

MINUTES

GOVERNING BOARD

MEETING

16 NOVEMBER 2020

15 April 2020



The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting took place online on 16 November 2020, and was chaired by Mr Lluís PRATS, Head of Unit of DG EMPL, European Commission (EC). The Chair noted that the meeting was being held online for the first time.

1. Adoption of the agenda

On a proposal of the Chair, the Board adopted the agenda for the meeting. No any other business points were suggested.

2. Introductory remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed the new GB members: Ms Sara MATTIONI, the new member from France; Ms Ioanna LYTRIVI the new member from Greece; Mr Tadas TAMOŠIŪNAS, the new member from Lithuania; Ms Lise WEERDEN, the new alternate from the Netherlands; and Mr Andrzej KURKIEWICZ the new alternate from Poland.

There were a number of members of the board who have recently appointed but were not present: the alternate from Bulgaria, Ms Vania TIVIDOSHEVA; the alternate from Italy, Mr Sergio MARTES; and the new alternate for Lithuania, Ms Lina VAITKUTĖ.

One of the independent experts appointed by the European Parliament, Mr Jean-François MEZIÉRES and the partner country observer from Serbia, Ms Dragana SAVIC could not be present.

The following Member States were not represented at the meeting: the Czech Republic, Latvia, Portugal and Slovakia.

The European Commission was also represented by Ms Myriam FERRAN, Director; Ms Maria ASENIUS; Ms Fanny SERÉE (DG NEAR); Ms Henriette GEIGER, Director; Mr Francesco LUCIANI, Head of Unit; Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG DEVCO); Mr Alberto FUNES BETANCOR (DG EMPL). Ms Diana SENCZYSZYN represented the European External Action Service.

Mx Romain BOITARD represented the ETF Staff Committee.

3. Follow-up to previous meetings

The Chair recalled that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no meeting had been held in June 2020 as normally would have occurred. He presented the follow up to the action points since the last GB meeting in November 2019 and informed about the three written procedures that were successfully concluded in March 2020, May 2020 and July 2020.

4. Single Programming Document 2021-23 – Annual Work Programme 2021

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the ETF's 2021 work programme, highlighting that it will be the first year of the implementation of the new ETF 'Strategy 2027' that was endorsed by the GB in June 2019.

He thanked the Commission representatives that had worked to negotiate the multiannual financial perspective, which also concerned the ETF, highlighting that the proposed ETF Budget is set to remain stable and increase with inflation over the next programming phase until 2027. This provides a solid framework for the implementation of the new Strategy.

He focussed on the three main objectives which come from of the ETF Strategy: (i) skills relevance and anticipation: to identify changing skills demands and ensure relevance; (ii) skills development and validation: to innovate skills development models and processes; and, (iii) performance and quality of education and training policies: to increase the quality and performance of lifelong learning systems.

Concerning skills relevance and anticipation, he stressed that this has continuity with what the ETF has been doing in the past but that in line with the new Strategy there will be a broader LLL approach as well as attention to different needs in the Partner Countries. The ETF will look at the areas of qualifications, active labour market support measures and skills demand, taking a new approach, focusing on developing the ETF as a knowledge hub and focusing on policy advice for partner countries. He highlighted that skills demand will be an area in which the ETF will aim to develop further its expertise.

In relation to the second strategic objective on skills development and validation, he drew attention to a renewed focus on innovative teaching and learning. In this aspect, the ETF will have action centred on creating new learning, as a flagship over the next programming period, looking at innovation at the teaching and learning level. In all of these strands of skills development and validation, the ETF will also continue working with the partner countries supporting their priorities and the ETF will develop networking approaches among the countries.

For the third strategic objective on performance and quality of education and training policies, he referred to the ETF Strategy 2027's goal to support sustainable systemic reforms. He emphasised that the ETF intends to deliver policy advice and policy support taking lifelong perspectives, looking at how reforms can become sustainable and affect the whole system. In order to do this, the ETF will continue with some of the established actions such as monitoring, evidence gathering and sharing of best practices. He underlined that quality assurance and governance remain at the core of this area.

He also highlighted that in 2020 the ETF concluded the 5th round of the Torino Process and that it is planned that the results will be presented at a conference in Turin in June 2021. The focus will be on system change approaches. The Torino process analysis on human capital development in partner countries done by ETF will be shared. Examples on how it has supported partner countries in the definition of priorities or the implementation of sustainable reforms in a lifelong perspective will be provided. The results of the analysis have and will support the upcoming work of Commission and member states.

Mr ONESTINI (ETF) informed the members that a slightly amended version of the SPD, with changes in red, had been circulated the previous week, reflecting discussions with the Commission. He thanked colleagues from DG EMPL, DG DEVCO and especially DG NEAR who have examined the draft document and assisted in adding a number of updates on current priorities of the EU and the latest policy developments. He emphasised that the changes do not affect the areas for action but that they provide all the elements needed to frame the actions planned for next year. He hoped that the members could adopt the document with these changes included.

The Chair thanked Mr ONESTINI for his presentation and invited Ms Ferran to intervene on the revision of the document.

Myriam FERRAN (DG NEAR) thanked the ETF for having taken into account the latest comments. She apologised for that they came very late the previous week and underlined the excellent cooperation that allowed these comments of clarification (rather than change of scope) to be taken

onboard. She confirmed the broad support both of the strategy and the annual work programme. As discussed last year, the strategy truly focuses on the top priorities and has very much anticipated and embedded all the new priorities of the Commission. She stressed that the ETF keep the Western Balkans and the Neighbourhood as top priorities. As discussed previously, expanding ETF activities to other regions is possible provided it can be done resources-wise. She welcomed the fact that the budget was stable in the latest discussions on the MFF. In terms of priorities, DG NEAR is interested and strongly supports the expansion of the scope of the activities of the agency. The support of the ETF will be all the more important now with the next programming period during which top priority has been given to human capital development. She emphasised that ETF expertise is absolutely recognised in the vocational and educational training field, and DG NEAR continues to rely on this and would very much like to broaden the concept to life-long learning, from primary to university, and linked to entry into the labour market with a specific focus on youth. She also mentioned the impact, particularly in the Western Balkans to develop a youth guarantee, but also the integration of people not in education or training and all those issues which have been broadening the scope of expertise step by step of the ETF.

