was needed.

He believed that, in order to close the gap between EU institutions and EU citizens, the role of national Parliaments was crucial. He thus invited national Parliaments to do their utmost in using the provisions of the treaties to their fullest potential.

In the debate which followed, 23 speakers took the floor.

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Mr Ramon Luis VALCARCEL SISO, European Parliament, noted that the three EU institutions were not able to agree on publishing a joint indicative legislative calendar to be updated constantly due to the Council's reluctance to adopt such a calendar, which was an essential pillar of transparency which should govern the EU legislative process, the so-called "better law-making". Mr VALCARCEL SISO asked the Latvian Presidency and the EU institutions, if they were able to correct this democratic anomaly of the EU legislative process in order to enhance efficiency to the benefit of the citizens.

Ms Danuta HÜBNER, European Parliament, praised the current efforts towards implementation and stated that cooperation among the institutions for improving the functioning of the EU would be reinforced, if a "change of culture" and the full use of the potential of COSAC were ensured. On TTIP, she stated that close cooperation between EU institutions was essential for the agreement to deliver results and underlined the need to have national Parliaments also on board, as they were an irreplaceable platform for constructive dialogue on the agreement with the citizens. She warned about the risks of rejection of a potential good deal, in the process of ratification, due to a lack of understanding. She argued that the agreement on TTIP was a commitment of grand strategic relevance that was necessary in order to avoid the risk that other global powers impose norms and standards without negotiating them with the EU.

Sir William CASH, UK *House of Commons*, stated that Europe was undergoing a democratic crisis characterised by a low turnout in the European elections and by the fact that people around Europe were losing faith in the European institutions. In his view, a change in the architecture of the EU was needed to overcome this crisis, because the introduction of a "green card" procedure or other similar measures was not going to restore people's faith in the EU. Furthermore, Sir CASH expressed his opinion that the United Kingdom (UK) was moving towards an Exit, because it was in its interest to put democracy first. He stressed that the Greek situation was "the elephant in the room", and that there was a contradiction in how the EU had dealt with similar situations in the past.

Mr Igor KOLMAN, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*, welcomed the priorities set out by the Latvian Presidency, in particular the emphasis given to economic growth as well as the security issues arising from the situation in Ukraine. In this context, he underlined the necessity for a re-assessment of EU-Russia relations. He welcomed the focus on digital agenda, industry and energy that offered a shift in approach towards overcoming the economic stagnation. At the same time, in his view, fiscal discipline remained a precondition for future growth and development. He stressed the importance of a greater involvement of national Parliaments in the establishment of the Country Specific Recommendations.

Mr Mehmet TEKELİOĞLU and Ms Pelin GÜNDEŞ BAKIR, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, firmly condemned the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and expressed their sympathy with the French people. Mr TEKELİOĞLU added that terrorism had no religion. They stressed the importance of reviving Turkey's accession process. In the light of the tragic events in Paris, Ms GÜNDEŞ BAKIR stressed that the negotiation Chapter on Foreign and Security policy should be opened soon in order to enhance cooperation on security policy, but also to guarantee regional stability and peace. She also referred to Turkey's cooperation in the fight against terrorism. On Syria, she explained that Turkey gave shelter to about 2 million refugees, and called on the International Community to contribute more.

Mr Kamal Izidor SHAKER, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, drew attention to the importance of macro-regional integration in deepening relations between EU and non-EU countries and in

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identifying relevant regional projects in the framework of Juncker's investment plan for Europe. He thanked the European Parliament for its active support for the macro-regional strategies and expressed his hope for its continuous engagement.

Mr Slaven RADUNOVIĆ, Skupština *Crne Gore*, pointed out that the most important strategic goal for Montenegro was EU membership. In his view, EU should continue to deepen relations with its immediate neighbours of the Western Balkans, not only for reasons of peace and stability, but also to guarantee prosperity for the continent.

Lord Timothy BOSWELL, UK *House of Lords*, asked how the review of the ENP was being conducted at a practical level and to what extent the partner countries and interested parties in these policies were being consulted.

