



MINUTES

GOVERNING BOARD

MEETING

7 JUNE 2023



The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting took place at the ETF and online on 7 June 2023, chaired by Mr Joost Korte, Chair of the ETF Governing Board and Director General of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (EC).

1. Adoption of the agenda

The Chair informed there was a point for information on the on the resignation of the accountant of the organisation. The modification of the agenda was agreed and the Board unanimously adopted the agenda for the meeting.

2. Introductory remarks from the Chair

The **Chair** welcomed the new ETF Director, Ms Pilvi TORSTI, who started mid-April and invited her to say a few words to the Board.

Ms TORSTI first of all thanked the Board and the EP representatives for the positive decision taken in her respect and then also the EC and the ETF colleagues for the thorough welcome preparation. She thanked in particular Mr Xavier MATHEU DE CORTADA, who served as Director ad interim and that by accepting to stay side by side on the operational issues until end of summer, will allow her for an introductory period in the ETF.

Then she presented her first goals: for her first 50 days, around end of June, and for her first 100 days around September. By around end of June, she mentioned one task she considered extremely valuable: meeting all staff individually: she found not only engaged experts but also passionate and devoted ones, representing not only the EU but also ETF partner countries. She confirmed her looking forward to working within the ETF.

She concluded by quoting Commissioner Schmit, who visited the ETF on 1st June after seven and a half hours he said: "I am pleased to have had an opportunity to visit European Training Foundation and engage in fruitful discussion with its staff that showcase the capacity of the agency as an international knowledge hub. We should use more it's outstanding expertise."

The Chair confirmed Commissioner Schmit came back to Brussels even more motivated than when he left and stressed that spending a full day at an agency is a clear sign of appreciation.

Mr Korte then welcomed the new GB members: Mr Božo PAVIČIN, new member representing Croatia; Mr Petri LEMPINEN, for Finland; Ms Sara CUCCI, for Italy (online); Mrs Emmelie VAN DEN BERGH, for the Netherlands. There were a number of members of the board who have recently been appointed but were not present: Ms Minna BÁLINT, alternate member for Finland; Ms Alice TOMASI, alternate for Italy; Mr Wouter VERHEIJ, alternate for the Netherlands and Ms Nataša HAFNER VOJČIĆ, alternate member for Slovenia. Bulgaria, Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg and Slovakia were not represented at the meeting.

The European Commission was also represented by Mr Giorgio GUZZUGLI MARINI (DG EAC); Mr Mathieu BOUSQUET, Ms Simone RAVE (DG NEAR); Mr Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG INTPA); Mr Alberto FUNES BETANCOR (DG EMPL).

Ms Ummuhan BARDAK represented the ETF Staff Committee.

3. Follow-up to previous meetings

The Board unanimously adopted the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 November 2022.

The Chair presented the follow-up to the action points since the last GB meeting and referred to the written procedure that took place in March 2023.

4. Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2022 and its Analysis and Assessment

Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) presented the 2022 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

Mr Carina LINDEN (Sweden), the GB member representing the current Presidency of the EU, congratulated on behalf of the GB members on the very clear and structured presentation of the successful implementation of the 2022 work programme, notably in a year of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, still under recovery from the pandemic, under the impact of inflation and transition to hybrid working methods.

The members welcomed the extensive work carried out in cooperation with Ukraine, notably on recognition of qualifications and the preparatory work for recovery and reconstruction of a post conflict Ukraine and noted with pleasure the synergies between the three ETF services and the Board encourage ETF to continue on this way.

The Board welcomed the ETF approach to strengthen links between this work and the priorities of the Commission through the intra social approach on transversal themes such as migration, green, digital and gender and its annual work programme.

Based on this report, the Board invited to consider in the future work programme increased cooperation between agencies on gender issues related to labour market integration and suggest using existing data to pool resources and possibly produce a report on gender issues in different parts of the world where ETF is active.

The Board also welcomed information on the evolution of extra subsidy activities as well as their increased use as it seemed not to affect the core business.

Ms Sara MATTIONI (France) welcomed very much the transparency on the information shared about the extra subsidy activities and thanked the ETF for that.

Mr Petri LEMPINEN (Finland) noted with pleasure the broadened geographical scope of ETF activities, now encompassing Africa and Latin America somehow and asked for more information, on the workload distribution and on the possible future development.

