

MINUTES

GOVERNING BOARD

MEETING

11 JUNE 2021¹

¹ Version 17 September 2021

The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting took place online on 11 June 2021, chaired by Mr Lluís PRATS, Head of Unit, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission (EC).

1. Adoption of the agenda

The ETF proposed to invert the order of points 5 and 6 so the point on the ETF Accounts 2020 would be dealt with before the point concerning the ETF Accounting Officer and the options for her replacement.

The Board unanimously adopted the agenda for the meeting.

2. Introductory remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed the new GB members: Mrs Monika RYBOVÁ, the new member representing Slovakia; Mr Antonio LEITE the new member representing Portugal; Mrs Merlin TATRIK the new member representing Estonia; Ms Lise WEERDEN, the new member representing the Netherlands; Ms Ana OLIM, the new alternate for Portugal; Ms Cécile BILLAUX, the new alternate from the Commission (DG INTPA); Ms Antoaneta ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA, the new observer from the Commission (DG EAC)

He also welcomed Mr Marco SALARIS, representing Italy in the meeting.

Ms Rossella BENEDETTI, Mr Andreas D. FOTOPOULOS and Ms Evelin LICHTENBERGER were also present as guests as the appointment process to confirm them as independent experts from the European Parliament was pending final completion.

There were a number of members of the board who have recently been appointed but were not present: Ms Sonja OOMS, the new alternate for the Netherlands; Ms Erica GERRETSEN, the new member from the Commission (DG INTPA); Mr Filip VAN DEPOELE, the new alternate observer from the Commission (DG EAC).

One of the partner country observers from Serbia, Ms Dragana SAVIC could not be present.

Poland was not represented at the meeting.

The European Commission was also represented by Mr Francisco LOPEZ MENCHERO; Ms Maria ASENIUS (DG NEAR); Mr Jean-Paul HEERSCHAP (DG INTPA); Mr Alberto FUNES BETANCOR (DG EMPL). Ms Diana SENCZYSZYN represented the European External Action Service.

Ms Liia KAARLOP represented the ETF Staff Committee.

The Chair informed members that for point 6 of the agenda, a representative from EU-OSHA would join the meeting.

3. Follow-up to previous meetings

The Board unanimously adopted the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 November 2020.

The Chair presented the follow up to the action points since the last GB meeting and informed about the written procedures that took place in January and February 2021.

4. Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2020 and its Analysis and Assessment

Mr Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the 2020 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

Mr Antonio LEITE (Portugal), the GB member representing the current Presidency of the EU, congratulated the ETF on behalf of the GB members on the quality of the documents.

He reported that the Board would like more information on the Staff Engagement survey, on what is measured by the survey and which activities have been initiated within the ETF, in response to the results.

He also stated that the Board noted that a review of ETF sensitive functions had been carried out on the Ethics and Integrity function. More information about the Ethics and Integrity function, would be welcomed, including which issues had been raised and what changes in the operations of the ETF may result.

Concerning Covid-19 restrictions and the reduction in travel and the reallocation of the mission budget to other activities, he said that the Board would be interested in understanding which extra activities have been made possible and how were they selected. In relation to this, he added the Board would like to know ETF's plan for after the pandemic restrictions are lifted, in terms of travel, if there will be a return to travel as pre-2020 or there is a plan for a wider use of digital tools.

His final point questioned what were the effects of funds being shifted from administrative to operational areas. The Board considered this a positive move, since more operational activities can be carried out and assumed that this is possible through more efficient administration and coordination, however members would be interested in knowing more about the positive and negative effects and any risks.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) thanked for the questions on the CAAR 2020 and the Board's appreciation of the quality of the documents. He highlighted the contribution of Ms Sofia SAKALI, now ETF's Acting Head of Unit of the new Project Management Unit, who as part of her previous function coordinated the drafting of the documents, together with the ETF Management Team and other colleagues.

He responded that the staff engagement indicator is a measure of a composite number of issues. He welcomed the progress measured in the survey and noted that while there is still room for improvement, the survey showed that staff are very committed despite the challenging circumstances of the previous year and of the reorganisation that accompanied the launch of the ETF Strategy 2027 at the beginning of 2021. He further informed members that the ETF leads an inter-Agency contract created a few years ago, with a contractor which performs Staff Engagement Surveys for many Agencies. This allows for a comparison of the results of the ETF, both over time and across the Agencies. The chapters that are analysed are quite standard, so they can be compared, and they cover areas relating to how well staff members relate to the policy content of the Agency, how they see their role, in relation also to the management. He highlighted that in the past seven years, some areas of concern for staff members in ETF have been focused on the area of respect at the place of work, in ways relating to relations between colleagues themselves or the management and staff. This is an area that has been looked at and discussed. He offered to give some examples. He stated that a second issue was that of management transparency, understanding of decision-making, particularly in relation to staff-related issues. He added that this is an area that the Staff Committee (represented in this GB meeting as an observer) also raised and is discussed together with management to find ways of making the processes more transparent. The third topic, he specified, was that of internal communication. After having looked at the issues, all has been brought under the umbrella of the 'OneETF' project, where these areas of concern are being followed up and results are being delivering. He expressed his satisfaction that, in particular, the Staff Engagement Survey showed that

in the area of respect, there has been improvement and that the work that has been put in place with the confidential counsellors, with training for management, training for staff has given some good results and work will continue on this. He underlined the importance of the Staff Engagement Survey and that the ETF tries to continue with the same set of questions to measure the progress among staff.

