

## **The European Union's Contribution To Countering The Effects Of The Almost Two-Year Russia's War Of Aggression Against Ukraine**

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### **Abstract**

*For almost two years, Ukraine has faced the Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression, an illegal, premeditated and illegitimate act that represents an attack not only against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but also a flagrant violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. The brutal military aggression against Ukraine caused destruction, material damages and widespread suffering for civilians, which has led to the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Consequently, the dramatic situation in Ukraine has caused new and unanticipated challenges for neighbouring countries, including Romania, given their proximity to the conflict zone. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight, first of all, the EU emergency response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and also solidarity with Ukraine. Taking into account Romania's status as an EU member, the next objective of this study is to point out Romania's involvement and comprehensive support for Ukraine in the humanitarian field, especially on protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. For almost two years, Ukraine has been facing the Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression, an illegal, premeditated and illegitimate act that represents an attack not only against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but also a flagrant violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations. The brutal military aggression against Ukraine caused destruction, material damages and widespread suffering for civilians, which has led to the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Consequently, the dramatic situation in Ukraine has caused new and unanticipated challenges for neighbouring countries, including Romania, given their proximity to the conflict zone. Therefore, the research undertaken for this study has been focused, first of all, on the EU's contribution to countering the effects of the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, with accent on the EU emergency response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and also solidarity with Ukraine. Taking into account Romania's status as an EU member, the next objective of this study is to point out Romania's involvement and comprehensive support for Ukraine in the humanitarian field, especially on protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. In order to achieve these proposed objectives, qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilised, written data being used, but also logical or statistical observations to draw conclusions. As well, inductive reasoning conducted the research from the specific to the general situations, while deductive reasoning allowed to make an inference by going from general premises to specific conclusions.*

**Keywords:** *invasion; war of aggression; humanitarian crisis; emergency response; economic and individual sanctions; protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Russia's premeditated military aggression against Ukraine began on February 2014, with the military operation of the Russian Armed Forces to seize a part of the territory of Ukraine, respectively the Crimean Peninsula. Having carried out the temporary occupation of the Crimea, Russia moved to the next stage - the war in the Ukrainian Donbas. Thus, units of the Russian special forces and other armed formations seized local bodies of power, police stations, and military facilities of Ukraine in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. On 21 February 2022, Russia officially "recognized" as "states" the entities "Luhansk People's Republic" and "Donetsk People's Republic" created by it in the certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. From here to the brutal aggression on Ukraine was only one step. After that, on 24 February 2022, Vladimir Putin - President of the Russian Federation announced the beginning of the so-called "special military operation" under the pretext of carrying out the

so-called "demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine". Afterwards, around four o'clock in the morning, missile strikes were carried out throughout the territory of Ukraine, and Russian troops launched a large-scale invasion.

Therefore, since 24 February 2022, Russia has been attacking Ukraine on multiple fronts from the land, air and sea and carried out indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and repeatedly targeted energy infrastructure, leaving millions of civilians periodically without electricity and water. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has caused massive civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, forcing people to flee their homes seeking safety, protection and assistance. Consequently, millions of refugees from Ukraine have crossed borders into neighbouring countries, and millions more have been forced to flee within the country. According to the data presented by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on 27 November 2023: 5,946,000 refugees from Ukraine recorded in Europe; 392,100 refugees from Ukraine recorded beyond Europe; 6,338,100 refugees from Ukraine recorded globally; and 3,674,000 is estimated number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine.

Referring to the illegal actions and atrocities presented above, it is obvious that Russia's unprecedented and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine represents an attack not only against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but also a flagrant violation of the principles and norms of international law, and in particular the Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations that prohibits the threat or use of force and calls on all Members to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of other States. At the same time, Russian aggression constitutes a violation of the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act (1975) which, while not legally binding, is a set of political commitments and principles, including refraining from the use of force, inviolability of frontiers and respect for human rights, which remain the cornerstone of security in Europe (Carpenter, 2023).