Mr MATHEU welcomed the comments and suggestions. He pointed out that the ETF work has been working for years now in Ukraine and praised the way Ukrainian public administration and stakeholders managed to continue running the education system even under the Russian aggression. He also stressed the new status of candidate countries granted to Ukraine and Moldova, which implied the ETF started working to support the Commission to elaborate the assessments for this candidate status and the reporting.

He also stressed that the key success factor about the extra subsidy projects is that they provide the capacity to expand the opportunities and added value of ETF work to further types of work and eventually in other countries, allowing the ETF to be present in more policy areas which are significant for the European Union, whilst not constraining the current ETF work. In addition, to note that the work carried out under such projects brings about positive spill overs into the work we carry out e.g. in Ukraine on the comprehension of the qualification system.

The Chair stressed the opportunities provided by such extra subsidy activities out of the budgetary constraint for the agency, and for all the five agencies under the remit of DG EMPL. He also indicated an increasing degree of openness in Brussels to allow financing of activity from agencies from the EU budget outside of the annual contribution. He was impressed by the number of extra subsidy projects and considered this extra contribution as a support to make a more sustainable balance between the administrative and the operational costs in the agency. He invited the GB members to report this information within their member states at governmental level (Council) and at the European Parliament. He welcomed the idea to use the expertise provision of the agency via service level agreement, avoiding time consuming tender procedure towards external consultants.

Ms Rossella BENEDETTI (EP Independent Expert) stressed that the ETF carries out an important work on gender by providing useful advice for policies in ETF partner countries and stressed it should be better reported in the document.

Ms Pilvi TORSTI (ETF) agreed and shared as example that the UNESCO's TVET guidelines for gender have been produced thanks also to the work of an ETF expert who had been detached to them for a period.

She also stressed that the ETF is the only EU agency working exclusively outside the EU, but still using procurement tools conceived to be used within the EU, a subject worth discussing to look for how to better tackle new challenges.

Hence the Chair invited Mr MATHEU (ETF) to present the Analysis and Assessment of the 2022 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

Ms Carina LINDEN (Sweden), on behalf of the GB members, praised the successful achievements of the 2022 ETF work programme and in particular the high rate of achievement on the planned actions in its partner countries within the work programme, as measured by the key performance indicators. She commended on the preparatory work for the Africa action plan and related projects as well as on the cooperation and support provided to Ukraine. She welcomed also the extensive increase in outreach of its social media, website and online communities. She stressed ETF ability to cope with the significant number of EU requests and to bring about high impact added value.

Based on this analysis she expressed satisfaction for a successful use of resources and the increase of core operational staff with a corresponding reduction in administrative support. She welcomed the cooperation with the network of EU agencies and with the other four agencies under the remit of DG EMPL.

She praised the sound management of the agency as well as the comprehensive internal control system in place and called on the EC to utilise the agency as a resource for upscaling selective methodology, intelligence and policy advice for countries with the support of dedicated funds.

She proposed that, as this document focused on 2022, the paragraph on the importance of assuring adequate staff and financial resources for the future would be taken out and rather discussed at the November meeting when the focus is on 2024.

She concluded confirming the information shared provided reasonable assurance that the resources had been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principles of sound financial management.

The Governing Board adopted unanimously the 2022 ETF CAAR and its Analysis and Assessment, by taking out the sentence stressing the importance of ensuring adequate staffing and financial resources allowing the agency to implement its tasks (page 6 on the assessment), and good note was taken also of the comments on gender for future reference. **Both documents were sent to the relevant institutions by 15 June 2023.**

5. ETF 2022 Annual Accounts and Opinion of the Board

The Chair reminded that Mr Bart GOESSENS (ETF) provides accounting services also to EU OSHA on the basis of an agreement between the two agencies. Mr Bart GOESSENS (ETF) presented the 2022 Annual Accounts.

The Chair thanked Mr GOESSENS for his presentation and invited Ms Carina LINDEN (Sweden) to take the floor.

