

## ETF GOVERNING BOARD MEETING 20 NOVEMBER 2012

# MINUTES

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The meeting of the ETF Governing Board was held in Turin on 20 November 2012 and chaired by Jan TRUSZCZYŃSKI, Director General for Education and Culture at the European Commission (EC).

A new member of the Board from Portugal, Isilda FERNANDES, was welcomed. All the independent experts nominated by the European Parliament were present. Commission officials Gerhard SCHUMANN-HITZLER (Director, DG Enlargement), Maria Rosa DE PAOLIS (DG DEVCO), Joao Delgado (Head of Unit, DG Education and Culture), Thomas BENDER (Head of Unit, DG EMPL), Ana STAN (DG Education and Culture) also attended. Miriam BREWKA PINO represented the European External Action Service. The ETF staff committee was represented by Pasqualino MARE.

Belgium, Estonia, France, Greece, the Netherlands and UK as well as the observers from Azerbaijan, Turkey and Jordan were not represented at the meeting.

### 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted by the Board without modifications.

### 3. FOLLOW-UP TO PREVIOUS MEETING

#### i. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 June 2012 were adopted as proposed.

#### ii. Follow up on action points and written procedures

**Shawn MENDES**, ETF, presented the actions carried out as a follow up to the June 2012 meeting:

- Updates of the draft 2013 Work Programme based on observations made by Board members regarding: i) Eastern Partnership programmes; ii) ETF risk management and iii) a more explicit link between the EU policy context and actions promoted by the ETF;

- The report on the implementation of the Governing Board decision based on the working group recommendations on ETF governance costs analysis and assessment will be delivered next year during the November 2013 Board meeting;
- A written procedure was carried out successfully on the Amending Budget 2/2012 – launched on 11 October 2012 and concluded on 17 October 2012.

## 4. ETF WORK PROGRAMME 2013

**Madlen SERBAN** and **Xavier MATHEU** presented the second draft ETF work programme, which takes into consideration the proposals of the Governing Board working group meeting of 11 September, the EC Structured Dialogue discussions of 2 October and the EC opinion issued on 8 October.

The changes introduced relate to: i) updated project budgets, number of outputs, ABB tables in line with additional requests received; ii) modifications as a result of EC interservice consultation (Secretariat General (Legal) - denomination of institutions and bodies; European External Action Service - reference to the May 2012 Communication (delivery of ENP) and negotiations on free trade areas with Armenia, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova; DG HOME - reference to the EU migration and labour mobility policy; DG EMPL - increased investment in Eastern Partnership countries).

The structure of the draft work programme remained as proposed in June: 2013 objectives and thematic priorities, policy context, activities contributing to human capital development, management of resources, governance and management.

The assumptions for 2013 are: the subvention from the EC will be €20,144,500; the total number of posts will be 135; and the total available full-time equivalent staff will be 129.5. These assumptions include the 1% staff cut decided by the EC.

The main objectives in 2013 are to: reinforce the holistic, evidence-based analysis of VET reform in partner countries through the Torino Process; strengthen the capacity of partner countries to develop and apply tools for evidence-based policy making; improve labour market analysis and forecasting and support the review of vocational education and training systems in this light; support the EU external policy instrument programming cycle and, when relevant, the external dimension of internal policies; disseminate relevant information and encourage the exchange of experience and good practice between the EU and partner countries and among the partner countries themselves in human capital development.

A total of 147 outputs are planned for 2013 compared to 144 planned in the Multi-annual Financial Perspective. This is due to the addition of two new projects, GEMM and FRAME. ETF operations are described at regional and country level. In each partner country, an implementation plan will detail how this will be put into practice, after the adoption of the work programme. The ETF's operations at country and regional levels are informed by the Torino Process and ETF work and policy dialogue with key stakeholders in 2012. Drawing on the analysis undertaken for each partner country, thematic policy areas for priority support address the following five criteria for each country: i) priority in EU external relations and contractual relationship; ii) priority of human capital development in EU external relations and at regional level; iii) priority given to human capital development as indicated by documented national strategies and policies and resource commitments; iv) stakeholder commitment to human capital development as indicated by their contribution and participation in national reform strategies; and, v) involvement of other donors in human capital and cooperation with them to avoid overlaps.

As regards regional projects, the ETF intends to continue the inclusive education project in the Enlargement region and to support measures for EU regional initiatives and policy dialogue. At the request of DG EAC and DG ELARG the ETF will implement a new project, FRAME, which supports the development of comprehensive HRD strategies. In Eastern Europe, the ETF will continue activities under the regional project on continuing vocational training as well as those related to Mobility Partnerships. In Central Asia the focus will be on school development. In the southern Mediterranean, the regional dimension of sectoral qualifications, entrepreneurial learning and skills for SMEs: support to the Euromed Charter, social partnership and support to Union for the Mediterranean policy dialogue and employment will be key. At the request of DG EAC and DG DEVCO, the ETF will also implement the Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean countries (GEMM) project.

Examples of country activities for Libya, Azerbaijan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Kazakhstan were presented.

The ETF plans to continue methodological developments to support evidence-based policy making and knowledge management by consolidating the Torinet networks in 11 partner countries and strengthening ETF capacity to capture and retrieve knowledge generated through its activities.

The results of the 2012 Torino Process will be debated by all countries during the corporate conference to be organised in May 2013.

In the area of thematic expertise, the six communities of practice that keep abreast of EU, partner country and international developments, maintain and consolidate ETF knowledge, provide content support to ETF regional and country projects and explore new areas of work are to be developed in the areas of i) qualifications and quality; ii) regional development and governance; iii) sustainable development; iv) employment and employability; v) social inclusion, and vi) entrepreneurship learning and enterprise skills. At the same time three projects that develop methodological instruments for country work will continue in: i) matching and anticipation of skills; ii) learning in different contexts and iii) migration and skills.

**Madlen SERBAN** presented the GEMM project which aims to contribute to enhancing youth and female employability by improving the quality and relevance of VET systems in the region by building capacity among different stakeholders in VET governance both at national (system) and local levels. The project will engage two target groups: i) at policy making level (national) - VET policy makers, authorities in charge of VET, social partners (employers and employee representatives) and civil society organisations; and ii) At VET institution/school (local/regional) level - school managers (public, private), school boards (including teacher and trainer representatives) and, depending on the pilot projects, stakeholders such as local employers, parent and student associations, local authorities involved in VET etc. Governance will be addressed in relation to financing VET and quality assurance. It will motivate and enhance the capacity of governments and social partners to play an active role in shaping VET systems in partnership. The DG EAC and DG DEVCO proposal foresees an additional budget allocation of €2 million to increase the impact of ETF activities and will run from October 2012 to March 2016.