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research was designed to highlight the European Union's contribution to countering the effects of the almost two-year Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, an invasion that caused massive civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, forcing people to flee their homes seeking safety, protection and assistance. Thus, since February 2022 millions of refugees from Ukraine have crossed borders into neighbouring countries, and millions more have been forced to flee within the country, situation which has led to the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since the end of the Second World War. Consequently, the dramatic situation in Ukraine has caused new and unanticipated challenges for neighbouring countries, including Romania, given their proximity to the conflict zone. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight, first of all, the EU emergency response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and also solidarity with Ukraine. Taking into account Romania's status as an EU member, the next objective of this study is to point out Romania's involvement and comprehensive support for Ukraine in the humanitarian field, especially on protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees. For this purpose, the research was focused on the documents adopted by the European Union such as declarations or plans of action, but also on the restrictive measures against Russia, including individual sanctions, economic sanctions and diplomatic measures. Also, a special attention was paid to the measures taken by Romanian government in response to the influx of people displaced from Ukraine, both with regard to the immediate emergency response, and the medium- to long-term response which focuses on the protection and inclusion of refugees. To achieve this proposed goal, qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, using written data, but also logical or statistical observations to draw conclusions (Vătăman, 2019). As

well, inductive reasoning conducted the research from the specific to the general situations, while deductive reasoning allowed to make an inference by going from general premises to specific conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### ***Immediate Response of the European Union and international community to the Russia's aggression against Ukraine***

The shock provoked by the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine sparked an unprecedented wave of strong reactions from States, as well as regional and international organizations.

Sharing strategic interests and facing the same challenges, the European Union and NATO reacted immediately and, even on 24 February, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the President of the European Council Charles Michel met with the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to discuss Russia's brutal, unprovoked and ongoing attack on Ukraine. On this occasion the three European leaders announced that NATO and the European Union stand united with the brave people of Ukraine in condemning Russia's barbaric actions, and in supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its right to self-defence.

In a special meeting that took place the same evening, the European Council (a collective body composed of the national leaders of the 27 countries of the European Union) condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine and expressed full unity with international partners and full solidarity with Ukraine and its people. As it appears from the European Council conclusions on 24 February 2022, "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". So that's the reason why the European Council demands that "Russia immediately ceases its military actions, unconditionally withdraws all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respects Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders". More than that, the European Council stressed that "the EU will continue cooperating closely with neighbours and reiterated its unwavering support for, and commitment to, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and of the Republic of Moldova. It will continue strong coordination with partners and allies, within the UN, OSCE, NATO and the G7".

Unfortunately, on 25 February 2022, the UN Security Council failed to adopt a draft resolution intended to end the Russia's military offensive against Ukraine. The draft, submitted by Albania and the United States, garnered support from 11 members but was vetoed by the Russian Federation. China, India and the United Arab Emirates all abstained. It is important to know that according the draft "the 15-member Council would have deplored, in the strongest terms, the Russian Federation's aggression as being in violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Charter of the United Nations — an obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State". By other terms of the draft, the Council would have decided that "the Russian Federation should immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine, and withdraw all its military forces immediately, completely, and unconditionally from that country's territory". Taking into account that the lack of unanimity of its permanent members has prevented it from exercising its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, at its meeting on 27 February the UN Security Council adopted a resolution by which decided to call an emergency special session of the General Assembly.

In these conditions, on 2 March 2022, the UN General Assembly adopted - by an overwhelming majority of 141 against 5 - a resolution rejecting the Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine and demanding that Russia immediately withdraw its forces and abide by international law. Deploring in the strongest terms its aggression against Ukraine in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Assembly also demanded the Russian Federation immediately and unconditionally reverse its 21 February 2022 decision related to the status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (Estrada & Koutronas, 2022). On the humanitarian front, the Assembly demanded that all parties allow safe and unfettered passage to destinations outside of Ukraine, facilitate rapid and unhindered access to those in need of assistance inside the country, and protect civilians and medical and humanitarian workers. It further demanded that all parties fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to spare the civilian population and civilian objects, condemning all violations in that regard.

In line with the European Union's ongoing concern for refugees (Vătăman, 2016), within days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU activated the "Temporary Protection Directive" for the first time, providing immediate protection to displaced Ukrainians and some others fleeing Russian aggression. Thus, on 4 March 2022, just one week after the start of the war, millions of displaced persons fleeing the Russian aggression against Ukraine were given immediate access to the labour market, education and vocational training, healthcare, and accommodation in the EU. The Directive's activation was complemented on 28 March 2022 with a "Plan on stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the Russian aggression against Ukraine".

