

MINUTES

GOVERNING BOARD

MEETING

10 JUNE 2016



1. Introduction

The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting was held in Turin on 10 June 2016 and was chaired by Michel SERVOZ, Director General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (EC).

The Chair opened the meeting by stressing the importance of the Skills Package adopted that day in Brussels, and promoted as the “Skills Day for Europe”.

He then welcomed Mrs MULLER-ROOSEN who from alternate member had been nominated as a full member. Though absent, he welcomed other recently appointed members of the Board: Karol JAKUBIK, member representing Slovakia, and Ms Signe TYCHSEN-PHILIP, member representing Denmark.

He also welcomed Ms ROOSE, who attended as an observer for Estonia, Ms Sintja SMITE who exceptionally represented Latvia, Mr Kefalas SOTERIS who exceptionally represented Cyprus, and Mr Alexander LUDVA who exceptionally represented Slovakia.

The Chair warmly welcomed Minister Predrag BOSKOVIC from Montenegro as an observer in the GB meeting and thanked him for his interesting presentation on the developments of HCD in Montenegro during the GB dinner the day before.

The EC was also represented by Mr Bernard BRUNET, Head of Unit (DG NEAR), Mr Stefano SIGNORE, Head of Unit (DG DEVCO), Kiril KIRYAKOV (DG EMPL), Christophe MASSON (DG NEAR) and Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG DEVCO).

Shawn MENDES and Mircea COPOT represented the ETF Staff Committee.

Mr Jean-François MEZIERES, independent member representing the European Parliament, could not be present.

Representatives from Bulgaria, Romania and Portugal were absent, as were the observers of the Partner Countries.

The EC is anyhow in the process of nominating new partner country observers: 22 applications have been received from 13 partner countries, and the pre-selection of CV's has started. If the nomination process goes according to schedule, the 3 newly-nominated PC observers can attend the GB meeting of November.

2. Adoption of the agenda

The Board adopted the agenda for the meeting.

3. Follow-up to previous meeting

i. Minutes of previous meeting

The Board adopted the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 November 2015.

ii. Follow up on action points and written procedures

The follow up points and the actions developed by the ETF to achieve them, and the written procedures which had taken place since the last Governing Board meeting were presented by the chair.

No comments nor questions were raised.

4. Draft ETF Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2015 and Draft ETF Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2015 Analysis and Assessment (CAARAA)

Madlen SERBAN (ETF) reminded the audience that exactly 1 month ago the Europe Day was celebrated in Torino together with the 4 UN agencies, as an opportunity to collectively reflect on how to implement the 2030 agenda. She thanked Mr RAMPAZZO, the Italian GB member, for his contribution. She reminded him of his commitment to join the ETF for the celebration of the Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in 2016.

Madlen SERBAN (ETF) then presented the draft 2015 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

She informed the Governing Board members that the draft 2015 ETF CAAR was prepared in accordance with the (EC) Regulation no. 1339/2008. It also draws on the outcomes of several consultative events, in particular the Structured Dialogue meeting held in Brussels on 19 April and telephone conversations with some of the GB members, as a substitute for the cancelled GB working group meeting in Brussels following the terrorist attacks there. All the recommendations and observations were considered for the preparation of the final draft.

The recommendations issued by the European Court of Auditors and the Internal Audit Service were also taken into account.

The CAAR, built around the same logic of performance improvement as the previous year, follows the standard template and applies the key performance indicators (KPIs) for discharge purposes as provided by the EC.

From the list of KPIs proposed by the European Commission for the agency directors in view of the discharge procedure, the CAAR concentrates on 5 KPIs which best capture the qualitative aspects of the work of ETF, all of which show progress compared to last year's report. As a clear strong point comes out ETF's capability to stimulate the partner countries to implement the VET agenda, despite the sometimes changing and volatile environments.