Kristin HESS (Germany), representing the Presidency, in the name of all the other GB members, congratulated the ETF on the well-prepared documents, for which there were no concerns among members. She informed that the members did have some questions:

- regarding the digitalisation strategy and how the partner countries are prepared for digital steps;
- on flexibility of the programme and how open ETF is to changes, for example, regarding COVID-19.

Malin MENDES (Sweden) also put forward two questions:

- The first one on indicators. She recognised that it is always difficult to find the perfect way to monitor progress according to a plan and it makes it so much clearer when the key delivery points and indicators are included. She asked how the ETF has decided on some quantitative indicators: the number of peer learning events, the number of countries advised. She was interested to know the related discussions and if there were alternatives that were difficult to manage and how the ETF arrived to the quantitative indicators;
- The second question concerned the benefits of the new organisation from the perspective of the ETF. In Spring 2020 there was a written procedure for a new proposed organisation and she was interested to understand what the expectations for this and what this will lead to when it comes to progress in the ETF tasks.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) thanked the Members for the comments and questions. In response, he responded:

- He first wished to start by echoing Ms Ferran's words, and thanked her and her colleagues. He stressed that comments on the ETF work programme are very welcome as it is a way of engaging, and as said from the beginning of the process, the more this is done upfront, the more the ETF can connect its programming to the Commission's priorities, especially in this moment where the Commission colleagues' are busy with the preparation of the new instruments. He was grateful that time was taken to connect the dots.
- On the issue of taking a broader lifelong learning perspective, that is exactly how ETF sees itself operating. The way in which the competence of ETF can be stretched is also a reflection of the way the ETF has grown over the past 25 years. The ETF is planning to look at ways in which the full spectrum of lifelong learning can be covered also through partnerships with

other international organisations which may complement the competence and strengths of the ETF. The ETF's key competence area is on the vocational and labour market policies and skills development. But then there are many others who have complementary areas of strength and the ETF wants to work together whilst also developing its own expertise. For this reason, ETF welcomes actions such as the diagnostics that has started with DG NEAR looking at the full systems of lifelong learning in some countries. This also gives a sense of how much the ETF can engage in the future and how much its expertise can develop beyond what was its traditional area of work. He recalled the discussions on the strategy that this is something the ETF wants to implement in the next seven years, direction is needed and can be built year by year.

- He thanked Ms Hess for her remarks also on behalf of the members and stated he would share them with ETF colleagues who have worked hard to make sure the document was very readable. The SPD needs to be clear for the members but also for everybody in ETF and the ETF partner countries. The aim is to ensure the work programme is not just a bureaucratic document but becomes a basis of the work that the ETF wants to develop.
- On the flexibility of the programme, he first referred to the SPD, which aims to be less specific on individual items of activities compared to the past and more specific on the goals and policy areas to be developed. The focus is on the goals and on finding the best possible way to achieve them especially knowing that in this COVID pandemic, some of the assumptions made may have to be reviewed. There is a flexibility which is built in through the way the work programme is constructed looking at three broader areas, and within each there is the flexibility to develop the types of actions which are most suited to the conditions that are met in the next year. Secondly, he noted that the big unknown is how much the pandemic is affecting the ETF partner countries' economies, and a wide diversity of situations can be found. Everybody is being affected, but the way in which the education and training systems have been able to react are reflecting the diversity that there is in the countries and perhaps highlighting this diversity even more. Flexibility needs to be kept in order to be able to continue to respond to the needs. Thirdly, he saw that the flexibility for next year will be very much in line with the work that the Commission and the Delegations will be doing, because next year is going to be important for the programming and prioritisation of interventions for the following period. The ETF has already been discussing with the Delegations on how the ETF can support that process and that by its very nature will require the ETF to adapt as it moves forward. So the aim has been not to ringfence too much but to focus on the process that will have to be carried through with the Delegations and the European Commission in the months to come.
- On the issue of indicators, he stated there is always much discussion within ETF on the approach to indicators, especially because at the beginning of the new programming phase, the aim is to select indicators that will accompany the organisation over the coming years so that progress can be monitored. He underlined that while some continuity was kept with the previous work of the ETF, the area where innovation was needed was the areas relating to policy advice. The ETF has always been active on policy advice to partner countries, but now there will be more emphasis on system change and system ability for reform efforts, and therefore some indicators have tried to capture what type of efforts the ETF is putting into this type of activity and measure the success. The indicators aim to be aligned with the new intervention logic. He referred to the session on the implementation of the ETF Strategy that will be held on 17 November where this issue can be discussed further. He recognised that there will be a 'learning by doing' element, so some flexibility will be kept to look at the way in which these indicators will be able to support the ETF in the next programming phase.

