



Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel and President Macron following the informal meeting of Heads of State or Government of 10-11 March 2022

Versailles, 11 March 2022

Thank you Charles,

Thank you Emmanuel,

Thank you for hosting us here in such a historical setting, for right now, the future of Ukraine and the next chapter of the European Union and of our democracies is being written. There is no denying that our fates are intertwined. Ukraine is part of the European family. Putin's attack on Ukraine is an attack on all the principles we hold dear. It is an attack on democracies, on national sovereignty, on the freedom of peoples to choose their fate and to shape their future. Our response today to Russia's heinous attack on Ukraine will as much determine Ukraine's future as it will the future of the Union and beyond the European continent. So let us stay true to the principles that have guided our joint response so far, namely responsibility, unity, solidarity and determination.

This crisis has indeed made us face up to our responsibilities in the face of a new reality. First, our duty to continue ensuring reliable, secure and affordable supply of energy to European consumers. In the mid term, this means getting rid of our dependency on Russian gas, by diversification of supply, by massively investing in renewables. Renewables are home-grown, they create jobs, here in Europe. They are a strategic investment in our security and in our independence. This is why the European Commission outlined REPowerEU this week. REPowerEU is a plan to diversify suppliers and switch to renewables. By mid-May, we will come up with a proposal to phase out our dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal by 2027, backed by the necessary national and European resources. But we also addressed energy price spikes. By mid-May, the Commission will present options to optimise the electricity market design, so that it better supports the green transition. But consumers and businesses need relief now. And therefore, this week, the Commission came forward with guidance on price regulation in these exceptional circumstances, and the possibility of a new Temporary Crisis Framework for state aid to support struggling businesses. This is complemented by the option given to Member States to tax windfall profits from energy groups. And finally, by the end of this month, the Commission will present options to limit the contagion effect of the rise of gas prices to electricity prices. Finally, we need to be ready for the next winter. So we will set up a Task Force that will design a refilling plan for the next winter and coordinate the operation. Beyond this first step, the European Union needs to define a longer-term EU gas storage policy. And therefore, the Commission will table a proposal to fill up underground gas storages to at least 90% of their capacity by 1 October each year. So you see, it is a whole big package. And this will be our insurance policy against supply disruption. Similarly, the Leaders also discussed food prices and global food security. And here too, the Commission will come forward with options to address these important issues.

Putin's war has also fundamentally altered Europe's security environment. To defend Europe, we will need different forces and different capabilities. Significant additional defence investments in Europe will be needed. I welcome that some Leaders have announced ambitious steps to increase defence spending. More will follow. But we need to avoid fragmentation. Thus, we need a coordinated approach. Because this only will ensure that we maintain a military technological edge in our European industrial base and that interoperability is given between our European Armed Forces. This will be the focus of our work in the next weeks to come. I want to be very clear that we need to closely coordinate also with NATO. NATO is the strongest military alliance in the world. Thus, I welcome that the Leaders have tasked us to prepare an analysis of the defence investment gaps and to make sure that we have a clear plan how to deal with those gaps in Europe by mid-May, when the Commission is presenting the results of this undertaking.

The second principle I mentioned was unity. It certainly guided us when we swiftly imposed, all together, three successive waves of sanctions on the Kremlin. With an immediate, hard-hitting effect. We will now come forward now with a fourth package of sanctions. These sanctions will further isolate Russia from the global economic system, increasing further the cost of Putin's invasion of

Ukraine.

Finally, a word on solidarity, which so many Europeans are showing shining examples of, in these days, by welcoming with open arms more than 2 million people who have now fled the war in Ukraine. I want to thank all EU Member States and in particular the countries on the frontline – that is Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and, of course, our partner, Moldova. Because the people of Ukraine need and deserve all our support – and so do the countries that welcome them. The Commission has set up a solidarity platform to coordinate operational and financial support and reception capacity. We are also using the flexibility of the EU budget to the fullest so that Member States can finance actions for refugees, like, for example, housing, or schooling, or medical care, and other topics. This flexibility within the budget could free several billion euros over the coming years for exactly these purposes.

The Ukrainian people are showing immense courage. And a people that stands up so bravely for European values is clearly part of the European family of nations. So while this terrible war rages on, we should already reflect carefully about what comes next. The membership application of Ukraine is an expression of national sovereignty, of its will and its right to choose its own destiny. Today, we have opened the pathway towards us for Ukraine. They are part of the European family.

Thank you.

STATEMENT/22/1708

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