

European Training Foundation

MINUTES GOVERNING BOARD MEETING 14 JUNE 2019

The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting took place in Turin on 14 June 2019, chaired by Joost KORTE, Director-General DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (EC).

1. Adoption of the agenda

The Chair requested the addition of an extra point on the agenda under "Any other business" where the ETF wishes to inform the GB members on activities related to its 25th anniversary.

The Board unanimously adopted the agenda for the meeting.

2. Introductory remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed new GB members for Croatia, Marina ŽIVKOVIĆ and new alternates for Denmark, Torben SCHUSTER; for Germany, Frank HOLLY; for Greece, Panagiotis PASSAS; for Latvia, Maija ZVIRBULE; for Luxembourg, Tom MULLER and for the Netherlands, Ellen IPENBURG-TOMESEN.

The following Member States were not represented at the meeting: Bulgaria, Ireland, Lithuania and Malta.

Alejandro CERCAS ALONSO, a non-voting expert representing the European Parliament was absent. The partner country observer from Serbia was not present either.

Nigar ISMAYILZADE, the partner country observer from Azerbaijan, joined the meeting online.

The EC was also represented by Lluis PRATS, Head of Unit (DG EMPL), Aristotelis MARGOS (DG EMPL), Myriam FERRAN, Director (DG NEAR), Christophe MASSON (DG NEAR) and Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG DEVCO).

The representative of Cedefop was Mr Loukas ZAHILAS, Head of Department. Ms Elena-Venera IONITA represented the ETF Staff Committee.

3. Follow-up to previous meetings

The Board unanimously adopted the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2018.

The Chair presented the follow up to the action points since the last GB meeting and informed about the written procedure that took place in April.

4. Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2018 and its Analysis and Assessment

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the 2018 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

Carmen CLAPAN (Romania), the GB member representing the current Presidency of the EU, congratulated the ETF on behalf of the GB members for the preparation of the documents.

She reported that the Board had noted that the indicator for staff engagement was rather low and asked for details on what it meant and what has been done to address the situation. Furthermore, she explained that the Board felt that the report could reflect risks and challenges to ETF activities more effectively and requested a dedicated section in future reports. She confirmed that the Board proposed that the report be adopted.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) responded on the staff engagement indicator which in past had also been rather low. This last survey took place at the same time as when the ETF started thinking about its future and how the structure could complement and support the new strategy. Staff appear to remain concerned about the vision of the organisation, and this was confirmed at the Director's meetings with staff. There were also a number of internal concerns about working relationships and the working environment, as in all organisations, which have now been followed up. The ETF has put a renewed focus on internal communication and on how decisions are taken and shared with staff. In order to do this in a slightly more objective way, external expertise was brought in to assist in steering the internal discussions. The proposed ETF strategy 2027, and the forthcoming new human resources strategy that will accompany it, will address the situation further.

Concerning the comment on risks and challenges, he indicated that the report does include some information that can be made more explicit in the future. The binding part of the report is where the Director has to indicate if he has any reservations considering the risks and challenges and the way in which the ETF is managed and carries out its activities. An assessment of the risks has been made internally. The report is drafted in accordance with instructions from the Commission.

Carmen CLAPAN (Romania) presented the analysis and assessment and proposed that the addition of a sentence on page 4 after '94%': "..., the high quality of work concerning the fulfilling more of 100 requests from the European Commission".

The Board adopted the 2018 ETF CAAR and its Analysis and Assessment unanimously. Both documents were sent to the relevant institutions by 15 June 2019.

5. ETF 2018 Annual Accounts

Martine SMIT (ETF) presented the 2018 Annual Accounts.

Carmen CLAPAN (Romania), on behalf of the GB members, said there were no comments from the GB members and presented the Opinion of the GB on the Annual Accounts.

The Chair remarked that the ETF accounts are a good demonstration of how carefully taxpayers' money is treated, even though the ETF budget is relatively small from an EU perspective. He congratulated the ETF on how seriously and meticulously ETF resources are managed.

The GB members unanimously adopted the 2018 ETF Annual Accounts and the Opinion of the Board. Both documents were sent to the relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2019.

6. ETF Financial Regulation 2019

Henrik FAUDEL (ETF) presented the 2018 proposed new ETF Financial Regulation.

No comments were made by the Board.