#### ***The EU's sanctions against Russia following the invasion of Ukraine***

It should be noted that under article no. 215 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Vătăman, 2011), the EU has adopted a series of restrictive measures against Russia since March 2014, initially in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilisation of Ukraine. Then, given the fact that President Putin signed on 21 February 2022 a decree recognising the independence and sovereignty of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" and the "Luhansk People's Republic", and ordered Russian armed forces to be deployed in those areas, on 23 February 2022, the Council adopted Decision (CFSP) 2022/266 by which imposed restrictions on goods originating in the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine and on the provision, directly or indirectly, of financing or financial assistance, as well as insurance and reinsurance, related to the import of such goods, with the exception of goods having been granted a certificate of origin by the Government of Ukraine. In addition, Decision (CFSP) 2022/266 restricted trade in goods and technology for use in certain sectors in the non-government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine, and prohibits services in the sectors of transport, telecommunications, energy or the prospecting, exploration and production of oil, gas and mineral resources, as well as services related to tourism activities in the non-government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine.

After 24 February 2022, in response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the EU has put in place unprecedented sanctions that include targeted restrictive measures (individual sanctions), economic sanctions and visa measures.

Thus, following up on the conclusions of the European Council on 24 February 2022, the Council adopted on 25 February the second package of sanctions which imposed individual sanctions against President Putin, Foreign Minister Lavrov, members of the National Security Council of the Russian Federation and members of the Russian State Duma. In addition, were imposed wide-ranging economic measures built on five pillars: financial sector sanctions; energy sector sanctions; transport sector sanctions; technology sector sanctions; and visa policy sanctions.



The third package of sanctions was adopted on 28 February and 2 March 2022, when the EU agreed to exclude key Russian banks from the SWIFT system, the world's dominant financial messaging system. Also, the Council adopted the following restrictive measures: prohibit investing in projects co-financed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund; prohibit the provision of euro-denominated banknotes to Russia; prohibit state-owned media Russia Today and Sputnik from broadcasting in the EU; and Restrictions on trade against Belarus and add members of the Belarusian military personnel to the list of sanctioned people and organisations.

Fourth package of sanctions in view of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine was adopted on 15 March 2022, when the Council decided to impose restrictive measures on an additional 15 individuals (the listed individuals include key oligarchs Roman Abramovich and German Khan as well as other prominent businesspeople involved in key economic sectors, such as iron and steel, energy, banking, media, military and dual use products and services) and a few entities that include companies in the aviation, military and dual use, shipbuilding and machine building sectors.

For to sustain utmost pressure on President Putin and the Russian government, the European Commission announced in its REPower Communication of 8 March a strategy to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible and work has started to implement this plan. Also, on 17 March 2022, the European Commission set up the "Freeze and Seize" Task Force to ensure EU-level coordination to implement sanctions against listed Russian and Belarussian oligarchs. It will work alongside the newly established "Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs Task Force", under which the EU operates together with the G7 countries Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Australia.

Likewise, on 8 April 2022, the Council agreed fifth package of restrictive measures against Russia, which contains the following six elements: Coal ban; Financial measures; Transport; Targeted export bans; Extending import bans; Excluding Russia from public contracts and European money; legal clarifications and enforcement.

Following the European Commission's proposal for "maintenance and alignment" package, on 21 July 2022, the Council adopted the following additional measures: gold import ban; reporting requirements strengthened; targeted export bans; port access ban; financial sanctions; food and energy security; medical and pharmaceutical exemptions; a number of clarifications to existing measures, for instance in the field of public procurement, aviation and justice.

On 5 October 2022, the Council adopted the eighth package of hard-hitting sanctions against Russia for its aggression against Ukraine. This package introduced new EU import bans worth €7 billion to curb Russia's revenues, as well as export restrictions, which will further deprive the Kremlin's military and industrial complex of key components and technologies and Russia's economy of European services and expertise. The sanctions also deprive the Russian army and its suppliers from further specific goods and equipment needed to wage its war on Ukrainian territory. The package also lays the basis for the required legal framework to implement the oil price cap envisaged by the G7.

