

The “European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament” bulletin is published monthly by the European Affairs Department. It provides the reader with an overview of parliamentary activities in the field of EU affairs and inter-parliamentary cooperation as well as with access to EU documents forwarded to national parliaments.

In Focus

The last meeting was held within the parliamentary dimension - Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs (COSAC) extraordinary meeting

The meeting was held on 16 June. It was opened by the Chairman of the European Affairs Committee Domagoj Ivan Milošević, who as the chair of the COSAC and with the support of the Presidential Troika convened an extraordinary videoconference meeting, at which representatives of European affairs committees of the Member States, the European Parliament, candidate countries and guests had the opportunity to discuss key issues related to addressing the economic consequences of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and adoption of the new Multiannual Financial Framework, as well as the preparations for the Conference on the Future of Europe.

In the introductory part of the meeting, Committee Chairman Milošević reported on the extraordinary videoconference meeting of the COSAC Presidential Troika held on 20 May, and presented the letter by the chair with the main points of today's meeting, which will be sent to the presidents of the EU institutions, inviting the members of the COSAC to co-sign the letter. The participants of the meeting were also presented with the 33rd Bi-annual Report of COSAC.

The first part of the meeting was dedicated to the common European response to the coronavirus outbreak and repercussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

In his address, the European Commission Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight Maroš Šefčovič presented the recovery package announced by the Commission in May, stressing that the Next Generation EU instrument, equipped with €750 billion and targeted reinforcements to the long-term EU budget for 2021-2027, should bring the total financial firepower of the EU budget to €1.85 trillion. He underlined that solidarity is needed to overcome the crisis and achieve recovery, and called on national Parliaments and governments to engage in adopting the new budget and to discuss recovery plans and future direction of investment that will lead not only to recovery but also to further development and modernization of the Union.

Jan Olbrycht, Vice-Chair of the EPP Group in the European Parliament and EP's Co-Rapporteur on the Multiannual Financial Framework, presented the Parliament's position on the new proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework. He emphasized that the adoption of the future budget was a demanding process requiring political agreement in view of the urgency of its adoption, preceded by demanding Member States' coordination procedures and the codecision procedure of the Parliament and the Council.

The discussion highlighted that solidarity and a joint European effort to overcome the crisis is the only way to recovery and that it is therefore necessary to reach a swift political agreement in order for the Multiannual Financial Framework to be adopted in time. In conclusion, it was said that the creation of the future financial framework is also the way how the EU will develop in the future.



The second topic discussed at the meeting was the Conference on the Future of Europe. In her introductory address via video message, the Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography Dubravka Šuica emphasized the importance of the participation of national Parliaments in the Conference on the Future of Europe and added that the contribution and support of national Parliaments, as the representative bodies of the citizens, was crucial for the success of the Conference. She also called on national Parliaments to inform their respective governments of the importance of finding an agreement on the Conference in the Council, and stressed the need for an agreement between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission on a joint declaration on the launch of the Conference.

Vice-President Šuica presented the Conference as a new public space where citizens, either physically or digitally, can engage with others on subjects of common interest, underlining that the need to create a common European space for discussion and exchange of views between citizens and European institutions is now more important than ever, in order to include the citizens in the decision-making process on the future of Europe. In conclusion, Vice-President Šuica emphasized that European solidarity and togetherness are necessary in overcoming the crisis caused by the pandemic and achieving economic recovery, and reiterated the important role of national Parliaments in jointly responding to the crisis and adopting the new Multiannual Financial Framework.

First Vice-President of the European Parliament Mairead McGuinness reiterated that the Recovery Plan and the Conference on the Future of Europe are strongly linked as they provide a platform for the long-term well-being of citizens and the European Union. She emphasized that she was convinced of the strong involvement of citizens in the implementation of the Conference and the adoption of joint decisions on the future of Europe.

The discussion of the participants confirmed the importance of ensuring adequate representation of national Parliaments in the Conference on the Future of Europe, as well as the urgent need of reaching an agreement and launching the Conference.

The extraordinary meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs rounded off the activities organized within the parliamentary dimension of the Croatian Presidency of the Council. The participants thanked the chair Domagoj Ivan Milošević for the initiative and organisation of the meeting, as well as for the overall contribution of the parliamentary dimension of the Croatian Presidency.

EU documents Forwarded Directly to the Croatian Parliament

According to the Protocol (no 1) on the Role of the National Parliaments in the European Union, all draft laws and communications shall be forwarded directly to the national parliaments.

The Croatian Parliament publishes on a daily basis the EU documents received, along with the information on: document number, adoption procedure, transmission date and subsidiarity deadline.

In June 2020, EU institutions forwarded to the Croatian Parliament [110 documents](#): 28 draft laws and 82 communications and other non-binding documents.



Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union

Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union encompasses the cooperation between the European Parliament and the national parliaments and the cooperation among the national parliaments in the frame of the parliamentary dimension of the Council Presidency.

