

MINUTES

GOVERNING BOARD

MEETING

10 JUNE 2022¹

¹ Version 07 October 2022

The ETF Governing Board (GB) meeting took place at the ETF and online on 10 June 2022, 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 that point 6 on the Amending Budget 2022 which was planned as a point for information is considered for adoption based on the additional documents provided to the GB last week. The modification of the agenda was agreed and the Board unanimously adopted the agenda for the meeting.

2. Introductory remarks from the Chair

The Chair welcomed the new GB members: Ms Marilia PERICLEOUS, the new alternate member representing Cyprus; Ms Sinead MAHON, the new member representing the Ireland; and Mr Mathieu BOUSQUET, the new member representing DG NEAR.

There were a number of members of the board who have recently been appointed but were not present: Mr Nino BUIĆ, the new alternate member representing Croatia; Ms Sarah MILEY, the new alternate for Ireland; Dr Tamás Valentin STRAUB, the new alternate from Hungary; Mr Alexander FARRUGIA, the new member representing Malta; Mr Matthew VELLA, the new alternate member representing Malta; Mr Joep VAN HEUMEN, the new alternate member representing the Netherlands.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal were not represented at the meeting.

The European Commission was also represented by Ms Antoaneta ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA, Mr German BERNAL RIOS (DG EAC); Mr Javier MENENDEZ BONILLA, Ms Fanny SEREE (DG NEAR); Ms Cécile BILLAUX, Mr Alexis HOYAUX (DG INTPA); Mr Alberto FUNES BETANCOR (DG EMPL).

Ms Ummuhan BARDAK represented the ETF Staff Committee.

3. Follow-up to previous meetings

The Board unanimously adopted the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2021.

The Chair presented the follow-up to the action points since the last GB meeting and referred to the written procedure that took place in April 2022.

4. Consolidated Annual Activity Report (CAAR) 2021 and its Analysis and Assessment

Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) presented the 2021 Consolidated Annual Activity Report.

Mr Sara MATTIONI (France), the GB member representing the current Presidency of the EU, congratulated the ETF on behalf of the GB members on the quality of the detailed documents. She said that GB members

suggested that future reports could be more focussed, for example, on key impact measures with more details that provide evidence of the impact. She also noted that there was limited mention of activities involving social partners. She added that the Board would also appreciate it if more information could be provided on the following up of the new methods and the new transversal approach, the new monitoring framework, the new indicators for the key performance indicators and also the governance of the project on Africa. She concluded with a request to have more information on the added value of the recent evaluation.

Mr MATHEU welcomed the comments and suggestions. Concerning impact he stated that in terms of real change of the system is a long term effect and it is challenging to link the annual reporting to impact which should come about many years ahead. Therefore reference is made to the expected results and they are grouped in the highlights. He recognised there is room for improvement and the ETF will continue to work on this aspect.

Concerning social partners, he recognised an explicit mention of the work ETF does with social partners was missing. He underlined that the ETF project on governance and quality assurance explicitly works on coordination mechanisms of stakeholders in the countries and tries to give recommendations to the countries on how to improve those mechanisms, within which the involvement of social partners is an important element. He referred to an activity with Eurofound comparing some of the practices in ETF partner countries with practices in the European Union. In addition, ETF has developed a number of networks of experts in the policy areas that ETF works on and social partners are involved. A third point raised was that ETF has been working together with the Cedefop on a system to monitor the implementation of the Osnabrück declaration and the recommendations on VET, and in that there is plenty of references on social partnership. In this respect, the candidate countries provide information on how monitoring indicators are evolving, including of course the inclusion of social partners. Lastly during the Torino process when one of the principles is partnership, social partners are invited to provide information on the different learning systems.

Concerning ETF's approach to transversal issues such as green skills, gender, social inclusion and migration, these are areas covered in different ways across ETF projects. He gave the example of green skills, when ETF analyses the emerging sectors in some of the countries and tries to see which are the new skills, the future skills, and the sectors particularly touched by the green transition. ETF identifies how green skills are incorporated into the qualification frameworks, or how the different training systems are going to develop these new skills. The idea is to coordinate the work on a transversal topic and create synergies between the different projects. He also referred to the skills dimension of migration that includes employment policies, the transparency of the qualifications, and how the different learning systems respond to the needs of the migrants.

Regarding the question on the new monitoring framework, he explained that during the previous year ETF has conceptualised and then operationalised the three services according to the new strategy (knowledge creation and management, monitoring and assessment, and policy advice). The three services are very much interconnected because what is produced in a study for creating new knowledge is used for the policy advice to

the partner countries, Commission services or international organisations. Afterwards this can be monitored through a system. When in policy dialogue with stakeholders in the countries, what is learned from this policy dialogue can be incorporated as new areas to be created in terms of knowledge.

The new monitoring framework is a reflection of the ETF Strategy defined that ETF works more on human capital development in a lifelong learning perspective. This is not a new idea, this has been included in the ETF regulation since 2008 but in reality ETF was working much more on the formal systems of education and more on initial VET than continuous training. In terms of the development of the new policy, an example could be that of the skills agenda, where a higher emphasis is needed on upscaling and reskilling.

The new monitoring framework has two different strands. One is more on monitoring, where the ETF works in three different areas: (i) access and participation; (ii) mobility inside the learning system and participation, and flexibility between the different systems; and (iii) excellence and governance issues. The second part of the new monitoring framework refers more to policy reviews agreed between the ETF and the countries on specific interests in the policy development and also analysis across countries with similar interests.

He added that there was a presentation recently on this new monitoring framework on 25 May where a number of countries already expressed their interest on carrying out policy analysis on areas of lifelong learning. He confirmed that if there is interest among Board members, ETF would be happy to organise dedicated session on the new monitoring framework.

On ETF's work in Africa, he referred to the agreement with the Board that ETF would contribute to external relations priorities of the European Union in Africa. The ACQF project of the European Commission, managed by the GIZ, covers different areas. GIZ has established partnerships with ILO, and also with ETF. ETF has worked on the African continental qualification framework, taking into account that in Africa there is already some national and some regional qualification frameworks. ETF has been analysing how these relate amongst themselves and how they relate internationally and particularly with the European Qualification Framework. ETF has been identifying tools that can be used for the different systems to relate to one another and is also delivering a number of capacity building actions to agree on the use of the same methodologies, terminology and concept. He added that ETF is now discussing with DG INTPA about a second phase of the project, where ETF could manage some parts of the action which will then start to work more on the implementation of agreements between the different systems and to formally develop this continental qualification framework.

Mathieu BOUSQUET (Acting Director, DG NEAR) welcomed the report and proposed to consider in the future to also report on the human resources allocation per activity as this would strengthen the quality of the report.

Mr MATHEU (ETF) pointed out that Annex 5 of the report includes a distribution of the costs with both activity based budgeting and activity based costing. This is an approximation, however the planned and actual costs by policy areas and projects can be seen. He indicated that a number of assumptions are made. The projects are grouped by objective on a proportional basis. He stressed that the most significant part of ETF costs is the staff cost. The distribution is complex both according to the different objectives and projects, and in terms of results.

In the past ETF had a system which was very precise but very cumbersome for staff to report on, so in 2021 it was decided to streamline it and report by key services. He stated that the approach will be revised once the new rules on working time that the Commission has approved for the Commission Services come in to force at ETF. He informed the Board that it is expected that the new rules will be submitted to the Board for adoption before the end of the year. The new rules are likely to require a new system of recording time which should provide more accurate data.

Malin MENDES (SWEDEN) asked for more details about the new key performance indicator system. She also linked to Ms Mattioni's question on the evaluations and asked what results does the ETF actually obtain from the external evaluations.

Mr Thierry FOUBERT (ETF) welcomed the questions and stated that in 2021, the Commission Opinion on the SPD 2022-23 challenged ETF to look at clarifying how ETF projects contribute to the impact of the wider objectives of the Geopolitical Commission. The ETF has tried to do so through the new indicators, to be both factual and at the same time refer to the impact. He provided a detailed explanation of the four new indicators and highlighted that whilst names are unchanged for the sake of comparability, the descriptions have been simplified and the method of calculation is new. Targets will be established after the second year of collecting data.

