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**An Comhchoiste um Ghnóthaí an Aontais Eorpaigh**  
Tuarascáil Taistil – an Bhruiséil - Cruinniú Iomlánach LXXI  
COSAC  
24 – 26 Márta 2024

**Joint Committee on European Union Affairs**  
Travel Report - Brussels, LXXI COSAC Plenary  
24 – 26 March 2024



## Membership

The following Deputies and Senators are Members of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Dáil Éireann and the 26<sup>th</sup> Seanad Éireann.



**Colm Brophy T.D.**  
Fine Gael  
*Cathaoirleach*



**Matt Carthy T.D.**  
Sinn Féin



**Francis Noel Duffy  
T.D.**  
Green Party



**Damien English  
T.D.**  
Fine Gael



**Marian Harkin T.D.**  
Independent



**Seán Haughey  
T.D.**  
Fianna Fáil



**Brendan Howlin  
T.D.**  
Labour  
*Leas-Chathaoirleach*



**Ruairí Ó Murchú  
T.D.**  
Sinn Féin



**Robert Troy T.D.**  
Fianna Fáil



**Senator Lisa  
Chambers**  
Fianna Fáil



**Senator Regina  
Doherty**  
Fine Gael



**Senator Sharon  
Keogan**  
Independent



**Senator Vincent  
P Martin**  
Green Party



**Senator Michael  
McDowell**  
Independent

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## 1. Introduction

Under the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, it is outlined that:

*“The Joint Committee shall represent both Houses of the Oireachtas at the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) and shall report to both Houses of the Oireachtas thereon.”*

COSAC, the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs, is the principal forum for co-operation between committees of national parliaments dealing with European Union Affairs. COSAC Meetings are held twice yearly and normally take place in the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The LXXI COSAC Plenary hosted by the Belgian Presidency and took place in Brussels, Belgium from 24 - 26 March 2024.

### Committee Delegation

The Joint Committee on European Union Affairs agreed to send a delegation to the LXXI COSAC in Brussels and was represented by:

- Seán Haughey T.D., *Head of the delegation*
- Robert Troy T.D.

The delegation was accompanied by:

- Rebecca Coyle (Policy Advisor to the Committee) and
- Paul Conway (Oireachtas National Parliament Representative to the EU).

## 2. Plenary Meeting of LXXI COSAC

### Sunday, 24 March 2024

The Committee’s delegation travelled to Brussels on Sunday 24 March. The delegation attended a guided tour of the City Hall in Brussels organised by the Belgian Presidency and then attended a reception at the Belgian Federal Parliament.

## Monday, 25 March 2024

### Opening of the LXXI COSAC

The LXXI COSAC plenary began with opening remarks by:

- Ms Eliane Tillieux, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs
- Mr Gaëtan Van Goidsenhoven, Senator and Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs
- Mr Othmar Karas, First Vice-President of the European Parliament

### Procedural Issues

The plenary agenda was adopted without amendment. Ms Tillieux outlined the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC on 24 March 2024 and the parts of the letters received from heads of delegations that had been incorporated into the plenary's draft contributions.

### Session I – Review of the 2019-2024 European legislature and prospects for the Council's strategic agenda for 2024-2029

Mr. Jakob Sjövall, the permanent member of the COSAC secretariat, presented the results of Chapter 1 of the 41<sup>st</sup> COSAC biannual report. The report provided a summary of the 2019-2024 European legislature and prospects for the Council's strategic agenda for 2024-2029. There were keynote speeches by:

- Mr. Georges Gilkinet, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Mobility
- Ms Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Ukraine's Integration into the EU.

The floor was then opened to Members who spoke on a variety of topics including security challenges facing Europe, Russia's war against the Ukraine, the EU enlargement process, competitiveness, migration policies, rule of law and proposals for reform the EU and the treaties. Deputy Seán Haughey spoke during this session and highlighted several of these topics in particular the importance of rule of law and that backsliding should be prevented. Deputy Haughey also spoke about protecting democracy, combatting climate change with implementing the EU's Green deal and achieving strategic autonomy.

