

Courtesy translation

**Opening speech of László Kövér,
Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly
at the Plenary Meeting of the
LXXII. COSAC
(Budapest, House of Parliament, 28 October 2024)**

Mr Chair,
Distinguished Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 72nd. COSAC Plenary Meeting, the fourth conference in the parliamentary dimension of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second half of 2024.

During the previous Hungarian Presidency, in May 2011, when I first had the opportunity to open the COSAC conference, the second Hungarian Presidency seemed a long way off, but it is a great pleasure for me to welcome back to the House of Parliament the delegations of the committees of the national parliaments of the Member States dealing with European Union affairs.

Things were better in 2011. Not only because we were all thirteen years younger, but also because we had only one challenge to deal with in the European Union at that time: the effects of the 2008 global financial crisis. But in the last thirteen years, Europe and the world have been hit by a series of crises: illegal migration, a pandemic and a regional armed conflict threatening a world war on European soil. All these crises have also brought with them the risk that the European Union will turn from a project of peace, democracy and prosperity into a reality of war, dictatorship and impoverishment.

You are well aware of the economic trends and data. Last year, as a result of the misguided sanctions policy of Brussels, the European Union's GDP rose by 0.2%, while Russia's GDP rose by 3.6%. The EU's share of world GDP is falling year on year because of the misguided economic policies of the EU leadership in Brussels. The price of electricity in the EU is 2-3 times higher and the price of natural gas 4-5 times higher than in the US. This puts European industry at a serious competitive disadvantage. The misguided migration policy of the EU leadership in Brussels is leading to social destabilisation in Western Europe, which, combined with the effects of the EU's economic destabilisation, could threaten the very existence of the European Union as an organisation.

I am convinced that the most important task of all responsible European politicians today, who love and serve their country and Europe, is to avert this danger, to preserve the European Union as the community of values and interests that its founders created it to be.

Since 2011, the number of COSAC participants has increased significantly, mainly due to the increase in the number of candidate countries, and I hope that the number of participants will increase during a future third Hungarian Presidency, due to the higher number of EU Member States.

I am pleased to inform you that the three conferences we have organised so far in the current Presidency - the COSAC Chairs' meeting in July, the Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy Conference in September and the Economic Policy Conference in early October - have been successful.

The Presidency events, organised by the Hungarian National Assembly, were attended by hundreds of members of parliaments of Member States, candidate countries and other invited countries, as well as from the European Parliament, who were open to exchange views on current challenges facing the EU and to learn from each other's positions, whether identical or different.

The highlight of this semester was the organisation of the 72nd COSAC Plenary, the only permanent inter-parliamentary conference recognised and named in the EU's founding treaties. The first and most important item on the agenda: the programme and achievements of the Hungarian Presidency.

Allow me to convey the greetings of Prime Minister Mr Viktor Orbán, who has accepted our invitation and would have liked to inform you personally about the Presidency's progress so far but had to travel to Georgia. He will therefore be replaced today by the Minister for European Union Affairs, Mr János Bóka.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Presidency programme states, Hungary has taken over the Presidency at a time of exceptional circumstances and challenges. Our continent and the European Union are facing serious challenges from war in our neighbourhood, illegal migration, demographic trends, fragile security, the vulnerability of international supply chains, the loss of competitiveness to global competitors, and the effects of climate change and natural disasters. We hope that the Hungarian Presidency will bring us closer to finding the right common responses to these challenges.

Our presidency coincides with a period of institutional transition and in just over a month we will reach a symbolic anniversary: on 1 December it will be 15 years since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Among the reforms introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, we should highlight the strengthening of the role of national parliaments in the EU decision-making process. More specifically, the intention to do so, what has not been successful, mainly because of the Commission's illegitimate policy of trying to take away competences from the Member States. 15 years on, it is also worth reviewing the effectiveness of the subsidiarity control procedures.

As experts of the subject, you can do so in the second session of the conference.

Among the innovations of the Lisbon Treaty, let me mention the European Citizens' Initiative, which could be an important tool for democratic expression. The most recent statistics show that 116 initiatives were registered between 2012 and 2024, but only 10 of these have reached the stage of receiving a formal response from the European Commission.

Why are these initiatives not yet producing any tangible results? Unfortunately, there are many unsuccessful collections of signatures, but even in the case of successful initiatives, the European Commission often rejects them for political reasons. Let me give you one example: the Minority Safe Pack, a valid citizens' initiative called "*One million signatures for diversity in Europe*", which was also supported by the European Parliament. Incomprehensibly, the European Commission has not considered it necessary to put forward a legislative proposal for any of the measures proposed by the initiative, which have been worked out in detail, even though this is a matter of the equal rights aspirations of more than 40 million Europeans living in a status of national minorities, not least European voters and taxpayers.

I hope - although there is no sign of this - that the attitude of the newly-established European Commission will change in the future and that it will exercise its powers not arbitrarily, but in accordance with the EU Treaties.

The third session of the conference will focus on demographic trends in Europe. It is undeniable that demographic change has profound implications not only for the EU's economy, welfare systems, prosperity, resilience and competitiveness, but also for the long-term chances for the survival of European civilisation as a whole. We are aware that demographic issues are essentially a national competence, but we need to address them at the EU level to halt the decline and continued ageing of the EU population. The solution is not to encourage migration, but to support the desire of European families to have children.

European security and defence have become an almost constant theme in inter-parliamentary events. Hungary pays particular attention to border protection, curbing illegal migration and increasing internal security, which contributes to the stability of the EU as a whole. From the point of view of security and stability, we cannot forget about the enlargement of the EU, where we cannot stress enough that we would need to make substantial progress. A coherent approach without double standards must be taken with candidate and potential candidate countries. We are convinced that we cannot wait any longer in the Western Balkans and that the countries that are advanced in their negotiations, Serbia and Montenegro in particular, must be admitted as soon as possible.

Honourable Members.

Allow me to briefly refer to our remaining inter-parliamentary events related to the Presidency. In November, in cooperation with the European Parliament, we will hold the 15th meeting of the Europol Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group in Brussels. At the beginning of December, here in Budapest, we will hold a special conference to discuss cultural heritage and the identity of traditional national minorities, which are key issues for the future of our continent. The parliamentary dimension of our EU Presidency will also extend to the first half of 2025, when we will host the Conference of Speakers of European Union Parliaments in May 2025 in this very room, to which I will of course be expecting the Speakers of your respective Parliaments.

Dear Colleagues.

I am not telling you anything new by saying that Hungary considers a strong European Union based on the cooperation of strong nation states to be a goal to be pursued in the future. But this is not at all at odds with finding common answers to common European challenges. However, we can only achieve these through open, honest, democratic debate, not by stigmatising and excluding those who disagree. To quote a true Christian Democrat politician, Robert Schuman: *“Europe has brought fulfilment to humanity. It must therefore show the way forward, not by seeking to subjugate others, but by recognising the diversity of cultures, each of which has mutual respect for the others.”*

This is the respect Hungary has for all and expects from all!

I wish you a rich exchange of views!