The Governing Board adopted the ETF Financial Regulation unanimously.

7. ETF Strategy 2027

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the ETF Strategy 2027. He referred to the preparation that started in June 2018 with the "enlarged" Governing Board consultation meeting and included evidence

collection, evaluations and consultations with GB members and stakeholders both in the partner countries and the Member States. Many GB members also took part in a discussion on 13 June 2019, prior to the GB meeting and provided final comments to the draft strategy. Comments provided by GB Members have been included in the latest version of the strategy tabled at the meeting.

He explained that the process began with an assessment of the drivers of change and that human capital development (HCD) is becoming a priority for the EU in its external action, also as a means of reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. He outlined the key features of the strategy including key changes as compared to the 2014-20 strategy. These include (i) an increased holistic approach to human capital, (ii) a differentiated approach to supporting partner countries and (iii) a higher degree of actions implemented through partnerships.

Thematically the ETF will focus on three areas:

- i) skills relevance and anticipation;
- ii) skills development and validation;
- iii) performance and quality of education and training policies.

and deliver the following services:

- i) policy advice and policy coaching;
- ii) reliable monitoring and diagnostics;
- iii) knowledge hub focusing on skills development and lifelong learning policies and practices.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) provided an overview of how comments from GB members have been taken into account for the finalisation of the strategy, and what further steps will be taken by the ETF to move to implementation in its operational actions.

In response to a question raised during the consultations as to how, in a situation where the budget is capped for the next seven years, the ETF can become more holistic and a knowledge centre, the Director outlined the practical implications of a differentiated approach. Among the nearly 30 countries with which the ETF is engaged, the ETF will have to take into account the capacity for the country to engage in meaningful reforms, the capacity of the EU to engage, and the need of the countries to focus on HCD. This differentiated approach will guide the implementation of the strategy. In practice, this means that the ETF will have to be more focussed on priorities and will identify a number of criteria to guide this prioritisation. As a result of differentiation, in terms of countries and themes, there will be closer involvement with the Commission services, while in programming, with the EU Delegations and Member States. The ETF will come back to the Governing Board in November with suggestions on how this differentiation will be implemented. Mr ONESTINI (ETF) mentioned some criteria such as (1) the progress in reforms; (2) the level of development in HCD of the specific country; (3) relations with the EU. He invited GB members with experience or ideas on the differentiation approach to contribute to shaping the proposed criteria.

On access to resources, the ETF subsidy is the main envelope. However, beyond this options are being discussed in terms of specific programmes and actions, where third parties (the Commission, partner countries or Member States) could request and fund the ETF to implement specific actions under certain conditions. On the issue of remuneration of services, this is an area that has not yet been explored and is on this list of options. Cost recovery is another option, which is already being applied in the work that the ETF is doing with the Commission funded programme to develop a Pan-

African Qualifications Framework. This is a win-win where ETF provides the expertise but the project covers operational costs. There is also the possibility for the ETF to be more active, as has already happened in some cases, on contracts already signed by the Commission with providers, where the ETF can improve the quality of delivery and shape some of the actions, in terms of surveys etc.

Concerning the implementation of the strategy, he provided an overview of internal expertise needs to ensure the delivery of the strategy, including increased focus on a more holistic understanding of the role of VET within HCD policies and lifelong learning systems. He also highlighted the increased focus on policy relevance of monitoring and assessment. As an example, he referred to the recent Ministerial Meeting of the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training in Belgrade where the results of the Torino Process in the region were presented. The ETF will focus more on methodologies and improve its work on identifying approaches that are developed in one country and can be replicated in others depending on the country's needs.

He referred to partnerships as an essential element in the future for both implementation and for disseminating the ETF's work more widely online.

Carmen CLAPAN (Romania), on behalf of the GB members, welcomed the good work done and the ambition of the document. The Board supported the adoption of the strategy in the revised form that incorporate the comments members in the discussion the day before. The comments related to:

- i) a possible risk of fragmentation, although it is clear that the ETF is aiming for a more targeted approach;
- ii) the inclusion under "delivering in partnership" of a reference to the Erasmus+ programme;
- iii) the growing VET sector and international cooperation.

Concerning "differentiation" it is understood that more details will be provided at the November 2019 meeting. In addition, on the ambition of the strategy and the availability of the budget, the GB members would be in favour of reconsidering the ETF's budget once discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework are final and implementation of the strategy has progressed.