Mr Mihai TARARACHE, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, declared that the preservation of the free movement of persons was of vital interest to Romania. He continued by stressing that even though Romania was investing a lot into securing its borders, including 600 km of the EU external border with Ukraine, his country was not yet granted membership of the Schengen area.

Mr Jean BIZET, French *Sénat*, stressed that security policy had become a priority since the Paris attacks and, although it mainly remained a national competence, cooperation at European level was necessary. In this context, he urged the European institutions to finally adopt the EU PNR file. In his view, Europe should engage more in fighting cross-border crime through reinforcing Europol and needed to adopt measures against appeals for violence on the Internet. He also commented on the situation in Greece, saying that there should be no cancellation of Greece's debt.

Ms Danielle AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, welcomed the 3 priorities put on the agenda by the Presidency. While acknowledging the need to build a digital Europe, she underlined that European artistic creativity had to be defended. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, Ms AUROI emphasised the principle of solidarity in the fight against terrorism, against any form of discrimination and intolerance, as well as in the preservation of Fundamental rights.

Mr Dominic HANNIGAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, addressed the current debt issues in Europe, highlighting that the stability of the continent was under threat if the EU started to give favourable treatment to one country. He reckoned that this would spread instability to other countries as well.

Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, asked the Commission to give its view on the initiative on the rule of law as well as on the fight against corruption. He then commented on the situation in Greece emphasising that it was important to stick to what has been agreed. Mr KRICHBAUM expressed his concerns that if the treaties were not to be respected, it would be difficult to keep the Union together.

Mr Karlheinz KOPF, Austrian *Nationalrat*, also welcomed the priorities chosen by the Latvian Presidency. He expressed his concerns about the rising opposition against the free trade agreements with the United States and Canada among citizens. He considered those agreements necessary in order to create growth and employment, therefore national Parliaments, Governments, as well as the European institutions must combine their efforts to better explain the content of those agreements to citizens.

Ms Agnieszka POMASKA, Polish *Sejm*, pointed out the importance of communication with society, and wanted to know how the Presidency was perceived by the Latvian population.

Mr Edmund WITTBRODT, Polish *Senat*, underlined the importance of competition and innovation in the Single Market and showed particular interest in the progress towards a European patent. He noted that the distance between the European institutions and the national Parliaments needed to be reduced. He suggested that the Commissioners should visit the national Parliaments more often. He then asked Vice-President Timmermans to assess the developments in the area of better regulation.

Mr HÖRCSIK, Hungarian *Országgyűlés*, declared his full support to the introduction of the European Investment plan, provided the following criteria were fulfilled: it should be an additional measure to existing Structural funds and guarantee equal treatment of Member States, in order to strike a balance in the choice of projects between new and old Member States, and those using the Euro and the non-members of the Euro-zone. Mr HÖRCSIK insisted that the creation of infrastructure such as the North-South and the South-East energy corridors were a prerequisite for a functioning Energy Union and that these investments could be made via the new Investment fund, under the condition that every country can still decide on its energy mix.

Mr Averof NEOFYTOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, expressed his deep condolences to the French people. He then welcomed the fact that economic growth had become a priority of the Presidency. He noted the lack of competitiveness in the EU, and urged for reforms in the area of energy security, manufacturing and digital agenda.

Mr Philippe MAHOUX, Belgian *Senat*, commented on TTIP and hailed the new transparency of the negotiation mandate. However, he noted that, if the agreement resulted in dismantling social rights, health care or environmental protection, there would not be a broad acceptance among citizens. He stressed that transparency was essential in agreements concerning services of public interest. Mr MAHOUX also wanted to know how the accession of the EU to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) (ECHR) was progressing after the ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU.

Mr José LÓPEZ GARRIDO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, agreed with the new political orientation of the European Commission towards growth and job creation. He then informed about the statement adopted by the Chairpersons of the Parliaments of the South, stating that those countries who were helped by the Union needed to comply with the commitments assumed in the bilateral aid programs. Mr LÓPEZ GARRIDO underlined that the structural reforms carried out in Spain during the past year resulted in considerable growth and job creation.