Concerning the external evaluations, Mr MATHEU (ETF) informed that he would cover this in his oral presentation later in the meeting. He did stress that the development of the three services was very much influenced by evaluation findings.

Mr Sara MATTIONI (France), on behalf of the Governing Board members the Board agreed with the draft Analysis and Assessment of the ETF CAAR 2021 with the inclusion of a reference to the positive achievement that ETF had obtained the EMAS certification.

The Board adopted the 2021 ETF CAAR and its Analysis and Assessment unanimously. Both documents were sent to the relevant institutions by 15 June 2022.

5. ETF 2021 Annual Accounts

The Chair welcomed Mr Bart GOESSENS (ETF) who had prepared the ETF Accounts for the first time in his new role. Mr Bart GOESSENS (ETF) presented the 2021 Annual Accounts.

The Chair thanked Mr GOESSENS for his presentation.

Sara MATTIONI (France), on behalf of the GB members, raised questions about the staff cost rising and the need to discuss the budget envelope at EU level and also how the extra-subsidy projects will impact the ETF. Mr GOESSENS replied that these points will be addressed in the later agenda point on the Amending Budget.

Slavica CERNOSA (Slovenia) referred to the concern raised by the Board in November 2021 about the Accountant dividing his time between EU-OSHA and the ETF. Mr GOESSENS clarified that he will only commence working for EU-OSHA from 1 July 2022. He stated that other accounting officers that also work with two agencies had been consulted on their experience and all confirmed that the arrangement is feasible if good support is available from an accounting assistant, which he confirmed is the case for the ETF and for OSHA. So no issues are foreseen. He added that the period December to February is very intense and to address this work was already being done to anticipate the preparation of the financial statements etc.

The GB members unanimously adopted the 2021 ETF Annual Accounts and the Opinion of the Board. Both documents were sent to the relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2022.

6. ETF Amending Budget 1/2022

Ms Eva JIMENO SICILIA (ETF) presented the first amending budget for 2022. She highlighted that this first amending budget was also to address the increase in staff costs due to increasing inflation and the higher than foreseen salary adaptation. She added that once the total increase is confirmed later in the year no further increase in staff costs is envisaged. She stated that ETF management aims to continue to reprioritise, develop negative priorities, postpone some activities to next year, and identify ways to make savings.

The Chair underlined that the methodology for the adaptation of salaries included in the staff regulations is law and therefore cannot be circumvented.

Sara MATTIONI (France), on behalf of the GB members, added that the members were not in agreement with the sentence included in the amending budget stating that ETF is seeking the full support of the Board for obtaining an increase in the overall EU contribution. It was agreed to delete the reference. She also raised question if the lessons learnt during the COVID pandemic resulted in changes that were expected to be integrated for the future and if the ETF could provide more information on what is expected in travelling costs and the perspective regarding increasing energy costs. Ms JIMENO (ETF) confirmed that ETF may need an additional €20,000 for energy costs, whilst missions will be managed within the allocated budget. Concerning lessons learnt during the pandemic, she highlighted that the mission budget, pre-COVID, had been €630,000 and in 2022 it was reduced to €400,000 as much more is now done online. She stressed that ETF still needs to be in the countries physically in order to build relationships, develop and maintain networks and source qualitative information to do proper monitoring. Mika SAARINEN (Finland) expressed his appreciation for the overview and stressed that the situation was the same across the EU. He noted that the ETF has additional extra-subsidy activities and he requested clarification on whether additional projects put a strain on the ETF subsidy. Ms JIMENO confirmed that the ETF can manage the extra-subsidy projects without placing pressure on the ETF subsidy and that they provide an injection of funds to do more with ETF expertise. The ETF management team will assess further as there is a limit as to the amount of additional activities can be taken

on as internal expertise and administration is finite. It is clear that the different budgets have to be kept separate. Mr MATHEU added that the issue of the increase of staff costs and the extra-subsidy projects were in fact related. He remarked that the inflation tensions and the increase of costs in Title 1 and Title 2 is a particular problem this year. In the multiannual financial perspective it was already foreseen that in 2023 there would be an increase in salary costs which would put pressure on the Title 3, the operational budget for work in the countries. However, this imbalance would be restored in 2024-25. He underlined that the issue that was discussed when formulating the ETF strategy, was that regardless of the issue of the inflation, the operational budget is not increasing at the same level of the salaries. The ambition of the strategy is to continue being relevant, policy-wise, and service-oriented to the different stakeholders, and for the ETF to be closer to some of the priorities which are not covered by the subsidy. He stressed that if the ETF works in Africa, the funds cannot be taken from what the ETF does in the Balkans. Or if the ETF works more in Central Asia providing services, this has to be done with extra funds. Therefore the proposal was to see if the moderate, but steady, decrease in Title 3 could be compensated with extra-subsidy funds. In principle, this should not impact the administrative cost of the agency and the service. The ETF has also opted to increase its efficiency also by reducing processes, making them faster and more efficient, also digitally and by using different tools, and working more in partnership with other organisations so the ETF can achieve an economy of scale and reduce the impact of the indirect costs.

Javier MENENDEZ BONILLA (DG NEAR) thanked the ETF for the presentation and reassuring explanations. He asked in the case of additional extra-subsidy actions, if these are not covered by the existing ETF staff, would the ETF recruit additional staff to carry out these projects. The Chair also invited the ETF to provide a clear answer as value for money is required and the ETF budget devoted to specific actions, overheads and other costs of the ETF should be isolated from the extra-subsidy projects. Erja KAIKKONEN (ETF) referred to the DARYA project in Central Asia, which is the biggest extra-subsidy project that the ETF is set to sign later in June. She underlined the time that has been taken to carefully negotiate the contract between the EU Delegation and the ETF, as an implementing partner of the project. These negotiations touch on when ETF can receive the 7% for overheads and what can this be used for. There have been long negotiations on procurement policies and outsourcing and whether the ETF would be recruiting staff or outsourcing and the result is that the ETF will now move towards the outsourcing option for additional staff. She stressed that ETF has always had activities in Central Asia, using human resources of the ETF. Now those human resources will be fully absorbed into the DARYA project. So those human resources from the ETF that would have been working on Central Asia normally, within the ETF budget are now all integrated into the DARYA project so the time itself does not increase. Ms JIMENO added that from the staffing point of view the resources that are specifically needed for the project should be funded from the project. The ETF provides its internal expertise, which is the added value of having the ETF in those projects, which is the model ETF used in the past for the GEMM and FRAME projects. She assured that reporting will be done clearly and separately. The Chair emphasised that the Commission services would follow this very closely. Ms JIMENO suggested that, given the interest, that the ETF could organise a dedicated information session on extra-subsidy projects. The Chair confirmed that there was

agreement on how important it is that the ETF is securing new extra-subsidy projects, which brings the ETF new sources of funding.

Malin MENDES (Sweden) raised a question on the situation with internships that had been announced at the previous GB meeting. Ms JIMENO (ETF) confirmed that currently there were 10 interns at the ETF until mid-August. It has been a very positive experience on both sides and she underlined that interns are an incredible source of innovation. Given the current budget constraints, the number of interns will decrease to four interns.

The GB members unanimously adopted the ETF Amending Budget 2022/1.

7. Progress with the Programming Document 2023-25 – Work Programme 2025

Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) presented the progress on the preparation of Work Programme 2023 which will be presented for adoption at the GB meeting in November 2022.

He highlighted some of the new elements in the current draft. Even prior to the start of the aggression in Ukraine, there are an increasing number of countries in post-conflict, pre-conflict or in a fragile situation. The ETF therefore needs to adapt the way it develops methodologies and is reflecting on what the other institutions are doing and what the ETF can do, without putting ETF staff and assets at risk. There are ways of cooperating on skills and skills development with actors who are active in these kind of situations, particularly in the post-conflict contexts.