Ms Serban presented a number of examples to illustrate the achievement of the ETF's results in each of its three strategic objectives and which showed the multidimensional mix of ETF's work by thematic area, by geographical region and by function. These included::

- 1) reinforced evidence based VET policy analysis, not only system wide but also thematic (Small Business Act for Europe) policy analysis (contribution to EC on Economic Reform Programmes);
- 2) implementation and investment in governance in VET systems focusing on subnational levels and/or regional development (WBL in all its formats; Teachers and Trainers);
- 3) increased relevance of VET provision for the labour market economic and social cohesion (matching, migration).

Special attention was given to the support and assistance provided by ETF to the EU, with an ever increasing number of requests for support. During 2015, the ETF had received 69 additional requests, out of which 20 required substantial resources. This confirmed the need for better anticipation, planning and structured cooperation, mainly with the EC and the EU Delegations especially in the context of reduced resources for the agency.

A last point mentioned was about the management of the EC GEMM project entrusted to the ETF. Ms Serban mentioned that the regional project which was implemented at a local level, was drawing to a

close with a technical event on 17 June 2016 in Brussels and a final conference in Tunis on 19 and 20 July 2016.

The Chair thanked Ms Serban for the information and stated that the CAAR to confirm that ETF was a very active organisation, underlining that partnerships at local level were the strongest asset of the organisation. ETF's work on migration received much appreciation.

Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (Netherlands) thanked the ETF for the technical quality of the document. He encouraged the ETF to include more case studies in such reports in the future. In his role as representative of the EU Council Presidency on the Board, he collected the following questions from the members: the origin of the decrease in staff engagement (page 42); the opinion of the staff on the successful reorganisation process (as mentioned on page 11) and the request to replace "teacher training" by professional development (page 22-23).

Dimitrios PSYLLOS (Greece) reinforced the request for more qualitative statements and more case studies, and mentioned MISMES as a very appropriate example. He would appreciate to see this project extended to other countries and to receive information about the MISMES conclusions. He also asked for ETF's definition of national, regional and local level.

Edit BAUER (independent expert nominated by the European Parliament) was surprised by the huge number of requests ETF received in 2015 from the EC. This could be related to the quickly changing context, but she nevertheless insisted on a better coordination between the EU institutions.

Madlen SERBAN (ETF) confirmed that staff engagement was indeed below target. An all staff day-out was organised last January in order to understand the reasons and to identify the concerns. The Staff Committee was and is closely involved and several working groups have been set up to address the common issues of concern. Senior management and the ETF HR unit support the exercise.

Shawn MENDES (ETF), the chair of the ETF Staff Committee, whilst underlining that the Staff Committee had not taken a position on the reorganisation, confirmed that the Staff Committee was now involved in the different working groups.

Madlen SERBAN (ETF) stressed that both the internal self-assessment and the external evaluation considered the reorganisation satisfactory, and that the final aim was to become more efficient, not necessarily to please everyone, and to move together towards good results. However, the Staff Committee was part of the consultation process organised for the ETF reorganisation. She agreed to label the Teachers and Trainers project as continuous professional development, and promised to try to integrate ETF's work on migration better into the CAAR 2015. In future, case studies will also receive more emphasis. She referred to ETF's publication on "Highlights and Insights" which already included a number of case studies. However, she promised a further reflection on ETF case studies for the autumn. On the differentiation between regional and local she pointed at the variable geometry based on the reality of each country – and not all countries had regional entities - while stressing that the key message is not to focus (only) on the central level, but to involve the subnational levels too in line with the EU approach to multi-level governance. Differentiated approaches according to the needs of each country were essential, Ms Serban argued.

The Chair picked up the remark on the increasing number of EU requests. For the Juncker Commission, skills, education and VET are essential priorities and one of the solutions to the economic and employment crisis. ETF delivers assistance effectively even at a local level which the Commission is not structured to deliver. The EC could eventually hire external contractors to do ETF's job, but this would not work and in addition would be very costly. He agreed that the budgetary constraints and limitations on the MFF, including resources for ETF, on the one hand, and the focus on VET and increase of requests on the other, can lead to considerable tensions, but that is the

reality. The Chair stressed that the articulation between EC, ETF and the work on the ground works extremely well, even in this difficult budgetary context.