The FRAME project (supporting the development of comprehensive HRD strategies in the enlargement countries) comes at the request of DG ELARG and DG EAC and aims to support the development of comprehensive HRD strategies in close collaboration with the stakeholders in seven countries. This will be a major initiative for the ETF over two years. DG ELARG will delegate an additional €1.4 million. The project will: i) develop a comprehensive package of methodological instruments for foresight and assessing institutional arrangements; ii) identify a set

of indicators for monitoring policy effectiveness; iii) build the capacity of national actors to use and embed these instruments into their policy making practices, and iv) provide input to DG ELARG for the country strategy papers for the period 2014-20. The ETF will coordinate with other strategic players in the region, including the Regional Cooperation Council.

As in previous years, the draft 2013 work programme is based on priorities. The ETF plans and manages its activities through an activity-based budgeting approach, aiming to achieve its objectives and use its resources efficiently. It sets a baseline to monitor progress during the year with quantitative and qualitative indicators. The main risks associated with activities and outputs are identified so that appropriate action can be taken and planning follows both a cascading as well as a multi-dimensional principle (geographical, functional and thematic).

**Torben KORNBECH RASMUSSEN** (Denmark) asked for details about the impact of the DG HOME request regarding EU migration policy. **Madlen SERBAN** explained that legal migration, in the EU concept, includes a skills dimension. In this context, the ETF is developing a series of activities under the Mobility Partnerships for Armenia and the Republic of Moldova and is cooperating with the EC on specific actions if requested in Georgia, Morocco or Tunisia.

The Governing Board approved the ETF 2013 Work Programme with no observations.

## 5. ETF 2013 DRAFT BUDGET

**Alastair MACPHAIL** (ETF) presented the 2013 draft budget, explaining that it would only become definitive after the adoption of the EU budget. If changes to the version presented are necessary, the approval of the Board would be sought by written procedure.

The adoption of the general EU budget for 2013 failed and the EC will present a new proposal, keeping the same allocation for ETF.

The draft budget was based on EC guidelines, with a nominal freeze of the subsidy and a 1% cut in staff (from 1365 to 1345) and staff costs. The EC proposal for the multi-annual financial framework 2014-20 comprises a 5% staff cut over 5 years for all EU institutions and other bodies over 5 years. Implementation will start in 2013.

The proposal is for the same allocation of the subsidy as in the last recent years. There is a slight increase in staff expenditure and a small decrease in Title 2. Other revenue will come from the new GEMM (€2 million) and FRAME (€1.4 million) projects, which will be inserted included in the budget next year. The ETF will request the approval of an amended budget once the funds have been transferred.

**Jan TRUSZCZYŃSKI** indicated that the figures for 2013 depend on the positions of the Member States and the Parliament. He also pointed out that an agreement on the 2012 amended budget was not reached and the EC was requested to present a new version. The intention is to approve the general EU budget in December at the last session of the Parliament.

**György SZENT-LÉLEKY** (Hungary) asked more information about the expenses under Title 2 Building and infrastructure. **Alastair MACPHAIL** clarified that Title 2 includes expenditure related to the working conditions of the ETF - maintenance of the building, ICT, possible upgrade of equipment, post and telecommunications, etc. The ETF pays a symbolic rent to the Italian authorities for its Turin premises of €1 a year due to the initial 5 million ECU investment made by the EC to restructure the building originally. Negotiations with the regional authorities, the owner of the building, have started for 2013 and it seems that administrative costs may increase.

**Karl WIECZOREK** (Austria) asked for clarification about the reduction of 5% in the budget.

**Alastair MACPHAIL** clarified that the 5% reduction is to be applied over five years, 1% per year, starting with 2013 and also applicable to staff costs.

The Governing Board adopted the 2013 budget, taking note of the fact that the final figures will be known once the Council and the European Parliament have finalised their decision on the overall EU budget.

## **6. PROVISIONAL DRAFT ESTIMATE OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE AND UNDERLYING THE GENERAL GUIDELINES 2014**

**Alastair MACPHAIL** presented the draft estimate of revenue and expenditure, which are the first steps of the budgetary process. He explained that the basis for submitting the request to the EC for the 2014 budget is given by the amount foreseen by the EC in the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-20. The ETF requests an increase of 2% of the level of 2013 budget to cover inflation.

As regards staffing, the ETF plans full employment by the end of 2013, keeping Title 2 at the same level and increasing operational expenditure by 5%. As regards staffing, the ETF is applying the 1% reduction of its statutory staff. In addition, with the earmarked revenue from the two new projects FRAME and GEMM, the ETF will recruit additional ancillary staff (CA) for the duration of projects.

The Governing Board adopted the provisional draft estimate of revenue and expenditure and underlying general guidelines for 2014.

## **7. ETF AMENDING BUDGET 2012**

**Alastair MACPHAIL** indicated that the first 2012 amended budget was adopted during the June meeting of the Board. The second was submitted for approval via written procedure in October. The reason was to reallocate some of the savings in staff costs, due to the fact that the Council did not adopt the salary adjustment. There are no changes in the subsidy expenditure and a 2.7% reduction in staff related expenditure was partially reallocated in Title 2 - Building and infrastructure expenditure, to upgrade workspaces and equipment. The remainder went to operational expenditure. The total subvention is €20,144, 530.

## **8. COOPERATION AGREEMENTS**

**Madlen SERBAN** introduced three cooperation agreements submitted to the Board for approval. She highlighted the ETF's decision to enhance the added value of its interventions through better coordination with EU Member State institutions and international and regional bodies to strengthen policy dialogue and mutual learning as regards EU developments in the field of vocational education and training.

In the case of the cooperation agreement with dvv international, the cooperation objectives are: i) fostering and supporting the development of vocational education and training in the partner countries, focusing on adult learning and lifelong learning; and ii) knowledge sharing in the field of adult learning and lifelong learning.

As regards the cooperation agreement between the ETF and the International Institute for Administrative Sciences/ European Group for Public Administration (EGPA), the main objective is

related to promoting the improvement of the performance of public policies in the ETF partner countries. This is related to the ETF function to disseminate information and encourage networking and the exchange of experience and good practice in human capital development issues. Some of the ETF regional event sessions in Jordan (September 2012) were jointly organised with EGPA.

The cooperation agreement between the ETF and the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat aims to i) further develop cooperation in the field of human capital as well as economic and social development in the region; ii) enhance awareness with key regional stakeholders on the importance of human capital for the development of the region; and iii) ensure structured knowledge sharing between the institutions and other RCC initiatives in the field of building and fostering human capital or economic and social development.