He stated that the ETF is continuing to look at how to have a more structured relationship with the Commission services and to strengthen partnerships, networks and the knowledge hub within the logic of co-creation of knowledge. During the COVID pandemic there was a learning exercise, and now there will be increased teleworking, and perhaps less missions or a different way of working with stakeholders. The ETF values have been redefined referring to excellence and service-orientation innovation and creativity, integrity and respect, accountability, and working together.

He confirmed that the thematic areas or the projects that ETF works on would not change, but rather that they may be presented differently, in order to improve from a communication point of view.

He presented the timeline for the drafting of the work programme and that the Commission services had provided comments on the first draft of January. The ETF has tried to address these comments, basically including better references to the different services of the Commission, references to the Global Gateway, the Erasmus+ programme, and synergies with DARYA. In addition there is need to make references to ASEM, where DG EAC is particularly an important partner. He referred to a new project that has started in 2022 on education diagnostic for the whole education system in Kosovo and that the ETF could extend the approach to other countries if extra-subsidy resources are allocated. Other comments included a proposal to make

reference to higher education bridging VET in order to ensure lifelong learning, the Ukraine crisis, a more explicit mention of the role of the private sector in skills development, and that the ETF received the pillar assessment exception for the receipt of extra- subsidy funds until 2023. Concerning the budget for 2023, he underlined that DG EMPL has proposed to add €467,000 to cover the increasing ETF staff costs under Title 1.

The Chair thanked Mr MATHEU for his presentation. He added that on the point on the budget for 2023, further debate in the Parliament and the Council can be foreseen on how the EU institutions will address these issues linked to high inflation. He hoped that there will be a positive impact on the agency's budget established by the Budgetary Authority in the multiannual financial framework.

8. Oral reports

See annex.

9. Any other business

The Chair provided an update on the progress with the selection of the new ETF Director. A shortlist has been drawn up. He cautiously hoped that three candidates could be put forward for the Board for their decision on the appointment at the next GB meeting in November. He invited Ms Slavica CERNOSA (SLOVENIA) to intervene as the Board's observer on the selection panel. Ms CERNOSA informed on her observer role and that a shortlist had now been drawn up of 16 candidates. The Chair thanked Ms CERNOSA for her feedback and added that with Mr MATHEU in the role as Director ad interim, the ETF was in good hands until the selection process was completed.

He also invited Board members to complete their evaluation forms of the meeting.

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will take place on 18 November 2022.

Follow up actions:

- The ETF to send the 2021 CAAR and Analysis and Assessment to the EU institutions by 15 June 2022;
- The ETF to send the 2021 Accounts and GB Opinion to relevant EU institutions by 1 July 2022;
- The ETF to organise a dedicated information session on extra-subsidy projects.

ANNEX: Oral reports

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

DG EAC

Ms Antoaneta ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA (DG EAC) updated the Board on DG EAC activities of relevance for the ETF. She started with a brief update on activities in the Western Balkan countries and highlighted the next Western Balkan ministerial meeting planned for 27-28 June 2022, including a round table on education and training, which will be a great opportunity to take stock at political level, at ministerial level, of the progress made of the achievements in implementing the Western Balkan agenda.

She thanked the ETF for the very close and important cooperation in digital education with regards to the Western Balkan countries but also for other partner countries. She highlighted the remarkable increase in the use of this SELFIE self-assessment tool for schools. After four years there are 3,300,000 users and the uptake is far beyond the EU countries. The tool is used by education leaders, teachers and students in 88 countries, in more than 27,000 schools. She referred to the very important role and contribution of the ETF for the uptake of the new modalities for teachers and on work based learning in countries outside of the EU.

She underlined the importance of entrepreneurship and also developing entrepreneurial and innovation as skills. As DG EAC is also the parent DG of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Budapest, she was very happy to see and would like to further promote cooperation between the EIT and the ETF. She referred to the EIT project on developing digital skills and entrepreneurial skills for girls from the age of 14 and 19, called Girls Go Circular, and saw potential for cooperation between the EIT and the ETF, in the context of the entrepreneurial centres of vocational excellence. Beyond the EU, Serbia and North Macedonia also participate in this action. The topics of e-waste, climate change, food, robotics that are covered are of high relevance.

She also informed the Board on the international dimension of VET which is now mainstreamed in the ERASMUS+ programme and the implementation of seven pilot projects in the VET field which link European VET organisations with their partners in the Balkan countries and sub-Saharan Africa. The project experienced some challenges during COVID, but still the implementation was particularly useful and it provided very helpful experiences to test cooperation opportunities in the VET field beyond Europe.

She stated that in 2022 there was the first call on capacity building in the field of VET. The countries that are covered are the Western Balkan countries, the neighbouring countries, sub-Saharan and Africa and Latin America. She expressed her appreciation for the good cooperation and support from the ETF. The next call will be published in October 2022 and then repeated annually.

She mentioned the European Youth Review which is really putting the spotlight on young people and highlighting their extremely important role in society. This is an initiative which was launched by the President of the European Commission, and it is of course for young people in Europe but also with a strong international dimension. Many activities are being organised throughout the year, also at regional local level. At EU wide level some activities took place in May on the occasion of Europe's Day. A closing event in the end of the year is under consideration to celebrate the achievements and also give a future perspective for the developing cooperation in the field of youth.

She gave an overview of activities in support of Ukraine. DG EAC has rapidly introduced all necessary flexibilities into the ERASMUS+ programme to respond to the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian pupils can be welcomed quickly by education and training institutions involved in ERASMUS cooperation projects with flexible use of project funding. Ukrainian teachers and trainers can receive financial support to facilitate integration. Also qualified staff may temporary go to regions where refugees are accommodated. Institutions benefitting from ongoing ERASMUS projects in areas such as inclusion, diversity, and integration of refugees, may voluntarily reallocate part of their funds in support of activities for Ukrainian refugees. DG EAC is also providing support for Ukrainian children and teachers through the European platforms including the school education Gateway and ITWIN. For example, by providing professional development courses for teachers.

DG EAC has also worked on measures to support the fast track recognition of qualifications and study periods of students and academic staff from Ukraine coming into the EU. In April the Commission published a recommendation on the recognition of academic and professional qualifications for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. And this helps national authorities with guidance and practical advice on how to ensure a quick fair and flexible recognition process. She also mentioned that on 2 June a guideline was published on fast track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications.

In addition an EU education solidarity group for Ukraine was set up, and the purpose is to support the countries which are primarily hosting Ukrainian school age children by pulling available expertise in Member States on continuing training of young Ukrainian refugees and providing guidance through existing tools and mechanisms.

She added that in June the updated version of the policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education will be presented. It is a living document and this is particularly

important in the context of the need to plan for enrolment of displaced children for the 2022-23 academic school year.

She concluded with the point that the Commission has provided the support to a joint initiative implementing the so-called New Ukrainian School Hub, which has been launched by the ETEC Alliance, in partnership with Finland and Ukraine, a joint project called “Learning Together Project” and this hub allows to bring together supplementary educational resources developed by the ETEC Alliance, but also curriculum-based support resources and Ukrainian learning tools and platforms.

The Chair thanked Ms ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA (DG EAC) and welcomed the increasing collaboration between DG EAC and the ETF. He highlighted the enormous effort that the Union and its Member States were doing to support Ukrainians throughout the continent.

DG NEAR

Mr Mathieu BOSQUET (DG NEAR) started by outlining DG NEAR’s key priorities for the cooperation with the ETF. Thematically DG NEAR was very happy to see the progress in widening in the scope of ETF work, focusing on lifelong learning and human capital development in line with the ETF strategy. He expected ETF to further expand its expertise to be able to advance and support new working in these areas. He reiterated that the Green and Digital Transitions are two key priorities for the Commission, which affects the skills needed by societies and the economies with important changes in the education and training systems of ETF partner countries. He saw an important role for ETF to support partner countries in these twin transitions and ensuring that no one is left behind.

He would like to see cooperation with ETF to focus on supporting policy dialogue with partner countries and supporting DG NEAR’s programming and assistance in the area of human capital development. He announced that a joint letter was to be sent to all DG NEAR delegations to present what ETF can offer and also set up clearer parameters to make ETF support even more useful than it is already now.