- In relation to the new organisational structure, he underlined that the main change in the new organisational structure, is that in 2017, when he took up the position of the Director of the ETF, there was a management structure in which of the nine ETF managers, three were focussed on operations and the others were on more horizontal issues. To reverse that balance he has proposed to put the management capacity mainly on the operations side. So, the new structure does exactly that: six of the managers are on operations and only three plus the director on the coordination or horizontal tasks, in order to put more of ETF's striking capacity on the operations side. He stated that it also responds to the different approach that the strategy sets out for the ETF to be more able to develop along the axis of knowledge hub and policy advice, and these two areas have been identified as the key mandates of the two operational departments, so one is focused on the knowledge hub, and the other one is focused on the policy advice. Two departments have been established to give equal importance to these two aspects of the ETF mandate. In the planning phase, the two departments will have each a clear focus, one on the knowledge, expertise and development, the other one on policy advice and support, so there will be a balance of these two dimensions. Another important change in the organisational structure is that all project management, which before was spread around the organisation, has been placed in one unit. This will require a more matrix organisation. This allows thematic experts, an important resource, to focus more on knowledge development, focusing on the provision of expertise either through the knowledge hub or policy advice, backed up by a project management capacity which is professionalising that aspect of the operation. In that spirit, he saw this project management unit also able to deal with the option of developing partnerships with other organisations which might in the future bring different approaches to resources. This could be either through requests from the Commission or through others, so that there is a dedicated capacity in place. He added that later in the meeting as part of his points on Trends and Developments he will illustrate the composition of new management which will start in January.
- On points raised on digitalisation, he responded this is indeed an area in which ETF is developing with a lot of attention. Initially external support was hired to guide the ETF in developing a digitalisation strategy to be implemented over a number of years. This is an area which is in full evolution, not just because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but because of the way in which the architectures are changing. The effort is more on upgrading ETF capacity. In terms of the preparedness of partner countries on digitalisation, he added that this needs to be taken into account on how this translates in the ETF's relations with the countries and in the services provided. Erja KAIKKONEN, Head of Strategic Development Department (ETF) added that the ETF had a roadmap for its digitalisation project developed this year, and a digital transformation architect is being recruited for the project lifeline from 2021 to 2023. The first objective of the digitalisation project is for internal purposes, to address the issue of fragmentation of ETF's IT tools and come up with easy-to-use IT systems that are smoothly integrated also with Commission tools. The ETF is working closely with the European Commission who is also updating some of its platforms that ETF is linked to. Secondly, the ETF wants to be ready to support its partner countries at the level that they require support, and during this year, the partner countries have also taken a major leap forward in digitalisation and online meetings and webinars in the same way as all have had to do. In a way, the COVID-19 crisis has only increased the need to move forward with the digitalisation project faster. Thirdly, the ETF is becoming a knowledge hub and needs to be able to store and share knowledge efficiently, to process qualitative and quantitative information, and to share it and then also to disseminate it to all ETF stakeholders.

Following this discussion, the GB unanimously adopted the ETF 2021–2023 SPD/Annual WP 2021.

5. ETF Budget 2021

Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the ETF budget 2021.

Kristin HESS (Germany), representing the Presidency, expressed her satisfaction with well-prepared documents for the 2021 budget. The GB members had two questions:

- One concerned the medical costs and if those are in any way related to COVID-19;
- The other question was regarding the travel cost and how does the ETF plans to use the funds if travel is not possible.

James CALLEJA (Malta) added that given that the operational budget has been dramatically low compared to staff costs, which is more or less normal in many EU agencies, he questioned the urgency of increasing the staff costs by 3.1% and what capacity needs had to be urgently addressed at ETF for additional funds to be allocated to staff costs and not into operational costs for partner countries?

Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) replied:

- On medical costs, chapter 14 on socio-medical infrastructure includes general medical expenses but the bulk of that budget line is about learning and development. Regarding the specific expenses linked to COVID-19, the ETF did invest in 2020. For 2021 the standard cost for medical advice will be kept and also some small amounts potentially for medical equipment, but an additional investment as in 2020 is not foreseen. The increase in that budget line for 2021 is mainly linked to learning and development and the intention is to reinstate it at the standard levels pre-COVID.
- On the question about travelling, this budget was prepared over the summer, at the beginning of September when the outlook on the evolution of the pandemic seemed more promising. It will need to be revised and the assumption is that any savings will go to title 3, the operational costs.
- On Mr Calleja's question, as mentioned there is not an increased capacity in the sense that the establishment plan remains stable. The increase is mainly to maintain the net salary increases of the staffing costs as well as other minor increases like the administrative missions. She expressed satisfaction about the title 3 increase of 1.7% next year, and with the assumptions having to be revised, she expected this increase will be even larger during the next year.

Given that there were no further questions nor observations, the GB members unanimously adopted the 2021 ETF Budget.

6. ETF Amending budget 2020/2

Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the second amending budget for 2020. She highlighted that this second amending budget confirmed the trends linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of capacity to travel, etc. The adjustments are mainly linked to the fact that the ETF reconfirms the budget of 20,957,000, that will be fully committed and a revised assessment of what can realistically be paid, because there have been some delays in the start of activities due to COVID-19. ETF will be able to pay 20,400,000. The remaining €557,000 payment appropriations will not be requested in 2020

since they will be paid in 2021. This change is mainly to do with the way that the European Union manages its cashflows and budgets. She reiterated that it does not have an impact on the overall ETF budget or on the activities that the ETF intends to perform for the overall budget of €20,957,000.

Kristin HESS (Germany), representing the Presidency, confirmed that the members did not have any concerns on the amending budget and that the GB members had only a question regarding whether there are any special rules or conduct regarding the transfer of funds from one year to another.

Malin MENDES (Sweden) asked for some details concerning the transfer of the funds for new online communication activities.

Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) responded that:

- regarding the transfer of funds from one year to another, there is in fact no actual transfer of funds in the sense that the budget 2020 is fully used in 2020 and the budget in 2021 will be 20,300,000. It is really an issue of management of cash flow. If the ETF confirmed the full payment appropriations and then did not use them all, there could have sanctions.
- For the communication activities, they are in fact more than communication. They are referred to as online partnerships, so two partnerships with prominent broadcasting channels like the BBC and Politico, and the idea is that they use the material that we have been producing over all this year on the impact of COVID-19 and how to get out of the crisis and lessons from the countries to do a series of social media campaigns and also online TV. It is also a way for the ETF to reach out and make the knowledge collected this year much more broadly available. It also goes in line with the digitalisation strategy discussed earlier. Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) added that this year, as soon as it was recognised that there was a possibility to invest a more on communication, it was seen to be a good opportunity, also because of the COVID-19 crisis and all the work that went into the response, to partner up with two strong media platforms, Politico, which has a strong presence in EU circles, and the BBC. The interests of the partnerships are that indeed the ETF has a lot of material, but the partnerships will use their own journalistic capacity to produce the content. It would be co-developed but then edited by the media organisation and then pushed through their platforms by them. A similar partnership was made with Politico two years ago when the ETF had a major conference on skills for the future. Now more open-ended formula is to be used. He proposed to share more information with the members about the actions planned with Politico and with the BBC.

