Title: Addressing the Refugee Problem in Europe: Position Paper for the European Council

Introduction:

As a member state of the European Council, Croatia recognizes the pressing need to address the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe. The influx of refugees, particularly from conflict-ridden regions like Syria and Ukraine, demands a comprehensive and compassionate response from the European Union (EU) member states. Croatia stands committed to upholding its humanitarian responsibilities while advocating for sustainable solutions that prioritize the well-being of both refugees and host communities.

Current Situation:

Europe continues to grapple with the largest refugee crisis since World War II, with millions of individuals fleeing conflict, persecution, and poverty. Croatia acknowledges the significant burden placed on frontline countries, including Greece, Italy, and Spain, as they receive and accommodate large numbers of refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

The Syrian conflict, now in its eleventh year, has resulted in millions of Syrians seeking refuge in neighboring countries and beyond. Similarly, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has led to a steady stream of Ukrainians fleeing violence and instability in their homeland. Croatia recognizes the unique challenges faced by both Syrian and Ukrainian refugees and acknowledges the importance of tailored approaches to address their specific needs.

Position:

Croatia believes that a unified and coordinated approach at the European level is essential to effectively manage the refugee crisis. This approach should be guided by the following principles:

1. Solidarity and Burden-Sharing: Croatia emphasizes the importance of solidarity among EU member states in sharing the responsibility of hosting and supporting refugees. This includes equitable distribution quotas and financial assistance to frontline countries facing disproportionate pressure.

2. Respect for International Law and Human Rights: Croatia reaffirms its commitment to upholding international law and protecting the human rights of all individuals, including refugees. This entails ensuring access to asylum procedures, non-refoulement, and safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups such as women, children, and persons with disabilities.

3. Integration and Empowerment: Croatia recognizes the importance of promoting the integration of refugees into host communities through access to education, healthcare, employment, and social services. Integration efforts should be accompanied by measures to empower refugees and facilitate their self-reliance and socio-economic participation.

4. Addressing Root Causes: Croatia advocates for addressing the root causes of forced displacement, including conflict, persecution, poverty, and climate change. Efforts should focus on conflict prevention, peacebuilding, development assistance, and humanitarian aid to create conditions conducive to voluntary return and sustainable reintegration.

5. Global Cooperation: Croatia emphasizes the need for enhanced cooperation with international partners, including the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), and relevant regional organizations. Multilateral collaboration is crucial for managing the global refugee crisis effectively.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Croatia urges the European Council to prioritize a comprehensive and compassionate response to the refugee problem in Europe. By upholding solidarity, respecting human rights, promoting integration, addressing root causes, and fostering global cooperation, the EU can fulfill its moral and legal obligations while fostering stability, prosperity, and resilience for refugees and host communities alike.

Short Note on Syrian and Ukrainian Refugees:

Syrian refugees have been fleeing violence and persecution since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011, with over 6 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries and beyond. They face significant challenges, including limited access to basic services, education, and livelihood opportunities. Similarly, Ukrainian refugees have been displaced by the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, with over 1.5 million internally displaced persons and refugees seeking safety in other parts of Ukraine and abroad. Both Syrian and Ukrainian refugees deserve our solidarity, support, and protection as they rebuild their lives and pursue a brighter future.