Mr Marc ANGEL, Luxembourg *Chambre des Députés*, referred to the role of Europe in the world and congratulated the Presidency for promoting the European Year of Development. He emphasised that the fight against poverty should be an integral part of European Foreign policy and Security policy. In the context of the negotiations of the post-2015 Millennium goals, as well as in the negotiations leading to a new protocol on climate change, he stressed that Europe must speak with one voice.

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Mr Luciano BUSUTTIL, Maltese *Kamra-tad-Deputati*, focussed his intervention on the immigration problem. He expressed his concerns about the instability in Libya that could threaten the security in Europe if extremists could not be effectively prevented from crossing the Mediterranean. He reminded that this was not only a Maltese or Italian problem, but a European problem.

Mr TIMMERMANS first responded to the interventions in relation to TTIP and reminded that the Commission had decided to act with a great level of transparency and carry on with this approach. He argued for a more rational approach when dealing with TTIP.

As for the role of the European Commission, the Vice-President stressed that, during the economic crisis, the Commission had been forced into a role which had not been foreseen by the treaties. In this sense, one of the tasks of the new Commission would be to put itself fully back in a position to fulfil its role as intended by the treaties. Mr TIMMERMANS underlined that a mere return of power to national institutions was not the answer to the democratic challenges, because that would mean to underestimate the crisis in which not only the EU institutions, but also national institutions find themselves in. In his view, all institutions, be it at national or European level, were challenged as a consequence of the economic crisis, thus every institution had to play its role under the treaties.

In his reply, the Vice-President also emphasised that countries must stick to their engagements and reminded the audience of the principle prevailing in International Law "*Pacta sunt servanda*". He recognised huge problems with youth unemployment and the terrible sufferings some countries and their population had to go through recently; however, he reminded of the tremendous level of solidarity shown by other Member States.

On the rule of law initiative, Mr TIMMERMANS informed that the Commission would look at it on a case-by-case basis and would work on it closely with the Council. He acknowledged a regression in this regard and stressed that the rule of law must remain the centre of attention. He emphasised that, if some minorities did not feel safe in Europe, Europe had no future. He added that the Commission remained committed to the EU joining the ECHR.

In conclusion, the Vice-President touched upon the ENP, informing that the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission worked closely together, so as the review would be ready by 4 March and the annual package would be presented later in March.

In her replies, Ms KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA stressed the key role of national Parliaments and the political dialogue. She added that the Council was committed to enhancing interinstitutional cooperation, notably by making progress in the interinstitutional Programming and by ensuring a more efficient legislative process. Commenting on one question, she stressed that the support for the EU in the Latvian population was at the highest level in history.

On the situation in Greece, Ms KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA made it clear that the Presidency appreciated the reforms already adopted and expected the obligations to be fulfilled. She also underlined that it was in the common interest of the EU that the UK did not leave the EU, declaring that there would be no winners in case of an exit.

As to Juncker's investment plan, the parliamentary secretary acknowledged that this constituted a key element to economic growth. However, the time frame fixed by the

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December Council was tight. She underlined that the Council was prepared to do its utmost to put the European fund for strategic Investment in place as early as June.

Ms KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA stressed that the Energy Union was one of the priorities of the Latvian Presidency. She expressed her hope that the so-called Riga process to be launched in February 2015 by the European Commission, would contribute to adoption of this concept. She then recalled the five main elements of the Energy Union: solidarity, functioning and interconnected energy market, energy diplomacy, energy independence and governance.

Commenting on the free movement of persons, she declared that this was one of the core values of the EU and a fundamental component of the Single market. Prevention of fraud and abuse in this domain could be achieved while guaranteeing equal and non-discriminatory conditions.

Ms KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA acknowledged that, although immigration issues had been on the agenda for a long time, Europe was confronted with a new phenomenon, namely, "ghost ships". In this context, she called for more coordinated and determined EU actions and recalled the comprehensive approach adopted by the Council in October. Its key elements were: strengthening the border controls, fight against human trafficking and cooperation with third countries.