Micheline SCHEYs (Belgium) suggested to make better use of the case studies to highlight the differences between regions, themes and priorities, while Jan ANDERSON (independent expert nominated by the European Parliament) insisted that agencies be more used to inform political decisions.

Finally, Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (Netherlands) representing the GB members fully agreed with the 2015 draft CAARAA.

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking the ETF for the quality of its work.

The Governing Board adopted the 2015 ETF CAAR and CAARAA. Both documents will be sent to the Budgetary Authority by 15 June.

5. ETF Draft 2015 Annual Accounts

Martine SMIT (ETF) presented the Draft 2015 Annual Accounts. She introduced the formalities of the AO appointment process, and informed the meeting about ECA's positive opinion on the ETF's 2015 financial position. Indeed, in the Court's opinion, the transactions underlying the annual accounts for the year ended 31 December 2015 are legal and regular in all material respects. They are the basis for the discharge by the European Parliament, received on 28 April 2016.

Two ECA findings on the budget disclosures were noted and followed up:

- A table on the implementation of the revenue has been included in the implementation report;
- The relatively high number of late payments, 15% in 2015, was reduced in 2016, and ETF will continue to improve this performance indicator.

Martine SMIT (ETF) explained the 2015 accounts by pointing at the main changes compared to 2014:

- Balance: the total value of the balance is less than in 2014, mainly due to the decrease in cash equivalents as a result of the end of the FRAME project;
- The statement of financial performance indicates a surplus on paper, but not in real terms as it is not the amount ETF is supposed to pay back to the EC;
- The statement of changes in net assets is linked to the financial performance;
- The cash flow shows a small decrease due to the end of the FRAME project;
- On commitments, the overall % of commitment is 98.17%, where the average of agencies is 95%, while on payments the percentage paid out of the available credits is slightly above 96%;
- The amount ETF has to reimburse to the EC is higher than in previous years – above €300,000 compared to under €200,000 previously.

In 2015 the ETF executed 2467 payments (a decrease compared to 2014 linked to the end of the FRAME project), and it gained a total of € 6,757.54 as interests.

The audience did not have any questions. The Chair complimented the excellent presentation.

The GB members adopted the 2015 ETF Annual Accounts and the respective opinion of the Board.

6. 2016 Amending budget

Henrik FAUDEL (ETF) presented the 2016 amending budget.

There were no modifications on the revenue side. Title IV now included the exact amounts of revenue for 2016 for the GEMM project and the Italian Trust Fund, figures that were not known at the time the initial document was prepared.

On the expenditure side, a total of €340,000 remained available under title I, due to savings on salaries (unforeseen departures, statute change from local agent to contract agent, extended deadline for the END vacancy) and to a review of, and reduction in, administrative missions of the directorate and the administration department.

Transfers between titles below 10% can be decided by the director, and a first internal transfer was made in April.

Part of the available amount will be transferred to Title II, essentially to cover for additional expenses and additional external expertise in the IT area. The remaining amount will be transferred to Title III to cover for strategic projects, mainly linked to the Torino Process (€180,000), and €25,000 to two smaller activities in the area of work-based learning. An additional €98,000 would go to operational and communication expenses (increased translation costs, social media).

The Governing Board adopted the ETF 2016 amending budget.

7. ETF external evaluation – pre-final presentation of main findings

Andrew McCoshan (ECORYS) presented the main findings of the ETF external evaluation covering the period 2011-14, a time of organisational change in ETF.

He noted some issues on impact and effectiveness, and mainly a lack of reliable quantitative data which will have an influence on the final conclusions.

The ETF, considered as a constructive player and a champion in terms of coordinating and mobilising relevant stakeholders, operates in a complex and fluid environment. Nevertheless, despite this challenging environment, it offers a unique combination of attributes and despite all caveats, it achieves quite impressive results with a high complementarity in relation to other stakeholders.