## **Session II – Gender policy and the representation of women and men in parliament**

The session was chaired by Ms Eliane Tillieux, who in her introductory remarks also informed delegations that a Joint Declaration on more gender-sensitive parliaments would be circulated for co-signing after the conclusion of LXXI COSAC. She stated that the declaration would be based on the text on gender policy and the representation of women and men in parliament which was included in the draft Contribution.

Mr. Jakob Sjövall, the permanent member of the COSAC secretariat, then presented the results of Chapter 2 of the 41<sup>st</sup> COSAC biannual report. The report provided a summary of gender policy and the representation of women in parliament. There were keynote speeches by:

- Ms Marie-Colline Leroy, State Secretary for Gender Equality, Equality Opportunities & Diversity
- Ms Latifa Gahouchi, Senator and Chair of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women & Men
- Ms Agnes Hubert, Founding Member of Gender5+ and Professor at the College of Europe
- Ms Maruša Gortnar, Head of Research and Policy Support Unit at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

The floor was then opened to Members and the discussion took the format of a direct question and answer with speakers and the panel chaired by Ms Tillieux with the four keynote speakers. During the debate Members spoke about representation of women in politics, in general society and the participation of men in gender equality discussions. During this session Deputy Robert Troy spoke on the importance of parity in political representation and referenced the policy that Ireland has implemented to increase gender quality in political participation where 40 per cent of a political parties' candidates must be of each gender in order to receive state funding. Deputy Troy highlighted the online abuse and toxicity that parliamentarians experience online which can be a deterrent in joining political life and questioned if social media companies have been engaged with regards to this online vitriol.

Deputy Troy also highlighted that parliaments aren't generally a family friendly work environment and asked which parliament has implemented the most family friendly policies with regards to its operations.

In the evening the delegation visited the 'Tour & Taxi' site in Brussels where it received a guided tour organised by the Belgian Presidency of the renovated area. The Belgian Federal Parliament organised a dinner for the COSAC attendees at this site.

## **Tuesday, 26 March 2024**

### **Session III – Open Strategic Autonomy: Competitiveness & Resilience**

At this session there were keynote speeches by:

- Mr Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights
- Mr Thierry Breton, European Commissioner for the Internal Market
- Mr Marek Hudon, Professor at Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management, ULB

The floor was then opened to Members who spoke on a variety of issues including reducing external dependency, disruption in supply chains in the wake of Covid-19 and Russia's war against the Ukraine, competition and the EU's single market.

### **Session IV – Democracy & the Rule of Law in Europe: the way ahead**

Mr. Jakob Sjövall, the permanent member of the COSAC secretariat, presented the results of Chapter 3 of the 41<sup>st</sup> COSAC biannual report. The report provided a summary of democracy and the rule of law in Europe. At this session there were keynote speeches by:

- Mr Didier Reynders, European Commissioner for Justice
- Mr Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union
- Ms Françoise Tulkens, Professor emeritus at UCL and former judge and Vice-President at the European Court of Human Rights
- Mr Arnaud Van Waeyenberge, professor at HEC Paris and researcher at Center Perelman on the philosophy of Law



An interactive session was then held, and moderated by journalist Mr. Rob Heirbaut, with the panel that included the last three keynote speakers. The floor was then opened to Members and the discussion took the format of a direct question and answer with the panel on protecting democracy, rule of law, enlargement of the EU, process of accession and concerns with regards to back sliding.

### **Closing Session**

The adoption of the contributions and conclusions of the LXXI COSAC discussed at the meeting of the Presidential Troika on Sunday 24 March and further at the meeting of the Chairpersons of COSAC on Monday 25 March were discussed and agreed at the plenary.

Following this, closing statements were made by:

- Ms Eliane Tillieux, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs
- Mr Gaëtan Van Goidsenhoven, Senator and Co-Chair of the Federal Advisory Committee on European Affairs

The final conclusions and contributions of the LXXI Plenary are available to read on the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), IPEX.eu. [Link](#) to webpage.