Mika SAARINEN (Finland) added that the very good work done by the ETF on the new strategy reflects the agency's mandate and current EU strategies in the area of HCD. He welcomed the shift towards lifelong learning and how it links with the EU's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, which is very important for all Member States. The Board is happy that the strategy accounts for a number of potentially divergent scenarios at a time when there is not a clear perspective on what the future holds for the EU and the partner countries. He congratulated the ETF on the wise decision of building a forward-looking strategy, putting the ETF in an active role, without closing any doors, and which allows the ETF to react to situations that arise. He thanked the ETF for taking on board the comments received from Board members and other stakeholders.

Malin MENDES (Sweden) thanked the ETF for taking on board the comments so efficiently. On the point of fragmentation, she appreciated the Director's explanation as to how diversification can lead to a more targeted approach.

Edit BAUER (European Parliament non-voting expert) appreciated that the new strategy takes vocational education and training as a part of the whole education process and lifelong learning. She welcomed the fact that the ETF is to be involved in the shaping of development policy, but noted that it is practically impossible to fulfil such a task with a frozen budget. It is not easy to understand how so

much money can be dedicated to the field of human capital development while, at the same time, a key player is constrained by diminishing resources. She was strongly in favour of reconsidering the resources available to the ETF so that it can fulfil its role in the new development policy framework.

Myriam FERRAN (DG NEAR) expressed her thanks to the ETF for the thorough process of preparation of the strategy and the wide process of consultation. She confirmed DG NEAR's support of the orientations of the strategy. She regards the document as more of an enabling strategy rather than a fully framed programme, and that it will cascade into annual programmes to be discussed and adopted. From a DG NEAR perspective there is a lot of interest in continuing to deepen cooperation. The assessment of a wider thematic scope, embracing human capital development, is particularly appreciated. Support to HCD both in the Neighbourhood and the Enlargement countries is a priority, as reflected last year in the Western Balkans Strategy. DG NEAR very much relies on the ETF for its assistance in policy dialogue and for its assessment and diagnosis capacity in the field of governance and financing. The aim is to go for more strategic and overarching assessments of the HCD systems in the countries, from institutional capacity to financing needs.

The Chair confirmed the appreciation of the ETF's good work. He recognised the difficulties in planning up to 2027 in a changing environment. He highlighted that the budget was not only frozen for the ETF, but this applied across the EU institutions and was due to the likely loss of a major Member State. He congratulated the ETF on the strategy.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) thanked all Members and the Commission for the support given in the production of the strategy. He particularly thanked Manuela Prina of the ETF who coordinated the work and Erja KAIKKONEN, the new head of the Strategic Development Department, who has taken it over since her arrival at the ETF in April. It has been a collective effort among all ETF staff.

The Governing Board unanimously adopted the ETF Strategy 2027 with the revisions presented at the meeting.

8. 2020-22 Programming Document– 2020 Work Programme

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the 2020 Work Programme. The 2020 Work Programme will be a bridge to the new Strategy 2027 and will already be organised based on the new principles and clusters. Consultation has already been initiated with the Commission services, and the Commission Opinion on the first draft is due in July. The budget for 2020 is in line with that of 2019. The operational portfolio will focus on developing partnerships and creating synergy with the external action of the EU at the level of policy design and that of implementation. The continuation of partner country policy dialogue will be connected to the current round of the Torino Process. For 2020 Work Programme, there was a first round of consultations in April with the Commission services. The aim is to try to include as many Commission requests as possible during the planning phase, rather than taking on ad-hoc requests during the year.

Last year's reorganisation of the ETF saw the creation of a new unit to consolidate the country intelligence capacity. Better processes are now being developed to ensure that country intelligence is more connected to the ETF's thematic work. For the Torino Process, a number of results will be published in 2020 and a conference will be held in 2021. Direct country support will continue. Many partner countries have strategies that end in 2020 and new ones are being developed.

With Cedefop, Riga monitoring will continue and a joint conference will be held. The ETF will intensify cooperation with EUROSTAT and ILOSTAT for data definition and collection.

The GB welcomed the update.

