Concept Note

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Session 1

Seven years after the 2015 migration crisis, lessons to be drawn in the light of the war in Ukraine

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In 2015, the sudden increase in migration flows into the European Union shed light on the **insufficient control of our external borders and shortcomings of our common migration and asylum policy**.

That year, Frontex numbered 1.8 million illegal entries into EU territory, 6.5 times more than the previous year. Asylum applications doubled, with 1,280,000 requests registered in the Member States for 2015 alone. The intake capacity in the main countries of arrival was quickly overwhelmed, making it nearly impossible for them to apply the Dublin III Regulation and to process asylum applications. Short of a consensus on how to establish solidarity mechanisms, tensions between Member States grew and ultimately led to a *de facto* deterioration in free movement within the Schengen area.

The burden placed by the Dublin III Regulation on first host countries, insufficient European coordination in external border control, and the weaknesses regarding freedom of movement in the Schengen area are all structural weaknesses in the European Union that were revealed in 2015. After that, the breakdown in negotiations on the Juncker Commission's package presented in 2016 showed just how much more work was needed to overcome the deep political differences between the Member States, especially regarding the issue of a refugee transfer mechanism.

In this context, **the return of armed conflict on European soil threatens the precarious *status quo* reached** in the wake of the 2015 crisis. On April 4th 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that 4.25 million Ukrainians had fled their country since the Russian invasion started on February 24th. With the intake capacity of Member States bordering Ukraine already under strain, **we must learn the lessons of the failures of 2015 in order to overcome this new crisis and achieve our ambition of greater European solidarity on migration**.

A first step was taken on March 4th with the swift and unanimous decision of the Council of the European Union to trigger the temporary protection mechanism provided for in the Directive of 20 July 2001 for Ukrainian refugees. This position of openness reflects a rare consensus among European partners. **Such progress must be properly valued, but it does not exempt us from a comprehensive reform of our common refugee policy**.

Now more than ever, the EU texts must be reformed to give Europeans control over their external borders and offer effective intake and integration conditions to the foreigners who they do accept into their territories.

The European Commission presented the New Pact on Migration and Asylum in September 2020, and it matters now that national parliaments take a stance on reinforcing external border control measures, on the solidarity mechanisms that should be implemented between Member States in order to receive migrants, on responsibility for taking care of those rescued at sea, on the common visa issuance policy, on the strengths and weaknesses of Europe's common asylum regime, and on the conditions for better immigrant integration.

In this context, several questions will be at the heart of this session's debates: how can we make our goal of greater European solidarity concrete when migration tensions run high? How can we step up coordination between the Member States and reinforce the EU's resources at its external borders? How can we enable Member States to effectively guarantee a right to asylum, while preventing it from being misused by certain migrants? What strategy should we adopt to overcome the political differences over transfers?