Ms LINDEN (Sweden), on behalf of the GB members, welcomed the document as very structured and providing a good overview of the annual accounts, including both financial statement and expenditure notes, as well as notes on budget execution and financial management. She appreciated the high budget execution and found the document to fulfil the objectives of the financial statements to provide useful information, to wide-ranging regions about the financial positions, performance and cash flow to the ETF.

She confirmed that based on the information received, namely on the 2022 annual accounts, on the information of the preliminary assurance of the Court of Auditors to give a clean opinion on them, the Board considered to have obtained reasonable assurance on the reliability, legality and regularity of 2022 annual accounts and decided to issue its positive opinion on the 2022 annual accounts.

The Chair of the Board noted that the execution rate of the 2022 annual accounts is impressive.

The GB members unanimously adopted the 2022 ETF Annual Accounts and the Opinion of the Board. Both documents were sent to the relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2023.

6. ETF Amending Budget 1/2023

Ms Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the first amending budget for 2023, highlighting that the main change was an increase in subsidies from €2,060,000 to a little more than 5,000,000 due to previously signed agreements. The breakdown of the extra subsidy was provided, which included funding for projects like the African Continental Qualifications Framework and a Center of Excellence agreement with DG Employment.

On the expenditure side, there was a small change involving the transfer of €15,000 from infrastructure and equipment to staff costs and training. This was to cover increased mission and travel costs.

Ms Carina LINDEN (Sweden), on behalf of the Board members, expressed gratitude for the information provided and acknowledged the additional revenue sources from European Commission as subsidy projects. The updated budget estimates for expenditure, including salary adjustments, internal reallocation, and a transfer between budget titles, were noted with thanks.

Ms JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) explained that the coefficient corrector had been applied to the salaries and its potential impact on the budget had been absorbed by the increased budget, thanks to the extra subsidy.

The GB members unanimously adopted the ETF Amending Budget 2023/1.

7. Framework Agreement for Cooperation CEDEFOP – ETF, Period: 2024-2026

Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) presented the Framework Agreement for Cooperation between CEDEFOP – ETF as a renewal of a longstanding cooperative relationship with CEDEFOP dating back to 2004. He emphasized that cooperation between the two agencies is mandated by regulations. The cooperation covers three main areas: Knowledge sharing activities; Joint activities; Administrative and corporate matters.

He concluded by mentioning the annual activity report and the joint report to the European Parliament, signed by the two agency directors, which outlined their collaborative activities.

Ms Carina LINDEN (Sweden), on behalf of the Board members, expressed appreciation for the long-standing cooperation between the two agencies, highlighting the benefits of their shared focus on various aspects of vocational education and training (VET) and human capital development. The Board acknowledged the importance of this cooperation and welcomed the intention to further explore opportunities for synergies, extending beyond core business activities to encompass essential administrative services; with the belief that such a cooperation had the potential to increase efficiency.

The Chair noted the growing number of agencies in Brussels, with 44 agencies currently in operation and the possibility of more being created. Concerns were raised about overlaps, synergies, and costs within this context, leading to ongoing discussions. He emphasized the importance of concrete examples of cooperation between agencies, even within the same family, to demonstrate efficiency and avoid resource wastage. He mentioned an upcoming meeting on September 20th involving five agencies working under the remit of DG EMPL, showcasing their similarity and peculiarity too. Four of these agencies would undergo a cross-cutting evaluation and this will be highlighting the value of such cooperation and progress.

The framework agreement for cooperation between CEDEFOP and the ETF for the period 2024-2026 was adopted.

8. Progress with the Programming Document 2024-26 – Work Programme 2024

Ms Pilvi TORSTI (ETF) gave an overview of the context on the preparation of Work Programme 2024 which will be presented for adoption at the GB meeting in November 2023. She focused on European Training Foundation's (ETF) mandate and its seven-year strategy extending up to 2027. The strategy being implemented in a rapidly changing world, the working program looking ahead three years and the work program, currently in the planning phase for 2024.

Mr Thierry FOUBERT (ETF) emphasized it's a work in progress highlighting that the ETF's work focuses on several core areas, including skills relevance and anticipation, youth engagement, internationalization of skills development, performance and quality of education (with a gender perspective), and engagement with various stakeholders, including social partners and civil society.