As to discussions on trade liberalisation, Ms KALNINA-LUKAŠEVICA assured that the Presidency was committed to concluding agreements with different partners and foremost with the United States. She added that ambitious TTIP agreement was not only important from an economical, but also from a geopolitical point of view. The Presidency would actively participate in measures guaranteeing transparency and raising public awareness. Although the public consultation on Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) had been closed, the Presidency considered that further discussions were necessary. Involvement of national Parliaments, as well as civil society, was crucial in the discussions leading to an agreement on ISDS. She welcomed the fact that topic was to be covered in the Bi-annual Report of COSAC.

The parliamentary secretary also commented on enlargement policy. She stressed the importance of the principle of conditionality in the accession negotiations and explained that a merit-based approach would be the key element. On Schengen enlargement, she referred to the ministerial discussion in March where she hoped a decision could be taken.

On terrorism she mentioned that a number of measures already in place must be implemented more actively, both internally and externally in cooperation with the partner countries. She noted that the Presidency was committed to concluding an agreement on the EU PNR guaranteeing a balance between security, freedom and data protection. She added that the upcoming Commission's review of internal security strategy would be considered as a priority.

5. Eastern Partnership and Challenges Ahead - keynote speakers: Mr Urban AHLIN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, and Mr Ostap SEMERAK, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration of the Ukrainian *Verkhova Rada*

In her introductory remarks, the Chair stated that in the light of one of the main priorities of the Latvian Presidency, namely, a Europe engaged globally – the role of the EU had to be recast in terms of its actions towards the rest of the world, including the Eastern Partnership countries.

In his speech Mr Urban AHLIN, Speaker of the Swedish *Riksdag*, seconded that statement, saying that the Eastern Partnership could not and should not be of concern only to some EU Member States, but that it should lay in the strategic interest of the whole EU.

Mr AHLIN reminded that Sweden, together with Poland, was an initiator of the Eastern Partnership policy aiming at ensuring stability and economic prosperity at the Eastern borders of the EU. He stressed that it was never intended to create any dividing lines, or to play geopolitical games with Russia, but that it was built upon an understanding that prosperous and secure countries also had prosperous and secure neighbours.

He pointed out two key components of partnership; first, it created links and facilitated cooperation between people. This included more student exchanges, widened participation in EU education and culture programmes, such as ERASMUS, streamlined visa procedures to facilitate such exchanges, and led to more freedom of speech. Second, it helped fight against corruption, as it devoted considerable resources to assist partner countries in making their public administrations more efficient and transparent, and in reforming their legal systems.

Mr AHLIN noted that great progress had been achieved in relations within the Eastern Partnership, but only tangible results fully visible to the citizens would ensure its success.

He estimated that the key to that end laid in individual approaches to each of those six partner countries, since they all faced different challenges and had made different choices along the way. It was important for the EU to recognise the right of every country to choose its way and to maintain good cooperation modes with all of them.

The upcoming Riga summit in May, he said, would have to address several challenges: assessment of progress made to date, and renewal of the commitment to the partnership from both sides.

He urged parliamentarians to ratify those Association Agreements already on the table before the Riga summit, namely, those with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and stressed the importance of upholding a strong, committed partnership, as well as highlighting those countries' European prospects.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Edgars RINKĒVIČS, pointed out that the overall priority was a balanced ENP, with critical challenges both in the South and in East being addressed (such as immigration, terrorism etc.).

He informed that the forthcoming Eastern Partnership summit in Riga would take into account the first results of the review of the ENP, and give a very clear signal to our partners

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about the EU's deep engagement in the EU Eastern partnership, so as to enhance prosperity, security and stability at its Eastern borders.

The minister mentioned differentiation as a key word, analysing whatever changes and improvements were needed. He noted that the Eastern partner countries had opted for different paths: Belarus and Armenia were members of the Eurasian Union, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine had signed Association Agreements with the EU, aiming at deeper cooperation, whilst Azerbaijan maintained specific bilateral relations.

Mr RINKĒVIČS reiterated that for Georgia and Moldova, already implementing those agreements, the Riga summit would set out the next steps for a robust assistance programme aiming at further implementation.

As for Ukraine, the minister stressed the need to deliver on the assistance programmes, because a lot of changes could occur in the 4 months' time run-up to the Riga summit. In this context, the Presidency was working together with other EU institutions and international institutions. This assistance programme must be linked to real reform results.