## Appendix I: Committee Terms of Reference

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| <p>(1) Go gceapfar Roghchoiste, dá ngairfear an Roghchoiste um Ghnóthaí Eorpacha, ar a mbeidh 9 gcomhalta de Dháil Éireann, chun breithniú a dhéanamh ar cibé nithe a éiríonn—</p> <p>(a) as ballraíocht na hÉireann san Aontas Eorpach, agus</p> <p>(b) as Éirinn do chloí leis an gConradh ar an Aontas Eorpach agus leis an gConradh ar Fheidhmiú an Aontais Eorpaigh,</p> <p>a roghnóidh sé agus nach bhfuil tarchurtha chuig aon Choiste eile.</p> <p>(2) Gan dochar do ghinearáltacht mhír (1), breithneoidh an Roghchoiste—</p> <p>(a) cibé Billí a bpléann an Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus an Roinn Cosanta leis an dlí reachtach ina leith,</p> <p>(b) cibé tograí a bheidh in aon tairiscint, lena n-áirítear aon tairiscint de réir bhrí Bhuan-Ordú 220, agus</p> <p>(c) cibé nithe eile,</p> <p>a tharchuirfidh an Dáil chuige.</p> | <p>(1) That a Select Committee, which shall be called the Select Committee on European Union Affairs, consisting of 9 members of Dáil Éireann, be appointed to consider such matters arising from—</p> <p>(a) Ireland’s membership of the European Union, and</p> <p>(b) Ireland’s adherence to the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,</p> <p>as it may select and which are not referred to any other Committee.</p> <p>(2) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), the Select Committee shall consider such—</p> <p>(a) Bills the statute law in respect of which is dealt with by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Defence,</p> <p>(b) proposals contained in any motion, including any motion within the meaning of Standing Order 220, and</p> <p>(c) other matters,</p> <p>as shall be referred to it by the Dáil.</p> |
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| <p>(3) Beidh an tAire Gnóthaí Eachtracha (nó comhalta den Rialtas nó Aire Stáit a ainmneofar chun gníomhú ina áit nó ina háit chun na críche sin), ina chomhalta nó ina comhalta <i>ex officio</i> den Roghchoiste chun na nithe atá leagtha amach i mír (2)(a) agus (b) a bhreithniú agus beidh sé nó sí i dteideal vótáil in imeachtaí an Roghchoiste.</p> | <p>(3) The Minister for Foreign Affairs (or a member of the Government or Minister of State nominated to act in his or her stead for that purpose) shall be an <i>ex officio</i> member of the Select Committee for the purpose of consideration of the matters outlined at paragraph (2)(a) and (b) and shall be entitled to vote in Select Committee proceedings.</p> |
| <p>(4) Beidh ag an Roghchoiste na cumhachtaí a mhínítear i mBuan-Ordú 96, seachas míreanna (6) go (10).</p>  | <p>(4) The Select Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 96, other than paragraphs (6) to (10).</p>  |
| <p>(5) Déanfar an Roghchoiste a chomhcheangal le Roghchoiste arna cheapadh ag Seanad Éireann chun bheith ina Chomhchoiste um Ghnóthaí Eorpacha, agus, gan dochar do ghinearáltacht mhír (1), déanfaidh an Roghchoiste an méid seo a leanas a bhreithniú—</p>   | <p>(5) The Select Committee shall be joined with a Select Committee appointed by Seanad Éireann, to form the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs, which, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1), shall consider—</p>  |
| <p>(a) doiciméid phleanála straitéiseacha an Choimisiúin Eorpaigh lena n-áirítear Clár Oibre an Choimisiúin,</p>   | <p>(a) the European Commission's strategic planning documents including the Commission Work Programme,</p>  |
| <p>(b) forbairtí beartais tras-earnála ag leibhéal an Aontais Eorpaigh,</p>  | <p>(b) cross-sectoral policy developments at European Union level,</p>  |
| <p>(c) nithe a liostaítear lena mbreithniú ar an gclár gnó i gcomhair cruinnithe de Chomhairle (Airí) Gnóthaí Ginearálta an Aontais Eorpaigh agus toradh cruinnithe den sórt sin.</p>  | <p>(c) matters listed for consideration on the agenda for meetings of the General Affairs Council (of Ministers) of the European Union and the outcome of such meetings,</p>  |
| <p>(d) cibé rialacháin faoi Achtanna na gComhphobal Eorpach, 1972 go 2009 agus ionstraimí eile arna ndéanamh faoi reacht agus is gá de dhroim na n-oibleagáidí a ghabhann le ballraíocht san</p>   | <p>(d) such regulations under the European Communities Acts 1972 to 2009 and other instruments made under statute and necessitated by the obligations of membership of</p>  |

