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Dear colleagues,

At the European Council in December last year we discussed the issue of humanitarian aid to Ukraine – and how we can better demonstrate Europe's collective effort to help. We had our discussion against the backdrop of an escalating conflict, leading to a continuously deteriorating humanitarian situation. Over one million people have been displaced from the Donbas region and Crimea since March 2014, either to safer areas within Ukraine or to neighbouring countries. Around 1.4 million people are considered to be in need of humanitarian assistance, especially in this harsh winter.

The European Union has been at the forefront of the humanitarian effort in Ukraine. The European Commission alone is the second largest donor of aid, after the United States; together with the aid provided bilaterally by Member States, we are by far the largest donor in the country. Our aid has funded shelter, healthcare and food which has been provided to the internally displaced within the Ukraine, people in need in the rebel-held areas and refugees who have fled to Russia and Belarus.

However, needs are increasing and therefore our support must increase too. The Commission is responding to this call: the humanitarian aid budget to be allocated by the European Commission to Ukraine in 2015 will be tripled, from EUR 5 million to EUR 15 million.

To the Members of the European Council

Commissioner Stylianides is currently in Ukraine where he has met with President Poroshenko, Vice-Prime Minister Zubko and the President of the Parliament Groyzman and has witnessed first-hand the needs on the ground. A European airlift operation arrived into Dnipropetrovsk today, delivering over 85 tons of relief items for winter needs, to be distributed to people both in government-controlled and in rebel-held areas. This assistance has been procured by the Commission and by a number of Member States through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. I want to express my sincere thanks to those of you who have contributed to the success of this joint operation.

I am now asking for your increased contribution to these efforts. Funding international humanitarian organisations present in the Ukraine continues to be the most efficient way to provide assistance, especially where the EU would not have access. However, the supply of targeted goods – such as medicine and medical health equipment – is also essential. It would be very helpful if your governments could contribute to our concerted relief efforts, so the successful operation this week will not be a one-off.

This will undoubtedly increase the visibility of EU aid, something which we all agree should be reinforced. The Commission already places its humanitarian aid partners under strict obligations to ensure the visibility of EU-funded aid, both by clear labelling and in their own communications; I would like to dispel any impression that EU regulations somehow 'prevent' visibility for the assistance we provide thanks to the generosity of our citizens. I am deeply convinced that the best way to increase visibility is to ensure that we contribute to a joined-up effort, and that we make this visible as a reflection of the EU's solidarity. This way we can ensure better leverage, better visibility and better recognition for what we collectively do for the people of Ukraine.

Yours sincerely,