On the issue of Ethics, he confirmed that in 2020 the ETF systematised all the different processes and decisions which had accumulated over the years. Ethics covers a broad area, ranging from anti-fraud to what to do if staff receive a gift when you go to a conference, to what to do when a staff member leaves ETF and takes on a new job. So, the ETF aimed to ensure that all of these different rules are more transparently available to staff and wanted to be more proactive in the delivery of training and information to staff, making them more aware of all these rules, which are part of being civil servants. Most of the Board members are civil servants in different capacities, so are well aware of the topic. He stated that on the question of sensitive functions, that was more of a consolidation exercise and it has not really led to big changes. The ETF already had in place all the important caveats. In the ETF overall, there are not many sensitive functions, given the nature of the work. The ETF is not dealing with commercially sensitive information or dealing with inspections, or similar, where there could be higher risks, so the ETF is a low risk Agency in this area. But, obviously, the ETF manages some funds and staff rights, so the different rules have been reviewed and there are a few functions which are under review. Given the ETF is a small Agency, possibilities for rotation are limited, but decisions follow exactly the rules of the Commission, with the four-eyes approach when needed and internal sampling and double-checking, also checking all of related decisions with auditors. The main focus for the recent work on Ethics was more of consolidation and increasing awareness among staff.

Mr ONESTINI confirmed that Covid-19 restrictions, travel and the new normal is a very interesting area of discussion for the ETF. He informed members that the Head of ETF's Strategic Development Unit, Mr Thierry FOUBERT, is leading the ETF internal reflection on what is now called the *next normal*, looking forward and this question of travel is at the core of it. On how the ETF reallocated with the mission budget last year, referring also to the discussion in the GB meeting in November, he confirmed that firstly the ETF used the available mission budget mainly to reinvest in equipping staff with the mobile technology needed. All ETF staff now have a laptop, a mobile and SIM card which allows all to be fully operational from their home offices. This was in the planning, but it was brought forward. Having the mission budget resources unused last year, allowed the ETF to reinforce the investment here. Secondly, the ETF redirected part of the amount into operational activities, to support new ways of delivering events. Online events are interesting developments because, obviously, they cost less in terms of mission and in terms of the carbon footprint, but they do require quite an intensive operation behind for the organisation. He noted that one of the bottlenecks encountered was with the availability of support staff. Whilst normally many meetings were organised when on mission and staff members go to the countries and they set up their meetings when they are there, for virtual events, virtual missions and virtual conversations, more support staff for the set-up, follow it from a technical and organisational point of view. It has been seen that this is a bottleneck. The ETF is therefore looking to invest also in better equipped hybrid facilities here in the ETF office so there are more rooms where these hybrid meetings can take place. Looking forward, he envisaged that firstly, the *new- or next-normal*, is not going to come about immediately. It is going to take a few years, because the development of the pandemic might differ from country to country as can be seen in ETF Partner Countries where it will take some time for them to also catch up vaccination-wise or in terms of events. It will be a process, rather than a switch. And secondly, from ETF's point of view, for the future, the positives with these new ways of delivering events need to be taken forward. It has been seen that the audience can be enlarged and diversified, going beyond the usual circles which are the main contacts in the country and that is beneficial, so it should be maintained. So, he saw in this the *new- or next-normal*, that the ETF will maintain an element of hybrid in meetings, but there is a need to also look at

the logistics and support so that the same quality can be delivered, by combining in person and online. He emphasised that, ultimately, the ETF is quite a unique Agency, in the sense that the ETF is the only one working with countries outside of the EU exclusively, and that is according to the ETF mandate. The ETF is the only Agency that is exclusively working outside of the EU, so elements of travel, missions, organising of events and networking are necessary to achieve the ETF's goals. It will always be a balancing act between these elements, because it is clear also that many of the partners to be reached in the countries are not, and will not be, equipped with the level and quality of access to the internet technologies that allow seamless participation and, especially, in the area of vocational education and training. The ETF will not be able to reach all its stakeholders if we do not continue working also in presence in the countries.

And on the question of the funds that went to operational activities Mr ONESTINI stated that it was more for this area of reinforcing the delivery through new means and using it also to support the mapping of Covid-19 responses that the ETF has done. He highlighted that the ETF also did an interesting project last year with UNICEF to hear the voices of youth from the Western Balkans and Central Europe on how they perceived their access to education, in view of Covid-19. This was presented, together with the Commission colleagues and EAC colleagues last year, and he found that had been a good exercise to keep listening to how youth is dealing with these challenges.

The Chair thanked Mr ONESTINI for his replies and added that the Commission and his team in particular were debating approaches on how to continue with international meetings and networking, in particular with partners who have limited online accessibility. He invited the ETF to share further reflection and lessons learned in relation to this topic with the Board in a future meeting.

Mr Onestini informed the GB members that there was a clerical error in the draft Analysis and Assessment of the 2020 ETF CAAR. He explained that in the document it is stated on page five "*Notes that there are no outstanding audit recommendations and that all the recommendations of the cross-cutting evaluation carried out in 2016 of the four EU Agencies under the remit of DG EMPL have been closed.*" whereas in fact, there is one outstanding recommendation. The text shall read "*Notes that there is one outstanding audit recommendations and that all the recommendations of the cross-cutting evaluation carried out in 2016 of the four EU Agencies under the remit of DG EMPL have been closed*". This is reflected correctly in the CAAR 2020 and was also reported by Ms SMIT (ETF) in her presentation of the Accounts 2020. This outstanding recommendation refers to a public procurement procedure for temporary workers agency services, which the Court had made in 2018. In agreement with the Court, it will be corrected when the ETF launches a new procedure in 2022.

The Chair asked the GB members if there were any objections to this correction. No comments were made by the GB members.

Antonio LEITE (Portugal) presented the Board's Analysis and Assessment of the 2020 ETF CAAR. He questioned the meaning of the sentence on the importance of ensuring adequate staff and financial resources.