9. Oral reports

See annex

10. Any other business

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) updated the members on activities related to the 25th anniversary of the ETF. During the European Vocational Skills Week, Commissioner Thyssen will host a social event on 17 October 2019 to mark the ETF anniversary and GB members present in Helsinki are invited to attend. Given the 100th anniversary of the ILO, an event on skills is to be organised in October together with the International Training Centre of the ILO, which is also based in Turin. The main events will be around the next Governing Board meeting in November. It is proposed that this be held in Brussels to provide an opportunity for the ETF and the GB members to interact with new MEPs. There is a proposal to hold a meeting with GB members at the Parliament's premises on 21 November 2019. With the think-tank, Friends of Europe, a debate is planned on 20 November.

To mark 25 years of service of a number of ETF colleagues, a ceremony will take place later in the year. Given this anniversary year, the ETF is also hosting the European Agencies Football tournament on 15 and 16 June 2019, with 700 participants from across the EU agencies.

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

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will take place in Brussels on 22 November 2019.

Follow up actions:

- The ETF to send the CAAR and Analysis and Assessment to the EU institutions by 15 June 2019;
- The ETF to send the 2018 Accounts and GB Opinion to relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2019;
- The ETF to provide a paper at the Governing Board meeting in November with suggestions on how differentiation will be implemented under the ETF Strategy 2027;

ANNEX: on Oral reports

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

For DG EMPL, the Chair referred to the Council of EU Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs in Luxembourg on 13 June and the adoption of three important pieces of legislation: (i) the directive on work life balance; (ii) the directive on transparent and predictable working conditions (iii) the European Labour Authority regulation. It was also decided that the seat of the ELA will be Bratislava. He highlighted that the process for establishing the ELA was extremely rapid, with the support of the European Parliament and the good negotiations with Member States. The first Management Board will be on the 17 October 2019. ELA becomes the fifth agency under the remit of DG EMPL.

During the Juncker Commission, there has been an unprecedented focus on Social Europe, with a very strong skills dimension. There were 27 legislative proposals and 24 have been adopted. Two of the remaining three, the European Social Fund + and the European Globalisation Fund, are linked to the discussions on the EU budget under the next MFF. The pending proposal is that on Social security coordination which was not finalised before the elections of the European Parliament.

Looking towards the future, with the EP elections having taken place and the process of forming the new European Commission having started, at the next European Council the new EC President should be appointed. Once the new President has secured the support of the majority of MEPs, the team of Commissioners and the political programme can be proposed with the aim of starting on 1 November 2019.

The outcome of the EP elections is interesting as neither of the traditionally two strongest parties have a majority now and a third or even a fourth party will be needed to confirm the EC President, together with the Council. So the EC programme is of even greater importance.

On future priority areas, in June the European Council should adopt the new Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. In the Coreper discussions the skills element is very substantial. There is widespread recognition on the importance of skills, talent and the investment in human capital, both inside and outside Europe. This is reflected in the agendas of the political parties', in the Member States and in the draft Strategic Agenda. In the Commission services, ideas are being prepared for the new Commission, also in the area of skills.

Of immediate relevance for the ETF:

1. External Evaluation of the agencies under the remit of DG EMPL: The Staff Working Document was adopted on 11 April. Action plans are now under development and will be implemented. The evaluation process can now be considered as concluded;
2. The current VET and Adult Learning policy agenda is coming to an end in 2020. The new framework is under development in consultation with social partners, Member States and other stakeholders. The tripartite ACVT adopted an Opinion on the Future of Vocational Education and Training on 3 December 2018 in Vienna. The opinion sets a shared vision on how to make VET systems fit for addressing the future societal and economic challenges. This is a good basis for the next Commission's proposals. This could lead to a future Council recommendation on VET.