He presented recent developments and how they are affecting DG NEAR’s work. He started with the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, and the situation in the Eastern neighbourhood. The landscape in the region is now fundamentally changed and different now. He was proud to say that assistance to Ukraine had been mobilised in record time. The EU made a very bold €4.1 billion euro available through micro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid.

He added that the Commission was also repurposing its ongoing projects to deliver emergency assistance to the population and to the authorities. In addition on 18 May, the Commission adopted its communication on Ukraine relief and reconstruction with the proposal to grant Ukraine in 2022 new exceptional micro-financial assistance in the form of loans of up to €9 billion. He noted that in the long term a major global financial effort would be required to rebuild Ukraine.

He underlined that continued unity among Member States was also of strategic importance as the reconstruction of Ukraine has to be a Team Europe effort. It should also be used as an opportunity to rebuild better, including reforms and linking it to the green and digital priorities of EU. In this context, he stressed DG NEAR's appreciation for ETF's emergency package for Ukraine.

He also mentioned the EU membership applications from Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and that the Commission was in the process of finalising an opinion on the membership application, in time for the June European Council for a decision on the EU perspective for these three countries.

He stated that with EU support, Moldova opened its borders to Ukraine for refugees and referred to the Commission's emergency package and ongoing assistance for vulnerable cities facing the general crisis in addition to support to the government's ambitious reform agenda.

Following the Eastern Partnerships since last December, and before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, DG NEAR was working on putting a new Eastern Partnership framework in practice. The engagement with eastern partners has to be adjusted to the new geopolitical realities on the ground. So the future of the Eastern Partnership will require reflection.

In relation to the Western Balkans, he stated that it was expected that the Council take a decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The Commission supports the official launch of the accession negotiations as soon as possible under the French Presidency. He also referred to the economic investment plan for the Western Balkans, mobilising up to €30 billion with €9 billion to support the green and digital transitions in the region and help the Covid 19 recovery. He mentioned the youth guarantee, one of the flagships in the Western Balkans, that will provide young people with offers of employment, quality education, apprenticeship, or training, within a certain period after becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. He thanked the ETF for supporting the Western Balkans in the establishment of this youth guarantee, together with the ILO.

Concerning the Southern Neighbourhood he stated that the new agenda and economic investment plan for the region clearly indicated human capital development as a key priority, underlining how very important the work of ETF was to support this implementation. He reiterated how important the rapid education diagnosis which was carried out in Lebanon by ETF and which was being used to feed policy making and programming to support education in that country. He stressed that this work was extremely valuable and more should be done.

He added that DG NEAR was also preparing a new action with ILO where the active participation of ETF could be very relevant. The action for youth NEETS will operate as a technical assistance facility and support on a demand driven basis the institutions and stakeholders in the MENA region to develop innovative options in order to re-engage NEETS youth in education, training and the labour market. In the medium run the technical

assistance facility can be instrumental in establishing also some youth guarantee schemes inspired by those existing in the EU and being developed in the Western Balkans.

H concluded with details of the EU support to Turkey which focused on increasing employability, in line with the skills needed for the future. It also aimed at improving the content and quality of VET by developing the knowledge, skills and competences in line with the quality assurance framework and through the establishment of centres of excellence for vocational education and training. Another important area supported is the strengthening of national vocational qualification systems and enhancing the implementation of the Turkish qualification framework. He highlighted the value of ETF expertise in this area. Support is already underway to improve youth employment in the field of industry 4.0 and digitalisation and additional support is planned to develop more effective programmes targeting NEETs. He finalised his intervention referring to EU support for refugees in Turkey and that the EU was also supporting VET and apprenticeship programmes to improve the employment prospects for Syrian refugees. This came in addition to the large programmes in support of the Ministry of Education for providing education to refugee children and youth.

He summarised that there has been much change in DG NEAR countries but there was a clear focus on human capital development in all the four regions and the strong support from ETF was really appreciated.

The Chair thanked Ms BOUSQUET for his presentation. He particularly expressed his appreciation for the support that DG NEAR is providing for the implementation of the youth guarantee in the Western Balkans, providing young people with a future allowing them to stay in their region and create wealth in their own country.

DG INTPA

Ms Cécile BILLAUX (DG INTPA) started her presentation highlighting that DG INTPA had been working with ETF more recently on different projects and how important it was to further cooperate with ETF because VET has really become a very important priority for DG INTPA partner countries and she really wanted to take benefits of the expertise that the ETF add to that. She stressed that VET, is not standalone priority but really something that was embedded into DG INTPA's agenda of investment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where DG INTPA wants to promote investment leading to jobs and growth. And that the connection with the private sector, with the labour market, and the demand that was there to ensure the skills are brought to the job market and then these countries can be more attractive for investment, which is not always the case in many of the countries.

She underlined that the ambition is considerable and the challenges were also very great in many of these countries. There was definitely a strong willingness at political level to scale up. There was the EU African Union summit in February 2022 and clearly one of the flagships that was agreed upon to work together with

African partners, was in VET and to really work together more on VET, also in a Team Europe approach. This Team Europe initiative was being developed.

She underlined that in this Team Europe initiative there are five new member states (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany and Sweden) discussing on the concept on how to design this Team Europe initiative and later in June there will be further meetings to shape the context and see what action will be implemented from next year.

She stressed the importance of embedding VET components in all the flagships in relation to jobs and growth. Many of these actions were on green jobs, and there was really room to embed VET in the different Team Europe initiatives.

She highlighted that of Invest in Young Business in Africa, which is a Team Europe initiative on supporting partner countries' young entrepreneurs to develop their business and to grow their business into businesses that employ people and that are competitive on the market. Support was lacking, not only in monetary terms, , but also on the skills and the training and the entrepreneurship skills to accompany young people to develop their business. There was also a very strong focus on gender, and women and VET components are needed to support that too.

She also referred to an action in sub-Saharan Africa, which was a political priority, also in the covid context, to support the local manufacturing capacity of pharmaceutical products, as around 98% of pharmaceutical products are currently imported from elsewhere. This Team Europe initiative that we was being developed together with the expertise of many Members States because skills to develop this industry are missing.

She stressed that demand in the partner countries for VET was growing. Most DG INTPA EU delegations had put TVET on their agenda and that will be need to be supported.

She referred again to the ongoing project involving ETF, concerning the African continental qualification framework, which was being carried out with the EU African Union, and that the project was progressing well. A learning management system had been established, the ACQF LMS with training courses, and online learning management modules. Different capacity building support had been provided at country level and also at regional level, with the various regional organisations in Africa. There was a webpage and policy document guidelines and there will be a first general assembly of the ACQF later in June and then in October. She stated that there was a need to get social partners more involved and that the ETF was also keen on this.

Ms BILLAUX mentioned the DARYA project that would start soon and contribute €2 million per year to the ETF budget for a total of €10 million overall. The project was with the five central Asian countries, building on the work of the Central Asia Education Platform, now in the post-covid recovery context, and focused on young people. She was happy to start the work with ETF on this project.

She concluded by referring to the training done online in the past year by the ETF for the EU delegations in sub-Saharan Africa. She stated that the intention was to continue with the training as the expertise in the EU delegations is too limited. This time it should be in person, in order to be more efficient in terms of passing the

messages, having a tailored approach to the support the Delegations need. The discussions were currently ongoing with ETF.

The Chair thanked Ms BILLAUX for her intervention and underlined how it demonstrated the importance of Vocational Educational Training, an essential element to bring about change and progress in partner countries. He referred to the recent discussions with Kenya, where there was a strong interest in the ETF's work on skills mismatch and data analysis. He underlined that this was another example of the great potential there was for the ETF to bring about change.

DG EMPL

The Chair provided an update on DG EMPL's activities of relevance to the ETF. He first mentioned to the Commission's adoption of a proposal and the Council's recommendation on the European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning, on which an agreement was expected in the coming days, under the French Presidency. The ETF was already participating actively in the kick off webinar.