The vision for Armenia could be a new agreement covering certain aspects that were worked out on the basis of previous Association Agreements.

As for Belarus, the minister reminded that the Eastern Partnership was also based on common values, thus particular efforts were made to address issues related to freedom of speech, and the like, whereas, in the case of Azerbaijan, those very issues were matters of concern in the way of further development of the partnership.

Mr RINKĒVIČS mentioned other key aspects of the deliverables of the Riga Summit - the programme of mobility and loosening of visa requirements, as well as the cooperation in the field of energy. He also insisted that the freedom of media was crucial in any reform process, thus a proper attention had to be devoted to this aspect.

Last but not least, the Minister stressed the key role of parliamentary cooperation. In his opinion, both the European Parliament and the national Parliaments had developed solid levels of partnership and contacts, which helped Eastern partners further develop their democratic systems and political rights.

Mr Ostap SEMERAK, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on European Integration of the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine, expressed his gratitude for the solidarity and support shown to Ukraine, in particular the Resolution from the European Parliament of 15 January and the EU Council decision of 29 January, as well as the statement adopted by the Chairpersons of COSAC earlier that morning.

He quoted the Latvian example as one to be encouraged by, in terms of implementing necessary reforms and making the prospects of EU integration real.

Mr SEMERAK expressed the view that the underlying cause for the Russian aggression against Ukraine lied in its European choice, and that the best answer to that aggression was a successful Ukraine. This goal should be reached by implementing reforms. The first package of reforms had been approved by the Parliament, together with an implementation plan. Among the priorities of this reform package, he mentioned tax and budget decentralisation, lowering the level of state expenditure, fighting the shadow economy and corruption. He

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suggested reducing spending on seminars held on the reforms within the framework of the Easter partnership, but investing more into their actual implementation, including in security.

Besides reforms, Ukraine must find ways of ending the war, which was not a civil war, nor a military conflict, but an attack on Western European values. Mr SEMERAK argued that the delivery of defensive weapons would help Ukraine, rather than prolong the conflict. He also considered a Geneva format more appropriate in working out a solution, as the Minsk Protocol was important in peaceful regulation, but the EU had to play a larger role in stabilising the conflict. He also stressed the importance of the new concept of information security of the EU that the Commission was currently working on, and informed that Ukraine was preparing its contribution to that document.

Mr SEMERAK called upon all countries to provide humanitarian support and urged all national Parliaments to speed up work towards ratifying the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine, so as to complete this process before the Riga Summit.

He concluded by pointing out the importance of loosening visa rules for ordinary citizens of Ukraine, and hoped for positive developments in this area at the Riga Summit.

In the following debate, 13 speakers took the floor.

Ms HÜBNER, European Parliament, hoped that the Riga Summit would give a real push to the renewed ENP, an 'after-Ukraine' policy acknowledging the lessons learned during recent years, notably Russia's manifest hostility towards the EU. She mentioned the challenges of the lack of compatibility between the EU deep comprehensive free trade agreements with post-Soviet countries and the latter's free trade agreements with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union, but also the fact that the Association Agreements did not cover security. She also mentioned EU's efforts to open the borders with Ukraine, so that the argument of unsafe borders could not be used and called for more generous financial support from the EU would be needed so that people in Ukraine would not fall for Russian propaganda.

Ms GÜNDEŞ BAKIR, *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, expressed Turkey's interest in the TTIP negotiations and its wish to be automatically included in EU free trade agreements with third parties. She added that Turkey supported a peaceful solution to the conflict in Ukraine based on territorial integrity and international law, stressing that Turkey did not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and considered a high priority the protection of the rights of the Tatars from Crimea, victims of unacceptable violations of fundamental rights and freedoms. Mr Cristian-Dănuț MIHAI, Romanian *Senat*, called for a comprehensive review of the Eastern Partnership, as the EU should adjust its offer in line with the principles of differentiation and 'more for more' in order to reward the best -performing partner countries, such as Moldova whose European agenda would continue to be backed by Romania. Mr Øeyvind HALLERAKER, Norwegian *Storting*, argued that the unacceptable Russian aggression in Ukraine should not become yet another frozen conflict in the Eastern Neighbourhood; he referred to Norway's efforts to provide budgetary support and capacity building to some of the EU ENP partners and to the recent agreement with Ukraine on a comprehensive package supporting reforms in various fields, signed in November 2014.