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) stated that this is a sentence which has been regularly used in the reports of the Board. It mainly originated at the time, when some years ago the Commission was reviewing the staffing levels of Agencies and there was much discussion between the Boards of the Agencies and the Commission to ensure that the staff-cutting approaches would not endanger the core activities of the Agencies. He confirmed that it is not a particular concern at the moment, but that it could not be excluded that the Commission may look at this issue in the future.

The Board adopted the 2020 ETF CAAR and its Analysis and Assessment unanimously. Both documents were sent to the relevant institutions by 15 June 2021.

5. ETF 2020 Annual Accounts

Ms Martine SMIT (ETF) presented the 2020 Annual Accounts.

The Chair thanked Ms SMIT for the comprehensive presentation.

Antonio LEITE (Portugal), 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 GB members unanimously adopted the 2020 ETF Annual Accounts and the Opinion of the Board. Both documents were sent to the relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2021.

6. ETF Accounting Officer retiring in March 2022

The Chair informed the GB members that after 20 years at the ETF, Ms SMIT (ETF) will be retiring in 2022. He thanked her for her service. He reminded members that the Accounting Officer reports to the Board and so there are a number of options for her replacement that are to be presented for information, one of which is the recruitment of a new Accounting Officer who would be shared with another Agency under the remit of DG EMPL, the Health and Safety Agency of the European Union, EU-OSHA, based in Bilbao. He welcomed the representative of EU-OSHA, Mr Andrea BALDAN (EU-OSHA), who joined for the discussion.

Ms Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the proposed three options for the appointment of the ETF Accounting Officer that have been identified:

1. Continue with the status quo: ETF employs an Accounting Officer;
2. Outsourcing accounting services in full or partially to DG BUDG;
3. Shared accountancy services with another agency.

Concerning option 3, Ms JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) informed that EU-OSHA have expressed an interest in sharing the accounting's services. For a shared service, a formal agreement between the two agencies would be required and the Accounting Officer could be appointed by the GB early in 2022. The ETF and EU-OSHA would need to further discuss the feasibility of a shared service. Based on that and the GB discussion, a proposal on which option to move forward with will be prepared in July for the decision of the GB by written procedure.

Mr Andrea BALDAN (EU-OSHA) added that EU-OSHA has had the experience in the past of having an internal Accounting Officer, similar to what ETF is currently doing and that for the last two years has outsourced the services to the Commission. Based on this experience EU-OSHA sees several benefits, in terms of efficiency and in terms of further collaboration to explore this opportunity of sharing accountancy services. He confirmed the interest of EU-OSHA to pursue further discussion and analysis and added that EU-OSHA held its Management Board Meeting on the 2nd and 3rd of June and presented this opportunity, explaining the pros and the cons. There was unanimous interest from EU-OSHA's Board to pursue this opportunity further. He emphasised the fact that this option is really about collaboration between the Agencies and flexibility in terms of having an internal Accounting Officer. When relying on the services of an external Provider, there is a lack of flexibility which is, of course, expected. If the shared option goes ahead a formal process will take place, and EU-OSHA will hold their next Board meeting in January 2022.

No comments were made by the Board.

The Chair added that, on behalf of the DG EMPL, this collaboration between two of the five Agencies under the remit of DG EMPL would be very welcome and it would be a very useful way of sharing resources.

7. Amending Budget for 2021

Ms Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the first amending budget for 2021. She highlighted that this first amending budget confirmed the trends linked to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of capacity to travel, etc. The adjustments are mainly linked to the one transfer falling under the authority of the Director that has already been performed within Title 1, as well as a proposal for reallocation which takes into account the various limitations and opportunities emerged in the first few months of 2021:

- the updated costs for Contract Agents, trainees and interim workers;
- activities related to the change process on implementation of the new HR strategy and strengthening internal communication taking into account the modalities of remote working (theOneETF initiative);
- the decision to avoid missions at least until September 2021;
- to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of staff working remotely;
- the confirmed restrictions linked to the organisation of traditional events and the technological opportunities represented by the necessity to organise increased online presence, online meetings and online workshops.

She stated that on the side of the revenue the main change is the integration of the amount of €102,739 as externally assigned revenue that the ETF received from DG INTPA. She recalled the proposal from DG NEAR and DG INTPA, in the Governing Board meeting in November 2021, for ETF to provide sessions of training to Commission Staff and delegations and to do a survey on Centres of Vocational Excellence in Africa. That was confirmed and the GB members received a letter in February concerning this. She confirmed that the revenue remains stable regarding the EC contribution 21.3 million.

Antonio LEITE (Portugal), on behalf of the GB members, confirmed there were no comments from the GB members.

The GB members unanimously adopted the ETF Amending Budget 2021/1.

8. Progress with the Programming Document 2022-24 – Work Programme 2022

Cesare ONESTINI (ETF) presented the progress on the preparation of Work Programme 2022. The first draft was shared with the Commission in January 2021 and some comments were received from Commission services. Following the Structured Dialogues with the EC/EEAS services in April, the draft was revised and the Commission will adopt its Opinion in the summer of 2021. A revised draft will be submitted to the GB for adoption in November 2021.

The draft Work Programme 2022 is guided by the ETF Strategy 2027 and the budget for 2022 which is in line with that of 2021. The operational portfolio will continue its focus on delivering three core services and strengthening the ETF's work in the geographical areas the Agency works in. The main areas of work continue and there will be more attention to the transversal themes of skills for a Green Transition, digitalisation and gender (as requested by Commissioner Schmit). He highlighted a strong emphasis on Adult Education, up-skilling and re-skilling, which post-COVID-19, become even more of a priority everywhere, including in the ETF's Partner Countries.

From ETF consultations 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. The ETF would like to also strengthen its work with the Member States.