He then referred to the initiative on the centre of vocational excellence bringing together hundreds of organisations. He expressed satisfaction that that DG EMPL was funding the ETF support of the initiative and discussions were ongoing for a successive service level agreement to develop the initiative on centres of vocational excellence further.

He also stated that countries participating in the EU VET cooperation were currently submitting national plans to implement the priorities on the council recommendations on VET and on the 2020 Osnabruck declaration. Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia have decided to follow and integrate the approach both on VET recommendations and the Osnabruck declaration. He thanked the ETF for their work in this respect.

The Chair concluded with an appreciation of the work that the ETF has been doing with the emergency package providing timely support to Ukraine. He highlighted the work that the ETF has been doing in the comparison between the European Qualifications Framework and the Ukrainian National Qualification Framework to ensure that employers and education and training providers in the EU can understand the Ukrainian qualification and make use of them. He thanked the ETF for having developed a resource hub and having translated the EU skill profile for refugees into Ukrainian, and the e-profile for Europass also allows Ukrainians to make their profile and create their CV in Europass.

Trends and developments at the ETF

.Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) thanked the Commission colleagues who had also referred to many topics that he had also planned to cover in his presentation. In relation to Ukraine, which has had a large impact on the ETF work programme, he mentioned the two documents tabled which provide the details of what the ETF had done in this respect. He highlighted that the ETF had agreed with the Ukraine authorities and with the DG EMPL, on

two main actions. Firstly the service in the ETF website in Ukrainian and in English where information is provided to both Ukrainians who are fleeing to European Union, and to European Union services who are receiving Ukrainians. The information is about the education system, and how it can be better understood, the qualifications and the skill needs that people bring when they are moving from one place to another. He thanked Member States for the information that had been received. He asked Board member to liaise with colleagues in order get more information particularly on VET and on upskilling, reskilling resources in the Member States for Ukrainian job seekers. He mentioned that there is an advanced draft study on comprehension of the qualification systems which was in the process of being validated by the Ukrainian stakeholders, and it was expected to be available soon.

In addition, the ETF has translated the Europass and ESCO. Also a version in Ukraine had been done of the EU Skills Profile for non-EU nationals. All these were tools that can help people to better ensure success in this process of settling as refugees in the European Union.

He stated that the other work that was important was that now being planned for the reconstruction phase, when the situation will allow. He referred to the paper shared with proposals. The ETF has been working with the financial institutions and the idea is to turn the dramatic situation into an opportunity to rebuild a new learning system in the 21st century perspective, considering the skills of the future, rather than just a reconstruction of the system that was already obsolete in the past.

He also mentioned that the ETF continues its work on Big Data analysis looking at three countries, including Ukraine. He shared the link to the dashboard where the different live data is presented showing exactly which are the skills that are required, which are the jobs, etc.

He announced that the ETF will be donating some equipment, that would have been donated to Italian NGOs in the past, to support refugees in Poland.

He mentioned that at the ETF, colleagues have been directly supporting different Ukraine institutions and initiatives. There are a number of people working in ETF who are Ukrainians, or who are married with Ukrainians, and therefore the ETF is trying to support them in this difficult situation. He also mentioned that an impact that was presented also by Ms Jimeno, on the energy costs, which the ETF was trying to address.

He provided information on the ETF's key performance indicators after the end of Q1, highlighting the good level of commitment rate, almost 80% by the end of March, and payments on time are above the target of 90%.

Concerning ETF activities he confirmed that the objectives were the same set in the strategy and that the ETF has been setting up the different services. Knowledge creation, and the monitoring and assessments were services that have been influenced by evaluations that have been done with external evaluators. The ETF has been developing the knowledge journey from all the processes from job creation to cooperation of knowledge, sharing of knowledge, and use of knowledge, for example, in policy advice. The ETF has also been developing

how to better provide policy advice to the EU Services but also directly to the partner countries and international organisations.

He underlined that partnerships were very important part of our strategy and represented a fundamental way of being more efficient in the way that the ETF works, rather than seeing them as competitors, but as partners, and the ETF was working with international organisations and with Member States organisations.

He gave one example of the Union for Mediterranean meeting in Marrakesh, where ETF received a very good feedback from both the countries participating in the Union and from the Commission Services and the work that the ETF had been doing in monitoring the Cascais declaration. The ETF continues now with the new Marrakesh declaration on employment. And on that occasion the ETF also signed an agreement to work together with the UfM secretariat. He announced that on the occasion of Marrakesh meeting, it was agreed that ETF will participate in the regional Team Europe initiative in the Mediterranean which will cover youth and to some extent VET.

He stressed the importance of working in networks. The ETF really believes, that the way it can contribute to create knowledge is by co-creating that with those who are already working in the field in the countries. There are many good experts working in the countries, but of course in the different Member State organisations and international organisations, and the ETF tries to develop networks where people on one side share information, share knowledge, learn from one to another, but also produce work together that afterwards can contribute to policy advice, or to monitoring and assessment.

He stated that the ETF was trying to be more systematic in the cooperation with the Commission Services, with regular meetings throughout the year, with the different services, at different levels, in order to secure that the information flows, and keep the flexibility compatible with better planning.

He referred to the very important different way of how ETF has started to work on communication, working with monthly campaigns, linked to political priorities, internationally or with priorities in our work programme. And around those topic areas the ETF develops a number of activities. It is a way of also channelling all the communication needs that the different projects have around a topic, which very often is transversal topic. He provided some data on communication activities.

He mentioned the action plans with Cedefop and Eurofound and highlighted that a common session is planned in the European parliament, involving all the three agencies together. The ETF continues working on the different working groups in the EU agencies that go from greening, to governance issues, to some cooperation on scientific methodologies and so on.

He referred to three recent evaluations, and the added value. The evaluations will be published. The one on knowledge management products was the one that inspired the ETF knowledge manifesto, which is the way we present this cooperation of new knowledge. Another evaluation reviewed not only the Torino process but also all the other activities done in monitoring implementation of thematic projects and other products in terms of policy review. This evaluation inspired the new approach on monitoring and assessment function which is the

way ETF will be working in the new Torino process that will be starting this year. He announced that in 2022 there will be an evaluation which will look at the way ETF works on skills demand analysis and other activities which refer to innovation and anticipation of needs.

Mr MATHEU mentioned that the audit by the Internal Audit Service on the relationship between the agency and the Commission Services in terms of complementarity and coordination. The advanced draft report is expected during the summer.

He referred to the new Commission decision on working time and hybrid working for which different agencies are trying to get some changes and with the Commission it remained to be seen what is the room any reformulation. He announced that before the end of the year the ETF in any case we will make a proposal to the Board on the final guidelines for the ETF.

He concluded with a point on the ETF premises and that in 2027 the agreement for the ETF building will expire. The ETF is therefore exploring the different alternatives for the building for after July 2027. The lengthy processes is to be commenced with a feasibility study which will provide an estimation of the costs of different options. Remaining at Villa Gualino would require some repair and maintenance works. Another option is to enter into a process together with the ITC-ILO and other organisations in Turin working on skills development which could be the basis of really creating a partnership. The third option would be to see to rent a building commercially. He emphasised that there was still time and this information point was to inform Board members that the process is starting and that ETF was in dialogue with different stakeholders involved in this final decision.

Update on the French Presidency

Ms Sara MATTIONI (France) recalled that The motto of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU was structured around three keywords “Power, Recovery, Partnership”. The Employment – Social Affairs component of the EPSCO Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) contained several legislative initiatives currently under negotiation, including the proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU and the proposal for a directive on women on boards.

She stated that work will soon start on the proposal for a directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. The proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work was currently being negotiated in order to establish the Council’s position. Proceedings will continue under the Czech Presidency.

Two Council recommendations were also negotiated on the basis of the Commission’s proposals for texts: on individual learning accounts and on the socially just climate transition. Both recommendations will be adopted by the EPSCO Council on 16 June.

The informal Council of 15 February was devoted to the impact of the twin green and digital transitions on the labour market and how the European Union can accompany these major transitions to foster a new European model of economic growth.