New topics for 2024 include a labour market observatory and skills intelligence, as well as flexibility to adapt to ongoing developments, such as talent partnerships and discussions on qualifications. The ETF also aims to

contribute meaningfully to discussions on artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and digital education and their impact on the labour market and education.

Geographically, the ETF continues to work with 28 partner countries, with a special focus on Ukraine. The ETF also contributes to candidates' status for various countries and explores global initiatives in regions like Africa (ACQF) and Central Asia (DARYA).

Institutionally, the ETF will continue to focus on digital maturity, greening, diversity, and inclusion. In 2024 the ETF plans to prepare for carbon neutrality strategies, anticipate cyber regulations, and conduct a mid-term review of its seven-year strategy. Foresight plays an important role in shaping the ETF's future, including considerations for human resources and the ETF venue.

Ms Rossella BENEDETTI (EP Independent Expert) raised the issue of migration and inquired whether migrants were included in the term "fragile adults". He emphasized that addressing migration, particularly in regions like Ukraine and the Western Balkans, should be part of the ETF's activities and that the issue of migration and integration should be addressed.

Mr FOUBERT (ETF) acknowledged the significance of migration as a topic on the political agenda in Brussels and the relevance of the ETF's role in addressing it. He mentioned that the ETF has always worked on opportunities for legal migration and incorporated aspects related to migration in its work on qualification recognition, validation, and mobility of skills. However, he noted that the field of migration is dynamic, and the ETF plans to update its draft work program with information expected by October to ensure its relevance and significant role in addressing migration-related issues.

Ms BENEDETTI (EP Independent Expert) emphasized the importance of addressing the impact of artificial intelligence and automation on women's jobs, particularly in the administration sector. She expressed concerns about the potential job loss for women due to these developments and the societal implications. The participant suggested that one of the key focus points should be the requalification and adaptation of qualifications for women working in administration to prevent job losses, especially in this sector and for women globally. She urged the ETF to play a stronger role in addressing this issue as a form of prevention and requalification.

8. Oral reports

See annex.

9. Any other business

The Chair informed the Board of the resignation of Mr Bart GOESSENS (ETF), the ETF Accountant, and indicated personal and family considerations behind it. He acknowledged Mr GOESSENS' contributions to the cooperation between agencies and the shared services. The transition and appointment of a new accountant to be carried out following normal procedures.

The Chair expressed great recognition and appreciation for the contribution of Ms. Gema CAVADA BARRIO (SPAIN) for her long-standing commitment to the ETF over her two mandates as Governing Board member. Ms CAVADA unfortunately could not participate to the meeting being sick and the Chair wished her a swift recovery.

The Chair then invited the Board members to complete their evaluation forms of the meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will take place on 24 November 2023.

The date was proposed considering that on 22 and 23 November a high-level event is organised by the ETF in Turin on DARYA (Dialogue and Action for Resources for Youth in Central Asia), to which ten invited ministries from 5 Central Asian countries will be participating.

Follow up actions:

- The ETF to send the 2022 CAAR and Analysis and Assessment to the EU institutions by 15 June 2023;
- The ETF to send the 2022 Accounts and GB Opinion to relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2023.

ANNEX: Oral reports

Progress on Commission policies and programmes that have an impact on the ETF

DG EMPL

The Chair provided an overview of recent developments in the EU, focusing on two major crises: the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. These crises have prompted significant policy changes and increased funding in response to the challenges faced by the EU.

The concept of "strategic autonomy" has gained prominence, reflecting the EU's need to strengthen its self-reliance in various areas, including economic and security matters. This shift towards a more geopolitical role for the EU has resulted in new legislation and policy measures.

Despite the external challenges, the European Commission continues to pursue its original agenda, as outlined in the five-year program initiated by the Commission President in 2019. The workload for the Commission has increased due to the need to address both ongoing policies and new crises.

He also highlighted the European Year of Skills and the Oporto agenda, emphasizing the importance of upskilling and reskilling workers, with a target of 60% of workers being upskilled or reskilled annually by 2030, whilst now is below 40%. The European Year of Skills officially began on May 9th and will run until May 8th of 2024, with considerations for future years depending on elections and Commission changes.