<p>Aontas Eorpach a roghnóidh an Coiste,</p>	<p>the European Union as the Committee may select,</p>
<p>(e) fógraí arna dtarchur ag an Dáil faoi Bhuan-Ordú 134(1)(a),</p>	<p>(e) notifications referred by the Dáil under Standing Order 134(1)(a),</p>
<p>(f) fógraí i dtaobh tograí chun na Conarthaí a fuarthas ón gComhairle Eorpach de bhun Airteagal 48.2 den Chonradh ar an Aontas Eorpach a leasú,</p>	<p>(f) notifications of proposals for the amendment of the Treaties received from the European Council pursuant to Article 48.2 of the Treaty on European Union,</p>
<p>(g) fógraí i dtaobh iarratais ar bhallraíocht san Aontas Eorpach a fuarthas ón gComhairle Eorpach de bhun Airteagal 49 den Chonradh ar an Aontas Eorpach, agus</p>	<p>(g) notifications of applications for membership of the European Union received from the European Council pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, and</p>
<p>(h) cibé nithe eile a tharchuirfidh an Dáil chuige ó am go ham.</p>	<p>(h) such other matters as may be referred to it by the Dáil from time to time.</p>
<p>(6) Tabharfaidh an Comhchoiste tuarascáil do dhá Theach an Oireachtais ar oibriú Acht an Aontais Eorpaigh (Grinnscrúdú), 2002.</p>	<p>(6) The Joint Committee shall report to both Houses of the Oireachtas on the operation of the European Union (Scrutiny) Act 2002.</p>
<p>(7) Beidh ag an gComhchoiste na cumhachtaí a mhínítear i mBuan-Ordú 96, 133 agus 135 agus beidh aige an chumhacht chun moltaí a chur faoi bhráid an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha (nó faoi bhráid Aire Stáit) i dtaobh nithe a bhaineann leis an Aontas Eorpach.</p>	<p>(7) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 96, 133 and 135 and shall have the power to make recommendations to the Minister for Foreign Affairs (or Minister of State) on European Union matters.</p>
<p>(8) Féadfaidh na daoine seo a leanas freastal ar chruinnithe den Chomhchoiste agus páirt a ghlacadh in imeachtaí gan ceart vótála a bheith</p>	<p>(8) The following may attend meetings of the Joint Committee and take part in proceedings without having a</p>

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| acu ná ceart tairiscintí a dhéanamh ná leasuithe a thairiscint:   | right to vote or to move motions and amendments:   |
| (a) Comhaltaí de Pharlaimint na hEorpa arna dtoghadh ó thoghcheantair in Éirinn,  | (a) Members of the European Parliament elected from constituencies in Ireland,   |
| (b) Comhaltaí de thoscaireacht na hÉireann chuig Tionól Parlaiminteach Chomhairle na hEorpa, agus   | (b) Members of the Irish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and  |
| (c) ar chuireadh a fháil ón gCoiste, Comhaltaí eile de Pharlaimint na hEorpa.   | (c) at the invitation of the Committee, other Members of the European Parliament.  |
| (9) Déanfaidh an Comhchoiste ionadaíocht do dhá Theach an Oireachtais ag Comhdháil na gCoistí um Ghnóthaí Comhphobail agus Eorpacha de chuid Parlaimintí an Aontais Eorpaigh (COSAC) agus tabharfaidh sé tuarascáil ar an gcéanna do dhá Theach an Oireachtais. | (9) The Joint Committee shall represent both Houses of the Oireachtas at the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) and shall report to both Houses of the Oireachtas thereon. |
| (10) Beidh Cathaoirleach Roghchoiste na Dála ina Chathaoirleach nó ina Cathaoirleach ar an gComhchoiste freisin.  | (10) The Chairman of the Dáil Select Committee shall also be the Chairman of the Joint Committee.  |

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