The cooperation agreements stipulate an annual assessment of implementation and the main outcomes are presented in the annual activity report.

The Governing Board adopted all the cooperation agreements.

## 9. IAS STRATEGIC AUDIT PLAN 2013-2015

**Jan TRUSZCZYŃSKI** presented the Strategic Audit Plan 2013-15, as the IAS was not able to attend the Governing Board meeting.

The Audit Plan is based on a risk assessment exercise carried out by the IAS in July 2012 and covering ETF's major processes, both operational and administrative. The objective was to define more detailed and focused audit topics, based on a risk assessment with involvement of the agencies. The mapping of risk is done on the level of sub-processes (operational and support) in the MARCI model.

To determine the most relevant audit approach in connection with the risks assessed, the IAS will consider the MARCI methodology. This methodology requires assessing risks according to the following dimensions: impact (inherent risk) of a risk if a control breakdown occurs, and vulnerability (residual risk) after applying controls. The audit approach will be contingent to the combination of these two dimensions, as described below:

1. Enhance risk mitigation: When management is unable to provide any assurance that controls are either effective or efficient, it should address risks requiring mitigation. In this situation, the added value might be limited if the Internal Audit Service work simply confirms the existence of risks already well-known by management. However, the Internal Audit Service could provide recommendations to management for consideration in developing and designing controls to reduce exposure and to also track progress on remediation plans.
2. Re-assurance: When management provides reasonable assurance that controls to prevent, detect and correct a risk are both effective and efficient, the role of the Internal Audit Service is to provide reassurance that management's controls can be relied upon. When management can only provide "qualified" or limited assurance — meaning that some controls are work while others don't — the IAS should audit those controls that are deemed to be effective and support improvement in other areas as required.
3. Redeploy resources: For the processes leading to risk with low impact on value and low vulnerability, the Internal Audit Service could test controls for effectiveness and develop recommendations for improving efficiency.

4. Measure for cumulative impact: in the case of low impact on value associated with high vulnerability, the Internal Audit Service could assess cumulative impacts and frequency to determine whether these risks could have a more significant impact.

The IAS proposes four audits for the period 2013-15:

1. Experts and missions management. The scope: planning, justification and monitoring of both missions and experts; budgeting for missions and experts; the selection of experts and management of potential conflicts of interest of experts, as well as the system for mission cost claim reimbursement (its compliance with the existing regulatory framework).
2. Performance management system and evaluation activities. The scope: performance measurement and management systems set up in the Agency and evaluation practices developed in the ETF.
3. Geographical operations (design and implementation). The scope is related to systems set up and practices developed in the Agency regarding quality assurance of ETF outputs produced by the Geographical Operations Department.
4. ETF risk management, priorities and ad hoc requests. The scope: principles and practices developed and put in place regarding the management of risks, priorities and ad-hoc requests.

In answer to **Maria Rosa DE PAOLIS** (DG DEVCO) question on the availability of an action plan on the follow up to the recommendations of the IAS visits and if there are high risks identified by the IAS, the chair replied that no high risks were identified and in 2012 no audit was carried out, since risk assessment undertaken at the ETF level was considered an important action.

**Tarja RIIHIMAKI** (Finland) asked if the risk of budget cuts could be included in the map of the IAS risks. The chair answered that in case the 2013 budget was not adopted by the end of the year, according to the current regulations, all the EU institutions will function using provisional twelfths.

**Sara PARKIN** (independent expert nominated by the European Parliament) stressed the role of the Governing Board, pointing out a phrase in the IAS document to this effect.

The Board adopted the IAS Strategic Audit Plan 2013-15.

## 10. ETF STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENT 2014-20

**Madlen SERBAN** presented the ETF Strategic Planning document 2014-20:

The document was only for discussion. It is the basis for presenting the ETF Mid-term Perspective 2014-17 to the Board next year. No changes to the ETF's overall vision and mission are foreseen. She highlighted the following principles of action:

- The ETF is an EU agency that provides impartial, non-commercial expertise on public policies for human capital development.
- The ETF encourages ownership and broad participation among relevant stakeholders. In this regard, the ETF supports consensus building and mutual learning among actors, thus connecting policy analysis and agreements about policy choices and implementation.
- The ETF believes in a holistic approach that takes into account the context of each country and is based on evidence. VET is considered in a broad context in terms of its links to employment, social inclusion, enterprise development, competitiveness and sustainable development.

- The ETF's priorities evolve constantly according to changes in its operational environment, EU priorities and specific requests from the European Union.

**The two main fields for action are:** i. Evidence-informed policy cycle and ii. European Union policy support

i. Under evidence-informed policy making, the ETF intends to support partner country intelligence and capacities at all stages of the VET policy cycle bringing innovation and sustainable development by reinforcing the provision of coherent, continuous, specific and well-informed assistance and capacity building in the area of policy analysis and advice. This will be done by i) strengthening the holistic approach of the contribution of VET in a lifelong learning perspective to sustainable development, focusing on competitiveness and social inclusion; ii) supporting policy development based on evidence and participation of all relevant stakeholders and a shared vision; iii) keeping abreast of wider international developments in human capital development and focusing on areas in which more added-value can be brought to the partner countries; and, iv) creating learning opportunities for networks of stakeholders in the area of policy analysis.

The ETF also plans to continue to build capacity in VET policy development and VET policy implementation as well as to strengthen support to monitoring and evaluation within the countries. The actions that will be promoted aim to improve policy co-ordination processes among stakeholders and across levels of government in the formulation of policies; create learning opportunities for stakeholders in implementing the policy cycle; develop methodologies and tools to increase capacity within partner countries to implement the policy cycle; contribute to VET policy adoption and related regulatory frameworks in partner countries.

At the same time, the ETF will promote stocktaking analysis and policy initiatives in a selected number of topics in each country, create policy learning opportunities through experimental actions to inform large scale policy implementation, support dissemination of good practice in policy implementation from partner countries and the EU; assess the effectiveness of the implementation of policy measures in partner countries and build capacity to review policies based on lessons learnt from assessment, monitoring and evaluation practices.

ii. Reference was also made to the actions related to the policy support offered to the EU which includes measures aiming at strengthening EU assistance in VET in the partner countries; enhancing the external dimension of EU HCD policies; and, providing a platform for information and good practice exchange between the EU institutions and bodies and the partner countries at national and regional levels.

Co-operation and communication with key stakeholders playing an active role in human capital development will be promoted in relationships with the EU institutions, bodies, agencies and other EU stakeholders, EU Member States, international organisations and international development banks and by improving the quality of communication with partner country stakeholders and networks.