3. On 22 May 2019, the Council adopted conclusions about the implementation of the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways. This recommendation aims to boost the literacy skills of 61 million low skilled adults. The Council underlined their commitment to the recommendation and agreed to a number of follow-up actions.
4. The European Vocational Skills Week 2019 will be held in Helsinki from 14-18 October. This campaign aims at raising awareness and promoting excellence in VET
5. The Online Vacancies Analysis Tool was launched in April 2019. The database contains in-depth information on skills, occupations and sectors of about 30 million online vacancies from 7 Member States. Eleven more countries will soon be added.
6. In Luxembourg this week, there was also the first Ministerial meeting with the Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Western Balkan countries. The EU was represented by the trio of the current and upcoming EU Presidency countries (Romania, Finland and Croatia). There was also a stakeholders conference with the social partners and civil society representatives. The Commission follows the social and economic developments in the Western Balkans very closely through the Economic Reform Programmes, where the economic and social performance is measured on an annual basis, as done for Member States. The Chair welcomed the fact the ETF remains very active in the region. The reports show the shocking figures on emigration of talent. The debate between Member States is also now moving towards of the *brain drain*. There is less discussion on the posting of workers and more on how countries can retain their people. This is much to do with how to keep and invest in skills. The results of the new Member States that joined in 2004 are good and show the positive GDP per capita in Czech Republic, Poland or Slovakia. The mechanisms of convergence are working well. As in previous enlargements, emigrants eventually wish to return, once their economic situation is better. In the Baltics, there is a positive trend in immigration. This does mean that the competition for talent will increase, and the debate will be about where to find the people to keep the economy growing, as the overall European population shrinks.

Myriam FERRAN (DG NEAR) provided an update on relevant Neighbourhood and Enlargement policies:

- On 29 May the Enlargement Package was adopted. The Commission put forward its Opinion on the application for EU membership from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a roadmap for moving forward on a path towards the EU. It is a document that will require further assessment. For the other countries the situation is a little less positive. For the two frontrunners, Serbia and Montenegro, the situation is stable, however an acceleration in the pace of reform is needed especially in the areas of rule of law and freedom of expression. The report on Turkey acknowledges that backsliding continues on the key reform efforts. The Member States are negotiating the conclusions that can be drawn from this important package. It is hoped the EC recommendations can be followed at the Council meeting in Luxembourg next week or by the Autumn at the latest. She thanked the ETF for the assistance in the assessment covered by the Agency's mandate.
- The annual Economic Reform Programmes assessment, done with DG ECFIN and DG EMPL, is particularly relevant for the ETF and builds on the expertise of the Agency. Skills development, education and employment represents important areas for the assessment in the ERPs. The

Council conclusions make a strong link between the two processes in that the recommendation on the ERPs are reflected in the conclusions on the Enlargement Package.

- In the framework of the MFF, there are two major instruments under negotiation in the Council and the Parliament: IPA III and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. For IPA, a change of approach is proposed in the programming to make the programmes more relevant to EU strategic orientations and to accelerate the implementation. There are no predefined allocations per country, but projects will be selected based on their relevance and maturity. The Commission had proposed an ambitious budget with a 30% increase for IPA and 22% for the Neighbourhood region. Discussion is ongoing for a greater role of the Member States and the Parliament in the current method of governance, with projects proposed by the partner countries, selected by the Commission and endorsed by the MS in comitology.
- The negotiations on the new NDICI is more complex with the inclusion of the Neighbourhood instrument and the European Development Fund. There is no shared position in the negotiations at present. The *more-for-more* approach and the programming is largely the same as before for the Neighbourhood region. An important additional element is the creation of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Fund Plus that will have a global scope and extra resources to increase investment, both blending and with a new guarantee fund. The aim is to generate a project pipeline, which is particularly relevant for the area of skills and education where soft and hard investments are required in many regions.

Ms FERRAN (DG NEAR) referred to two new valuable initiatives with the ETF that DG NEAR would like to expand due to their strategic approach:

- The development of budget support programmes for Georgia, Albania and North Macedonia. This modality is relevant for the areas of education and skills as it builds on sector policy and countries have to develop their strategy and it gives them ownership of the implementation of their reforms. The work of the ETF in the design of these programmes is very much appreciated;
- In Montenegro, there was a very positive experience last year with the diagnosis of the governance and the financing of the VET system. The ETF developed a specific methodology for this and DG NEAR would like to expand it to other countries and other fields beyond VET as it allows DG NEAR to enter into a policy dialogue with government on the governance structure of education and skills.

Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG DEVCO) highlighted that:

- Employment issues are high on the agenda for DG DEVCO and will also be for the new Commission in view of demographic developments and associated migration patterns in Africa. The role of VET is becoming an element of comprehensive programmes. Last year the EU-Africa Alliance on Jobs was launched and a communication has been issued since, which has four pillars under employment (investment, human capital development, business development and the trade environment). In response to the External Investment plan, DEVCO is working on a facility to quickly react to emerging skills needs that will be associated to the VET Toolbox, which is providing advisory services similar to the ETF in countries where the ETF is not present. DG DEVCO is part of a G7 working group and a ministerial declaration will soon be announced in

Paris on Girls and Education as well as on VET. A vocational charter will be attached to the declaration.