In response to Russia's continuing war of aggression against Ukraine and the gravity of the escalation against civilians and civilian infrastructure, on 16 December 2022, the Council adopted a ninth package of sanctions, the new measures including bans on: exports of drone engines; exports of dual-use goods and technology; investments in the mining sector; transactions with the Russian Regional Development Bank; the provision of advertising, market research and public opinion polling services.

One year after Russia's full-scale invasion and war of aggression against Ukraine, the Council adopted tenth package of economic and individual sanctions. Thus, on 25 February 2023, the Council adopted new restrictive measures that includes bans on: exports of critical technology and industrial goods; imports of asphalt and synthetic rubber; provision of gas storage

capacity to Russians; transit through Russia of EU exported dual use goods and technology. In addition, a number of other measures have also been taken: suspended the broadcasting licenses of RT Arabic and Sputnik Arabic; restricted the possibility for Russian nationals to hold any position in the governing bodies of EU critical infrastructures and entities; introduced new reporting obligations to ensure the effectiveness of the asset freeze prohibitions; imposed additional sanctions against individuals and entities, including key decision makers, military leaders, military commanders of the Wagner group and drone manufacturers.

After only two weeks, more exactly on 13 March 2022, the Council decided to prolong the restrictive measures targeting those responsible for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine for another six months, until 15 September 2023. The existing restrictive measures provide for travel restrictions for natural persons, the freezing of assets, and a ban on making funds or other economic resources available to the listed individuals and entities.

On 23 June 2023, within the comprehensive eleventh package of sanctions adopted, the Council decided to impose new restrictive measures against Russia. The agreed package includes amongst others, measures to: strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation with third countries to impede sanctions' circumvention; prohibit the transit of goods and technology via Russia; tighten export restrictions. The Council has also imposed additional sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

On 18 December 2023, EU adopted a twelfth package of economic and individual restrictive measures in view of the continued Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The focus of this package is to impose additional import and export bans on Russia, combat sanctions circumvention and close loopholes. In particular, this package includes additional listings of Russian individuals and companies and new import and export bans – such as banning the export of Russian diamonds to Europe – in very close cooperation with our G7 partners. Moreover, the package tightens the implementation of the oil price cap by monitoring more closely how tankers may be used to circumvent the cap. It also includes stricter asset tracing obligations and tough measures on third-country companies circumventing sanctions (Council Decision 2023/2874).

Along the same lines, on 29 January 2024, the EU renewed economic sanctions over Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Thus, the Council decided to prolong by six months, until 31 July 2024, the restrictive measures targeting specific sectors of the economy of the Russian Federation. They currently consist of a broad spectrum of sectoral measures, including restrictions on trade, finance, technology and dual-use goods, industry, transport and luxury goods. They also cover: a ban on the import or transfer of seaborne crude oil and certain petroleum products from Russia to the EU, exclusion from SWIFT Banking System of several Russian banks and the suspension of the broadcasting activities and licenses of several Kremlin-backed disinformation outlets. Additionally, specific measures were introduced to strengthen the ability of the EU to counter sanctions circumvention. It is important to note that in the press statement given on this occasion, European officials highlighted that as long as the illegal actions by the Russian Federation continue to violate the prohibition on the use of force, which is a serious breach of obligations under international law, it is appropriate to maintain in force all the measures imposed by the EU and to take additional measures, if necessary (Council Press Release 57/24).

All these measures adopted at the level of the European Union are designed to weaken Russia's ability to finance the war and specifically target the political, military and economic elite responsible for the invasion. The restrictive measures do not target Russian society, that is why areas such as food, agriculture, health and pharmaceuticals are excluded from the restrictive measures imposed.

Economic indicators are showing that the restrictive measures taken in Europe and elsewhere against Russia have had an impact on the Russian economy. Thereby, according to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2022 was a bad year for the Russian economy. It is estimated that in 2022, Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) dropped by 2.1%. According to the same sources, Russia's economy continued to shrink in 2023. Even if at this moment we do not have a clear statistic, we can refer to some estimates according to which its GDP was forecasted to decline by 2.5% in the worst-case scenario (OECD) or by 0.2% according to the World Bank, while the IMF expected a 0.7% growth in 2023 (Council Infographic - Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy, 2023).

### ***The EU actions in solidarity with Ukraine after Russian's invasion***

Since the start of Russia's war of aggression, the EU and its member states firmly stood with Ukraine and its people, and continue to strongly support Ukraine's economy and society.

