

**Reply of the European Commission
to the Contribution of the LXX Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union
Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) plenary meeting in Madrid,
26-28 November 2023**

1. Ukraine

The Commission and the European External Action Service appreciate COSAC's reiteration of its firm and strong condemnation of Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter, as well as COSAC's call for an unconditional and immediate cessation of Russia's illegal military actions and the withdrawal of all its force and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

The EU confirms its unwavering commitment to continue to provide strong political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. In response to Russia's war of aggression, overall assistance to Ukraine and its people by the EU and its Member States to date amounts to EUR 85 billion. To demonstrate our commitment to support Ukraine against Russia's aggression, on 1 February 2024, the European Council agreed on a new Ukraine facility with an overall capacity of €50 billion in the period 2024-2027 which will ensure the stability and predictability for Ukraine.

The EU and its Member States made it also clear that they would continue to address Ukraine's pressing military and defence needs, notably through the European Peace Facility and the EU Military Assistance Mission, as well as through direct bilateral assistance by Member States. The EU has collectively delivered more than EUR 28 billion of military equipment, including tanks, attack helicopters, air defence systems, missiles and ammunition. The European defence industry has already increased its production capacity by 40% – and this is still growing. But more is needed and we are working with the Member States to get ammunition to Ukraine – be it from the national stocks or be it by diverting other orders or making new orders. We will have delivered 520,000 rounds of artillery shell by March. And we will more than double this amount by the end of this year.

The EU and its Member States remain dedicated to contributing, for the long-term and together with partners, to security commitments to Ukraine, which will help Ukraine defend itself, resist destabilisation efforts and deter acts of aggression in the future.

The EU is determined to further weaken Russia's ability to wage its war of aggression and has therefore adopted 12 packages of sanctions against Russia and Belarus targeting almost 1,950 individuals and entities altogether. The EU imposed unprecedented sanctions against Russia in close cooperation with its like-minded partners. The 12th package of sanctions was adopted by the Council on 18 December 2023 and further raised the costs of Russia's aggression by targeting high-value sectors of the Russian economy, including prohibiting the imports of liquified petroleum gas into the EU and making it more difficult to circumvent EU sanctions. The EU will continue coordinating its efforts with its partners and it is continuously stepping up its efforts in implementing and enforcing sanctions.

Furthermore, the EU is determined to ensure that Russia and its leadership are held fully accountable for waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and for other most serious crimes under international law as well as for the massive damage caused by this war. The EU encourages further efforts, including in the Core Group, to establish a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine that would enjoy the broadest cross-regional support and legitimacy, and a future compensation mechanism. The EU reiterates its support for the Council of Europe's 'Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation Against Ukraine' as a first tangible step in this direction. The EU also reiterates its support for the work of the International Criminal Court.

The EU condemns Russia's attacks against Ukraine's civil and critical infrastructure and underlines the importance of security and stability in the Black Sea. It is vital that Ukraine's grain exports are sustainable and reach global markets. Therefore, the EU supports all efforts to facilitate exports of Ukraine's grain and other agricultural products to the countries most in need.

The EU supports Ukraine's Peace Formula as the only comprehensive basis for a just and sustainable peace. Any solution to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine must respect Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognised borders and as protected by international law, notably the UN Charter.

The Commission will start working on a series of pre-enlargement policy reviews to see how each area may need to be adapted to a larger EU. We will need to think about how our institutions would work. We need to discuss the future of our budget – in terms of what it finances, how it finances it, and how it is financed. And we need to understand how to ensure credible security commitments in a world where deterrence matters more than ever. The Commission will put forward its ideas to the Leaders' discussion under the Belgian Presidency.

2. European Pact on Migration and Asylum

The Commission appreciates that COSAC underlines the urgent need to reach a balanced and viable political agreement on the Pact on Migration and Asylum, which was in the meantime achieved on 20 December 2023. The Pact ensures solidarity by introducing a permanent, mandatory and flexible solidarity mechanism that supports Member States under migratory pressure. Solidarity can take various forms, including through the relocation of asylum seekers, provision of experts and in-kind support as well as by funding projects in third countries to manage migration flows.

