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Dear Chairs,

The Commission would like to thank the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národní Rada for their Conclusions regarding NATO, migration and asylum and defence co-operation.

I. In relation to NATO

In the wake of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine, the EU and NATO have displayed strong transatlantic unity and close coordination, both at political and working level, epitomised by the participation of President von der Leyen at the extraordinary NATO Summit on 25 February 2022 and of NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg at the Foreign Affairs Council on 4 March 2022. In light of the new geopolitical reality in Europe, both organisations are fully committed to building on the unprecedented progress achieved over the past years, by deepening and expanding their strategic partnership even further in areas such as political dialogue, resilience, cyber and hybrid threats, climate change and security, space and emerging and disruptive technologies.

The reference in the Joint Statement to each nation's freedom to choose their alliances, allied policies as well as their own foreign policy orientation deserves our full support. In this vein, the European Council stressed in its conclusions of 24 February 2022 that by its illegal military actions, 'Russia is grossly violating international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermining European and global security and stability'. The European Council also underlined that 'this includes the right of Ukraine to choose its own destiny'. Furthermore, the NATO leaders confirmed on 25 February 2022 that 'NATO remains committed to all the foundational principles underpinning European security, including that each nation has the right to choose its own security arrangements'. This once again demonstrates their unity and like-mindedness.

II. In relation to the current status of the European Union's draft Pact on Migration and Asylum

The Pact on Migration and Asylum highlighted a fundamental truth inherent in the nature of the EU: that every action has implications for others. While some Member States continue to face the challenge of external border management, others must cope with large-scale arrivals by land or sea, or overpopulated reception centres, and others still face high numbers of unauthorised movements of migrants among the Member States. A new, durable European framework is needed to manage the interdependence between Member States' policies and decisions and to offer a proper response to the opportunities and challenges in normal times, in situations of pressure and in crisis situations: one that can provide certainty, clarity and decent conditions for the men, women and children arriving in the EU, and that can also allow Europeans to trust that migration is managed in an effective and humane way, fully in line with our values. The Pact includes a proposal addressing situations of crisis and force majeure in the field of migration and asylum. Ukraine's invasion by Russia has confirmed in the strongest possible way the need for such a crisis instrument. Under the current regime, the Temporary Protection Directive was

activated for the first time on 4 March and helped bring clarity and security to people in need, offering rights to welfare support, access to the job market and education.

The Pact provides for a comprehensive approach, bringing together policy in the areas of migration, border management, asylum and integration, recognising that the overall effectiveness depends on progress on all fronts. It creates faster, seamless migration processes and stronger governance of migration and border management, supported by modern IT systems and more effective Union agencies. It aims to reduce unsafe and irregular routes and promote sustainable and safe legal pathways for those in need of protection. It reflects the reality that most migrants come to the EU through legal channels, which should be better matched to EU labour market needs. And it will foster trust in EU policies by closing the existing implementation gap.

The Pact also underlines that the external border is where the EU needs to close the gaps between external border controls and asylum and return procedures. That is why the Commission proposed to establish a seamless procedure at the border applicable to all third country nationals crossing without authorisation, comprising pre-entry screening, an asylum procedure and where applicable a swift return procedure – thereby integrating processes which are currently separate.

In addition, the Pact further recognises that the EU needs a fresh look at its priorities, first in terms of the place of migration in its external relations and other policies, and then in terms of what this means for our overall relations with specific partners. It is important to address the complex challenges of migration and its root causes to the benefit of the EU and its citizens, countries of origin and transit, as well as migrants and refugees themselves. By working together, the EU and its partners can improve migration governance, deepen the common efforts to address shared challenges and benefit from opportunities.

Moreover, it underlines that no Member State should shoulder a disproportionate responsibility and that all Member States should contribute to solidarity efforts. This includes a new solidarity mechanism to embed fairness into the EU asylum system, reflecting the different challenges created by different geographical locations, and ensuring that all contribute through solidarity so that the real needs created by the irregular arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers are not handled by individual Member States alone, but by the EU as a whole. The new solidarity mechanism recognises that various useful means of support can be provided to help Member States finding themselves under pressure, from relocation to support on return or complemented with other alternative solidarity measures, for example, in the external dimension.

III. In relation to the V4 defence co-operation

In accordance with the EU Strategic Compass for security and defence, endorsed by the European Council on 25 March 2022, strengthened defence cooperation among EU Member States as well as with bilateral, regional and multilateral initiatives contributes to Europe's security. The increased defence cooperation among the V4 countries is

welcome and will contribute to developing a stronger and more capable EU that takes more responsibility for its own security by acting in its neighbourhood and beyond.

The regular set up of the V4 EU Battlegroup and the annual joint exercises bring clear added value to interoperability among the armed forces of the V4 countries as well as towards those of the other EU Member States. It will provide a valuable contribution, moreover, in the context of the development of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity, as agreed in the Strategic Compass, which will allow the Union to deploy a modular force to be used in different phases of an operation in a non-permissive environment.

The joint procurement of ammunition by the V4 countries is an illustration that defence cooperation bears fruit and a clear example to follow. This is in line with proposals made in the Strategic Compass and the Defence Package presented by the European Commission. They aim, amongst others, to further incentivise joint procurement of defence capabilities, including those developed in a collaborative way within the EU.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Josep Borrell Fontelles
High Representative/Vice-President*

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*