The GB members unanimously adopted the ETF Amending Budget 2020/2.

7. 2021-2023 IAS Strategic Internal Audit Plan for the European Training Foundation (ETF)

Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the 2021-2023 IAS Strategic Internal Audit Plan for the European Training Foundation on behalf of the IAS. The Plan outlines the IAS audit topics and timeframe proposed by the IAS after consultation with the ETF for the period 2021- 2023. The Governing Board was invited to take note of the plan, including the shortlist of prospective audit topics for the years 2021-2023. She highlighted that the IAS proposes a new approach for 2021 focusing on EU policy objectives and priorities instead of on the auditees which could lead to changes in what is currently proposed. For now, the following areas are proposed for the internal audits for the ETF over the 2021-2023 period: (i) Complementarity and cooperation mechanisms between the ETF and the EC services; (ii) Digitalisation and review of the internal processes.

There were no comments or questions from the GB members.

The GB members unanimously adopted the 2021-2023 IAS Strategic Internal Audit Plan for the European Training Foundation (ETF).

8. Implementation of ETF Strategy 2027

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) proposed to share some of the basic elements of the strategy implementation. He reminded members that a dedicated session would be held on 17 November to go more in depth and give more examples.

He referred to the three objectives of the SPD and that these are delivered through three key services: (i) the knowledge hub; (ii) monitoring and assessment; and (iii) policy advice. They have already started being prepared this year, as discussed with the 2020 work programme. They will be launched more formally in 2021 and he list the type of key outputs under each of the three services that will be developed over the next seven years. The activities of the three services will be tailored to the needs of the different partner countries. Some services will be developed and delivered to all the countries, some of them will be focusing more on those countries which are more concerned or interested or able to engage, so depending on the types of activities, there will be tailor-made approaches and differentiation.

To the questions:

- How can ETF expand its policy reach towards a real lifelong learning approach, looking at the whole spectrum of learning and development and entering the labour market?
- How can ETF maintain the same ambitions of geographical reach, and at the same time have the same resources?

he stated that the response was the ETF needs to be better at differentiating between the needs and capacities of different countries. This was done in the past but there will be more focus in the future. He added that the aim is to work more on country clusters and regional support, so wherever possible, the ETF will combine the work done with partner countries and cluster countries which have similar interests and needs. In the past, often the focus was more on geographical clustering, now the ETF intends to combine this geographical clustering also with a clustering which is more responsive to country typologies and needs. Then, by delivering with partnerships, operationalising them and using partnerships to focus on areas of real impact for ETF. He acknowledged that the danger is to spread too thin, but the ETF intends to focus its approach on partnership that support the deliver of shared policy goals.

The ETF has developed a paper on human capital development and lifelong learning to spell out its approach. Instead of reinventing too much, the paper refers to the best approaches and definitions available, in particular from Cedefop and trying to arrive at clearer definitions of all of these concepts.

He outlined the intervention logic of the ETF, as included in the SPD document that was adopted earlier. He confirmed the geographical reach of the ETF, which also reflects the priorities of colleagues in DG Near. The ETF is very much focusing on the neighbourhood and enlargement countries. The relationship with Russia is defined under the framework of the relations of the EU and Russia, limited activities will continue there. For Central Asia, there is expectation on the follow-up of the Central Asian education platform, that will remain the main vehicle for the development of a regional approach to Central Asia.

He referred to the African Union, for which the ETF continues to develop the support with the continental framework for qualifications. He stated that through the knowledge hub, everything the ETF develops, like the ETF expertise, has relevance beyond the partner countries. He considered that ETF expertise should be provided in a way that can then be mobilised by others, notably by EU delegations, and in that context he welcomed that the ETF is working with DG NEAR and DG DEVCO to develop a training course for all delegations. Such training will help to strengthen the links between ETF and the EU Delegations increasing awareness of ETF expertise and how it can be mobilised. He renewed the offer to EU member states agencies, adding that the ETF has relations with many of the agencies in EU countries and the goal is that whatever expertise the ETF develops through the knowledge hub or the policy advice, will also be made available to member states agencies which are interested in the same policy area and want to cooperate. He presented the agenda of the interactive discussion session to be held the following day and hoped that all members will be to join.

Peter VAN IJSSELMUIDEN (the Netherlands) thanked the ETF Director for the explanation and declared he was looking forward to session of 17 November. He complimented the ETF on the infographics contained in the presentation and the document.

9. Oral reports

See Annex

10. Any other business

Nigar ISMAYILZADE-ASGAROVA (AZERBAIJAN) thanked the ETF for gathering all together for the first online meeting of the ETF Governing Board with everybody joining in online. She expressed her appreciation of the informative presentations and reports. She highlighted that during this challenging time during the COVID-19 pandemic, work has continued and also new cooperation has been established, despite the difficult situation made even more so due to the instability and war in the region. She referred to the completion of the Torino process in Azerbaijan in this challenging period. She looked forward with optimism to the era of green skills and digitalisation, with education becoming more worthwhile and more flexible according to the demands of the times and society. The Chair expressed sympathy and solidarity for all in the in the Caucasus in this difficult situation at this moment.

Sara MATTIONI (FRANCE) thanked the ETF for providing the translation of the documents.

The Chair reiterated the requirement to submit the annual declaration of commitment and interest. He invited the GB members to complete the form immediately after the meeting. He also asked members to fill in the online meeting evaluation form.