She added that following the formal Council meeting in Brussels on 14 March, the next Council meeting will be held in Luxembourg on 16 June. The French Presidency was also fully involved in organising several ministerial conferences, particularly on the new generation Erasmus on 20 January and on integration measures in the face of the challenges of the recovery on 2 March.

Update on the upcoming Czech Presidency

Ms Marta STARÁ (Czech Republic) highlighted that in education the Czech Presidency intended to continue the next steps to realisation of the European Education area. The work of the Education Committee will be focused on the Council recommendation on pathways to school success, and the Council conclusion on wellbeing in digital education. The aim of the Council conclusion on supporting wellbeing in digital education is to introduce a new angle to the topic of digital education, take stock of the experiences of the past two years, and address new gaps and inequalities. It will draw attention to challenges risks and opportunities in online education ecosystems, and focus on the topics of wellbeing in digital education, safer digital environment, media literacy, critical thinking and mental health. Recommendation on pathways to ensure success should address topics such as improvement of education outcomes and agreement of basic skills, by all people up to secondary school, secondary level of education, early school leavers, mental health and wellbeing of pupils, children with fewer opportunities. The Czech presidency found these issues fundamental for fair chance, future progress and success in education for all children.

ANNEX: Oral reports

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

DG EAC

Ms Antoaneta ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA (DG EAC) updated the Board on DG EAC activities of relevance for the ETF. She started with a brief update on activities in the Western Balkan countries and highlighted the next Western Balkan ministerial meeting planned for 27-28 June 2022, including a round table on education and training, which will be a great opportunity to take stock at political level, at ministerial level, of the progress made of the achievements in implementing the Western Balkan agenda.

She thanked the ETF for the very close and important cooperation in digital education with regards to the Western Balkan countries but also for other partner countries. She highlighted the remarkable increase in the use of this SELFIE self-assessment tool for schools. After four years there are 3,300,000 users and the uptake is far beyond the EU countries. The tool is used by education leaders, teachers and students in 88 countries, in more than 27,000 schools. She referred to the very important role and contribution of the ETF for the uptake of the new modalities for teachers and on work based learning in countries outside of the EU.

She underlined the importance of entrepreneurship and also developing entrepreneurial and innovation as skills. As DG EAC is also the parent DG of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Budapest, she was very happy to see and would like to further promote cooperation between the EIT and the ETF. She referred to the EIT project on developing digital skills and entrepreneurial skills for girls from the age of 14 and 19, called Girls Go Circular, and saw potential for cooperation between the EIT and the ETF, in the context of the entrepreneurial centres of vocational excellence. Beyond the EU, Serbia and North Macedonia also participate in this action. The topics of e-waste, climate change, food, robotics that are covered are of high relevance.

She also informed the Board on the international dimension of VET which is now mainstreamed in the ERASMUS+ programme and the implementation of seven pilot projects in the VET field which link European VET organisations with their partners in the Balkan countries and sub-Saharan Africa. The project experienced some challenges during COVID, but still the implementation was particularly useful and it provided very helpful experiences to test cooperation opportunities in the VET field beyond Europe.

She stated that in 2022 there was the first call on capacity building in the field of VET. The countries that are covered are the Western Balkan countries, the neighbouring countries, sub-Saharan and Africa and Latin America. She expressed her appreciation for the good cooperation and support from the ETF. The next call will be published in October 2022 and then repeated annually.

She mentioned the European Youth Review which is really putting the spotlight on young people and highlighting their extremely important role in society. This is an initiative which was launched by the President of the European Commission, and it is of course for young people in Europe but also with a strong international dimension. Many activities are being organised throughout the year, also at regional local level. At EU wide level some activities took place in May on the occasion of Europe's Day. A closing event in the end of the year is under consideration to celebrate the achievements and also give a future perspective for the developing cooperation in the field of youth.

She gave an overview of activities in support of Ukraine. DG EAC has rapidly introduced all necessary flexibilities into the ERASMUS+ programme to respond to the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Ukrainian pupils can be welcomed quickly by education and training institutions involved in ERASMUS cooperation projects with flexible use of project funding. Ukrainian teachers and trainers can receive financial support to facilitate integration. Also qualified staff may temporary go to regions where refugees are accommodated. Institutions benefitting from ongoing ERASMUS projects in areas such as inclusion, diversity, and integration of refugees, may voluntarily reallocate part of their funds in support of activities for Ukrainian refugees. DG EAC is also providing support for Ukrainian children and teachers through the European platforms including the school education Gateway and ITWIN. For example, by providing professional development courses for teachers.

DG EAC has also worked on measures to support the fast track recognition of qualifications and study periods of students and academic staff from Ukraine coming into the EU. In April the Commission published a recommendation on the recognition of academic and professional qualifications for people fleeing the war in Ukraine. And this helps national authorities with guidance and practical advice on how to ensure a quick fair and flexible recognition process. She also mentioned that on 2 June a guideline was published on fast track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications.

In addition an EU education solidarity group for Ukraine was set up, and the purpose is to support the countries which are primarily hosting Ukrainian school age children by pulling available expertise in Member States on continuing training of young Ukrainian refugees and providing guidance through existing tools and mechanisms.

She added that in June the updated version of the policy guidance on supporting the inclusion of Ukrainian refugees in education will be presented. It is a living document and this is particularly

important in the context of the need to plan for enrolment of displaced children for the 2022-23 academic school year.

She concluded with the point that the Commission has provided the support to a joint initiative implementing the so-called New Ukrainian School Hub, which has been launched by the ETEC Alliance, in partnership with Finland and Ukraine, a joint project called “Learning Together Project” and this hub allows to bring together supplementary educational resources developed by the ETEC Alliance, but also curriculum-based support resources and Ukrainian learning tools and platforms.

The Chair thanked Ms ANGELOVA-KRASTEVA (DG EAC) and welcomed the increasing collaboration between DG EAC and the ETF. He highlighted the enormous effort that the Union and its Member States were doing to support Ukrainians throughout the continent.

DG NEAR

Mr Mathieu BOSQUET (DG NEAR) started by outlining DG NEAR’s key priorities for the cooperation with the ETF. Thematically DG NEAR was very happy to see the progress in widening in the scope of ETF work, focusing on lifelong learning and human capital development in line with the ETF strategy. He expected ETF to further expand its expertise to be able to advance and support new working in these areas. He reiterated that the Green and Digital Transitions are two key priorities for the Commission, which affects the skills needed by societies and the economies with important changes in the education and training systems of ETF partner countries. He saw an important role for ETF to support partner countries in these twin transitions and ensuring that no one is left behind.

He would like to see cooperation with ETF to focus on supporting policy dialogue with partner countries and supporting DG NEAR’s programming and assistance in the area of human capital development. He announced that a joint letter was to be sent to all DG NEAR delegations to present what ETF can offer and also set up clearer parameters to make ETF support even more useful than it is already now.

He presented recent developments and how they are affecting DG NEAR’s work. He started with the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, and the situation in the Eastern neighbourhood. The landscape in the region is now fundamentally changed and different now. He was proud to say that assistance to Ukraine had been mobilised in record time. The EU made a very bold €4.1 billion euro available through micro-financial assistance, budget support, emergency assistance, crisis response and humanitarian aid.

He added that the Commission was also repurposing its ongoing projects to deliver emergency assistance to the population and to the authorities. In addition on 18 May, the Commission adopted its communication on Ukraine relief and reconstruction with the proposal to grant Ukraine in 2022 new exceptional micro-financial assistance in the form of loans of up to €9 billion. He noted that in the long term a major global financial effort would be required to rebuild Ukraine.

He underlined that continued unity among Member States was also of strategic importance as the reconstruction of Ukraine has to be a Team Europe effort. It should also be used as an opportunity to rebuild better, including reforms and linking it to the green and digital priorities of EU. In this context, he stressed DG NEAR's appreciation for ETF's emergency package for Ukraine.

He also mentioned the EU membership applications from Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and that the Commission was in the process of finalising an opinion on the membership application, in time for the June European Council for a decision on the EU perspective for these three countries.