He recalled a few key points related to the European Year of Skills (EYoS), labour market dynamics, recognition of qualifications, and legal migration within the European Union:

1. **European Year of Skills:** primarily a communication initiative aimed at bringing clarity and focus to the numerous skills-related policies and initiatives within the EU. While there is already a wide range of policies in place, it seeks to emphasize certain key areas, particularly those related to the labour market, digital and green transitions, and migration.
2. **Labor Market Dynamics:** The EU is experiencing low unemployment rates, with rates below 6% on average. However, significant disparities still exist among member states. The job vacancy rate is high, indicating a shortage of labour, particularly in specific industries and skill sets. This shortage highlights the importance of upskilling and reskilling to match available jobs with the workforce.
3. **Recognition of Qualifications:** it remains a challenge within the EU, and this issue is particularly prominent when dealing with migration from third countries. Efforts are being made to simplify the recognition process and focus more on skills rather than formal qualifications. The principle of "skills first" is gaining attention, emphasizing the importance of assessing an individual's abilities and potential rather than relying solely on diplomas and qualifications.

4. **Ukraine:** The EU has granted a special status to approximately 4 million Ukrainian nationals living within the EU. This temporary protection directive provides access to the labour market, education, and social services, demonstrating the EU's response to humanitarian crises and the successful integration of migrants.
5. **Legal Migration:** it is recognized as an essential component in addressing skills shortages and labour market needs within the EU. The EC is actively working on initiatives, such as the talent pool proposal and talent partnerships, to facilitate legal migration and match migrants with job opportunities in EU member states. Legal migration is viewed as vital for the EU to address its skills and labour challenges effectively.
6. **Strategic Importance of Human Capital:** Human capital and skills are increasingly viewed as strategic assets for the EU's future prosperity, particularly in the context of the digital and green transitions. These skills are essential for the internal market and transitioning to more sustainable economies. The EC is showing flexibility in fiscal matters, acknowledging the importance of investing in human capital, even within the constraints of economic governance.

In summary, the EYoS aims to enhance communication and focus on skills-related policies within the EU, particularly in the context of labour market dynamics, recognition of qualifications, and legal migration. Human capital and skills development are recognized as strategic assets for the EU's future prosperity and sustainable development.

DG NEAR

Mr Mathieu BOSQUET (DG NEAR) provided an overview of several key points related to the European Neighbourhood and Enlargement regions, emphasizing the changing external dynamics, policy priorities, and the role of ETF. He introduced the change of DG NEAR Director General, Gert Jan Koopman who has been the director general for several years of DG Budget, and the creation of a new directorate for Ukraine.

He mentioned the significant **changing external dynamics**, including COVID-19, Russian aggression against Ukraine, natural disasters such as the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria and increasing uncertainty in global geopolitics. He noted that uncertainties like these often go together with a tendency in societies to lean more towards supporting extreme political ideologies and increased vulnerability towards dis- and misinformation. We see an increasing risk of instability including the rise of violence such as was recently witnessed in Serbia and Kosovo.

He noted that the EU landscape has also changed impacting strongly our relationship with the neighbouring countries of the EU:

- **Enlargement is back on the agenda.** With the new three candidates for EU enlargement: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

- **Migration:** remains a sensitive and important topic affecting strongly the EU and our neighbouring countries. This includes an increased number of refugees but also increase in the legal migration such as encouraged under the EU Talent Pool as part of the European Year of Skills.
- **Artificial Intelligence:** The impact of AI, such as ChatGPT, on our labour market and education system is not yet fully clear, however what we do know is that it will have a significant impact including on our Partner Countries.

In his intervention he then stressed:

- **Labour market mismatch:** A challenge both for our Partner Countries and the EU. What might be an opportunity for an individual can be a disaster for the country. NEAR/ETF organised beginning of the year a brainstorming on braindrain, braingain and brainwaste affecting our partner countries and the EU. We would expect the ETF recommendation and guidance on how EU support can mitigate these risks and create win-win situations.
- **Skills as an enabling factor for our policy priorities:** We cannot advance on our policy priorities if we do not have the skilled labour. This includes the green agenda and the digital agenda. This also includes the opportunities and threats of artificial intelligence for our countries.
- **Economic growth and investment** is a key priority in our relationship with the Partner Countries under the Economic and Investment Plans and the Global Gateway. Without skills no investments. Skills are key enabling factor for EU investments and for SME development. He noted the cooperation the ETF has already established with the IFIs and the need that something concrete should be coming out of that. We are putting massive investment through the EIP, but we may hit a bottleneck if the necessary skills are not there to implement. He mentioned the need for good practices, scaling up and replication. This is where the ETF can play a role.
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Linking programming to policy is one of the key priorities of DG Gert Jan Koopman. In the field of Education ETF can play a major role in this, as specialised agency in both EU policies and the enlargement and neighbourhood region. He Mention the importance of the **rapid diagnostic assessments of the education system** conducted with ETF, including one in Kosovo and plans for a similar assessment in Eastern Partnership countries.