- Another important recommendation is to increase coordination outside Europe and at a country level. Some coordination is done by the Inter-Agency Group chaired by UNESCO and with ETF, Cedefop and others, although many bilateral organisations are not involved.
- On Erasmus, DEVCO though the PANA unit and ETF support, started a €5 million pilot project for the exchange of VET students, staff and principals. It intends to extract lessons for future programming when VET will be an integral part of the Erasmus programme.

Trends and developments at the ETF

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) provided an update on ETF activities starting with the positive trends of the Key Performance Indicators for 2019. He shared an overview of the requests from EU services which have also included ETF support for the areas mentioned previously by Commission colleagues during this intense period of planning for the new instruments, as well as the VET mobility project. In the different regions where the ETF is active, he highlighted:

- In the Western Balkans and Turkey: the ETF presented the preliminary Torino Process findings at the Western Balkan Platform on Education and Training meeting in early June and the ETF supported DG EMPL in preparation of the Western Balkan Ministerial meeting on Employment in Luxembourg. The preliminary Torino Process findings confirm, as mentioned previously by the Chair, that the skills base in countries is diminishing due to both migration and poor quality of skills acquisition. So there is a depletion of the skills capital and the countries have difficulties in finding the skills needed. In May in Sarajevo, together with DG NEAR, OECD and EBRD, the ETF launched the EU-funded flagship publication SME Policy Index for the Western Balkans and Turkey. The ETF has worked particularly on the entrepreneurship dynamics in the countries.
- In the Eastern Partnership: the ETF has continued its support to DG NEAR implementing the Eastern Partnership Platforms (II & IV). In Ukraine, the ETF is supporting the large EU project to implement the education and training reforms that have been put in place with the assistance of the EIB, German funds and also some Finnish interventions. In Georgia, the main focus has been the definition of modalities for budget support. The Torino Process is being launched in the region and will be a priority until the end of 2019.
- In the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean: the ETF contributed to the Union for the Mediterranean 2019 Employment Ministerial Conference in Portugal with input to the background documents. Following the declaration, the ETF is now cooperating with DG EMPL on the follow-up actions. Concerning support to the EU Delegations, the ETF is most active in Algeria, Egypt and Jordan. The Torino Process is moving ahead and initial results are expected in early 2020.
- In Central Asia: in May 2019, the Commission adopted a new EU-Central Asia Strategy “New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership”. This includes a strong commitment to continue the work on skills that has taken place under the Central Asia Education Platform and taking it to a higher level. The College has made clear references to the Torino Process and to the

collaboration with the European Training Foundation to promote the employability of young people and of adults in Central Asia. Discussion is ongoing with DG DEVCO on the specifics of how ETF can support the implementation of the new strategy.

- On Skills for the Future, following the ETF conference of last November, the conclusions have been published. Two elements emerged: firstly, that there is the need to see which techniques can be used to identify the skills needed in countries in economic transition, where data is less available than in Member States. The ETF is developing methodologies on how to use big data in these countries, also inspired by the work of Cedefop, Secondly, that there is much happening in the countries that is not known, and so the ETF is drawing up in-depth case studies in traditional sectors which are changing. The aim is to share these qualitative results and use them to reflect on the trends observed in preparing for the future. To broaden the expertise and knowledge, a call for papers has been launched (deadline 30.09.2019) to gather further case studies that can be useful for the elaboration of follow-up actions.
- Concerning one of the major areas of ETF expertise, Qualifications, the Toolkit publication on «Skills and Qualifications: Benefits for People», will be finalised by end June. The publication and the main messages will be presented at the major ETF Conference on 6-7 November in Turin. The Conference will also showcase good practice identified through a call organised in 2018-19.
- On partnerships that are moving ahead with a broad range of partners, an example is that with the cooperation with the International Training Centre of the ILO (also based in Turin) where 4 training programmes have been developed based on ETF work. So ETF methodologies and work are being made use of for capacity building among the wide-reaching network of the ILO.
- On audits, he drew attention to the fact that the European Court of Auditors will carry out a performance audit of all EU agencies in the coming months. The audit aims to address 3 questions: (i) Is the initial design of EU agencies fit for purpose?; (ii) Are there effective performance accountability arrangements?; (iii) Is the rationale for setting up the agencies periodically reassessed? GB members may be approached by the Court as they carry out interviews or stakeholder surveys. The consolidated audit report of all the EU agencies will be provided to the new Commission early next year and may serve as an input to any future approach to agencies.