The ETF also aims to be a reliable and efficient EU organisation by maximising results and increasing efficiency and a series of actions are proposed in this respect.

The results targeted by 2020 refer to the ETF contribution in the partner countries to: i) more effective VET policy with better governance; and, ii) increased employability and enhanced social and territorial cohesion. This will be done by increasing accountability and trust and developing and consolidating expertise in the benefit of the partner countries and of the EU.

**Jean-François MEZIÈRES** (independent expert nominated by the European Parliament) thanked ETF for the quality of the document and made some general remarks insisting on the importance of opening the perspective of the document and drawing attention that events like Arab Spring were not being able to be predicted three years ago when discussed the Mid-term Perspective. For these reason different scenarios can be envisaged. He offered the examples of how important issues of economic recovery, high unemployment, informal sector, the way in which public policy is developed in the countries can affect the activities of ETF. Another important element is related to the evolution of VET and lifelong learning is an important area to invest in the next period of time. Social networks, ICT are elements that ensure and facilitate the update of knowledge and skills and maybe higher attention should be paid.

**Gerhard SCHUMANN- HITZLER** (DG ELARG) stressed the importance of the work of ETF for DG ELARG. He also welcomed the fact that ETF sees its role as demand driven, providing support to EU policies. He appreciated the holistic approach, that encourages ownership from the partner countries, and the results-oriented differentiated approach. The chair agreed with this point of view.

**Torben KORNBECH RASMUSSEN** (Denmark) showed his appreciation of the document. He stressed the importance of the ETF's proposal to enhance the work that it has carried out to date and suggested adding the links between VET and higher education to the activities proposed.

**Miriam BREWKA PINO** (EEAS) remarked on the quality of the document and thanked the ETF for its pro-active approach to supporting developments in the Neighbourhood region and its activities in the area of human capital development.

## 11. STATE OF PLAY OF 2012 EUROPEAN DATA PROTECTION SERVICE VISIT

**Alice PISAPIA** (ETF) informed the Board that the European Data Protection Supervisor issued a general report and a letter of compliance with the Regulation 45/2011. The Data protection Supervisor carried out a visit to ETF and agreed on an action plan. The main achievements were the following:

- All processing operations involving personal data have been identified and an updated inventory has been provided to the EDPS;
- A structure to ensure the correct implementation of the regulation has been established by appointing Persons in Charge for each area of activity (Director's Decision ETF/12/DEC/004);
- Following a consultation with the EDPS, the Implementing Rules have been revised and adopted (Director's Decision ETF/12/DEC/015).
- The relevant processing operations have been notified by the Data Controller to the Data Protection Officer (DPO) and have been included in the Registry ex Art. 25 of the Regulation 45/2001. From among all processing operations involving personal data (Registry ex Art. 25) the DPO, supported by the EDPS, has identified those likely to present specific risks to the rights and freedom of the data subject by virtue of their nature, scope, or purpose;
- The DPO register was given to the EDPS at the end of October 2012 to show the increased level of compliance with the norms of the regulation.
- The ETF Video Surveillance Policy, developed in line with the EDPS Guidelines, has been adopted (Director's Decision ETF/12/DEC/015);

- In accordance with the regulation 45/2001, a short version of this policy has been published on the ETF's web page and a dedicated page has been created in the ETF's intranet.

## 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**Giedre BELECKIENE** (Lithuania) informed that the Lithuanian Presidency will organise the next DG VET meeting on 13-14 November, linked with a presidency conference that will address inclusiveness in VET.

## 12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held in Turin on 14 June 2013.

### FOLLOW UP ACTIONS:

Following the adoption of the 2013 EU general budget, if applicable, the ETF will launch written procedure to approve the changes that may occur in the 2013 Work Programme and 2013 budget;

Once revenue is transferred for the new GEMM and FRAME projects the ETF will request an amendment to the 2013 budget via written procedure.

## ANNEX

### 4. ORAL REPORTS

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

**João DELGADO** (DG EAC) presented the Copenhagen process - Bruges Communiqué Mid-term stocktaking.

#### **The Bruges Communiqué, societal challenges and VET in the current policy context**

The Communiqué is in line with Europe 2020, relevant headline targets and flagship initiatives and includes long-term strategic objectives for 2011-20 in the area of vocational education and training. The first report is to be presented in 2014 and the mid-term stocktaking took place in 2012.

The EU is facing slow economic development. The financial crisis and high unemployment increase the pressure for short-term solutions. Vocational elements in education and better permeability blur the differences between general and vocational education. There are diverse systems, providers, regions, countries and sectors that may affect transparency. At the same time, complicated governance structures affect the consistency and complementarity of policies. Co-operation and coordination among stakeholders, including social partners is critical.

#### **First analysis of the 22 short term deliverables**

In 2012, the first stocktaking of the 22 short-term deliverables was carried out in the 27 Member States, EEA and acceding and candidate countries (34 countries). The process was carried out by Cedefop and the ETF. The next analysis will be carried out in 2014. 27 Member States, Iceland and Norway were analysed by Cedefop and the five acceding and candidate countries (Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey were analysed by the ETF.

The stocktaking reveals the state of implementation in all countries in 2010, as well as progress since. There are two concrete "results" of the stocktaking: a fiche showing developments in each country and a synthesis report showing overall progress in each short-term deliverable.

The implementation of the Bruges objectives was very different at the time of the adoption of the Communiqué. Much was already being implemented, and countries did not start from scratch. The stocktaking clearly shows that in many countries, VET systems, initiatives and policies already addressed one or several short-term deliverables prior to 2010. It also shows that countries are progressing at a varying pace.

A lot is going on in the field of work-based learning as well as in early school leaving. These two areas have been the target of a lot of attention at EU level, and this is reflected in the results of the stocktaking.

Work-based learning appears to be an increasingly popular feature of VET. Ireland, Finland, Luxembourg, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Norway and Switzerland all show increases. In general, there seems to be a correlation between low youth unemployment and high participation in work based learning in initial VET. This can be seen in particular in Germany, Austria and Denmark.

There is a group of countries where work-based learning in initial VET is decreasing, such as Belgium, Czech Republic, Iceland, Poland, Slovakia, and Spain. The issue is not only quantity, but type of work-based learning. Good quality is based on systematic cooperation between schools and enterprises. The impact of such cooperation goes far beyond the experience of individual learners during their placements.

In some areas, progress has been weaker:

**Incentives** can be used to encourage partnerships in the field of VET. The stocktaking reveals that the use of incentives appears limited. Many countries did not report on incentives encouraging i) partnerships for creativity and innovation, ii) VET provider networks for cost-effective use of technology, iii) public-private partnerships for state-of-the-art technology in VET and, iv) cooperation between VET, employment services and social partners.