11. Date of next meeting

The next regular meeting of the GB will take place in Turin on 11 June 2021.

The Chair thanked the GB members for their active participation in the online meeting and the interpreters for their work.

He then closed the meeting.

Follow up actions:

- To provide the WP 2021 to the budgetary authorities by 30 November 2020.
- To provide information on the proposed media partnerships with Politico and the BBC.

ANNEX

ANNEX

10. Oral reports

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

DG DEVCO

Henriette GEIGER (Director for People and Peace, DG DEVCO) informed the members there is reorganisation of DEVCO ongoing in the midst of being in the programming for the next seven years, so together with the EEAS, DEVCO for the next seven years has identified five priority areas: Green deal, digital, sustainable jobs and growth, migration partnerships and governance, peace and human development. Education and skills are cross cutting areas. With the new structure, for the jobs and growth area and the area of VET, as of mid-January 2021, the team dealing with employment and hence VET will join the team that works on private sector development, and that will be in a new directorate. She informed that this would be her last official function with the ETF and in the new year a new director take over. She reassured that there will be full continuity in the new structure.

She highlighted that this programming exercise is based on three principles. One is co-creation, second is policy first, and the third is geographisation. Co-creation means that policy objectives and priorities are all interconnected. Co-creation also has an external dimension because in the COVID-19 crisis, the entire portfolio of cooperation programmes were redesigned, to make them COVID-resilient. In order to ensure the impact needed, DEVCO teamed up with all the member states and this was so successful in the response to COVID-19 that it has been decided to use the team approach by default. So now in the programming, the member states and each delegation come up together with Team Europe initiatives. These are big programmes that should give the needed leverage and impact. With policy first, she stressed that first the policy objectives have to be clear, and then in close engagement with its partners, DEVCO looks at how this then translates country by country, region by region, into concrete action. This then has to be smartly linked with the global policy shaping. She explained that the final principle is geographisation, which means the transfer of funds from global to national envelopes. In reality, what will happen is that the national geographical envelopes will receive much more funding and the thematic instruments will be greatly reduced. One example is that there is a global challengers programme which has so far 7 billion over 7 years and will get less than half. Whatever is to be done in terms of global challenges, it is to be done from national and regional envelopes.

In the DEVCO partner countries, there are a good number of Team Europe initiatives with an important skills and training dimensions. The Commissioner for International Partnerships has set the target the 10% of the DEVCO budget should be spent on education. There will increasingly be a focus on private sector participation and how skills are accompanying the strong push on jobs and growth. This will be one of the main points in the new programming. There will also be an increased push on digital and green towards the future. Commissioner Urpilainen is also strongly interested in youth, and the youth angle is of course key for VET. There will be investment in terms of blending grants, loans and guarantees. This can only work if there are the skills are present in the partner countries to accompany that investment push, and that's what the VET tool box is attempting to do. 15 million euro has been added to the existing VET tool box, which is a facility that is implemented by member state agencies supporting and accompanying VET training to European investments in the programming cycle. Eleven new African countries have been added for this to give the push it needs to support our delegations and the partner countries with skills. She noted the importance that the new Erasmus plus is having with a reinforced skills angle, a vocational training angle. She emphasised that

decent work has become a key objective internally and externally in line with the Commission President's priorities. She stressed that decent employment is all the more important now in the COVID crisis, not only in the EU but very much so in the partner countries, and resilient skills development is needed, that can build on creative forces in societies to build back better and be resilient. For the global recovery initiative, creative employment opportunities and smart skills can help a long way. She underlined how very fortunate DEVCO is to work with ETF as a centre for expertise. She confirmed that DEVCO is keen to tap continuously into ETF expertise to support international bodies, in particular the African Union Commission, and to continue mobilising ETF experts for analytical work and staff training. She expressed her gratitude that the ETF has seconded an expert to her directorate in DEVCO, who has been key in supporting delegations in designing and implementing VET actions. She emphasised the importance that delegations are equipped to deliver on their tasks and so if not all delegations has such expertise to hand, it is very important this can be done and the ETF expertise has been key in this. She thanked ETF for its solid work.

DG NEAR

Ms FERRAN (DG NEAR) provided an overview of the policy developments in the NEAR region highlighting that there are many political priorities which are directly relevant to ETF. The first one is the programming in the neighbourhood and enlargement regions She highlighted that one of the big changes of the financial architecture under the MFF is to have one large single instrument, the neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument, which will apply to all countries but the enlargement ones. The negotiations of those regulations are almost near completion with limited number of points still open including the governance model, the share of power between Council and Parliament in the programming process in particular, and also the issues of migration and some of the spending targets. It is hoped that the official adoption will be done by very early 2021, so that the Commission can engage in programming.

In terms of programming, the specificities of the neighbourhood region remain, with the same principles of policy first and the other principles that Ms Geiger mentioned being applied. , Programming will be based on so-called joint documents, which are agreed in the neighbourhood agenda bilaterally with each country and these are called partnership priorities, association agendas etc. depending on the country. These are the political frameworks for programming and there is an important principle in the neighbourhood, which is the 'more for more' approach, meaning the more a country eagerly implements the reform, the more funding they can receive and there is a reserve of about 10% of the envelope which is allocated on a yearly basis based on the progress on the previous year. Very good progress is being made on the enlargement front and the IPA III regulation, which is at the very end of the adoption process. For the upcoming dialogue, the key issues are the same, in particular governance and migration. In terms of pre-programming, there is a draft of the programming framework which is the overall policy document that will guide the programming where human capital development represents a significant part, and it is highlighted as one of the top priorities of the Commission. She stressed the importance of programming in the field of human capital development. She emphasised the link to the political framework that will guide not only the programming but also the policy for the enlargement region and the Western Balkans in general; namely, the Commission Communication of the Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans, adopted on 6 October. It very clearly sets what will be the priorities that will be followed when implementing IPA III for the Western Balkans region. She referred to the fact that up to €9 billion, out of the €14 billion that will be devoted to IPA III, may be allocated to support the economy recovery and development of the region, moving from connectivity, green agenda, digital and human capital development. She pointed out that this very important political communication that will guide the activities includes all the key words that can be found in the ETF Strategy in terms of priorities.