Mr ONESTINI gave an update on four lines of actions which are of particular interest in close cooperation between the ETF and the Commission: (i) the ETF has been asked by DG Employment to work on a comparison between the European Qualification Framework and third country frameworks; (ii) DG Employment is considering requesting the ETF to also better connect the ETF's work on Centres of Vocational Excellence with the work that Erasmus+ will be carrying forward on vocational excellence; (iii) DG INTPA already requested (and the Board endorsed) the ETF to support, in relation to skills development, the preparation of the next EU/African Union Summit (which was postponed in 2020); (iv) discussions are ongoing with DG INTPA concerning the ETF management of the new education platform for Central Asia (DARYA). This last action would run over a five-year period from 2022. It will focus on regional cooperation and dialogue on the Labour Market and inclusive skills developments in Central Asia.

He added that the DARYA platform will be the subject of a consultation meeting on 30 June 2021, also with Member States, and the ETF will organise this with the assistance of GB members, who will receive an invite. Members were encouraged to involve colleagues from their national administrations who deal with Central Asia.

Mr ONESTINI thanked colleagues from the Commission services for their support and highlighted that the ETF had an in-depth discussion this year with each individual service. Meetings were held with DG EAC, chaired by the Director-General of DG EAC; with DG Employment, chaired by Manuela GELENG (Director, DG EMPL) on the Skills Agenda side; with DG NEAR, chaired by Myriam FERRAN (Director, DG NEAR) followed up by regional meetings; and a cross-DG meeting on the Skills dimension of Migration chaired by Mr PRATS (DG EMPL).

The Chair expressed the appreciation among the Commission services for the enhanced cooperation with the ETF, especially with the Skills Department of DG EMPL, but also with DG INTPA on issues related to Africa, where he agreed that the expertise of the ETF is so much needed.

The GB welcomed the update.

9. Oral reports

See annex.

10. Any other business

Ms Nigar ISMAYILZADE-ASGAROVA (AZERBAIJAN) requested to intervene and expressed her appreciation of the presentations and the documents. She stated that as an Observer Member at ETF Governing Board (mandate expiring in July 2021) she wished to reiterate the importance attached to collaboration between Azerbaijan and the ETF. The ETF helped Azerbaijan in priority areas last year when there were many challenges including dealing with Covid-19. She expressed her gratitude to the European Commission and the ETF for providing the opportunity to represent the Eastern Partnership region in the ETF GB for the last five years. She hoped that her mandate may be renewed. She informed that the EC had contacted her in this regard.

Cesare ONESTINI thanked Ms ISMAYILZADE-ASGAROVA for her intervention and active participation over the years, confirming that cooperation will certainly continue through the ETF's work. He stated that for the ETF, the Observers from the Partner Countries are a very special category of Members of the Board, because they allow to make a connection with policies in the field.

The Chair confirmed that there were no other points for any other business. He also invited Board members to complete their evaluation forms of the meeting.

11. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will take place in Turin on 19 November 2021.

Follow up actions:

- The ETF to send the 2020 CAAR and Analysis and Assessment to the EU institutions by 15 June 2021;
- The ETF to send the 2020 Accounts and GB Opinion to relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2021;
- The ETF to share with the GB members at a future Governing Board meeting, reflections and lessons learned concerning the organisation of international meetings and networking.

ANNEX: Oral reports

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

DG NEAR

Mr Francisco LOPEZ-MENCHERO (DG NEAR), representing Ms Myriam FERRAN (DG NEAR), provided an overview of the latest developments on programming and the main developments in the regions covered by DG NEAR. He highlighted that for IPA III political agreement was reached on 2 June. This political agreement will now be translated into a legal text before the institutions launch the adoption process to formally adopt IPA III. He emphasised that this is a very important step forward as IPA III will offer increased support to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey with an overall budget of more than €14 billion, current prices, for the whole period 2021 to 2027. And it will start retroactively from 1 January 2021. Support for education, training and labour market systems are part of the thematic priorities, as part of civic objectives for the regulation and it fall under the thematic window number four of the Programming Framework, so it will be one of the main areas of support. He added that the Programming is advancing, notably, partner countries have put forward their strategic responses for actions for the period 2021 until 2024. The target is to adopt the related Commission financial decisions for the IPA III 2021 actions by the end of this year. He announced that on 9 June 2021, the European Parliament had adopted the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument for Global Europe. With this decision the European Union will be able to use €79.5billion, in current prices, to foster global recovery over the for the period 2021-27. He expected most bilateral and Multi-country Indicative Programmes, MIPs, will be adopted by the end of 2021. On 9 June, Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, noted that the European Union's new external financial instrument will be a game changer to boost the resilience and prosperity of the EU's closest neighbours. It will underpin the renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, helping to unlock and tap the economic potential of the region and support its post-Covid pandemic recovery, as well as that of the EU's partners to the East, boosting growth and jobs, Digital and Green Transformations, as well as human development and opportunities for youth. In addition, the EFSD+ with the capacity to guarantee financial instruments up to 53.4billion in investments will also benefit, in addition to these regions, the Western Balkans. On a regional level, he referred to the Joint Communication on the Southern Neighbourhood, published together with the External Action Service. It is entitled *A Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood* and it sets out a new Agenda for the Mediterranean. Importantly, it formulates the EU's policy priorities in the region and key actions for the years to come. One of the key objectives is an effort to renew and revitalise work on human development. In particular the aim is to empower youth, but also focus on health, good governance and the rule of law. For example, actions that are relevant to ETF will be to further cooperate on the Centres of Vocational Excellence platforms, so for example, through the ETF Network of Excellence. Also, cooperation will support the better anticipation of skill needs and development of strategies for Lifelong Learning, also with the support of ETF, and also to scale-up initiatives inspired by the EU Youth Guarantee, for which DG Employment is in charge in organising the multi-country TAIEX workshop on the 29 June. Then, together with this joint communication, the Commission has also published an Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood. This plan puts forward flagship investments to support its priority area, similar to the EIP for the Western Balkans and, for example, it envisages multi-country actions as a basis for a shared vision of VET. The Commission will also support partners through financial instruments, under the EFSD+, notably blending to reduce the burden on countries and through guarantees, to mitigate the risk for private investors. Lastly, but not least for this region, he informed that DG NEAR is coordinating closely with the ETF and with the EU