**Monitoring.** Information on the transition of VET graduates and their employability later on can help increase the labour market relevance of VET and accommodate the needs of at risk groups. However, the stocktaking shows that for this is lacking in many countries.

**ICT to access VET for groups at risk.** About half of the countries did not report on a lifelong learning/VET strategy to promote the use of ICT for at risk groups or VET platforms/portals tailored to the needs of at risk groups.

A series of "policy options" was identified to implement each deliverable. In the case of work based learning, eight policy options were identified. Many countries had these options in place in 2010. Others have adjusted these options since the adoption of the Bruges Communiqué, or are preparing to implement them.

**Attractiveness.** There is an interesting comparison between perceived and actual enrolment rates in VET. In countries where VET is perceived as attractive according to recent Eurobarometer results, but participation rates in VET – such as Cyprus, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and UK – can build on a relatively positive image of VET, and introduce measures to increase participation. As many of these countries also have problems with youth unemployment, it would be very interesting to exploit the opportunities that VET provides. All countries in which a relatively low attractiveness of VET coincides with a relatively low share of VET students in upper secondary education are taking measures to improve VET attractiveness.

**Quality Assurance.** Most countries have national quality assurance approaches in line with the EQAVET recommendation. Countries are working on implementation strategies. As for the use of EQAVET indicators, the results show that there is little progress on indicators concerning monitoring transitions and employability

A further challenge at national level is the establishment of common quality assurance frameworks for VET providers, as agreed in Bruges. Also, quality assurance approaches are implemented mainly at the level of initial VET. They should be developed also at continuing VET level.

ECVET. This tool has a strong potential for inspiring reforms (e.g. in Belgium/Wallonia, Lithuania, Slovenia). Some countries are advancing in its implementation (Germany, Finland, Austria), but mainly focus the use of ECVET in mobility. It is not used in an optimal way to support lifelong learning, even though it would give excellent possibilities for this. Both credit systems, ECVET and ECTS, offer the opportunity to support lifelong learning. It is a challenge to tackle the recognition and the accumulation of what the learner has learned, and help build further learning and progression on these elements.

**Creativity and innovation.** In most countries, measures to support creativity and innovation are still missing, or are only just being developed. In particular, Austria, Denmark, Germany, Finland and the Netherlands are forerunners in this field while other countries are either lacking, or preparing the implementation of such measures.

In the area of **innovative technology**, countries are rather advanced in terms of having strategies and supporting cooperation with business. However, the development of networks or joint ventures between VET and business, as well as incentives for ensuring state-of-the-art technology in VET, provide further opportunities, as the examples from Belgium, Malta and the Netherlands.

**Gerhard SCHUMANN-HITZLER** (DG ELARG) presented updated information in the area of EU Enlargement.

The Nobel Prize for Peace awarded to the European Union equally constitutes a recognition of the enlargement process. The process is on the track and the EU has demonstrated that this process is credible vis-à-vis the enlargement countries and the EU Member States..

**Croatia** will join the EU on 1 July 2013, which is an important step for the whole region as it demonstrates the transformative powers of the Enlargement process. There is still a lot to do especially in areas like strengthening administrative capacity, rule of law and structural reforms for competitiveness. Another Comprehensive Report will be published in spring 2013.

Negotiations started with **Montenegro** following an agreement at the European Council. At present each chapter is screened (analysis of the state of legislation and the preparations for fulfilling the EU rules and standards). **Serbia** was granted candidate status but no dates have been established for the start of negotiations and this is also due to the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo\*. The Enlargement Strategy clearly indicates that there are basic conditions to be fulfilled before moving forward, such as the fight against crime, corruption and the rule of law.

The **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** has been a candidate country since 2005 but negotiations have not yet started. The EC has proposed again that the negotiations should start. There are hopes that the issue of name with Greece may be solved by reaching an agreement in a reasonable time.

**Albania** in key areas applied for EU membership but the EC has not yet proposed candidate status as further progress is necessary beforehand.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** registers a considerable political blockage. There are hopes that once neighbouring Croatia becomes a Member State, some issues might change.

The EC has submitted a feasibility study on concluding a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with **Kosovo**. There are important discussions going on between the Member States since not all of them recognise Kosovo as an independent state or country. The European Parliament has issued a favourable opinion on Kosovo as a separate state.

In the case of **Turkey**, the EC has a high interest in advancing negotiations as it is an important economic and geostrategic partner. There are issues like human rights, minority rights, press

---

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence – hereinafter, Kosovo.

freedom that need to be tackled. The EU also proposed a "positive agenda" and there is hope that there will be positive developments.

**Iceland** is a special case. Negotiations are progressing well but there are a few politically sensitive issues for both Iceland and the EU like protecting endangered fish species and whaling. In 2013 negotiations are expected to be concluded, followed by a referendum.

In December 2011, the EC tabled a proposal for continuing pre-accession assistance. The amount of support depends on the decisions on the EU budget 2014-20. There is a high degree of common understanding on what should be done and how it should be done. The proposal advocates a longer-term, more strategic approach and support to the individual countries according to their specific needs and capacities.

In 2013, the EC intends drafting Comprehensive Country Strategies which will also cover human capital development. The ETF plays an important role in this.

**Maria-Rosa DE PAOLIS** (DEVCO) informed on the progress on DEVCO policies and programmes:

Fighting poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals is paramount. Pro-poor, inclusive growth is vital to this process. Programming will continue to address issues in line with EU support for inclusive sustainable growth within the framework of the Agenda for Change, which explicitly states that the EU should take a more comprehensive approach to human development and highlights the importance of providing the workforce with skills that respond to labour market needs.

The EU has interests – in particular with regard to skills development with a strong employment orientation and with a strong focus on the informal economy – that take them away from their traditional areas. At the same time it has a strong continuing interest in the neighbourhood and Central Asia where countries have already done a lot.

Youth Employment is currently a main challenge in most partner countries. At least 50% of young people aged 12-13 are out of school and only 30% complete secondary school. There are problems in access to traditional training pathways because they are under-financed and under-equipped. The EC will continue to support youth employment through a twin-track approach in which youth-specific programmes are combined with the strengthening the youth perspective in employment-related interventions.

The informal economy is crucial because so much of the global economy is now 'informal' in terms of where people live and work and have their livelihoods. It is clear that most young people are in the informal economy

A study will be carried out to address ways on how to increase knowledge and strengthen the role of TVET interventions in EC Development Cooperation within the framework of the informal economy.