The ETF is seen as a reliable reference whose products are considered to be of high quality and good support tools to inform policymaking and support processes. It makes its strongest contribution in terms of spread across partner countries and changes taking place in 1) governance, systems and policymaking, 2) VET provision and quality assurance, 3) qualifications and qualifications systems.

The ETF's success is due to a number of factors, many of which are mutually reinforcing: a high level of expertise, a professional and practical approach, stable and sound working relationships, openness and mutual trust, collaboration and the creation of dialogue, a neutral broker status and multi-lateral approaches.

Nevertheless, sustainability is considered a major challenge given the partner country operating context, with 1/5 of partner country respondents highlighting poor sustainability. Additional obstacles hampering greater effectiveness are the fluid, often unstable political situation and the high turnover of personnel in partner countries; the complex landscapes of foreign aid agencies; the great variety of EU policy frameworks and EC services; and misperceptions about the role of the ETF.

In conclusion, the ETF is considered to be small but unique, with a high credibility and reputation. It should deploy its resources strategically in order to reach a maximum effect and lean on the Torino Process to identify its strategy.

To reduce the effects of its complex and fluid operating environment, the ETF should take further steps to improve the complex relationships with EC services and continue to build strong communication messages regarding its role.

The Chair thanked ECORYS for the interesting findings and confirmed the broad positive assessment, with some areas for improvement.

Micheline SCHEYS (Belgium), the representative of the GB in the external evaluation steering committee, gave a short feedback of the committee meeting which took place on 23 March. She confirmed the good job done in consistency with the ToRs, and the very positive results for ETF, but stressed that still some additional work needed to be done. Whilst agreeing that an in-depth quantitative analysis was difficult to achieve because of lacking data, and that bringing more evidence to causality is very important but equally difficult in the field of education and training, she suggested to take these limits into account when concluding on impact and effectiveness. More investment in case studies could have brought out more differences, as local situations give different results and can also show how to work in the future.

She underlined the real importance of a balance between the strategy of the ETF and the responsiveness in the partner countries, and the strength and added value of the Torino Process to achieve this balance.

According to the ToRs, an intervention logic needs to be provided and complemented, if possible, with real indicators for the collection of more quantitative and qualitative data – either now, or in a next evaluation.

Dimitris PSILLOS (Greece) confirmed the positive outcomes of the evaluation, the flexible and structured organisation capable to quickly adapt to external factors, such as the Arab Spring. The ETF is not only seen as a knowledge provider but also as a knowledge creator, which has significant long-term effects on education systems. At the same time, it is a catalyst of synergies, very important in a global context. However, the control of external obstacles nor of internal obstacles, such as the cooperation with the EC and the variety of EU policies, does not lie in the ETF's hands. Nevertheless, he wondered who responded to the evaluation survey, why so many variations in the responses were noted and why some graphs showed considerable differences between the perception of beneficiaries and, for instance, ETF staff.

Küllü ALL (Estonia) congratulated the team on the excellent work, but would have preferred to see more synergies between countries in the implementation and impact of projects. She also wondered why the external evaluation seemed almost final, while Estonia's deadline for providing comments had not yet passed.

Andrew McCoshan (ECORYS) explained that interviews and surveys were addressed to respondents with a wide variety of backgrounds to allow evidence from different perspectives. The Interim Report shows the entire graphs, while the draft Final Report focusses more on the different perspectives. ECORYS promised to incorporate some case studies in the Final Report.

The deadline for the submission of comments is flexible: the draft Final Report is expected end June, whilst the finalised Report will be provided end July. ECORYS tried to align its work with the GB schedule.

The intervention logic, the indicators and guidance on how to attribute transformation in partner countries to the specific actions and outputs of the ETF were still under finalisation and would be included in the final report.

Kiril KIRYAKOV (DG EMPL) reminded the GB members of the next steps: the contractual deadline is end July, the date by which the external evaluation results have to be provided. This submission will trigger an inter-service steering group discussion to finalise the report, and eventually go back to the contractor with additional questions. Once the Final Report is accepted by the Commission, it will be circulated to the members of the GB. An action plan will have to be designed by the ETF on how to follow up on the final conclusions. The whole process will be concluded by early 2017.