He stated that with EU support, Moldova opened its borders to Ukraine for refugees and referred to the Commission's emergency package and ongoing assistance for vulnerable cities facing the general crisis in addition to support to the government's ambitious reform agenda.

Following the Eastern Partnerships since last December, and before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, DG NEAR was working on putting a new Eastern Partnership framework in practice. The engagement with eastern partners has to be adjusted to the new geopolitical realities on the ground. So the future of the Eastern Partnership will require reflection.

In relation to the Western Balkans, he stated that it was expected that the Council take a decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The Commission supports the official launch of the accession negotiations as soon as possible under the French Presidency. He also referred to the economic investment plan for the Western Balkans, mobilising up to €30 billion with €9 billion to support the green and digital transitions in the region and help the Covid 19 recovery. He mentioned the youth guarantee, one of the flagships in the Western Balkans, that will provide young people with offers of employment, quality education, apprenticeship, or training, within a certain period after becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. He thanked the ETF for supporting the Western Balkans in the establishment of this youth guarantee, together with the ILO.

Concerning the Southern Neighbourhood he stated that the new agenda and economic investment plan for the region clearly indicated human capital development as a key priority, underlining how very important the work of ETF was to support this implementation. He reiterated how important the rapid education diagnosis which was carried out in Lebanon by ETF and which was being used to feed policy making and programming to support education in that country. He stressed that this work was extremely valuable and more should be done.

He added that DG NEAR was also preparing a new action with ILO where the active participation of ETF could be very relevant. The action for youth NEETS will operate as a technical assistance facility and support on a demand driven basis the institutions and stakeholders in the MENA region to develop innovative options in order to re-engage NEETS youth in education, training and the labour market. In the medium run the technical

assistance facility can be instrumental in establishing also some youth guarantee schemes inspired by those existing in the EU and being developed in the Western Balkans.

H concluded with details of the EU support to Turkey which focused on increasing employability, in line with the skills needed for the future. It also aimed at improving the content and quality of VET by developing the knowledge, skills and competences in line with the quality assurance framework and through the establishment of centres of excellence for vocational education and training. Another important area supported is the strengthening of national vocational qualification systems and enhancing the implementation of the Turkish qualification framework. He highlighted the value of ETF expertise in this area. Support is already underway to improve youth employment in the field of industry 4.0 and digitalisation and additional support is planned to develop more effective programmes targeting NEETs. He finalised his intervention referring to EU support for refugees in Turkey and that the EU was also supporting VET and apprenticeship programmes to improve the employment prospects for Syrian refugees. This came in addition to the large programmes in support of the Ministry of Education for providing education to refugee children and youth.

He summarised that there has been much change in DG NEAR countries but there was a clear focus on human capital development in all the four regions and the strong support from ETF was really appreciated.

The Chair thanked Ms BOUSQUET for his presentation. He particularly expressed his appreciation for the support that DG NEAR is providing for the implementation of the youth guarantee in the Western Balkans, providing young people with a future allowing them to stay in their region and create wealth in their own country.

DG INTPA

Ms Cécile BILLAUX (DG INTPA) started her presentation highlighting that DG INTPA had been working with ETF more recently on different projects and how important it was to further cooperate with ETF because VET has really become a very important priority for DG INTPA partner countries and she really wanted to take benefits of the expertise that the ETF add to that. She stressed that VET, is not standalone priority but really something that was embedded into DG INTPA's agenda of investment, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where DG INTPA wants to promote investment leading to jobs and growth. And that the connection with the private sector, with the labour market, and the demand that was there to ensure the skills are brought to the job market and then these countries can be more attractive for investment, which is not always the case in many of the countries.

She underlined that the ambition is considerable and the challenges were also very great in many of these countries. There was definitely a strong willingness at political level to scale up. There was the EU African Union summit in February 2022 and clearly one of the flagships that was agreed upon to work together with

African partners, was in VET and to really work together more on VET, also in a Team Europe approach. This Team Europe initiative was being developed.

She underlined that in this Team Europe initiative there are five new member states (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany and Sweden) discussing on the concept on how to design this Team Europe initiative and later in June there will be further meetings to shape the context and see what action will be implemented from next year.

She stressed the importance of embedding VET components in all the flagships in relation to jobs and growth. Many of these actions were on green jobs, and there was really room to embed VET in the different Team Europe initiatives.

She highlighted that of Invest in Young Business in Africa, which is a Team Europe initiative on supporting partner countries' young entrepreneurs to develop their business and to grow their business into businesses that employ people and that are competitive on the market. Support was lacking, not only in monetary terms, , but also on the skills and the training and the entrepreneurship skills to accompany young people to develop their business. There was also a very strong focus on gender, and women and VET components are needed to support that too.

She also referred to an action in sub-Saharan Africa, which was a political priority, also in the covid context, to support the local manufacturing capacity of pharmaceutical products, as around 98% of pharmaceutical products are currently imported from elsewhere. This Team Europe initiative that we was being developed together with the expertise of many Members States because skills to develop this industry are missing.

She stressed that demand in the partner countries for VET was growing. Most DG INTPA EU delegations had put TVET on their agenda and that will be need to be supported.

She referred again to the ongoing project involving ETF, concerning the African continental qualification framework, which was being carried out with the EU African Union, and that the project was progressing well. A learning management system had been established, the ACQF LMS with training courses, and online learning management modules. Different capacity building support had been provided at country level and also at regional level, with the various regional organisations in Africa. There was a webpage and policy document guidelines and there will be a first general assembly of the ACQF later in June and then in October. She stated that there was a need to get social partners more involved and that the ETF was also keen on this.

Ms BILLAUX mentioned the DARYA project that would start soon and contribute €2 million per year to the ETF budget for a total of €10 million overall. The project was with the five central Asian countries, building on the work of the Central Asia Education Platform, now in the post-covid recovery context, and focused on young people. She was happy to start the work with ETF on this project.

She concluded by referring to the training done online in the past year by the ETF for the EU delegations in sub-Saharan Africa. She stated that the intention was to continue with the training as the expertise in the EU delegations is too limited. This time it should be in person, in order to be more efficient in terms of passing the

messages, having a tailored approach to the support the Delegations need. The discussions were currently ongoing with ETF.

The Chair thanked Ms BILLAUX for her intervention and underlined how it demonstrated the importance of Vocational Educational Training, an essential element to bring about change and progress in partner countries. He referred to the recent discussions with Kenya, where there was a strong interest in the ETF's work on skills mismatch and data analysis. He underlined that this was another example of the great potential there was for the ETF to bring about change.

DG EMPL

The Chair provided an update on DG EMPL's activities of relevance to the ETF. He first mentioned to the Commission's adoption of a proposal and the Council's recommendation on the European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning, on which an agreement was expected in the coming days, under the French Presidency. The ETF was already participating actively in the kick off webinar.

He then referred to the initiative on the centre of vocational excellence bringing together hundreds of organisations. He expressed satisfaction that that DG EMPL was funding the ETF support of the initiative and discussions were ongoing for a successive service level agreement to develop the initiative on centres of vocational excellence further.

He also stated that countries participating in the EU VET cooperation were currently submitting national plans to implement the priorities on the council recommendations on VET and on the 2020 Osnabruck declaration. Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia have decided to follow and integrate the approach both on VET recommendations and the Osnabruck declaration. He thanked the ETF for their work in this respect.

The Chair concluded with an appreciation of the work that the ETF has been doing with the emergency package providing timely support to Ukraine. He highlighted the work that the ETF has been doing in the comparison between the European Qualifications Framework and the Ukrainian National Qualification Framework to ensure that employers and education and training providers in the EU can understand the Ukrainian qualification and make use of them. He thanked the ETF for having developed a resource hub and having translated the EU skill profile for refugees into Ukrainian, and the e-profile for Europass also allows Ukrainians to make their profile and create their CV in Europass.

ii) Trends and developments at the ETF

.Mr Xavier MATHEU (ETF) thanked the Commission colleagues who had also referred to many topics that he had also planned to cover in his presentation. In relation to Ukraine, which has had a large impact on the ETF work programme, he mentioned the two documents tabled which provide the details of what the ETF had done in this respect. He highlighted that the ETF had agreed with the Ukraine authorities and with the DG EMPL, on

two main actions. Firstly the service in the ETF website in Ukrainian and in English where information is provided to both Ukrainians who are fleeing to European Union, and to European Union services who are receiving Ukrainians. The information is about the education system, and how it can be better understood, the qualifications and the skill needs that people bring when they are moving from one place to another. He thanked Member States for the information that had been received. He asked Board member to liaise with colleagues in order get more information particularly on VET and on upskilling, reskilling resources in the Member States for Ukrainian job seekers. He mentioned that there is an advanced draft study on comprehension of the qualification systems which was in the process of being validated by the Ukrainian stakeholders, and it was expected to be available soon.