delegation in Beirut regarding the ongoing diagnosis of the Education Sector in Lebanon. He stated that this work is progressing well. Concerning, the ongoing work in the Western Balkans and Turkey, he referred to the Economic and Investment Plan, EIP, for the Western Balkans that was announced in October 2020. This plan identified Human Capital Development as one of the priority areas, inspired by the EU Youth Guarantee to be established in the region. DG NEAR is working closely to help Partner Countries materialise and implement these Youth Guarantee Schemes. In this direction, there has been fruitful collaboration between DG NEAR and ETF at service level, during the last months, not only through ongoing bilateral meetings with the authorities, the preparation of the upcoming TAIEX event on the 23 June, which is the basis for the second EU Western Balkans Ministerial Meeting on Employment and Social Affairs that will take place on 8 July 2021. He expressed the Commission's appreciation for ETF's support in this important endeavour and looked forward for this to continue in the future. He added that DG NEAR is launching, together with the ETF, EPPP and UNESCO and all the Ministries of Education in the Western Balkans, a series of in-depth education diagnoses. This is a very important and positive step, not least as a way to widen the ETF's scope in education beyond VET. He provided an update on the Economic Reform Programmes, the ERPs. In the Enlargement countries, the ERPs define key structural reform measures and remain the EU's key policy framework, leading to a joint Ministerial meeting with the EU Member States, where joint policy guidance is agreed. This represents the highest level of dialogue with the region. Recently, the Commission assessments have been published and the policy guidance is expected to be adopted in the margins of the ECOFIN on 13 July and that will include many references and recommendations concerning the Youth Guarantee. For the Eastern Neighbourhood, he informed that DG NEAR is currently working on a joint Staff Working Document on the topic of recovery, resilience and reform to set out priorities for the Eastern Partnership until 2025. This will complement last year's joint communication on Eastern Partnership policy and its New Deal for Youth. He highlighted that the ETF is providing valuable support for projects for youth employment, as a part of the EU for Youth Programme, for example, for the Youth Engagement Roadmaps Project and he looked forward to DG NEAR cooperating with the ETF on work-based learning, in particular, in the context of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The opening of the Alliance to Partner Countries from the Neighbourhoods, East and South, should provide for new opportunities to engage. He concluded, in the spirit of Team Europe, with a reference that working in cooperation with Member States and the international financial institutions currently help boost joint intervention capacity. This is also thanks to the multiplying factor that the EU financial countries can offer, in terms of mobilising private sector resources, increasing the magnitude of EU interventions, based on EU policy guidance. This is the aim of the policy-first approach, defining together, with the Member States, partner countries and international financial institutions, what the key priorities are for a specific partner country and then merging all the efforts together to jointly provide support.

The Chair emphasised that DG EMPL was very pleased that that DG NEAR had accepted the implementation of the Youth Guarantee as one of the flagships for the Western Balkans, which will enable the Commission to support youth in the region, helping them also to develop good skills and better strategies.

DG INTPA

Ms Cécile BILLAUX (DG INTPA) reiterated the fact the Commission has now a *policy-first* approach for all the Global Europe tools for all the external dimensions. From an INTPA perspective, VET is not seen as a standalone topic, but it is seen together with decent employment and also inclusive growth and is subject to a great deal of investment. She recalled that DG INTPA covers areas of the world like Africa, in particular Sub-Saharan Africa, where there is a need and a political push to have more EU

investment and to promote their intrinsic growth. DG INTPA reorganised this year and is very much focused also on doing more policy work. She stated that DG INTPA's approach was very much based on *geographisation*, meaning the funding will be at bilateral, national level, also regional to some extent, but will really come from a bottom-up approach. Use of development funds is driven by a knowledge of the country by the EU delegations and by what is needed on the ground, fitted to the local needs. She emphasised that DG INTPA is working more and more in Programming, in a Team Europe spirit. The idea is to have more impact and focus more on specific areas and working together with EU Member States to advance common objectives, working together in programmes in a synergy so that there is more impact. For VET, we have seen that 78% of the programming done by the delegation at country level in MIPs, mention VET as it being a priority. She highlighted that the Commissioner for International Partnerships is very keen on education and wants to promote education all through development, including VET. Commissioner Urpilainen has a very high target, earmarking 10% of funds for education, up from the current figure of 7%. So there is a positive mix of demand and political support for investment in education reform. She estimated that €1billion will be invested over the current MFF if we look at how many countries have food and the 7% to 10%, we arrive to the €1billion core objective. She stressed the importance to respond to the labour market needs and to the specific situation of each partner country. She stated that DG INTPA has done an evaluation of VET interventions from 2014-2018 and the most important conclusion was that most interventions were aligned with national policy, but not enough with labour market specificities. It appears that there is lack of coordination between Social Partners, civil society and the informal sector. Not enough dialogue is happening with Ministry and with the VET structures in the partner countries. This results in having programmes which seem to fit the priorities, but in reality, do not correspond to what the actors on the ground want to do. This is a challenge because, often a different interlocutor, a different Ministry should be involved. She found that this is where some emphasis should be put on the process of participation of how to design VET interventions. She gave an example of the support measure that DG INTPA have recently launched a second edition of the so-called VET Toolbox, which represents €30million and DG INTPA works together with organisations from Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg and further with the British Council. This is an excellent example of working with Member States. This new phase provides dedicated support for 11 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to look at which skills are needed in support of European investments, linking it also to the EFSD+ interventions. She concluded thanking the ETF for the support also on the African Qualification Recognition Framework, which is important work at a continental level. It could develop further in the perspective of next year's African Union -EU Summit in 2022. She welcomed that ETF continues to work with DG INTPA on supporting the preparation for the Summit. She mentioned also the recent online training for the EU Delegations (INTPA and NEAR) delivered by the ETF. She praised how it was very well-organised and very interesting. It focused also on Green Skills because integrating the Green Agenda with the skills element is very important and the training has really brought a lot of knowledge to the EU delegations. She was convinced that this was an area where ETF could support the Commission's work. She concluded expressing her thanks to the ETF for having seconded an ETF staff member to DG INTPA for the last two years. This really brought a very good substantial knowledge to DG INTPA's work and a better understanding of how each organisation works and the complexities, Cooperation will continue as there is lot of work in this area under this new MFF.