8. Progress with the Single Programming Document 2017-20

Peter GREENWOOD (ETF) presented an update.

Usually the discussion on the WP for the next calendar year takes place during the GB meeting of June. However, given the change in programming guidelines for all agencies, a first discussion was anticipated to November 2015, followed by a written procedure early 2016. A draft text was then sent to all EU stakeholders. On 1 July, an opinion on this document is expected from the EC, upon which the ETF will revise the document and circulate the revised text again by 23 September. On 11 October, the revised version of the SPD, with actions and outputs for the WP 2017 and a first outline proposal for WP 2018, will be discussed in the GB WG with GB members and in the Structured Dialogue meeting with EU Commission officials. This rolling view of the ETF's work will then be tabled for adoption in the next GB meeting of 25 November. After which the cycle starts again, with the submission of the proposals for 2018 by end January 2017.

Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (Netherlands) underlined that the SPD cycle and template is imposed on all agencies, and that it is an exercise all agencies have to comply with. It also stimulates DGs to synergise their efforts.

Sintja SMITE (who exceptionally represented Latvia) suggested that the success of the Central Asia Education Platform be taken up in the SPD (pages 37-48).

Micheline SCHEYS (Belgium) raised a question on the link between the SPD and the ECORYS external evaluation, and on how the intervention logic could impact on the SPD.

Kiril KIRYAKOV (DG EMPL) stressed that the SPD is a rolling document: at the start of each year an updated version is prepared. The ECORYS findings will be integrated in the next version that will have to be approved in the following GB meeting.

As a reaction to the comment from Latvia, Madlen SERBAN (ETF) referred to the priority given to actions exclusively at regional level as agreed in the previous November GB meeting. Furthermore, the ETF was waiting to see the perspectives 2017-18 of the Central Asia Education Platform before making a decision.

She also agreed that it would be a lost opportunity if the SPD would not reflect the results of the external evaluation, as adopted by the opinion of the European Commission and the GB's position.

9. Progress with the recruitment of the ETF Director

The Chair informed the GB members on the upcoming steps in the recruitment process:

- After the informal consultation with GB members, the EC services have finalised the vacancy notice. It is now ready for internal EC consultation;

- Publication of the vacancy is foreseen end June;
- The preselection phase will take place September-November 2016, leading to a shortlist of suitable candidates to be interviewed;
- If possible, the preselected candidates will pass a final interview at the GB meeting of 25 November in Brussels. However, it appears more likely that a dedicated GB meeting will have to be organised in the first quarter of 2017, for the successor to be appointed in time for June 2017.

The Chair asked the GB for the nomination of a GB member to act as observer in the process.

Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (Netherlands) informed the Chair that GB members had decided during their meeting the evening before to appoint him as observer. Tarja RIIHIMÄKI (Finland) will act as his deputy, should a replacement be needed.

11. Any other business

The Chair reminded the Board members who have not yet done so to provide their CV and declaration of interest as soon as possible as the European Parliament requires the publication of these documents on the website.

The Chair also invited the Board members to complete the evaluation form of the meeting.

The Chair also said goodbye to Mr. Ian PEGG (UK) who is leaving the civil service in October after a reorganisation of his department. He thanked him for a fruitful cooperation.

12. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board takes place in Brussels on 25 November 2016, back to back with the ETF international conference on qualifications.

Follow up actions:

- ETF will integrate the comments of the GB members in the CAAR before circulating to the budget authority.
- ETF will present its approach to assessing impact at country level (see follow up actions from November 2015 GB meeting)
- ETF will reflect on how case studies can help communicate the work of ETF to stakeholders
- ETF will circulate the short summary version of the WP 2016 and prepare a summary version of the SPD.
- ETF will outline in the SPD 2017-20 how it draws on relevant EU policy initiatives, and in particular the Skills Agenda in its support to partner countries.