Regarding the EU economic assistance to Ukraine, in 2022, the EU has made available €7.2 billion in EU macro-financial assistance, in the form of loans and grants. The aim of this financial help was to foster stability in Ukraine and address its immediate and most urgent funding needs. As well, in December 2022, the Council adopted a legislative package which will enable the EU to help Ukraine financially throughout 2023 with €18 billion. As respects to other measures to support Ukraine's economy, the EU is also providing support via the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development by providing EU grants and loans that enable these banks to lend to the Ukrainian government and to companies providing vital services. In the same line, together with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, the EU established the EU-Ukraine solidarity lanes in May 2022. The purpose of these essential corridors was to ensure that Ukraine can export grain and other agricultural products, but also import the goods it needs, from humanitarian aid to animal feed and fertilisers. 23 million tonnes of cereals and related goods - worth €20 billion in revenues - were exported from Ukraine thanks to EU solidarity lanes. Also, the electricity grids of Ukraine and Moldova were successfully synchronised with the Continental European Grid, in March 2022. In June, Ukraine and the EU started trading electricity.

In the field of humanitarian aid, the EU has allocated €733 million in humanitarian assistance to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine. This includes €685 million for Ukraine and €48 million for refugees and host families in Moldova. The EU and its member states' together have mobilised €2.2 billion. So far, close to 16 million people have benefitted from humanitarian assistance in Ukraine, thanks to the EU and other donors. A short while ago, more precisely on 20 April 2023, the EU topped up its humanitarian aid to Ukraine with €55 million, focused on preparing for next winter to ensure an extra layer of protection of those in need.

According to the official data presented by the EU, Between January and September 2023, 9 million Ukrainians, including in hard-hit-areas, have received humanitarian support in Ukraine thanks to the EU and other donors. Since January 2023: over 4 million people have received food assistance; health interventions or supplies have benefited 6.2 million people; cash assistance has reached 3.2 million people; critical protection services have been extended to 1.6 million people; almost 4.1 million people have regained access to clean water and essential hygiene and sanitation services.

It should also be emphasized that, in response to Russia's military aggression, the EU is coordinating the largest EU civil protection mechanism operation to date. All EU countries, as well as Iceland, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye, are providing material assistance to Ukraine, including: medical supplies; power generators; shelter items; vehicles specialised equipment for public health risks such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats. Given the immense need for medical supplies in Ukraine, the EU has deployed its strategic

rescue reserves. The EU is also coordinating medical evacuations of Ukrainian patients in urgent need of treatment and has opened a dedicated medical hub in Poland. The assistance provided via the EU civil protection mechanism is worth more than €647 million.

### ***Romania's support for Ukraine in the humanitarian field***

It should be noted that Romania, as a member of NATO since 2004 and of the EU since 2007, condemned in the clearest terms Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, preceded by the recognition of the so-called "independence" of the separatist Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Since the first days of Russia's invasion, Romanian officials pointed out that these actions are serious violations of international law and international commitments undertaken by the Russia, as well as of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, namely the inviolability of its borders. Thereupon, in concert with relevant resolutions of the UN General Assembly, Romania demanded that Russia stop the war immediately and withdraw all its forces from Ukraine, to fully respect international humanitarian law, and to allow safe and unhindered humanitarian access and assistance to all civilians in need.