DG EAC

Ms Antoaneta ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA (DG EAC) expressed her thanks for the opportunity for DG EAC to participate in the Governing Board as an Observer. She highlighted that DG EAC is cooperating increasingly with countries which are covered by the ETF, in particular, through the Erasmus+ Programme. The Erasmus+ Programme has a reinforced international dimension and many of the current shared political priorities. She referred to the example the Digital Education Action Plan.

She emphasised the very close cooperation with colleagues in DG NEAR and DG INTPA, including in preparing the MIPs on education. She proposed to take the opportunity, at the next meeting, to provide more information on how DG EAC and the ETF work together on education and skills and jointly support efforts to assist the countries in those regions vis-a-vis human capital development

DG EMPL

The Chair provided an update on the continuing work on the European Pillar of Social Rights and how its 20 key principles are essential for a fair and well-functioning labour market and social protection for all Europeans. A Eurobarometer was carried out recently, which interestingly showed that nearly nine in 10 Europeans, 88%, say that Social Europe is important to them personally and just over seven in 10 respondents, 71%, believe that the lack of social rights is a serious problem currently.

He highlighted that on 4 March 2021, the Commission adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, a blueprint of how the Pillar plans to be implemented in the coming years. The Action Plan that the Commission designed has a number of targets, three of them are extremely interesting and important. The first one, more and better jobs, has the target of at least 78% of the adult population to be in employment. The current rate is 73%. The second, on skills and equality, has the target that at least 61% of adults take part in training every year. Figures from 2016 registered just 30%. The aim is to double the number of adults taking part in training every year by 2030. An incredibly challenge with needs for skilling and re-skilling and up-skilling, which will be essential to maintain that level of employment. And thirdly, on social participation and inclusion, lifting 15 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion, out of which 5 million are children. This compares with the 91 million Europeans who were in poverty in 2019. He stressed that extremely challenging objectives, which encompass, what the implementation of the Social Pillar is about. The Action Plan provides clear tools and policy measures. He underlined the importance of the Social Scoreboard, which is going to be renewed and revisited, including the new, very challenging standards. He recognised that it was much more difficult to agree among Member States on the Scoreboard than on the Pillar itself. All this preparation on the Action Plan came to fruition at the landmark event of the Porto Social Summit. He congratulated the Portuguese Presidency for organising it and, indeed, for the Commission's mandate, acknowledging this as one of the highlights of the Von der Leyen mandate and for Social Europe. It brought together Heads of the Governing State, 24 Heads of the Governing State attended in person, for the first time since the outbreak of the pandemic. The Partners signed off three previously mentioned 2030 headline targets and the Porto Social Commitment, calling on Member States to set ambitious national targets. The document was also signed by the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Parliament, the Portuguese Prime Minister, holding the Presidency of the Council, and the European Social Partners, and the Social Platform. The Social Platform being the largest networking society of organisations in Europe. The Porto Declaration also showed the determination to continue deepening the implementation of the Pillar and welcoming headline targets.

Turning to the Action Plan, he mentioned that the Commissioner made another recommendation on Effective Active Support to Employment. In some cases, short-time schemes covered almost 40% of the workforce. This represented an unprecedented effort to protect jobs and recognise the need to find ways to move beyond of these schemes. The Effective Active Support to Employment provides guidance and policy measures to support Member States on how to promote job creation or job-to-job transitions, which are going to be extremely useful and important in this moment. There is also a commitment of the Commission to prepare, very shortly, an initiative on Platform Workers. Again, Platform Workers were instrumental in ensuring business continuity throughout the pandemic. They are already now 11% of the EU workforce, so they are increasing. There are complex issues related to Social Protection, their participation into Social Security systems, unemployment, labour rights. On

VET skills, DG EMPL will continue its extraordinary cooperation with the ETF on actions planned on the European Skills Agenda for Europe of 2020. There is a five-year plan in progress, helping leaders of business to develop more and better skills. He also mentioned that there are also a number of issues in the pipeline, including a European approach to micro-credentials is currently being explored. This approach will enhance the quality and transparency and take-up of assured learning experience. This initiative will help others to create skills that they need to master the Green and Digital Transitions. He expected that by the end of this year, the Commission will be submitting a proposal to Council Member States on these micro-credentials of Life Long Learning and employability. DG EMPL is working with DG EAC colleagues on this issue. There is also another Commission proposal on the Digital Learning Account, an important issue, and an Impact Assessment on the preparation is being undertaken. A broad consultation will be needed with all Member States, Social Partners and all relevant Stakeholders. He concluded saying that the ETF is also working with DG EMPL on the Qualifications Framework Comparison with some pilots in Third Countries. Currently work is focussing on Morocco, with Ukraine, with the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework and others with Cedefop and ETF on this.