She stated that another equivalent, but yet to be, political development will be in the South. She referred to one of the new tools, mentioned by Mr Onestini, that are being developed in particular starting in the Western Balkans is education diagnosis, in terms of diagnosis of the overall state of the education system. This is a tool that is already being replicating in the Southern Neighbourhood. In Lebanon it is being pilot-tested this year and the intention is to expand to the entire Southern Neighbourhood region. Building on the fact that the end of this month will be the 25th anniversary of the Union for the Mediterranean, the Commission is currently preparing a strategic communication on the EU policy for the Southern Neighbourhood which will encompass an equivalent to the Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans. The communication will provide the political orientations on the support and priorities in the Southern Neighbourhood, where the youth and education dimensions are very important.

She referred to the the third region, covered by the the Eastern Partnership and that in March 2020, a communication on the Eastern Partnership was adopted spelling out five priorities which very much resemble the priorities of the new Commission. Again human capital development is highlighted as having a clear role to play, She highlighted that in all three regions the importance of the dimension of human capital development was evident and therefore the Commission very much relies on the ETF's intervention in this sector.

She added that the aim is to use to its full extent the new tool of the external action guarantee that has been introduced in the new MFF. In the spirit of Team Europe, working in cooperation with Member States and the International Financial Institutions can really help develop the intervention capacity thanks to the multiplying factor that the guarantee can offer in terms of mobilising private sector resources and increasing the magnitude of the EU intervention based on policy guidance, and this is really the aim of the policy first approach, by defining together with the Member States and the International Financial Institutions what the key priorities are for a specific country and then merging the power to support the country in this respect.

DG EMPL

The Chair provided an update from DG EMPL and referred to the previous two speakers praising the advancement on the programming and the DGs' planning on the multiannual framework which, despite the pandemic, is ahead compared to the previous MFF. He was optimistic that the human-centred approach was here to stay. DG EMPL is closely following the establishment of these programmatic documents very closely and also seeking to keep decent work very much at the top of the Commission's agenda.

Concerning DG EMPL, he focused on the European Labour Authority (ELA) and VET and skills, where despite the situation, the implementation of actions continues to advance. ELA has been established, the main focus of the work currently is facilitating access to information to citizens and employers and also starting the important work of coordination in joint inspections. The agency is still in Brussels, with 53 staff, of which 18 are national liaison officers. He highlighted the importance of member states already being very well centred in the authority. He underlined that ELA is not an agency but an authority, an instrument of collaboration with member states. ELA will be moving to Bratislava soon. 2021 is a year of transition. ELA will continue preparing reactions, and labour mobility and risk assessments. It is also integrating two very important responsibilities that were previously managed by DG EMPL. The first one is the European coordination of Eures, the European job mobility council, and the European platform on tackling undeclared work. He informed the members that the ELA board appointed a new executive director, Cosmin Boiangiu (a the former deputy permanent representative of Romania to the EU, and also former ambassador of Romania). The Chair stated that ELA works at about 60% in 2021 and will continue increasing up to full establishment plan by 2024. Cooperation with EU bodies has started, including the ETF. He referred to the first inter-agency workshop organised on 10 November on the topic of labour mobility analysis and risk assessment, and another

is organised for January 2021 on capacity. ELA will also start reflecting on preparing some memorandum and cooperation agreements with the other agencies, he expressed his appreciation that ETF is already in discussions with ELA.

Concerning VET and skills, he underlined that DG EMPL relies on ETF's expertise in this area. There are actions planned on the new Skills Agenda for Europe and the new generation of youth employment support with a renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships. There is also a draft Council recommendation on Vocational Education and Training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. It will promote European vocational and training systems in the international context ensuring recognition worldwide. He highlighted that the candidate and the neighbourhood countries will be able to participate in all these initiatives. DG EMPL and ETF will work together maintaining and fostering the organisation of apprenticeships in ETF partner countries with the work on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, implementing the European alliance roadmap 2021 and organising the annual meeting planned for September 2021. Work will continue on joint international cooperation under the umbrella of the UNESCO Inter-Agency Group on TVET. On 1 July 2020, the Commission adopted the European Skills Agenda, a five-year plan, to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use. This will strengthen and sustain the level of competitiveness, linked to the green deal, ensuring social fairness, putting into practice the first principle of the European pillar of social rights. DG EMPL is in the process of developing a plan to implement the whole European pillar, which will be a joint effort. Access to education, training and lifelong learning for everybody is the first principle of the European pillar.

The new European Skills Agenda builds on the ten actions of the Commission's 2016 Skills Agenda. It will include 12 actions organised under 4 headings; Joint forces and collective action, the pact for skills, the right skills for jobs, all the issues relating to strengthening skills, intelligence, EU support to teaching, national upskilling action, the VET council recommendation proposal, etc., and tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning, a framework to unlock investments in skills enabling the framework to lock in member states and drive investments in skills, again working with member states and private investments, in line with this new MFF.

On 13 September, the Commission adopted the updated digital education action plan and the communication on the European education area. The digital European plan sets out two priority areas: the first one is developing a high-performing digital education eco-system. The COVID-19 crisis shows that overall levels of digital readiness in Europe are low, and that education and training institutions need to adopt a plan, an organisation-wide approach to integrate technology and develop digital skills for staff and students. The second element of this second priority area will be enhancing digital competences for digital transformation, focusing on the importance of digital skills. The European education area communication sets out the means and milestones to achieve the European education area by 2025 supported by the European recovery plan and the Erasmus programme. The communication addresses six dimensions, quality in education, inclusion and fairness, and gender equality, education in the context of the green and digital transformations, teachers and trainers, higher education and transformation, and anchoring the European education area in the world.