ANNEX

10. Oral reports

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

Kiril KIRYAKOV (DG EMPL) introduced the freshly adopted “New Skills Agenda for Europe” to the audience, a major package and a key policy initiative for 2016.

The skills package has three priority areas: 1) to improve the quality and relevance of skills formation; 2) to make skills and qualifications more visible and comparable and 3) to improve skills intelligence and information for better career choices.

- 1) A proposal for a new Council Recommendation on a Skills Guarantee is part of the first priority area, and the core initiative of the package launched today. It will be mainly of help for low qualified people to achieve a higher level of qualification. The recommendation will support the investment in skills assessment to be able to offer tailored education and training, and will implement a system for the validation and recognition of skills, in cooperation and partnership with all stakeholders and through guidance, support measures and close monitoring.

Three more actions are linked to this priority:

- a) A new emphasis is put on VET as a pathway to excellence: increase its attractiveness, revise the existing quality standards and streamline governance for cooperation in VET, define a target to ensure that a higher number of learners can be involved in work based learning and finally organise an EU VET week from 5 to 9 December 2016;
 - b) Later this year, a package around digital skills for Europe will be released, supporting the creation of national digital skills coalitions and attracting pledges from a broad range of stakeholders both from the ICT sector and the ICT using sector to provide training to individuals;
 - c) Later next year, a revision of the key competences framework is on the agenda to complement the Council Recommendation of 2006.
- 2) Making skills and qualifications more visible and more comparable, through a) a revision of the EQF (with types of actions such as a commitment to a regular update of referencing of NQFs, the development of common principles for QA and credit systems, the encouragement of EQF and its coordination with third countries, mainly the ENP and enlargement countries) and b) a new skills tool kit for third country nationals to accelerate their integration by early profiling, in close cooperation with national authorities.
 - 3) Improving skills intelligence and information for better career choices through a) a revision of Europass later this year, b) sharing best practices to mainly address brain drain, c) a new blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills to develop EU strategies in key economic sectors, and d) a new initiative on graduate tracking foreseen for the second quarter of 2017.

All relevant documents are on the website of DG EMPL and of the ETF. The support and comments provided by the ETF on the different drafts preceding the final launch of the Skills Agenda were very much appreciated and DG EMPL is looking forward to cooperating with ETF on the different parts of the package.

Michel SERVOZ underlined the importance of the skills package for the EU and repeated that skills issues are at the top of the EC agenda. He would welcome feedback and suggestions on the relevance of this Skills Agenda for third countries.

Bernard BRUNET (DG NEAR) presented the EU policy frameworks for the enlargement and neighbourhood countries.

He referred to the Enlargement Strategy adopted by the Juncker College in November last year. It has essentially three main priorities: the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms, of public administration reform and of economic governance, the last one being the most important for ETF. With a key focus on economic governance, and through an EU Semester “light” exercise similar to the one applicable in the Member States, and fiscal and structural reforms mainly in the social, employment and labour market areas, including for the first time education and skills, acceding countries are stimulated to join the EU in a healthy economic situation. He also stressed the role of the Member States in these economic reform programmes.

DG NEAR attaches a lot of importance on regional cooperation in the context of the wider region, where cooperation with some of the regional organisations is taking place, such as the RCC, or with other more specialised organisations.

The region has different categories of countries: Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro in a negotiating phase, Albania as a candidate country but where negotiations have not yet started, and the potential candidate countries. In some countries, the reform is well advanced. In others it is stalling. He mainly expressed concern about the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The revised ENP of November last year puts stabilisation at the top of the political priorities, supports a high level of differentiation and focuses on Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan. The new agreements with these countries, mainly through DCFTAs, show a tendency to more competition, needing a quick modernisation of the economic structure and an increased quality of the labour force to resist competitive pressure.

He also mentioned the importance of the UfM Ministerial Conference on Labour end September in Jordan.