The involvement of the private sector for inclusive and sustainable growth is unavoidable. Strengthening engagement with the private sector is possible at various levels and civil society and non-state actors must regularly and increasingly be involved too.

Efforts can/should be associated with support for formalising the economy. In this context, support for the private sector should also be in terms of improving the regulatory environment, making it easier to do business (and encouraging more formal economy actors to provide decent jobs).

The on-going programming shows that in eastern and southern Neighbourhood, VET and employment are among the proposed sectors for intervention. These include: human resources development; improved quality and capacity of the education and training system; VET reform and public education to align VET to job needs; equal opportunities to access education and jobs; social protection; vulnerable groups; job creation for young people in rural areas; integrated employment strategies; social dialogue and protection; the environment for political and economic participation.

It is therefore important to know how the ETF cooperates with EU Delegations which have strong VET and employment components in their geographical programmes especially those in the southern neighbourhood.

**Thomas BENDER** (DG EMPL) updated the Board members on the EC approach to Employment and Social Reform Programmes (ESPRs) for enlargement countries, indicating that:

DG EMPL has reviewed its activities in the enlargement strategy earlier in 2012 and decided to deepen policy dialogue on employment and social policies with the enlargement, and in particular the candidate countries. This was confirmed in the Commission Communication on the enlargement package in October.

The rationale is that most candidate countries have important challenges in the employment and social policy areas and would need to pursue long-term reforms in order to develop their labour markets to European standards. In the past DG EMPL used the JIM and JAP processes, which were more focussed on fitting the countries into the employment and social open method of coordination, rather than on their own development needs.

Such reinforced policy dialogue will contribute to the overall enlargement strategy, which puts more focus on economic aspects and is designed to associate the enlargement countries to the Europe 2020 strategy. The dialogue will be embedded firmly in the institutional framework of EU cooperation with the enlargement countries.

Concretely, DG EMPL will soon launch structured bilateral policy dialogue to formulate employment and social reform programmes with the candidate countries. The plan is to start a first round of dialogues in 2013 to develop the first set of programmes to be ready by the end of the year. From 2014 on the annual monitoring cycle would start with yearly programme and a joint assessment of progress that would feed into the EC annual progress reports.

DG EMPL is currently developing the thematic scope of these programmes. Based on the Europe 2020 framework, the programmes would include thematic and horizontal chapters. Under the overall Europe 2020 objective of promoting inclusive growth, they would look at: i) labour market and employment policies; ii) human capital and skills development; and, iii) social inclusion and social protection policies. These dimensions mirror the respective policy area in the new IPA Regulation. Horizontal chapters would focus on framework conditions for policy implementation and cover: i) Capacity building, governance and institutional reforms; ii) financial aspects; and, iii) targets, indicators, benchmarks. This is the general outline which will be adapted and further spelled out for each country.

The development of these reform programmes will strengthen DG EMPL's own planning capacity for the next generation of IPA programmes and for cooperation with other donors in the region, such as the World Bank.

The ETF will be an important partner in the development and the monitoring of the programmes. Complementing and utilising ETF work in these countries (e.g. the FRAME project), DG EMPL will

want to involve the ETF closely in the process very soon when Commission services are consulted on draft outlines for these countries.

**Miriam BREWKA PINO** (EEAS) informed the Board on the latest developments as regards the Neighbourhood area.

The EU is paying much importance to the region to strengthen ties with partner countries, most notably those willing to reform. Progress reports will be issued in spring, and the ETF will also contribute to them.

The EEAS and the EC will soon issue a document on cooperation with the Maghreb countries, focusing on regional cooperation, security, energy, the environment and private sector development. The VET sector will also feature.

At present, the programming of 2014-20 funds takes place in cooperation with DG DEVCO and the EU Delegations, focusing on the choice of main sectors of intervention. As regards the Neighbourhood South, employment, education and VET will be important.

As regards the new generation of ENP Action Plans, the ones with Jordan and the occupied Palestinian Territories have been finalised, the ones with Morocco and Tunisia are close to being finalised. HR Catherine Ashton visited Algeria and negotiations for an ENP Action Plan were also launched, marking the beginning of new type of cooperation with the country (which so far had not fully taken part in the ENP). €23 million were allocated to a youth employment project in Algeria.

In Libya the VET project designed with ETF support was finalised. At present the EU is informing the new authorities about the ENP with a view to bringing Libya as a full participant into the ENP (including through a future basic framework agreement).

On 14 November the meeting of the EU-Egypt Task Force was organised, similar with the events held with Jordan and Tunisia. Youth employment and job creation figured high on the agenda.

Legislative elections were held in Ukraine, but no positive progress could be seen in terms of democratic standards. The Foreign Affairs Council will discuss how the EU will engage with Ukraine in the future.

The EU finalised negotiations on a new Association Agreement with the Republic of Moldova while those with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are on-going. Negotiations are in preparation with Azerbaijan on a Mobility Partnership.

## TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS AT THE ETF

**Madlen SERBAN** presented the latest developments at the ETF since the last meeting of the Governing Board. Detailed information can be found in the Spotlights publication distributed to Governing Board members.

ETF cooperation with the European Parliament's Employment Committee included a visit of MEP Sergio Cofferati on 25 June and the participation of the chair of the EMPL Committee in the ETF's regional conference on "New Challenges for Skills Development in the Arab States of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region", held in Amman from 25-27 September. At the request of the Employment Committee, a first meeting took place on 12 November on the joint EP EMPL – ETF – Cedefop conference on competitiveness, to be organised at the EP in October 2013, in cooperation with Eurofound and OSHA

As regards DG Education and Culture, the following activities have been carried out:

- Two presentations during the DG EAC-ACVT meeting, the first on “Working with Social Partners in the ETF Partner Countries”, and the second on the Torino Process, 29 June;
- A presentation on the Torino Process at the Dialogue with Southern Mediterranean countries on Higher Education Policies and Programmes, upon invitation from DG EAC, on 3 July;
- Presentation and facilitation of a working group on “Cross-sectoral youth policies: employment/education and training input” at the Joint EU Council of Europe symposium on “Arab Spring: Youth participation for the promotion of peace, human rights and fundamental freedom, 27-29 August.
- Members of DG EAC and DG DEVCO participated in the ETF’s regional conference on “New Challenges for Skills Development in the Arab States of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region”, held in Jordan from 25-27 September;
- In the context of the Bruges Process, a presentation of the outcomes of the stocktaking exercise on progress in the implementation of the Bruges communiqué short-term deliverables in the Copenhagen Working Group meeting, 9 October;
- A coordination meeting was organised by DG EAC with ETF and Cedefop, 9 October;
- A presentation on “Inclusion for Growth” in the Jean Monnet conference organised by DGEAC on “Sustainable Growth in the EU: the Role of Education and Training”, 14 November;
- Participation in a brainstorming on “European Alliances for Apprenticeships” with DG EAC and Cedefop, 15 November;
- DG EAC contributed to the ETF conference “Towards Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Skills”, Brussels, 15-16 November.