Mr BIZET, French *Sénat*, insisted that there was no military solution to the Ukrainian conflict and that a solution needed to be negotiated in the framework of the Minsk Agreements ensuring the respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty; in his view, the EU should use individual sanctions and measures against those who supported the military

actions of separatists; he also stated that a political solution called for a national dialogue, reforms and the election of representatives in the Eastern region that would be recognised by all. He added that the Eastern Partnership should abide by the 2009 Prague Framework and observe the principle of differentiation, a pragmatic approach that should also be applied to the Southern partners. Ms AUROI, French *Assemblée nationale*, mentioned the diverse situation of the Eastern Partnership countries: while Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan were closer to Russia and had authoritarian regimes, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia decided to conclude Association Agreements with the EU. She insisted on the fact that association did not automatically lead to EU membership, as those were two distinct processes, and on the need to find a peaceful solution that respected Ukraine's independence and democratic choices. She called on the Latvian Presidency to remain focused on Mediterranean countries and recalled Turkey's role as necessary interface in fighting terrorism and intolerance.

Mr HANNIGAN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, recalled the recent ratification by Ireland of the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, an important step given the current crisis in Ukraine, and supported the declaration on Ukraine adopted by the Chairpersons of COSAC, expressing the hope that important measures would also be taken during the Riga Summit.

Mr KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, referred to the importance of the Southern dimension of the ENP. He added that in Germany the ratification procedure of the Association Agreements with Eastern partners would be concluded before the Riga Summit, which was an important message. Mentioning the US decision to support Ukraine with defence weapons, while Europe discussed whether sanctions would be maintained, he stated that it was vital to continue to speak with one voice, as Russia only understood the language of strength. He acknowledged the need for solidarity with Ukraine, which was the victim of actions aimed at destabilising it economically and militarily, but called for reforms to be implemented so that financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU could be further granted.

Mr WITTBRODT, Polish *Sejm*, also underlined the need for solidarity and to speak with one voice; he informed the audience that by the end of the week Poland would have ratified the Association Agreements and called for further support for programmes such as Erasmus+; he also referred to Russia's 'soft war', influencing the public opinion in Ukraine and in the Baltic countries by media and propaganda. Mr BENESIK, Czech *Poslanecká Sněmovna*, called for support to make education programmes such as Erasmus available to the Ukrainian people, as they enabled students and teachers to experience first-hand how developed democracies functioned. Mr Vaclav HAMPL, Czech *Senát*, supported the statement of the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC on Ukraine and referred to the burden on Ukrainian's economy, estimated at 10 million dollars per day, and to the increased risk of complete economic collapse which would have disastrous consequences for Europe; he asked how Ukraine intended to ensure the success of the necessary reforms.

In his replies, Mr AHLIN mentioned the importance of sanctions and dialogue, but also of support to Ukraine, as successful development of Russia's neighbours could have a direct impact on Russia's own evolution. In his view, it was only up to Russia's actions to trigger the easing of sanctions. While stressing the need for dialogue because no military solution was conceivable at EU level, he insisted on the importance of both support from the EU and of the Ukrainian national efforts to conduct comprehensive reforms and implement the signed agreements. Although he acknowledged the consequences of the war situation, he deplored the insufficient results achieved so far and underlined the need for progress which

conditioned long-term support from the EU. He argued that Russia suffered from "post-imperialistic stress syndrome" and referred to the media propaganda campaigns exalting its greatness; he expressed the belief that it would take time until Russia decided to focus on diversifying its economy and building a prosperous democratic country and called on the EU to stay united and continue to speak with one voice.