Stefano SIGNORE (DG DEVCO) mentioned three developments important to ETF:

- 1) The VET facility, with a budget of €15 million, is somehow a light version of the Torino Process focussing on certain areas: analysis of the VET system, increased intelligence on labour market issues, a better collaboration with the private sector and, in alignment with the principle of not leaving anyone behind, focuses on the participation of disadvantaged groups. The facility is demand driven by the partner countries, and will probably be managed by a delegation agreement entrusted to a consortium of Member States. The facility will probably be adopted end 2016 and launched during the first quarter of 2017, covering countries outside ETF’s mandate. Yet, collaboration with the ETF is important, including to ensure complementarity and cater for synergies;
- 2) The 2030 development agenda, with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted last year on the principles of universality and shared responsibility, is not only applicable to development countries, but also to developed countries, including the EU. There will be an overarching framework including an internal and external dimension to replace the European Consensus on Development adopted in 2005. A Recommendation proposal is expected towards the end of the year, that will serve as a basis for the revision of the Agenda for Change;
- 3) The external dimension of migration is a real priority in the external relations of the EU. On 7 June, a comprehensive package on migration was launched by the EC, including a stocktaking on the progress of the last 12 months and a planning on what is needed for further progress such as strengthened partnerships with key countries, increased coordination between EU-Member States – partner countries, implemented through a new comprehensive partnership framework

called “compact”. Five Sub-Saharan countries receive priority: Nigeria, Mali, Ethiopia, Senegal and Niger, plus Jordan, Lebanon, Libya and Tunisia. Financial sources on the longer term will come from an external investment plan that combines public and private investments, similar to EFSI. The launch is scheduled for the autumn with a budget of around €3 billion.

Furthermore, on a parallel track, a new “post-Cotonou” framework for cooperation beyond 2020 between EU-Africa-Caribbean-Pacific countries will replace the current Cotonou agreement. Many consultations are ongoing and recommendations are expected towards the end of 2016.

The Chair thanked all the presenters and highlighted the importance of a close coordination between the EU services. He suggested to dedicate some time for discussion on the implications of all these initiatives on the work of ETF.

Trends and developments at the ETF

Madlen SERBAN (ETF) made a presentation on the Riga conclusions and a new set of mid-term deliverables.

Backed by the Riga Conclusions and with a clear mandate, the ETF assists candidate countries to implement VET reform, through an ex-ante impact assessment and follow up support actions, triggering a move from often too many policy options to a policy choice. The ETF accompanies the candidate countries in their implementation of the Riga deliverables, avoiding overlap with other donors, and monitoring progress together with Cedefop. The next Torino Process round in 2019 will look forward and define where the candidate countries should be beyond the 2020 deliverables.

Minister BOSKOVIC, the Minister of Education of Montenegro, attending the GB as an observer, confirmed the very important role the ETF plays in the Riga process, and stressed the fact that his and the other SEE countries face similar problems and want to achieve the same goals as the EU Member States.

Madlen SERBAN also referred to the ETF international conference on qualifications that will take place in Brussels on 23 and 24 November. She mentioned that the ETF is investing in the possibility to strengthen HCD in the area of trade and DCFTAs, that a friendly version of the ETF WP 2016 is under preparation, and that the ETF spotlight on activities 2016 is now available in the restricted area of the website. Country presentations for the SEET countries are also available on the ETF website.

Michel SERVOZ confirmed the parallels between the EU semester exercise and the Riga Conclusions, and the strong similarities of processes and of challenges between the EU and the SEET countries.

Update on the Dutch Presidency

Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (Netherlands) had to leave the meeting at lunchtime. The documents on the Dutch Presidency were tabled.

Updates on the upcoming Slovak Presidency

Alexander LUDVA (Slovakia) introduced the Slovak Presidency priorities, a Presidency taking place under the motto of “fostering the development of talent”.

The Presidency will focus on social inclusion, on making the education system more consistent with the labour market, on the development of the new Skills Agenda, including transparency of skills and qualifications, and digital skills.

The DGVT Conference on 19-20 October will concentrate on “Apprenticeships: better training, higher skills, more opportunities”.