Activities in cooperation with other EC DGs and the EEAS covered the following:

- At the request of DG HOME, a presentation of the ETF’s work in the Republic of Moldova at a High Level Conference on “The Mobility Partnerships: past, present and future”, 27 June;
- At the request of DG ELARG, organisation of a brainstorming on “VET lessons learnt in the Western Balkans” in the context of the IPA 2014-20 discussions, 28 June;
- Morning session with DG DEVCO and brainstorm on “Trends and Approaches in VET and Training Reforms in the ETF Partner Countries”, 29 June;
- Contribution to the discussion on the policy index and assessment process for the ENP South SBA Charter assessment in 2013 with DG ENTR and OECD, 7 September;
- The EEAS participated in the ETF’s regional conference on “New Challenges for Skills Development in the Arab States of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region”, held in Jordan from 25-27 September;
- The ETF presented at the EE Regional Summit “A Charter for Entrepreneurial Learning” organised by Croatian Ministries and DG ENTR in Zagreb, 23 October;
- Co-organisation with DG ENTR of the EE Regional Summit - “The Small Business Act for Europe” event in Zagreb, 24 October;
- Presentation of the SME policy assessment at the SME panel organised with DG ENTR in Georgia, 30-31 October;
- In the context of the Eastern Partnership Platform IV, the ETF will hold a regional meeting on the preliminary findings of the Torino Process 2012, 4-5 December.

The Committee of Regions invited the ETF to make a presentation at the ARLEM ECOTER Commission on 'Technical and Vocational Training in the Mediterranean: the Torino Process' as a participatory and evidence based analysis of VET policies, 4 July. Examples of good practice were provided to the ARLEM ECOTER Commission on 20 September and a member of the CIVEX Commission participated in the ETF's regional conference on "New Challenges for Skills Development in the Arab States of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region", held in Jordan from 25-27 September.

The ETF also cooperates with the European Economic and Social Committee. The President of the REX Section participated in the above-mentioned regional conference in September. Support was provided to the ETF conference "Towards Excellence in Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Skills", Brussels, 15-16 November and the President of the EESC participated as panel member in the conference conclusions.

The ETF has annual cooperation work programmes with Cedefop and Eurofound. With Cedefop the ETF carried out a stocktaking exercise on the Copenhagen process (progress in the implementation of the Bruges communiqué-short-term deliverables), co-operation on the external dimension of the EQF and preparations for enhanced cooperation in the area of matching and skills. Furthermore, the ETF participated in the 2012 ReferNet annual plenary meeting, 15-17 October. As regards Eurofound, ETF staff participated in a focus group as a key user of Eurofound information on 24 September and the Eurofound representative participated in the ETF regional event "Social Partnership in VET in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region", in Istanbul from 14-16 October. The action plan for 2013 was agreed on 18 October and is annexed to the Work Programme.

In the second semester of 2012, the ETF closely cooperated with the Cyprus Presidency which included the ETF regional event held in Jordan in September in its calendar. George Demosthenous, Minister of Education from Cyprus attended and contributed to the event;

ETF staff participated in several events organised under the Cyprus Presidency: i) 4th European Conference on Lifelong Guidance Policy, 24 October, ii) ELGPN Plenary Meeting, 25-26 October, iii) Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in the field of Special Needs Education (VET) project conference, 12-13 November and iv) Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 5-7 December. The ETF also initiated discussions with the forthcoming Presidencies to: include the ETF corporate on the Torino Process in the Irish Presidency calendar; and explore possibilities of cooperation with Lithuanian Presidency and Italian authorities. In depth discussions were organised with Austria, France, Germany and UK for more coordinated action in the implementation of the 2013 Work Programme activities and the ETF hosted an exchange of experience in knowledge sharing events with Sweden (5 October) and Romania (6 November).

Cooperation activities with international organisations includes:

- Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat. As regards the human capital agenda, the ETF contributed to a conference on adult education, 3-5 October, Sarajevo. A series of activities were developed under the RCC economic and social development agenda, such as ETF input to the South East Europe 2020 Task Force deliberations, as well as on the possible objectives/indicators/targets (July and October), ETF input (presentation) at New skills for Jobs in the Western Balkans conference organised by the RCC in July in Sarajevo and ETF participation in the ministerial meeting of the South East Europe Investment Committee, 8 November, Tirana, Albania.

- UNESCO: Discussions on actions aiming to strengthen cooperation were held on 9 October, in Paris. The ETF hosted the inter-agency working group meeting on TVET, led by UNESCO (19 October)
- IFC: Discussions held on potential areas of cooperation with the IFC e4e Initiative in the Southern Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia)
- EIB: The ETF participated in the 11th FEMIP conference in Marseille on 27 November and supported the EIB in drafting terms of reference for expertise as regards technical colleges (July)

In evidence-based policy making, 25 partner countries participated in the Torino Process (16 self-assessments) (Algeria, Iceland, Syria and Turkmenistan, did not participate. Egypt and Libya will participate in 2013). Of the five countries participating in the Bruges Process, Montenegro and Serbia also participate in the Torino Process). The draft report and validation meetings are scheduled by end 2012 and the regional meetings on preliminary findings are to be organised as follows: i) southern Mediterranean region - Jordan, 25-27 September 2012; Eastern Partnership - Brussels, 4-5 Dec 2012; Central Asia - Kazakhstan, 30-31 January 2013; Enlargement - Torino, 8-9 May 2013. The next Torino Process conference is to be organised in Turin, on 8-9 May 2013.

Recent audits include:

- Court of Auditors: from 14-18 November 2011 and 7-11 May 2012. The preliminary findings were received on 31 May 2012 and the ETF reply was sent on 4 June 2012. A contradictory procedure was finalised at the beginning of September 2012. The final report will be received by mid-November. As regards the financial year 2012, on 19-23 November 2012 an interim audit mission is on-going.
- Internal Audit Service. The IAS has carried out a risk assessment at the ETF on 4-6 July 2012. The outcome feeds into the IAS Strategic Audit Plan for the ETF for the forthcoming three years. No audit visit took place in 2012. There are no outstanding very important recommendations and the ETF has never received any critical recommendations.
- In terms of human resources, in accordance with the establishment plan, eight new Temporary Agents started and four left since the beginning of 2012. By 31/12/2012, it is estimated that 94 out of 96 posts will be filled. Therefore two vacant posts may be filled in 2013. Six new Contract Agents started and five left since the beginning of 2012. By 31/12/2012, it is estimated that 34 Contract Agents and two Local Agents will be in service.