All conferences, meetings and other activities that take place in the framework of inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union planned for May and June are not held until further notice due to the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parliamentary dimension of the Croatian presidency of the Council of the European Union

Activities of the Croatian Parliament in the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of the European Union (COSAC)

Videoconference between Chairpersons of the Committees on European Affairs of EU Parliaments and EU Chief Negotiator Mr Michel Barnier was held on 26 June 2020.

The European Commission's Task Force for Relations with the United Kingdom (UK) organised a video conferential briefing for chairpersons of the Committees on European Affairs of EU National Parliaments with EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier, with the support of the Croatian COSAC Chair Domagoj Ivan Milošević. The videoconference took place following an agreement in the Presidential Troika of COSAC to hold a briefing on Brexit outside of the COSAC framework, to allow for a more confidential and open debate.

Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the Croatian Parliament Domagoj Ivan Milošević opened the videoconference, noting that the National Parliaments continuously carefully monitor the negotiations on future relations between the EU and the UK, as well as the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA). He also noted that the crisis caused by the coronavirus outbreak has had a significant impact on the negotiations and welcomed efforts to continue negotiations via videoconferences, while acknowledging indispensable value of personal contacts, which are currently not possible. Mr Milošević took note of the UK's position not to seek an extension of the transitional period, but expressed concern that such a decision is leading to a scenario where there would be no agreement on future relations.

Head of the Task Force for Relations with the UK and EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier opened his presentation by expressing solidarity with the Croatian EU Council Presidency, having in mind the coronavirus outbreak and the earthquake that struck Zagreb this March. He emphasised importance of National Parliaments in the negotiations with the UK and assured that the Task Force is devoted to cooperation.

Speaking of the Brexit state of play, Mr Barnier said that the political and institutional Brexit was done on 31 January 2020 and is regulated by the Withdrawal Agreement. The most prominent issue in this stage were citizens' rights, which are also in the focus of the process of implementation of the WA. Financial and institutional arrangements have also been finalised. Terms of the economic Brexit and future relations between the EU and the UK are yet to be determined and are the subject of current negotiations between the two sides. A transitional period, during which the UK remains a part of the Single Market, is in place until 31 December 2020, and can be extended if an extension is mutually agreed by 30 June 2020. However, the British Prime Minister had already made it clear that the UK would not seek extension and leave the Single Market on 1 January 2021, giving the two sides around four months to reach an agreement on future relations, taking into account ratification process in the European Parliament and possibly National Parliaments as well, depending on the nature and scope of the future agreement.



Mr Barnier reiterated that the Political Declaration (agreed at the meeting of the European Council on 17 October 2019, alongside the WA) remains the only framework for negotiations on future relations with the UK that the EU will accept. He noted that the EU side is currently disappointed and concerned to see the British side move away from the Political Declaration, rendering an agreement less likely. The EU remains firmly at the position not to accept any agreement that would jeopardise the functioning of the Single Market. Most notably, no “cherry-picking” will be allowed, while the UK seems to want the freedom to diverge from the standards of the Single Market wherever possible. Mr Barnier also made it clear that the conditions of access to the Single Market will be determined by the EU, not the UK or any other third party.

The main points of dispute in negotiations on EU – UK future relations remain the form of the agreement and so called Level Playing Field. While the EU offers the UK a single comprehensive agreement, covering various areas of cooperation, such as trade, energy, transport, fisheries, security and defence, the UK would prefer a series of sectorial agreements and is most interested in trade. While both sides agree that the agreement should remove all tariffs and quotas, the EU conditions such an arrangement with the implementation of the Level Playing Field, which the UK side deems unacceptable. The UK proposes a form of regulatory cooperation, aiming at removing technical barriers to trade, while maintaining own rules and staying outside the scope of the European Court of Justice. More specifically, the two sides considerably diverge in their positions on designations of origin and phytosanitary controls. Negotiations are currently heavily focusing on trade and some other areas have not yet been touched upon, such as security and defence. However, the positions of the two sides in these areas are much more convergent. Some other areas where discrepancies are present and agreement will be hard to reach are fisheries and coordination of social systems.

So far, four rounds of negotiations between the EU and the UK took place, with fifth round set to begin on 29 June 2020.

Mr Barnier also took note of the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, emphasising the importance of respecting the agreed provisions on the rights of citizens. Ireland and the situation on the border with the Northern Ireland (NI) remains a point of concern, as it is a sensitive and complex issue, not only when it comes to trade and economy, but also to keeping a fragile peace.

Mr Barnier concluded by saying that the EU wants a balanced agreement and closest possible relations with the UK, but considers that the UK will need to be more realistic in their requests.

After the debate, Mr Milošević closed the videoconference by thanking Mr Barnier for organising the briefing, emphasising again the role of National Parliaments. He also thanked colleagues from the National Parliaments on their support during the Croatian EU Council Presidency, announcing that the videoconference on Brexit was his last engagement in his role of the COSAC Chair. He concluded by conveying his best wishes to the incoming German EU Council Presidency and Mr Barnier in the upcoming six months.