He concluded by informing members of the upcoming written procedure on the revised rules on recruitment of contract staff.

Malin MENDES (Sweden) referred to the KPI on countries' policy development progress in 2018 that specified that progress had been made in 86% of partner countries. She questioned if, in the remaining 14%, lack of progress was due to the ETF not being present in the countries concerned.

Manuela PRINA (ETF) clarified that this indicator denotes progress in policy domains and represents the ETF's expert assessment based on evidence collected in the partner countries. Lack of progress was mainly due to delays in the legislative process that impede progress in policy domains and lack of participation of the private sector in the governance of skills development.

Update on the Romanian Presidency

Carmen CLAPAN (Romania) recalled the Presidency motto in the area of Education and Training “Connecting Education”, and the focus on three aspects: mobility, inclusion and excellence. She highlighted the adoption of (i) the Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages; (ii) the Recommendation on high quality early childhood education and care systems; (iii) the Conclusions on upskilling pathways. She reported on the number of relevant events that took place during the semester and underlined the DGVT meeting that focussed on the role of key competences and excellence in the development of VET. She also highlighted the meeting of the ASEM Education Ministers which had the theme of Connecting education - inclusion, mobility and excellence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and concluded with the ASEM Bucharest Declaration.

In addition, in the context of cooperation with ETF partner countries, she stated that the Romanian Ministry of Education is organising a visit to Romania by a delegation from Azerbaijan to support the establishment of the Regional VET Competence Centre in Ganja.

Update on the upcoming Finnish Presidency

Mika SAARINEN (Finland) started with a reference to the Presidency logo, which is very similar to that of the previous Finnish Presidency in 2009, adding that the theme of recycling will be very present throughout the Presidency. He remarked that it will be an interesting Presidency during a period of institutional transition and also the upcoming Brexit deadline. Finland will be first to implement the 2019-2024 Strategic Priorities. There should be the adoption of the work programme of the new Commission and the adoption of the new MFF. He highlighted the key principles of the Presidency: (i) sustainable meeting arrangements (rethinking events and no gifts but offsetting the carbon emissions for travel to the Presidency events); (ii) open, active and clear communication and increased transparency are important tools and discussions in the Council meetings will be made public whenever possible; (iii) Finland will continue the work on better regulation, following the good progress already made; (iv) the use of digital tools will be enhanced both in the work of the Council and other meetings (he welcomed the ETF initiative to open up online participation for the GB meetings since the last meeting in November).

For the education and training sector, he emphasised the major tasks of advancing the ERASMUS+ negotiations, on which he expressed appreciation of the work of the Austrian and Romanian Presidencies. In line with the Finnish approach to the sector, priority will be on promoting continuous learning, a future-orientated education policy and investment in human capital. He noted that this links very well with the principles of the ETF Strategy 2027. Other traditional themes for Finland such as equity, equality and effectiveness will be brought in as well as an emphasis on the cooperation between education and research, also on financing. For the first time there will be Joint Council meeting of Education and ECOFIN on investing in human capital (again at the core of ETF's mission). All meetings in Finland will be in Helsinki to be more sustainable and will use a single meeting facility. Also the number of meetings will be kept to minimum.

He referred to the European Vocational Skills week (EVSW), 14-18 October, following on from the previous edition in Austria. He emphasised the greater focus on the international dimension and cooperation and lifelong learning. The VET conference will be on VET for ALL – Skills for life. The Vocational Excellence awards and VET Expo will continue. Novelties include the involvement of parents associations and a greater presence of international organisations. He presented the detailed

EVSW programme, including the EAfA event and the VET in and for the World Conference. As in Austria, Finland will also organise company site visits. All countries are invited to involve stakeholders and organise events and include them under the EVSW. Many national events are taking place on Monday 14 October. More details on the Presidency agenda with dates and events can be found in the PowerPoint presentation provided.