## VILLA GUALINO

The current contract between the ETF and the Villa Gualino Condominium, created following the liquidation of the Villa Gualino Consortium, covers the provision of services until 31.12.2012. The mandate of the administrator of the Condominium came to an end on 31.10.2012 and no successor has been appointed. The ETF has asked for the contract to be amended to transfer responsibility to the Regione Piemonte for the remaining two months of 2012. However, the ETF is still waiting for a reference person to be appointed. The extraordinary maintenance work on the roof, which was supposed to be carried out during the summer break started in the second half of September causing considerable disruption to the ETF. In recent weeks a series of incidents have occurred caused by the works and/or poor maintenance of the building, including a stoppage of sanitary water supply, a heating malfunction and water infiltration. The ETF has written to the Regione asking for compensation for damages suffered. Negotiations for the renewal of the service contract for 2013 and beyond have started. It is doubtful whether the Region will agree to continue the overall management and maintenance of the Villa Gualino complex from 2013. In

this case the ETF will be obliged to take on a part of these tasks, which will require additional resources (approx. €50,000).

As regards the situation of the contract for the Villa Gualino, the GB chairman indicated that he is waiting for proposals for the next steps. DG EAC has already launched a consultation with other services, including the Legal Service. He insisted that the situation must change and the next steps the EC will take will be announced soon.

**Franco GIORDANO** (Italy) stressed that the Italian Government and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is supporting the ETF to find a solution, and is strongly committed to keeping the ETF in Turin. He explained that for financial reasons, the Regione Piemonte put the building on the market. Several possibilities have been identified: i) the City of Turin is trying to find a solution, not necessarily at Villa Gualino since it belongs to the Region but in another location, possibly sharing with another international organisation or ii) to find other facilities in the city centre.

## THE CYPRUS PRESIDENCY AND THE UPCOMING IRISH PRESIDENCY

**Elias MARGADJIS** (Cyprus) presented the activities of the Cyprus Presidency, listing the meetings that were organised in Cyprus in the area of education, training and youth and focusing on the outcomes of the meetings organised in the area of vocational education and training, such as:

The meeting of the directors general for VET (DGVT) discussed the following issues:

- Vocational excellence for competitiveness. In the discussion, the importance of striving for excellence at national level, and especially developing VET at higher EQF levels, was emphasised. The DGVT delegates stressed the close links between excellence and innovation, as well as the importance of creating VET standards and skills strategies, possibly in cooperation with OECD. Some countries were concerned about the lack of financial resources, due to the crisis, and the need to link action more closely to the needs of the labour market;
- Work-based learning in initial VET. The DGVT delegates highlighted the need for the education sector to act in cooperation with employment, also at national level, for example in peer reviews. However, these peer reviews should go beyond just showing good examples, and they should tackle implementation in practice. There is a need to involve Social Partners in linked activities and facilitate the participation of small enterprises;
- Permeability. Cedefop, presented a snapshot on permeability, including the state-of-play of implementation of ECVET in Member States. Member States confirmed the findings of the survey and discussed the main challenges, such as incentives and validation of prior learning. Again, the importance of developing VET at higher level was raised, and the need to continue efforts for greater permeability, not only from VET to Higher Education, but also within VET, from Higher Education to VET and from education and training to the labour market;
- Mid-term stock-taking of the Bruges Communiqué: Presentation of findings by Cedefop and Discussion on follow-up action ;
- Mid-term stock-taking of the Bruges Communiqué: Fine-tuning governance under the Copenhagen process;
- Mandate for a Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving in VET. Presentation of the document outlining the mandate for a sub-group to the existing Thematic Working Group on

Early School Leaving. The group was expected to fill the gap on specific knowledge on ESL in VET, which the main group was not able to do. The opinions of the delegates were divergent. As there was no conclusive support for the need of this new group, the Commission will look for possible ways of addressing the issue of ESL in VET within the existing ESL thematic working group;

Policies and practices in the area of special education in VET .The Ministry of Education and Culture, in cooperation with the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, organized the final conference of a three-year European project on "Vocational Education and Training: Policy and Practice in Special Education". The programme focused on identifying and investigating key parameters which apply to basic vocational education and training for students with special educational needs (SEN), aged between 14 and 25, with the aim of vocational rehabilitation in the open market.

**Ann REDMOND** (Ireland) presented the priorities of the Irish Presidency. The overall themes of the Presidency are Quality and Equity. The Presidency will follow topics related to skills agenda; qualifications: NQFs and EQF – linked to the skills agenda; the teacher educator profession. As regards higher education themes include the social dimension, U-Multirank and regional clusters.

**Copenhagen process.** The semester theme is related to quality assurance and the DG VET meeting will be organised on 20-21 May 2013 – Dublin Castle;

**EQF-NQF issues:** The Presidency Conference will be organised on 12-13 March at Dublin Castle and proposes to address issues like quality assurance in qualifications frameworks, the role of employment sector actors in quality assurance, quality assuring learning outcomes in relation to needs of labour market and Convergence of EQF and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) frameworks;

**Teacher education:** the Council conclusions at the May Council will address the issue of Improving policy support for the teacher educator profession and a Presidency Conference on the role of teacher educators will be organised on 18-19 February 2013 at Dublin Castle;

**Better assessment and evaluation:** the overall theme is related to better assessment and evaluation for better learning and better school systems and the discussions will take into account EC work on the assessment of key competences and OECD work on assessment and evaluation frameworks, 19-20 March, Dublin Castle

Calendar of meetings to be organised:

- High Level Group on Education and Training, 13-14 December 2012 – Dublin Castle
- Bologna Follow-up Group, 14-15 March 2013 – Dublin Castle
- DG HE, 22-23 April 2013 – UCD (tbc)
- DG VET, 20-21 May 2013 – Dublin Castle
- Informal meeting of the Education Committee, 13-14 June 2013 – Royal Hospital, Kilmainham
- Ministerial dinner with Trio counterparts, Leuven
- DG Schools, dates and agenda (tbc)
- Conference on validation of non-formal and informal learning, (tbc)
- Torino Process Conference “Moving Skills Forward”, 8-9 May, ETF, Turin

- Meeting of ESF Committee and associated preparatory meetings – details tbc
- European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) plenary session, 27-28 February 2013 - Clyde Court Hotel
- Bi-annual meeting of European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 14-16 May 2013 – venue tbc
- European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) Conference – details tbc

