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Background Note

Session II

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The role of national Parliaments in the future of the EU

In the past decade, the European Union experienced mounting pressure and challenges that are continuing to erode its core political structures and beliefs. The *Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap* of 16 September 2016 set out an ambitious but very important task; that of regaining confidence in the European project and reaffirming that the European Union is the best instrument to address the challenges and overcome political, economic, environmental and social hurdles. Furthermore, the Declaration calls on Member States to improve communication with each other, with EU institutions, and to address citizens' fears, hopes and expectations, having as its ultimate goal that of regaining trust and legitimacy from European citizens.

The signing of the Rome Treaties in 1957 led to a free and united Europe that was still recovering from the tragedies it had endured during World War II, and transformed it into a tangible economic, political and social Union. Therefore, the year 2017 marks a very important year and anniversary for the European Union and its Member States.

In the past 60 years this project transformed and shaped its composition, structures, institutions and operability to better reflect changing geopolitical realities, developments on the international stage and citizens' expectations. On 25 March 2017 during the commemoration of the 60th Year Anniversary from the signing of the Treaties of Rome, Member States renewed their commitment to ensure a free, peaceful and prosperous Europe based on an undivided and indivisible Union and committed to work towards:

- i. a safe and Secure Europe;
- ii. a prosperous and sustainable Europe;
- iii. a social Europe; and
- iv. a stronger Europe on the Global scene.

The Whitepaper on the *Future of Europe*, published by the European Commission as a contribution to the *Rome Summit* presents five possible scenarios for Europe by 2025. The five scenarios are:

- i. the EU focuses on delivering its positive reform agenda;
- ii. the EU is gradually re-centred on the Single Market;
- iii. the EU allows willing Member States to do more together in specific areas;
- iv. the EU focuses on delivering more and faster in selected policy areas, while doing less elsewhere; and

- v. the EU decides to do much more together across all policy areas.

The Commission highlights that too often the discussions on the future of the EU focus on a binary choice between having more or less Europe. This could be a simplistic and misleading approach. The way ahead reaffirms the importance to further promote the shared motto, 'unity in diversity', and recognise that cooperation and dialogue are the epitome for sustainable development and peace.

Against this back drop and at a 8 year distance from the *Lisbon Treaty*, the role of national Parliaments is promoted further and re-centred at the heart of European discussions. Together with the European Parliament and Member States, the Commission is committed to host a series of 'Future of Europe Debates' across Europe's national Parliaments. The main aim of these debates will be to reaffirm the important democratic component of the EU and therefore ensure that European citizens are well engaged and fully participant in the discussion on the future of this common project.

The second chapter of the 27th Bi-annual report of COSAC gathered information on national Parliaments' active involvement and participation to the debate on the future of the EU. Replies by national Parliaments highlighted that the exercise of scrutiny and increased cooperation during the legislative process are two cardinal elements that could further promote the European project and contribute to the future development of the EU.

In this Session II Members are invited to discuss how national Parliaments can promote the European project and ensure the four freedoms are strengthened and promulgated in the future.