A fair sharing of responsibility is ensured by reforming the rules for determining the Member State responsible for processing an asylum application and by introducing mandatory border procedures to swiftly examine asylum applications from applicants with a low probability of being in need of international protection so that those who do not have the right to remain in the EU can be swiftly returned. Mandatory border procedures will support the functioning of the Schengen Area by preventing irregular migration within the EU and will contribute to an effective return policy.

The European Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement on the key elements of the Pact on Migration and Asylum in December 2023. The legislative texts of the Pact on Migration and Asylum are currently being revised at technical level and the formal adoption of the laws should still take place during this legislative term, that is before the European elections in June 2024.

3. Energy crisis and green transition

The Commission agrees with COSAC on the importance of leading the fight against climate change and increasing the EU's strategic autonomy on energy and resources. The Critical Raw Materials Act, which is close to adoption, creates a regulatory framework to strengthen the EU's security of supply for the minerals needed for our green and digital transitions, as well as for defence and aerospace.

Considering the important role of energy storage in the future energy system, namely to provide flexibility, reliability and stability, the Commission published on 14 March 2023 a recommendation to Member States which addresses regulatory barriers, a better consideration of storage as part of grid planning and operation, and financing.

The Commission has taken swift action to accelerate work on critical infrastructure resilience, particularly in the three priority areas preparedness, response, and international cooperation. The Council Recommendation on a Union-wide coordinated approach to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure adopted in December 2022 includes the conduct of stress tests, starting with the energy sector. In January 2023, the Directive on the Resilience of Critical Entities (CER) entered into force, setting out new rules to strengthen the resilience of critical entities, including energy. The EU has further enhanced cooperation with key partners, such as with the joint EU-NATO task force on resilient infrastructure.

In addition, political agreement was reached in trilogues on further major files, notably the Electricity Market Design reform package and the Hydrogen and Gas Decarbonisation Package¹.

4. Open Strategic Autonomy and relations with Latin America and the Caribbean

The Commission welcomes the support of COSAC to strengthen relations with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The III EU-CELAC Summit, which took place in Brussels on 18-19 July 2023, was an important milestone in the relaunch of the strategic partnership between the two regions as equal partners. The reinforced political engagement will help to boost trade and investment, and to build more sustainable and inter-connected societies. The Joint Declaration² and the EU-CELAC roadmap for 2023 to 2025³ are key deliverables from the Summit. Leaders also recognised the potential of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, an important commitment to working together, identifying fair green and digital investment opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Concrete steps to advance the renewed agenda include the Declaration establishing the EU–LAC Digital Alliance, as well as the bilateral memoranda of understanding on Energy with Argentina and Uruguay and on Sustainable Raw Materials Value Chains with Chile, signed in the framework of the Summit.

¹ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6602 and https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_6085

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_3924

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/65921/eu-celac-roadmap2023-25.pdf>

The Commission acknowledges the importance of strengthening and developing a solid EU-LAC trade and investment agenda. The full implementation of existing agreements and the ratification of agreements signed and currently applied are important priorities. The Commission welcomes the signature on 13 December 2023 of the Advanced Framework Agreement and Interim Trade Agreement with Chile and looks forward to the rapid finalisation of the modernised agreement with Mexico. The Commission is also making significant efforts towards closing the EU-Mercosur negotiations. These comprehensive agreements, with trade, cooperation and political dialogue pillars, are catalysts for sustainable and inclusive development, giving a voice to parliamentarians and to civil society on both sides, and provide a platform to advance the respect for human rights, including labour rights, the protection of the environment and regional integration.

5. Middle East

The Commission welcomes COSAC's contribution with regards to the situation in the Middle East, which reflects the position of the EU.

The Commission is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza and has quadrupled its humanitarian assistance to EUR 103 million and operates a humanitarian air bridge together with Egypt. It has announced additional EUR 125 million for humanitarian aid for 2024.

The extended humanitarian pause at the end of November 2023 allowed for an unprecedented surge of delivery of humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians in Gaza, and the release of the first groups of hostages. The Commission hopes that another pause can soon be agreed and supports efforts to that end. The EU will also continue to support the efforts to release all the hostages.

The EU remains the largest international donor of aid to the Palestinians. An assistance package of EUR 118.4 million was adopted in December 2023 to support the Palestinian Authority. For 2024, a wider mid-term package will be designed to contribute to the economic and political stability of Gaza and the West Bank.