He then updated on the latest developments in the NEAR region, notably:

- Updates on **enlargement negotiations**, including screening processes in North Macedonia and Albania and the progress reports for the enlargement countries now also including Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. ETF expertise contributing to these reports is highly welcome;
- ETF key role in supporting youth guarantee in the Western Balkans;

- The **EU's support to the countries in the Eastern Partnership including the** a substantial support package for the Ukrainian people, but also substantial support to the other countries in EaP such as the budget support in Armenia, Education support in the Moldova and support to Georgia under the EU4Smart Economic Development in Georgia., governance, and smart economy development in Georgia;
- He also mentioned the substantial support in the field of education and skills development in the Neighbourhood South amounting almost EUR200 million in the programming period 2021-2023, while more is still to come. He thanked ETF for their very active presence and cooperation in the Neighbourhood South region as well as their involvement in the discussions in the EU talent Partnership and reemphasized the important role ETF can play in providing recommendation and guidance that would allow us to mitigate risks that these schemes might have on skilled labour leaving the Partner Countries, and recommendation on how to create win-win situations. Finally, he mentioned that the UfM ministerial on higher education is scheduled for 8 November in Fez this year.
- As closing note, he mentioned the **European Year of Skills**. The European Year of Skills is an opportunity also for our Partner Countries to draw public attention to the challenges they are facing in the labour market mismatch, which are largely similar to the EU!, and possibly accelerate initiatives in these fields. He noted that the ETF is planning a number of events in this area and encouraged them to use the opportunities to draw visibility to the initiatives and good practices that we can share within the European Year of Skills.

DG INTPA

Mr Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG INTPA) discussed the concept of Opportunity Driven Vocational Education and Training (VET) and shared updates on the Team Europe initiative. Here are the key points presented:

1. **Imbalance in Labor Market:** he emphasized the imbalance in the labour market, particularly in regions where there is a large informal sector and limited formal job opportunities. This imbalance is expected to worsen in the coming years, with more people entering the workforce than formal jobs being created.
2. **Need for a Holistic Approach:** It was noted that focusing solely on skills development is insufficient to address the problem. Instead, a holistic approach is required, which includes creating job opportunities through private sector investments and support programs.
3. **Team Europe Initiative:** he introduced the Team Europe initiative called "Opportunity Driven VET." This initiative aims to promote VET programs that align with employment opportunities created by investment programs.
4. **Participating Member States:** Belgium, Finland, France, and Germany are already on board with the initiative, and other countries like Sweden, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands are considering joining.

5. **Technical Assistance Facility:** The program includes a technical assistance facility to help identify employment opportunities and the required skill profiles in the regions. This will enable the development of VET programs tailored to demand.
6. **Regional Exchange on Public-Private Partnerships:** The initiative seeks to foster regional exchange of best practices in public-private partnerships in VET. He mentioned that ERASMUS plus, which includes vocational education and training, can play a crucial role in facilitating this exchange.
7. **Funding Mechanisms:** Funding for the initiative will primarily come from bilateral envelopes, and specific value chains will also receive support. This includes emerging sectors like the hydrogen value chain.
8. **Continental Qualification Frameworks:** he expressed satisfaction with the progress made on African Continental Qualification Frameworks and DARYA, highlighting the importance of working on recognition and comparability of qualifications.
9. **Training Collaboration with ETF:** he thanked the ETF for its collaboration in organizing training sessions for youth delegations and annual training seminars for staff.

The Opportunity Driven VET initiative aims to bridge the gap between skills development and job opportunities in regions facing labour market challenges, with a focus on private sector investment and collaboration.