Mr ONESTINI thanked the Commission colleagues for the cooperation, in particular to Ms Geiger, given it was her last GB meeting. He recalled when the reflection started on the ETF strategy three years ago, Ms Geiger and Ms Ferran both helped the ETF kick-start the exercise. He echoed their comments on the importance of the new programmes and the way in which these principles presented will also affect the capacity of the delegations to implement sectoral policy changes. It puts a greater burden on the delegations and therefore the sectoral expertise of ETF would need to be even better mobilised to assist the delegations address the issues, which in the area of human capital development are quite complex as has been now in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. He saw the challenge, as an opportunity to cooperate more with the delegations, under the guidance of DG

NEAR and DEVCO. He also added that at the European Vocational Skills Week, which took place the preceding week, there were many ETF events confirming the interest of ETF partner countries in this initiative. He congratulated the German presidency on managing to hold it all virtually. He shared the fact the segment of the week that attracted the highest number of participants, apart from the more political sessions with the Commissioners, was a conference on the internationalisation of vocational education and training, that ETF co-hosted and organised together with DG NEAR and DG EMPL. The question of internationalisation of VET and approaches resonated with almost 1,500 people who joined in with the discussion and which shows that there is a lot of interest in this from the wider public.

Trends and developments at the ETF

Mr Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) provided an update on the recent work of the ETF.

He first referred to the impact of COVID-19 on ETF's work, and recalled that that northern Italy was affected slightly before other parts of Europe and went into lockdown a few weeks earlier in March 2020. This meant that there was no model for the ETF to follow, on how to do a lockdown and on how to immediately reorganise activities. It took a relatively short time to do so and the core ETF activities continued with no interruption. The modalities of delivery were changed and the entire ETF workforce was transferred online, the ETF premises had to close in lockdown. There was a partial return to the building in October 2020, but unfortunately due to the second wave the office has since been kept open for minimal services or video conferences such as today's meeting in order to provide the necessary support. He outlined some of the elements of the ETF response.

- The ETF quickly made contact with stakeholders in the partner countries and carried out a mapping of developments from March to May. Countries were locking down at different times, some were closing the full education system, while others managed to stay open much later. There was a question of validation of exams at the end of the school year, the question for VET of practical training and what could be done. The ETF therefore shared the results of the mapping with partner countries and the Commission and the delegations to also guide the reprogramming of activities wherever possible. Web campaigns were developed to share best practice as it was happening. The ETF joined the umbrella of UNESCO and contributed with its own networks to bring in the partners from the different countries.
- The main point for the ETF was to be able to be responsive to the requests from partner countries. Although the way that school systems have been resilient has to be admired, the reality is that learning opportunities have decreased for pupils and this has had a very strong impact, especially on more fragile pupils and trainers and trainees. The impact has been disproportionate on the VET system compared to the general education system for many reasons, and this therefore calls for long-term thinking as well. It has brought to the surface some of the weaknesses and fragilities that were already apparent. In spite of many years of talking about competence-based approaches, it is still very difficult to shift to virtual platforms with this competence-based approach. There is often a return to more traditional learning methodologies with just teachers talking and pupils listening, as it is very difficult to transfer online without having a fully developed competence-based approach. These reflections will also guide ETF work in the next phase.

He emphasised that the priorities for 2020 were a bridging year in terms of strategy, moving from the current strategic period to the next, an opportunity to look at the new EU programmes and to realign, and to develop strengthened partnerships and in preparation for 2021. The pandemic affected that but the ETF nevertheless focused its efforts on the priorities that were identified at the beginning of the year. In terms of key performance indicators, the ETF is on target with most of them. We plan to meet commitment targets by the end of the year, having already committed 90% by the end of October. In

terms of payments, in the amending budget the ETF has the approach to not request all the payment appropriations.

He highlighted the main developments in the regions from the ETF's point of view. The ETF is continuing to work directly with the countries. In terms of regional approaches for the Western Balkans and Turkey, he referred to the completion of the follow-up of Riga conclusions, which is the EU process of the open method of coordination of vocational and training areas, amongst EU Member States and also the Western Balkans and Turkey. Together with Cedefop, the ETF presented the final results at a joint conference in June, held with the Croatian and German Presidencies of the EU and participation from Commissioner Schmit and Vice-President Schinas. This then paved the way for the Osnabruck declaration, which will include Western Balkans and Turkey, and the ETF will continue its work of monitoring with Cedefop. He highlighted that the final Riga reports are available on the ETF website, and a short policy document was produced by Cedefop and the ETF to highlight the main policy challenges in terms of VET in the coming period. This is an example of the regional cooperation that the ETF continues to promote with the Western Balkans and Turkey and he echoed Ms Ferran's words concerning the latest political-level communication from the Commission, on how this will remain highly relevant in the next phase.

Concerning the Eastern Partnership, as mentioned earlier there was a summit to which the ETF contributed to supporting the 20 deliverables of the previous goals. The Eastern partnership involves some countries which had more political instability in the recent months. The ETF also received questions on social media about its engagement with Belarus and what to do about the situation in Azerbaijan and Armenia. He underlined that the ETF is an EU agency, that follows the EU guidelines relating to engagement with third countries. In this framework, the ETF continues to engage at the technical and civil society level, and continued as much as possible with the Torino process and the dissemination of the results. Most of it was done before the instability and events in Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The ETF shared the results at the event that took place in September, together with DG NEAR management there and it had quite a lot of visibility.

