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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Situation in Ukraine - Presidency steering note

Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, in preparation for the lunch debate that will be held at the EPSCO Council on 14 March 2022.

EPSCO Council (Employment and Social Affairs)

Lunch – Situation in Ukraine

Since Russia's military aggression against Ukraine on 24 February, the European Union has shown unity and responsiveness by adopting a series of economic sanctions and targeted restrictive measures.

The invasion of a part of Ukrainian territory by the Russian armed forces and the multiplication of conflict zones have led to an extremely alarming humanitarian situation. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is now predicting 8 million refugees. According to UN projections, 18 million people affected by the conflict will need humanitarian assistance. Thousands of civilians have been killed or injured since the beginning of the war. Many others – almost 2 million in total – have fled the fighting to find refuge elsewhere in Europe, more than half of them in Poland. Many non-governmental organisations have called for urgent humanitarian measures.

On 3 March, the Council of the European Union unanimously adopted the immediate activation of the arrangements provided for in the 2001 Directive on granting temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons¹. The temporary protection status applies for one year, and is automatically renewed for further periods of six months for a total duration of one additional year. It grants immediate protection and rights, including residence rights, access to the labour market, access to housing, social assistance, medical assistance, access to education for children, the right to legal guardianship for unaccompanied minors, and the right to means of subsistence.

¹ Directive 2001/55/EC <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32001L0055&from=EN>

On 8 March, the European Commission adopted a communication on European solidarity with refugees and people fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Commission is proposing to mobilise European funding by means of: the CARE initiative (Cohesion Action for Refugees in Europe) aimed at renewing part of the budgetary flexibilities and reallocations introduced in the cohesion funds and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in 2020² and the European Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) funds, in particular by redeploying unused appropriations from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the period 2014-2020.

In the face of the looming humanitarian crisis, and at a time when there is a strong surge of solidarity in Europe, ministers in the EPSCO configuration of the Council have a key responsibility. In addition to humanitarian emergency aid, it is important to put in place now arrangements for the reception and support of displaced persons. These measures are essential to protect the most vulnerable groups, in particular children and unaccompanied minors, the elderly and people with disabilities, and to address the risks of exploitation and the risks of violence against women and girls. It is also important to facilitate the implementation of all the rights provided by the Directive, in particular housing, social support and, where appropriate, access to the labour market for displaced persons.

This exchange of views on the practices already initiated and those planned will be particularly useful for developing effective reception and integration arrangements.

² Communication from the Commission (COM (2022) 107 final)

Interventions could answer the following questions:

- What measures have been taken in the various Member States to provide immediate humanitarian support to persons displaced from Ukraine? What means are needed to enable and facilitate the implementation of these measures? What role can the EPSCO configuration of the Council and the Commission play in implementing these measures with a view to closer and more effective cooperation between Member States?
- How can the rights of displaced persons be successfully implemented through the activation of the provisions of the Temporary Protection Directive, in particular as regards housing, social support and access to the labour market, including through the mobilisation of EU funds?