DG EAC

Mr Giorgio GUZZUGLI MARINI (DG EAC) provided an overview of the EC's activities and priorities in the field of education and training, with a focus on cooperation with partner countries. Here the key points presented:

1. **Change in Leadership:** Commissioner Gabriel resigned, and Vice President Schinas took over the Education, Culture, and Youth portfolio. The transition had been smooth, and Vice President Schinas is actively involved in the education and training agenda.
2. **Cooperation with Ukraine:** Ukraine is a top priority, and Vice President Schinas will visit Kiev to strengthen cooperation on education and training. Ukraine has been invited to participate in various working groups and initiatives to align its education system with European standards.
3. **Financial Support for Ukraine:** The EC has mobilized significant funds to support Ukraine's education and research initiatives. This includes funding from programs like Erasmus+ and the Marie Curie Sklodowska Action, as well as the establishment of a Community Hub in Kiev to promote innovation.
4. **Western Balkans:** Cooperation with the Western Balkans is a priority, with a focus on modernizing vocational education and training (VET) systems. A Community Hub in Skopje is also planned to support innovation. The Erasmus+ program is also being used to promote opportunities and build capacities in the region; the upcoming workshop on the internationalisation of VET in the Western

Balkans organised by ETF in November would be a good occasion to raise awareness about these opportunities.

5. **South Mediterranean:** The first Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on Higher Education is scheduled for November 8th, 2023, in Fes. It will address various topics, including governance, internationalization, digital education, inclusion, sustainability, and academic values. ETF is actively involved in the preparation of this conference.
6. **Digital Education:** The EC has adopted the Digital Education and Skills Package, which includes two proposals for council recommendations. These proposals aim to ensure universal access to inclusive digital education and strengthen the provision of digital skills in schools and universities.
7. **Erasmus+ Capacity Building Action:** This action focuses on building the capacities of partner countries to modernize their VET systems. It has seen increased demand, and the selection process is ongoing. The November workshop is expected to promote this action further.

Overall, the EC is actively engaged in promoting education, skills development, and cooperation with partner countries in various regions, with a strong emphasis on modernization, innovation, and inclusivity.

Mr KORTE (DG EMPL), GB Chair, left the meeting and delegated Mr BOUSQUET (DG NEAR) to chair the remaining part of the meeting.

Trends and developments at the ETF

Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) provided an overview of ETF's main priorities and activities in 2023. Here the key points presented:

1. **Priority Areas for 2023:** ETF's work in 2023 is aligned with key priorities, including the Year of Skills, ERASMUS, flexibility, resilience, and partnership and institutional development.
2. **Regional Focus:** ETF's activities are concentrated in various regions, including Ukraine, candidate countries, the Western Balkans, the Neighbourhood, Africa, Central Asia, and knowledge hubs in Latin America and Asia. The organisation collaborates with local actors and shares methodologies to promote skills development.
3. **Key Achievements:** ETF has achieved several milestones, including projects related to digital skills for youth, active labour market measures, comparison of qualification frameworks, vocational excellence, innovative education, and technology transfer in the western Balkans.
4. **Knowledge Products:** ETF has developed a new generation of knowledge products, including updated information on education, labour markets, and migration, to support projects and stakeholders.

5. **Cooperation with the European Commission:** ETF collaborates with the EC on various projects, including DARYA, centres of vocational excellence, and vocational frameworks in Africa. Recent approvals include additional support for the Rwanda project.
6. **Requests for Support:** ETF receives requests for support from different DGs and collaborates on projects related to education, training, and skills development in partner countries.
7. **Strategic Communication:** ETF actively contributes to the EYoS and participates in events, workshops, and campaigns to promote skills development and inclusion.
8. **CARMEN Dashboard:** ETF is developing a monitoring system called CARMEN to track the utilization of its budget and resources. This system aims to provide accurate information on expenditures and activities.
9. **Open Space and Networks:** ETF utilizes open spaces and networks to connect with experts and stakeholders in partner countries and collaborates on various topics and projects.
10. **Evaluation and Audits:** ETF is involved in external evaluations, internal evaluations, and audits to assess the impact and effectiveness of its activities.
11. **Partnerships:** Building partnerships remains a fundamental part of ETF's strategy to achieve its ambitious agendas and goals.
12. **Human Resources:** ETF has almost filled all vacancies and is actively recruiting experts, including junior experts, to contribute to its mission.
13. **Premises:** ETF is preparing for changes in its premises, as its contract for the current building is until 2027, exploring different options for the future.