He looked forward to the future implementation of the Youth Employment Support Package, the Youth Guarantee, in the Western Balkans. A number of meetings and workshops are to be held in the coming weeks and months on supporting them to prepare this and, of course, the ETF is very much at the core of these preparations. There is reflection ongoing on reinforcing the Youth Guarantee to reach everybody up to 30. This group of people, between 25 and 30, face many difficulties in finding a proper job. Again, there are some issues related to European Child Guarantee, a long-term guarantee, the new Multinational Financial Framework, and also a new generation EU recovery.

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. He highlighted that in this difficult year, in ETF, there had been the other complication that, for ETF staff (and all EU Staff based in Italy, including pensioners), not being part of the National Health System in Italy, there has been the question of how to access both the track and tracing mechanisms and how to access the vaccination campaign managed by the National Health System.

He thanked Italy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is represented on the Board, for their support, in finding a solution. He informed that the solution remains ad hoc, it requires an individual approach, meaning every staff member and family member has to receive a specific individual code. Every change in appointment or every revision cannot be done by the individual concerned, but it has to be done through the ETF in cooperation with the local Health Authority. It is a fairly complicated system, prone to errors and it has become more evident that there is a wider issue of access to health services that we were aware of before, but with the pandemic, this became quite problematic for staff and especially for those with pre-existing health conditions. This has meant that many of them have not been able to vaccinate when they should have, together with the rest of the population in the country, but they have only been vaccinated many months later, leading to quite a difficult situation. He stressed that it is important that the Commission continue with the negotiations on accessing the national health system that they have been having with the Italian authorities, in order to find a solution, which is not just for ETF but is more in general for all members of the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme of the European Union Institutions, who are not affiliated to the National System.

He provided an update on the implementation of the strategy and highlighted that, as the Board had been previously informed, the ETF had implemented a new organisational structure with new Department, Unit and project plans. He pointed out what the main challenges include the integration of all different elements of the Lifelong Learning perspective. The ETF-UNESCO conference later in June 2021 will focus on this. He also referred to DG NEAR and what was mentioned earlier concerning the idea to take a more systemic look at the whole educational system and the work the ETF is doing in Lebanon, on the diagnostics, is an example of that. On supporting the Commission there are many strands of work, which, for the ETF, remains key.

On working with partners, as discussed in the past, he confirmed that the goal remains for ETF partnerships to be, maybe fewer, but deeper. Here, the first rank of partnership for the ETF is with Cedefop and Eurofound, the two EU Agencies which have more links with our work than other. He also listed other key partners, such as UNESCO, ILO, EBRD, Asian Development Bank, UNIDO. The ETF has intensified these partnerships and, during the conference week on implementing system change on 21-25 June, all are represented, and progress that has been made in these partnerships will be shared. Clearly, the case for a Green Economy has emerged as a cross-cutting priority.

He stated that ETF is making an effort to make communication much more strategic, focus now on monthly campaigns. The ETF has developed its social media interactions, during the Covid-19 pandemic and this will continue also with specific targeted initiatives. The ETF had partnerships with Politico Europe and with the BBC, which have been very successful since early 2021.

He shared details concerning the greening of the ETF, referring to a very committed team of colleagues, working throughout the organisation. The ETF has obtained the ISO Certification already and has almost finalised the EMAS Certification, a voluntary European level scheme to evaluate, report, and improve environmental performance of organisations. He noted that 2020 was unsurprisingly the best year ever in terms of emissions due to the travel restrictions, however beyond that, a review of all related processes has been put in place. An Audit Team reviewed all ETF's work in this area and the ETF is also investing some resources. He emphasised that EMAS is not a compulsory certification, however the ETF decided to do it on a voluntary basis, in order to be an example for others also on what ETF preaches. He thanked all the colleagues involved in the EMAS related work.

Mr ONESTINI (ETF) referred to the recent survey sent to GB members which aims to check if there are any particular areas of ETF's work on which members (or colleagues in their national administrations) wish to be more involved. He thanked those who had replied, and with the others who are still working on it or the new Members, the ETF follow-up will be led by Thierry FOUBERT (ETF) to ensure that members have all the information and can also assist in the identification of those in Member States who might want to be further involved with ETF activities.

Concerning evaluations, he highlighted that evaluations have been carried out on ETF work in the area of Qualification systems and on our related Networks. He summarised the results that are overall very positive and this encourages the ETF to continue this work with some very good ideas to follow up. He added that there was also the evaluation of Learning and Development within the ETF, staff training, which has also contributed to the reshaping of ETF's Human Resources Policy.

He provided an update on the recent audit visits by the Court, also discussed earlier on the agenda point concerning the Accounts 2020.

Mr ONESTINI (ETF) concluded by providing details on the upcoming international conference week on 21-25 July 2021. While it is was unfortunate not to be able to host all participants in Turin, it was foreseen that there would be 1,300 participants online, plus streaming to a wider audience, 40

international and regional organisations, 56 countries and 80 Speakers. The conference will be opened by Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director General of UNESCO, Commissioner Schmit and the Italian Minister of Education, as G20 President. Ministers from ETF Partner Countries have already confirmed. All these details are available on the ETF website and many members have also already been contacted for participation in the week's events.