In addition to unwavering political support for Ukraine, from day one of the conflict, the Government of Romania established a high-level decision-making Task-Force, coordinated by the Prime Minister. Furthermore, the Humanitarian Assistance Strategic Coordination Group was established at the level of the Prime Minister's Chancellery, led by a Counsellor of State to ensure the strategic framework of humanitarian response and to facilitate the inter-agency cooperation among national, European, and international partners. It should also be mentioned that the Government of Romania has issued over 20 legal acts to meet the needs of Ukrainian refugees. Among the relevant legal acts can be mentioned: Government Emergency Ordinance No. 15/2022 regarding the mechanisms of support and humanitarian assistance by the Romanian state to foreign citizens or stateless persons in special situations, coming from Ukraine; Government Decision No. 367/2022 establishes the conditions under which the temporary protection of all persons who were forced to leave Ukraine due to the armed conflict is ensured, as well as the source of financing the necessary expenses; Government Decision no. 337/2022 on the granting of gratuities and facilities for the transport of foreign nationals or stateless persons in special situations from the area of armed conflict in Ukraine; Government Decision no. 336/2022 for establishing the mechanism by which natural persons, who host Ukrainian refugees, benefit from the reimbursement of food expenses; Government Ordinance No. 20/2022 regarding the support and humanitarian assistance to children, adults, people with disabilities, and all Ukrainians who come to Romania; Government Decision No. 315/2022 for the accommodation of Ukrainian citizens and for providing the necessary funds to support them during their stay on the national territory; Government Emergency Ordinance for the amendment and completion of Law no. 21/2020 on the Air Code so that flights by military aircraft registered in other NATO countries are exempted from the payment of certain categories of air navigation tariffs; Ministry of Education Order no. 3325/2022 by which the student or PhD Candidate who cannot prove the studies completed by documents issued by the higher education institution he/she previously attended in Ukraine, the Romanian higher education institution decides on the recognition and award of transferable study credits; Government Emergency Ordinance no. 100/2022 regarding the approval and implementation of the National Plan of Measures regarding the protection and inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine, beneficiaries of temporary protection in Romania.

Regarding Romania's Response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis, it was structured on two layers of intervention: a phase focusing on emergency response, and a phase centred on the protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Romania.

Emergency response is, basically the urgent reaction and intervention ensured by Romania to the newly arrived refugees from Ukraine. The Department for Emergency Situations (DES),



as part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was the lead of operations in this phase, consisting of deploying resources and capabilities at the main entry border points, humanitarian transports, emergency shelter, food, basic medical assistance etc. The efforts by the DES were complemented by the intensive legislative and administrative work by the various ministries from the Romanian Government that issued a large number of pieces of legislation so as to be able to accommodate the emergency needs of the refugees. As well, local authorities coordinated their efforts with the governmental agencies and also developed their own operational plans based on local needs' assessments. The public effort was vigorously supported by the national civil society, international nongovernmental organizations, UN Agencies and private actors.

Protection and inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in Romania, the second phase of the protection response, is a mechanism developed to ensure the medium and long-term protection and inclusion measures for Ukrainian refugees who choose to live in Romania. For this purpose, the Romanian Government decided to modify the "50/20" scheme instituted in March 2022, according to that people hosting citizens arriving from the armed conflict zone in Ukraine received monthly cash payments for: accommodation (50 Lei per person per day) and meals (20 Lei per person per day). In keeping with the new support program dedicated to Ukrainians living in Romania, entered into force on 1st of May 2023, the money will be given directly to the refugees and not to the families hosting them, as it was the case before. Thus, for the first 4 consecutive months, will be granted 2000 Lei monthly per family for accommodation expenses, 750 Lei monthly per single person for accommodation expenses and 600 Lei monthly per person for food costs. Starting with the 5th month until the end of the year, the financial aid will be 2000 Lei monthly per family for accommodation expenses and 750 Lei monthly per single person for accommodation. As a novelty, in order to receive this financial aid further, the beneficiary need to be legally registered as employees with a working contract under the Romanian rules and have minor kids registered in the Romanian educational system. Elderly people (above 65 years), persons with disability, care givers of children (below two years), and care givers of children with disability (below three years) have been exempted from employment and/or school enrolment requirements.

According to a report published by the Romanian Government, "over 3 million Ukrainians have crossed our borders, and have not only been wholeheartedly welcomed in Romania, but also provided with a comprehensive array of support services. Over 106 million euros have been invested from public funds for accommodation and food, an additional 12 million euros for transportation, and an estimated 26 million dollars in cash assistance by the UN Agencies and INGOs".

In compliance with data presented by UNHCR Romania on 18 December 2023, the situation of Ukrainian refugees in Romania was as follows: 149,493 refugees granted temporary protection in Romania; 83,765 refugees present in Romania; 62,486 refugees supported with cash assistance programmes in 2023 (43,129 refugees supported in 2022); 89,797 refugees provided with protection counselling services and legal support in 2023 (65,000 refugees assisted in 2022); 6,672 refugees supported with livelihoods and employment services in 2023.

## CONCLUSION

The humanitarian situation in Ukraine has been deteriorating progressively since Russia launched its military aggression on 24 February 2022. The heavy fighting and attacks have resulted in significant human costs, including a growing number of civilian casualties and damage to critical civilian infrastructure, such as water and sanitation infrastructure, schools and health facilities.