In his replies, Mr RINKĒVIČS expressed his willingness to actively participate in the process of the Commission's review of the ENP. He stressed the need for a common understanding of the overall goal of the two-tier ENP. In his view, among the lessons learned was that there had been no clear understanding on the "exit" strategy of the Eastern Partnership, second, that 6 countries with different situations and levels of ambition had been undifferentiated. He considered the situation as even more complicated in the South where enormous financial support was given to various sets of policies, ranging from the Mediterranean dimension to assistance programs and cooperation with third countries for combatting terrorism, with no conditionality, differentiation, and sufficient individual approach. He recalled that Russia reacted to the Eastern Partnership only in 2013, when it started to perceive ENP as a potential interference with the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union. He mentioned the recent discussions on a potential EU - Eurasian Economic Union dialogue, which would be feasible only provided that the situation in Ukraine changed and that the Eurasian Economic Union functioned, which was currently not the case; this dialogue should not be ruled out, especially if it helped to engage with Eastern partners, but its objectives and level of ambition should be clear. He then clarified that discussions with Ukraine concerned visa liberalisation and not borders' opening and, while reiterating EU's practical and political support and assistance, he stressed that Ukraine would not benefit from a fast track procedure and that it needed to meet the relevant criteria.

He commended EU's approach in engaging in a political dialogue with Russia on the situation in Ukraine, under the Geneva or Normandy format, and stressed that, although the Geneva Declaration of 17 April and the Minsk Agreements formed a good basis for tackling the situation in Ukraine, there was no implementation because Russia continued to back the actions of separatists and to be part of the problem and not of the solution. He insisted on the need for greater involvement of EU diplomacy and referred to the excellent contacts with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in order to ensure the necessary negotiations between EU and Russia in various formats. He underlined that economic sanctions were, along with the political dialogue and the diplomatic instruments, the few available tools that the EU could use. In his view, the overall policy of resorting to sanctions in case the situation deteriorated and softening them if there were improvements, could not change Russia's behaviour, but had already functioned as a deterrent preventing it from intensifying its action. He emphasised that it was clear that the EU did not provide military assistance; he mentioned that Member States should assist Ukraine in every possible way, and that those with military capabilities willing to cooperate with Ukraine could do so only based on a national decision and not on one adopted at EU level.

The Minister further expressed hope for progress on the negotiations on TTIP during the Latvian Presidency and, while stating negotiations would be continued by the next two EU Presidencies, he expressed willingness to try to address the concerns regarding the inclusion of Turkey in the overall TTIP framework.

On the protection of the Crimean Tatars, he referred to the clear position expressed during the Foreign Affairs Council of 29 January 2015 and to the efforts of raising this issue in the framework of United Nations (UN) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in

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Europe (OSCE) meetings, urging all Member States to do the same during bilateral meetings with Russia and in various international organisations.

He stressed that Association Agreements were indeed not to be equated with admission agreements, but referred to the vision of the Founding Fathers of the EU and to the explicit provisions of the EU treaties under which European countries which meet the criteria could become EU members provided there was unity within the EU on that issue. He also mentioned the information warfare conducted by Russia throughout Europe and welcomed recent EU decisions to address strategic communication of the EU and measures to counter propaganda, insisting on the need of a debate on setting the limit between freedom of speech and its deliberate misuse to fight the EU.

Mr SEMERAK mentioned that the EU and US sanctions were the right approach and helped limiting Russia's aggression, but believed that there should be no message on a possible easing of sanctions in the absence of changes on Russia's part. On the violation of human rights of Crimean Tatars and other minorities, the Ukrainian Parliament prepared a report presented also to the European Parliament. According to him, the military solution was not the only way to solve the Ukrainian conflict, but he explained that the conflict needed to be localised, a solution needed to be found to re-integrate those regions into Ukraine, an agreement on the cease-fire regime was necessary and efforts had to be deployed so that Russia fulfilled the Minsk Agreements which was currently not the case.

He expressed the hope Commissioner Hahn and the European Parliament would be successful in working towards a common policy on media freedom and countering propaganda; he also informed participants on the recent reforms in higher education and thanked Latvia for its support for programmes of student exchanges. He expressed confidence in the success of reforms, which were the only way out of conflict and could maintain Ukraine's unity. While thanking the EU for its support, he explained that up to 25 per cent of the Ukrainian economy was located in the conflict region which made modernising and rebuilding economy and infrastructure more difficult.