Overall, ETF is actively engaged in various regions, collaborating with partners and stakeholders, and continuously working to promote skills development, education, and training.

Update on the Swedish Presidency

Ms Carina LINDEN (Sweden), gave an overview of the Swedish presidency of the Council in the area of education and training, by highlighting several key priorities and initiatives:

1. **Presidency Priorities:** The Swedish presidency focused on security, competitiveness, green and energy transitions, and democratic values. Supporting Ukraine and its path towards the EU was a top priority.
2. **European Year of Skills:** The presidency negotiated the decision on the European Year of Skills with the Council and linked several initiatives to the Year. A conference on "Skills for the Green Transition

for a Competitive Europe" emphasized the role of education and training in addressing the green transition and upskilling.

3. **Council Conclusions on Skills for Green Transition:** Council conclusions were adopted in March, emphasizing the skills needed for individuals and companies to navigate the green transition successfully. The role of vocational education and training (VET), higher education, and adult learning in equipping the workforce with these skills was highlighted.
4. **Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training:** Council resolutions on the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, towards 2030, were approved. These resolutions respond to the Commission's progress report and aim to advance the European Education Area.
5. **Automatic Mutual Recognition in Education and Training:** Council conclusions on further steps to achieve automatic mutual recognition in education and training were approved, building on the Commission's recommendations.
6. **Digitalization in Education:** The presidency initiated the process for Council recommendations presented by the Commission on digitalization in education. These recommendations to be adopted and continued under the Spanish presidency.
7. **Informal Ministerial Meeting:** The informal ministerial meeting for employment and social affairs addressed the importance of relevant skills during labour market transitions. Social partners at the European level were invited to share their needs in this context.
8. **Meetings and Events:** The presidency organized multiple meetings, including 11 meetings on vocational education and training (VET). Special attention was given to the consequences of the Ukraine war on education, and discussions took place on the role of VET in the green transition.
9. **High-Level Conference:** A high-level conference on "Skills for the Green Transition" was held in conjunction with DG meetings, addressing the significance of skills and competencies for the green transition.
10. **Transition to the Spanish Presidency:** The Swedish presidency ensured a smooth transition to the Spanish presidency, maintaining close cooperation to continue key initiatives.

Ms LINDEN expressed best wishes to the incoming Spanish presidency.

Update on the upcoming Spanish Presidency

Ms Mária Ángeles HERAS LÁZARO (SPAIN) updated on the upcoming Spanish presidency of the Council and the focus on education and vocational training. Here the key points presented:

1. **Presidency Priorities:** The Spanish presidency to emphasize the contribution of education to the EU's open strategic autonomy and support for the European Pillar of Social Rights. To also contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe.
2. **Promoting European Values:** One of the main topics during the presidency will be the promotion of European values and democratic citizenship. The presidency will present conclusions on the contribution of education to promoting common values and European citizenship.
3. **European Education Area:** The presidency will work on advancing the European Education Area, aligning with ongoing initiatives.
4. **Digital Transformation of Education:** Two recommendations from the Commission on digital transformation in education will be a focus, covering enabling factors for digital education and improving the provision of digital skills in education and training.
5. **Gender Perspective and STEAM Education:** The presidency will also address the support for gender perspective in digital education and the promotion of vocational STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) education for girls.
6. **Ministerial Meetings:** Key ministerial meetings include the informal meeting of ministers of education and youth on 18-19 September in Zaragoza and the formal *Education, Youth, Culture and Sport* (EYCS) Council meeting on 23 November in Brussels.
7. **Other Events:** Additional events include a high-level group meeting in Jerez in June, a ministerial conference on VET in Seville in October, and a DGVT meeting in Seville.
8. **European Year of Skills:** Spain will actively support the EYoS, with plans for a tripartite declaration involving Member States, social agents, unions, and company representatives. A major event during the EYoS will be held in Barcelona in October, focusing on active labour market policies.