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From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: European Education Area in times of Russian aggression in Ukraine
- *Policy debate*

Following consultation of the Education Committee, the Presidency has prepared the attached background note, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate to take place at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 28 November 2022.

European Education Area in times of Russian aggression in Ukraine***Presidency background note***

When the strategy to achieve the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025 was being formulated in the Commission's communication of 30 September 2020, Europe was already facing the worldwide crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. That unprecedented crisis had a huge impact on education and training in all Member States, forcing them to quickly adapt by rapidly implementing online and blended teaching and learning. The Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP), which forms a part of the EEA strategy, reflects on lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. It also sets out a plan for achieving a high-performing digital education ecosystem, comprising a set of initiatives, tools and mechanisms to support digital education. As our education systems moved beyond the emergency phase, the DEAP offers a strategic and longer-term approach to digital education and training, and aims to build resilience and foster sustainable and inclusive growth.

Before Europe had fully recovered from the impacts of the pandemic, Russian military aggression hit Ukraine. Many Ukrainian citizens, mostly women and children, fled Ukraine to EU Member States, which showed remarkable solidarity. To help Ukrainian pupils and students, they integrated them into their education and training systems, formed adaptation groups and provided language support, psychological assistance and other means of help to children fleeing terror and facing an uncertain future.

Such a spirit of cooperation, responsiveness and inclusivity is rightly at the heart of the EEA. The EEA has been designed with a strong focus on equal access to quality education for all, on equity and inclusion, and on strong international cooperation. These principles are fundamental for all our education systems and the crises have made them even more visible and necessary.

Following the adoption of the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) under the Portuguese Presidency and of the Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) under the Slovenian Presidency, we are now at the stage of implementing gradual steps leading to the creation of the EEA by 2025.

The Commission is currently finalising the progress report on the EEA, and a mid-term review process is planned for 2023, which offers the right moment to reflect on and evaluate progress towards the EEA in view of the lessons learned from crisis situations, the current geopolitical and economic state of affairs, and nine months of ongoing aggression in Ukraine.

As education and training policies are a Member State competence, approaches to the integration of Ukrainian pupils and students as well as to additional support and help vary. These efforts are complemented and underpinned by a number of EU initiatives, such as the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive, which guarantees access to the state education system for persons under 18, and financial support under the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus and the Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) initiative. The establishment of the EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine facilitated peer learning in its various Working Group formations, which led to a practical manual for the current school year (*Supporting the inclusion of displaced children from Ukraine in education: Considerations, key principles and practices for the school year 2022-2023*).

Access to education-related information and online educational materials is centralised via the School Education Gateway or European Education Area Portal. Information on qualifications and training opportunities is accessible through Europass. Erasmus+ very quickly introduced flexibility measures to support Ukrainian participants and institutions across all the fields and facilitates the integration of Ukrainian teachers into Member States' education systems, including in terms of language skills. Support for Ukrainian teachers and educators is also available via eTwinning. The recognition of Ukrainian refugees' skills and qualifications has been accelerated, including through the *Guidelines on fast-track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications*.

The Czech Presidency organised two High Level Group meetings on the topic of the integration of Ukrainian children into Member States' education and training systems, where lessons learned and best practices were shared and Ukrainians' most pressing needs were openly discussed. The new school year 2022/2023 has given rise to more questions and issues on which we need to reflect. Therefore the Presidency would like to put forward the following questions for Ministers to discuss:

Questions for the discussion

1. In the light of Russian aggression against Ukraine, how can the European Education Area contribute to addressing and mitigating the impact of such crises on education and training?
2. What tools need to be strengthened or newly introduced to enhance the European Education Area's ability to react to such emergencies more quickly and efficiently?