In the southern and eastern Mediterranean, he highlighted ETF's work to finalise the Torino process with most of the countries. ETF has been following the conclusion of the UfM labour ministerial together with DG employment and as mentioned by Ms Ferran, there is an ongoing political reflection on the partnership with the UfM. He was confident that the area of human capital development, employment, etc. will remain an important pillar of cooperation. In the southern and eastern Mediterranean, as well as in Turkey, one key partner for the ETF has been the EBRD. He highlighted some examples of ETF cooperation with European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, partnership with whom has been growing. He was pleased with the way in which the ETF can be complementary to EBRD activities. EBRD funds many projects for business, private sector development in the ETF partner countries, and they are very keen to connect their investment with the development of qualifications that promote inclusion and that are connected with the VET reforms in the countries.

Regarding Central Asia, he referred to the work on the Torino process. He emphasised that the most important issue for ETF would be regional EU programmes. DG DEVCO is working on the next phase of the regional platform and the ETF has been cooperating closely with DG DEVCO on this and ETF is ready to be even more involved. The platform will cater broadly to lifelong learning, looking at all education training sectors and he hoped that ETF will be able to support the regional level.

Mr ONESTINI highlighted the state of play concerning the fifth round of the Torino process. The ETF has completed almost all of the regional segments and, all of this work will come together at the conference next June. In parallel, he added that he will be starting to reflect with the new management team about the next phase: what does ETF want to do and how to bring differentiation out, as the Torino process outputs are aligned to the needs of the new strategy.

He mentioned that the ETF has continued the work with the African Union. ETF involvement is limited, with one of senior experts working as part of an EU-funded project managed by a consortium with GIZ and others. In this framework he saw a growing interest from the African Union, and especially also from the regional organisations where they are trying to develop their own approaches at the same time as looking at the continent-wide qualification framework, seen also in the context of the creation of a continental economic area.

Concerning cooperation with Cedefop, he highlighted that the connection between knowledge development between ETF and Cedefop is very important. He recalled the breadth of cooperation with Cedefop as a sister agency and he underlined the complementarity of the two agencies. He referred to the SPD 2021-2023 that was adopted earlier during the meeting where there is a joint action plan that reflects this.

He thanked the GB members from the Member States for the participation of experts from member states, often the governing board members themselves, in ETF events in 2020.

He drew attention to ETF's cooperation with international regional partners and referred to the planned session on 17 November, when partnerships will be discussed and more can be said about the logic behind this. The ETF has significant cooperation with EU national agencies in the area of development and vocational education e.g. GIZ, Enabel, BIBB, LuxDev and others. He stated he was always keen on this cooperation because it then brings together ETF's work in the partner countries with the interests of the Member States there.

He highlighted some interesting cooperation developments with new partners. One with UNIDO, in Vienna, which has worked by network focusing on business development and SMEs. The ETF worked with UNIDO on sharing knowledge and took part in a large UNIDO annual forum on learning and knowledge development facility. This partnership with UNIDO is particularly important in the ETF project on Skills for Enterprises. Another partnership with the Michelangelo Foundation is interesting because they focus on traditional skills sectors, and some of ETF partner countries do have very strong crafts sectors. This foundation looks at traditional arts and crafts brought to the highest standards. The ETF saw this partnership could be a way of giving more visibility to some of these traditional arts and crafts sectors which are real business opportunities if they find the right partners.

Mr ONESTINI presented the new organisational structure, which the GB adopted earlier in the year, that will be operational from 1 January 2021. He pointed out the greater focus on policy and public outreach which as a department links with the Knowledge Hub Department and the Strategy and Resource Department. He referred to the heads of department from 1 January 2021: We've heard from Eva Jimeno Sicila, Erja Kaikkonen and Xavier Matheu de Cortada. He added that the selection for the vacant unit heads has just been completed in order to be ready to start in January. He thanked Anastasia Fetsi, currently Head of the Operations Department, and Alistair, head of the Communications Department and recognised that this represents a generational change with some colleagues who have been instrumental for a number of years as part of the management team move on and a new management team coming in. He thanked them warmly for their contribution to leading the ETF and included in this Henrik Faudel, formerly Head of Resources and Services Department, who retired earlier in 2020.

He looked forward to January with ETF starting with a new management team, new organisational structure and new strategy.

He concluded with some information on upcoming written procedures which will be submitted for adoption based on European Commission framework decisions. He also referred to the recent publication, '25 years of ETF', with a preface by the President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli, that tells the ETF story through the voice of many stakeholders.

Update on the German Presidency

Ms HESS (GERMANY) provided a presentation on the ongoing Presidency. She referred to the motto of Excellence in research and innovation, education: towards a resilient, sovereign and sustainable Europe. The plan to achieve this was with digital education, a focus on technical sovereignty and contribution to the European Green Deal, research to strength resilience, and a more dynamic, effective and targeted European Research Area.

She highlighted:

- Education is a foundation for personal fulfilment, employability and active and responsible citizenship. The right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning was proclaimed in the European pillar of social rights, therefore, the European education area aims to bring education and learning communities the support they need to fulfil their fundamental mission.
- Milestones achieved in education and training included promoting equivalence between vocational and academic education and transfers. Another goal was to promote cross border cooperation by strengthening networks and funding measures and the context of vocational education and training.
- A key role in the age of digital technology, training requirements and the world at work and democratic change is to open up career opportunities for young and old by offering appropriate initial and continuing education as well as lifelong learning. It is important to finalise Erasmus+ to contribute to this objective.
- For the Osnabruck declaration, there an informal meeting of education ministers on 16-17 September in Osnabruck, and the declaration will be adopted on 30 November.
- There is trio presidency with Portugal and Slovenia for which the main focus topics are agreed.

The Chair thanked Ms Hess and emphasised the major achievements in terms of programmatic, strategic documents and acknowledged the success of the German presidency. He referred to a very interesting event that DG EMPL organised with the Ministry of Labour on decent work and global supply chains with 1,500 people participating with the Commissioner Schmit and Commissioner Reynders. The Council conclusions on decent work and global supply chains are being finalised. He congratulated the German presidency on the tremendous work done.