Update on the Portuguese Presidency

Mr Antonio LEITE (Portugal) informed that the Portuguese Presidency is almost at its end and the most important things that had been aimed to achieve were achieved by now. The Portuguese Presidency was certainly impacted by the pandemic crisis, both in the mode, in the objectives, in the way it was organised. But its main purpose was to deliver on the European Union Social Pillar as a key element for ensuring a fair and inclusive Green and Digital Transition, the so-called two transitions. The main priorities were those connected with those five concepts (social, green, resilient, digital and global). Concerning "social", he emphasised the strengthening of Europe's Labour Market and the social dimension as a response to the crisis and for economic growth. For digital, since it is absolutely connected with the transformations that currently being faced now, there was the development of the data economy, connectivity and values for principles, humancentric and competitive digital societies. Technology and digital should be a tool in order to achieve a better world, in this case in order to achieve a better Europe. And, in terms of global, he referred to the strengthening of multilateralism and global Partnerships, highlighting that this is what the ETF is about. He also highlighted the building of a fair and Social Europe, and as the most important and the most visible purpose of the Portuguese Presidency, the future of work and decent work. It is absolutely key to talk about work, in terms of quality jobs and work that allows the workers to have a decent and inclusive life. Concerning social cohesion and social rights, in terms of fighting poverty and social exclusion and social inequalities and on the point of equality and on discrimination he referred to the forms that are almost disguised, that are not recognised in everyday life.

Concerning the Porto Social Summit which aimed to turn the principles into actions and to favour the appropriation of them by all Social Partners all over Europe he stated that that was clear in the Porto Social Commitment that tries to emphasis the Action Plan. Concerning the future of work and decent work, one of the aims was to promote opportunities and strengthen decent work and social dialogue, according to the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union.

Update on the upcoming Slovenian Presidency

Ms Slavica CERNOSA (Slovenia) passed the floor to her colleague Ms Jasmina POLICNIK (Slovenia) who thanked the Portuguese for the very good cooperation that has been established, also with the German Presidency, so we will try to keep up our part and do as much, at least as much as we really provided into the upcoming programme. The Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is striving for being together, being open and being Europe. Slovenia's main priority, during the Presidency, will be the Union's resilience to crisis, the debate on the European strategic autonomy and the recovery of the European economy, based on the Digital and Green Transition. An important part of the conference on the future of Europe, which officially started in May and its closure is scheduled for spring 2022, will take place during the Slovenian Presidency. The main aim of the conference, which will be managed in close cooperation between the three main European

institutions, is to engage in a comprehensive debate with European citizens, especially young people about what kind of Europe they want to live in, involving not only the European institutions, but also national Parliaments and other interested Stakeholders. The annual dialogue and the rule of law will be conducted in a manner that unites the Member States in a community of European values. The Slovenian Presidency will draw attention to the importance of preserving the European way of life, which is all but self-evident and it is based on respect for personal dignity, freedom and fundamental rights, as well as on compliance with the rules and enforcement of obligations. Supporting the higher representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Slovenian Presidency will contribute to the effective promotion of the European interests and values in the world. The Slovenian Presidency will pay special attention to the strengthening of transatlantic relations, both the European Neighbourhood and on globally relevant issues. Equally important a priority will be to support countries of the Western Balkans on their path towards European integration. She was convinced that education, training and research are the many vehicles for future development of European society and the European way of life, and the Slovenian Presidency believes that there is a need for a new European vision of knowledge, education and research for green and digital future. And priorities falling within the competence of the Ministry of Education can be summed up as an effort to achieve the joint vision. Accordingly, knowledge and skills, Greening and Digital Transformation have been set as overarching priority areas of the Presidency programme within education and training, together with the issue of inclusive governance, crucial for shaping the overall European Agenda for education and training, as well as research in the next decade. In the area of education and training, the Presidency will contribute to the European Agenda and the trio Presidency programme with the following thematic priorities: Synergies between Higher Education and Research, Digitalisation, Artificial Intelligence and Ethics, European Agenda on Adult Learning. So, specifically, on the area of education and training, a European education area will be advocated for with clear goals and excellent management of the set objectives at all levels. Support and focus will be given to strengthen European Partnerships and international cooperation. Efforts will be made to achieve inclusion and equity and reduce the digital gap in education processes. Synergies will be sought between Higher Education and science and, based on the experience from the Covid-19 pandemic, focus put on new knowledge and skills in a changing society and innovative learning and studying environments, digital competencies of Teachers, Educators and Professionals in educational institutions. Attention will also be put on the broader context of the development of Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence and Ethics in the educational processes, thus contributing to the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan. Special attention will be paid to the individual's attitude towards society, which is also good for the digital Workers and the learning of individuals. Focus will be put on the new European Agenda for Adult Learning and in this context there will be a continuation of the processes of the European Skills Agenda, which also concerns adults within the context of Life Long learning. The aim will be to create integrated, high-quality and inclusive adult education systems for all, including the elderly and, especially, for those most in need of access to learning, including distance learning and online learning forms. Special attention will be paid to strengthening the key competencies of adults and the appropriate development of vocational and professional education. She emphasised that the role of Apprenticeships will be highlighted, together with the appropriate training of Professionals and the provision of technological and digital support. Achieving sustainable goals will be also an important horizontal aspect in the renewal of the Adult Learning Agenda. And, regarding the Agenda, a paper was prepared and widely discussed in consultation with different Stakeholders. She firmly believed that Adult Learning is a pertinent drive for responding to current and future challenges in life and work dimensions. As such, several fields in the new Agenda will be tackled. One of the blocks to build upon is a learning culture to boost Adult Learning. Governance and Partnerships is the second one. Inclusion, encouragement and motivation of low-skilled Workers and disadvantaged groups is the third one, quality of Adult Learning and, of course, formal, non-formal and informal Adult Learning. Funding and assisting ability systems is also one of the crucial elements. Digital and Green Transition, Adult

Learning Professionals and, as the last one, European targets and indicators. The next milestone ahead is the presentation of the first version of a Resolution discussion amongst Member States and Educational Committees, set on the 2 July 2021. Concerning the two main events, related to the VET and Adult Learning, she pointed out the meeting of the Directors General for VET, planned on 4-5 October and the conference on Adult Learning, which is planned on 8-9 September.