In addition, the ETF has translated the Europass and ESCO. Also a version in Ukraine had been done of the EU Skills Profile for non-EU nationals. All these were tools that can help people to better ensure success in this process of settling as refugees in the European Union.

He stated that the other work that was important was that now being planned for the reconstruction phase, when the situation will allow. He referred to the paper shared with proposals. The ETF has been working with the financial institutions and the idea is to turn the dramatic situation into an opportunity to rebuild a new learning system in the 21st century perspective, considering the skills of the future, rather than just a reconstruction of the system that was already obsolete in the past.

He also mentioned that the ETF continues its work on Big Data analysis looking at three countries, including Ukraine. He shared the link to the dashboard where the different live data is presented showing exactly which are the skills that are required, which are the jobs, etc.

He announced that the ETF will be donating some equipment, that would have been donated to Italian NGOs in the past, to support refugees in Poland.

He mentioned that at the ETF, colleagues have been directly supporting different Ukraine institutions and initiatives. There are a number of people working in ETF who are Ukrainians, or who are married with Ukrainians, and therefore the ETF is trying to support them in this difficult situation. He also mentioned that an impact that was presented also by Ms Jimeno, on the energy costs, which the ETF was trying to address.

He provided information on the ETF's key performance indicators after the end of Q1, highlighting the good level of commitment rate, almost 80% by the end of March, and payments on time are above the target of 90%.

Concerning ETF activities he confirmed that the objectives were the same set in the strategy and that the ETF has been setting up the different services. Knowledge creation, and the monitoring and assessments were services that have been influenced by evaluations that have been done with external evaluators. The ETF has been developing the knowledge journey from all the processes from job creation to cooperation of knowledge, sharing of knowledge, and use of knowledge, for example, in policy advice. The ETF has also been developing

how to better provide policy advice to the EU Services but also directly to the partner countries and international organisations.

He underlined that partnerships were very important part of our strategy and represented a fundamental way of being more efficient in the way that the ETF works, rather than seeing them as competitors, but as partners, and the ETF was working with international organisations and with Member States organisations.

He gave one example of the Union for Mediterranean meeting in Marrakesh, where ETF received a very good feedback from both the countries participating in the Union and from the Commission Services and the work that the ETF had been doing in monitoring the Cascais declaration. The ETF continues now with the new Marrakesh declaration on employment. And on that occasion the ETF also signed an agreement to work together with the UfM secretariat. He announced that on the occasion of Marrakesh meeting, it was agreed that ETF will participate in the regional Team Europe initiative in the Mediterranean which will cover youth and to some extent VET.

He stressed the importance of working in networks. The ETF really believes, that the way it can contribute to create knowledge is by co-creating that with those who are already working in the field in the countries. There are many good experts working in the countries, but of course in the different Member State organisations and international organisations, and the ETF tries to develop networks where people on one side share information, share knowledge, learn from one to another, but also produce work together that afterwards can contribute to policy advice, or to monitoring and assessment.

He stated that the ETF was trying to be more systematic in the cooperation with the Commission Services, with regular meetings throughout the year, with the different services, at different levels, in order to secure that the information flows, and keep the flexibility compatible with better planning.

He referred to the very important different way of how ETF has started to work on communication, working with monthly campaigns, linked to political priorities, internationally or with priorities in our work programme. And around those topic areas the ETF develops a number of activities. It is a way of also channelling all the communication needs that the different projects have around a topic, which very often is transversal topic. He provided some data on communication activities.

He mentioned the action plans with Cedefop and Eurofound and highlighted that a common session is planned in the European parliament, involving all the three agencies together. The ETF continues working on the different working groups in the EU agencies that go from greening, to governance issues, to some cooperation on scientific methodologies and so on.

He referred to three recent evaluations, and the added value. The evaluations will be published. The one on knowledge management products was the one that inspired the ETF knowledge manifesto, which is the way we present this cooperation of new knowledge. Another evaluation reviewed not only the Torino process but also all the other activities done in monitoring implementation of thematic projects and other products in terms of policy review. This evaluation inspired the new approach on monitoring and assessment function which is the

way ETF will be working in the new Torino process that will be starting this year. He announced that in 2022 there will be an evaluation which will look at the way ETF works on skills demand analysis and other activities which refer to innovation and anticipation of needs.

Mr MATHEU mentioned that the audit by the Internal Audit Service on the relationship between the agency and the Commission Services in terms of complementarity and coordination. The advanced draft report is expected during the summer.

He referred to the new Commission decision on working time and hybrid working for which different agencies are trying to get some changes and with the Commission it remained to be seen what is the room any reformulation. He announced that before the end of the year the ETF in any case we will make a proposal to the Board on the final guidelines for the ETF.

He concluded with a point on the ETF premises and that in 2027 the agreement for the ETF building will expire. The ETF is therefore exploring the different alternatives for the building for after July 2027. The lengthy processes is to be commenced with a feasibility study which will provide an estimation of the costs of different options. Remaining at Villa Gualino would require some repair and maintenance works. Another option is to enter into a process together with the ITC-ILO and other organisations in Turin working on skills development which could be the basis of really creating a partnership. The third option would be to see to rent a building commercially. He emphasised that there was still time and this information point was to inform Board members that the process is starting and that ETF was in dialogue with different stakeholders involved in this final decision.

iii) Update on the French Presidency

Ms Sara MATTIONI (France) recalled that The motto of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU was structured around three keywords “Power, Recovery, Partnership”. The Employment – Social Affairs component of the EPSCO Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs) contained several legislative initiatives currently under negotiation, including the proposal for a directive on adequate minimum wages in the EU and the proposal for a directive on women on boards.

She stated that work will soon start on the proposal for a directive to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. The proposal for a Directive on improving working conditions in platform work was currently being negotiated in order to establish the Council’s position. Proceedings will continue under the Czech Presidency.

Two Council recommendations were also negotiated on the basis of the Commission’s proposals for texts: on individual learning accounts and on the socially just climate transition. Both recommendations will be adopted by the EPSCO Council on 16 June.

The informal Council of 15 February was devoted to the impact of the twin green and digital transitions on the labour market and how the European Union can accompany these major transitions to foster a new European model of economic growth.

She added that following the formal Council meeting in Brussels on 14 March, the next Council meeting will be held in Luxembourg on 16 June. The French Presidency was also fully involved in organising several ministerial conferences, particularly on the new generation Erasmus on 20 January and on integration measures in the face of the challenges of the recovery on 2 March.

iv) Update on the upcoming Czech Presidency

Ms Marta STARÁ (Czech Republic) highlighted that in education the Czech Presidency intended to continue the next steps to realisation of the European Education area. The work of the Education Committee will be focused on the Council recommendation on pathways to school success, and the Council conclusion on wellbeing in digital education. The aim of the Council conclusion on supporting wellbeing in digital education is to introduce a new angle to the topic of digital education, take stock of the experiences of the past two years, and address new gaps and inequalities. It will draw attention to challenges risks and opportunities in online education ecosystems, and focus on the topics of wellbeing in digital education, safer digital environment, media literacy, critical thinking and mental health. Recommendation on pathways to ensure success should address topics such as improvement of education outcomes and agreement of basic skills, by all people up to secondary school, secondary level of education, early school leavers, mental health and wellbeing of pupils, children with fewer opportunities. The Czech presidency found these issues fundamental for fair chance, future progress and success in education for all children.