As a consequence of the destruction of vital infrastructure, millions of Ukrainians have forced to flee their homes in search of safety, protection and assistance, either inside or outside the country. Most refugees from Ukraine have fled to neighbouring countries, while some have sought safety elsewhere in Europe. While there has been an unprecedented mobilisation of support for Ukrainian refugees at the national level in all European countries, the EU also mobilised its programmes and policy tools to provide immediate protection to displaced Ukrainians and some others fleeing Russian aggression. Thus, millions of displaced persons fleeing the Russian aggression against Ukraine were given immediate access to the labour market, education and vocational training, healthcare, and accommodation in the EU. At the same time, in response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the EU has put in place unprecedented sanctions that include targeted restrictive measures (individual sanctions), economic sanctions and visa measures.

All these measures adopted at the level of the European Union were intended to weaken Russia's ability to finance the war and specifically target the political, military and economic elite responsible for the invasion. It must be emphasized that the restrictive measures do not target Russian society, that is why areas such as food, agriculture, health and pharmaceuticals are excluded from the restrictive measures imposed.

Even under these conditions, in the face of persistent sanctions, Russia's economic landscape at the end of last year presents a compelling narrative of resilience and growth. Despite the challenges posed by external pressure and earlier negative forecasts, Russia's GDP growth in 2023 is estimated to be 3.5%. Thus, the natural question arises: have the sanctions against Russia had an effect or not? That's because, according to the Russian Central Bank, government debt has been reduced from \$46 billion to \$32 billion and private foreign debt has also decreased from \$337 billion to \$297 billion. The country's industrial and manufacturing output is steadily increasing at 3.6% and 7.5%. These developments surprised everyone, a fact that also emerges from what was stated by Sergey Markov (CEO of the Institute of Political Studies and a former adviser to President Putin): "The successes of the Russian economy in the face of the most severe, unprecedented sanctions in the history of mankind turned out to be a surprise to all economists of the world. I think that even the Russian government itself did not expect such a turn" (Teslova, 2023).

For its part, Romania condemned in the clearest terms Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and, at the same time, reiterated Romania's full solidarity with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. In addition to unwavering political support for Ukraine, the Government of Romania has established a clear decision-making and coordination structure to enable agencies with different legal and functional responsibilities at all levels of Government to effectively plan, coordinate, and interact on the ground in response to the humanitarian refugees' crisis. Romania's comprehensive response to the high influx of refugees took place in two phases. The first one, the emergency response, was an urgent reaction and intervention ensured by Romania to the newly arrived refugees from Ukraine consisted of deploying resources and capabilities at the main entry border points, humanitarian transports, emergency shelter, food, basic medical assistance etc. In the second phase, the Romanian authorities developed a mechanism to ensure the medium and long-term protection and inclusion measures for Ukrainian refugees who choose to live in Romania. Also, has set up six working groups that have the role to design inclusion and protection policy measures in the following areas: health, education, labour, housing, vulnerable persons, children and youth.

Thus, the Romanian authorities, assisted by civil society and international organisations, responded to the unprecedented influx of persons fleeing Ukraine both swiftly and efficiently. All these efforts and measures taken are eloquently described by a headline that appeared in the international press: "Romania – a safe haven and transit point for Ukrainian refugees".

It should also be remembered that Romanians were appalled by the Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and, consequently, have shown extraordinary solidarity with the Ukrainian refugees. Outrage, anger, fear for the Ukrainian people is what Romanians feels right now, especially since there are some historically rooted strong anti-Russian resentments in Romania. Thus, it can be said that, despite a language barrier, there's many things that unites Romanians and Ukrainians, reason why Romania will do everything in its power to support Ukraine as is has done so far, with all openness, strengths and capabilities, at all levels.

The determination of Romania and the Romanian nation to continue multidimensional and consistent support for Ukraine and the Ukrainian people is in close connection with the desire of the other EU member states reiterated on 29 January 2024, on which occasion European leaders announced that as long as the illegal actions by the Russian Federation continue to violate the prohibition on the use of force, which is a serious breach of obligations under international law, it is appropriate to maintain in force all the measures imposed by the EU and to take additional measures, if necessary.

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