



THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION

IS THE EUROPEAN UNION'S CENTRE OF EXPERTISE SUPPORTING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM IN THIRD COUNTRIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EU EXTERNAL RELATIONS PROGRAMMES.

HOW TO CONTACT US

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TEN YEARS OF THE EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION

1994 - 2004

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (http://europa.eu.int).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

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PAT COX, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Dialogue and co-operation between different regions and different cultures is essential for the development of a forward-looking education policy. Since its establishment in 1994 the European Training Foundation has made an important contribution to the development of training and education policies in the neighbouring countries of the EU by setting ambitious objectives based on trust and mutual respect, but also through genuinely trying to understand one another.

The European Union is founded upon the need for peaceful reconciliation between peoples who share a common destiny – through overcoming the destruction wrought by the division, hatred and mistrust of our previous barbaric century. The desire for dignity and respect based on diversity has always been respected by the European Training Foundation. We must share our experiences of the past in order to enhance our knowledge for the future. This will increasingly be needed in the European Union's relations with our near neighbours over the next decade.



CHRIS PATTEN, EU COMMISSIONER FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS, EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Over the last ten years, the ETF has spread the message about the importance of learning and promoted EU experience and practice in vocational education and training throughout its partner countries.

Across all of the regions with which the ETF works, we encourage and support step-by-step progress to help ensure stability, prosperity, democracy and freedom. These factors depend a lot on the collective knowledge and skills that a country or region has at its disposal. A solid skills base is crucial to enhancing international competitiveness and creating the right climate for strong and sustained growth.

Through the experience that we have gained, particularly through the work of the ETF, we know that a rich pool of educated and skilled citizens is a major component of this – education and skills development, together with flexible labour markets, enable governments to achieve their economic and social goals. I sincerely hope that the ETF will use the next ten years to continue the good work that it has started in helping its partner countries to reach these goals.

VIVIANE REDING, EU COMMISSIONER FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE, EUROPEAN COMMISSION

In March 2000 in Lisbon, the EU Heads of State and Government set 2010 as the date by which Europe should become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, while at the same time achieving a high level of social cohesion. At the 2002 Barcelona summit, they also set 2010 as the date by which Europe's education and training systems should become a worldwide quality reference.

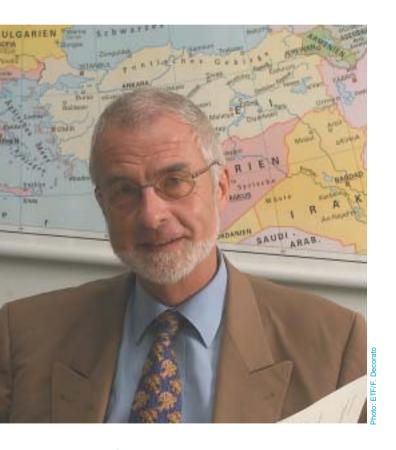
Since its establishment in 1994, the ETF has worked hard in spreading EU experience in vocational education and training into other neighbouring regions of the EU, initially by providing support to the implementation of programmes and projects in its partner countries and more recently by providing expert advice to these countries in their vocational training reform efforts.

This is all very much work in progress. The post-enlargement scenario brings further challenges for the Union's relations with its new neighbours to the east and the south. The ETF is well placed to play an important role in the social and economic transformation of these countries and contribute decisively to the European Union's strategic goal of spreading stability and prosperity beyond its enlarged frontiers.

As Commissioner responsible for Education and Training, I wish the ETF further decades of achievement in its mission to contribute to the economic and social development of its partner countries in its capacity as a recognised centre of expertise in vocational education and training reform.



A DECADE OF LEARNING



In two or three centuries from now, a historian looking back over the past decade would probably conclude that it marked the peaceful end of a division that ran through Europe for half a century.

For us standing right at the centre of it, however, it has been an extremely exciting period, at times turbulent, but continually feeding the belief that we have an active stake in making things better – in the world, in the European Union, even at the European Training Foundation.

Encouraged by the results of our involvement in preparing the new Member States for accession, today we feel that we are not at the end of a process, but right in the middle of it. What we have learned can, and must, continue to be used in the new EU Member States as well as elsewhere. For us enlargement is no longer simply an aim achieved. It has come to mean access gained to an inspiring new resource of expertise that can greatly support our work in our other partner countries, be it in the next wave of accession or in the new neighbours of the enlarged EU.

And time is on our side.

Right now, the notion that 'education and training reform is key to sustainable social and economic development' is shedding its status as a cliché – not just in our partner countries, but also in the European Union. In a world where change seems to have become the only constant, the momentum propelling the significance of human resources development upwards on policy agendas is stronger today than ever before.

At the same time there is growing awareness that, in a more 'globalised world', introvert policies can no longer secure social and economic welfare at home. The greater mobility of people and goods has increased the need to actively engage in the development of peace and prosperity in the broad range of countries with which we interact.

As a result, there is a pressing need for an effective fusion of knowledge on EU policies and programming, on the EU's partner countries, and on education and training development. This is precisely the expertise we have developed over the past ten years.

At the European Training Foundation we have learned a lot in these years and we would be unconvincing advocates of training reform if we had not used these lessons to improve our own services.

The publication in front of you describes in broad brush strokes how we did this. It is a frank account of how we progressed through the first ten years of the ETF's existence – not on our own, but through intense discussions with our Governing Board, the Commission services and our partner countries.

It describes how a vision to support the transition process in Central and Eastern Europe, by strengthening education and training in the region, materialised in 1994 when the ETF was established.

It shows how the ETF fared in a changing European landscape. In the past decade, the European Community shed the last remains of its 1950s founding legacy and transformed into a strong political union. Its foreign support changed accordingly: from seemingly ad-hoc interventions to a targeted drive towards EU enlargement and meaningful support to social and economic development in our neighbouring countries through the current *Neighbourhood Policy*.

It portrays the ETF growing, often in fits and starts, towards its position as *the* European centre of expertise on vocational education and training reform in regions like Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia, northern Africa and the near Middle East.



Albeit with quite a detour of learning by doing, the original vision of an expertise centre on vocational education and training reform has now materialised and is recognised by many partner organisations. I cannot underline enough how proud I am to see that. Neither can I underline enough how grateful I am to our staff, our Governing Board and our Advisory Forum, without whose unwavering commitment we would have never been able to achieve this.

Peter de Rooij Director ETF, 1994-2004

Programmes

Most ETF work takes place in the framework of (and is funded through) four large EU external support programmes. These are:

Phare

Phare was the programme devised in 1989 to support the transition process in Poland and Hungary. Other transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe were included in the years that followed. In 1997, Phare became the main instrument for the implementation of the EU's pre-accession strategy. Originally allocated €4.2 billion for the period 1990-1994, the Phare budget was increased to €6.69 billion for the period 1995-1999 and a massive €11 billion for the period 2000-2006.

Tacis

The EU's relations with the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia were underpinned in 1991 through a programme of technical assistance called Tacis. The programme supports the process of transition in the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union (except the Baltic States) and in Mongolia. In its first eight years, a total of €4.23 billion of funding were allocated to projects in the region. A new Council Regulation adopted in January 2000 opened a new phase of co-operation between the European Union and the partner countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, aiming to provide assistance totalling €3.14 billion until the end of 2006.

MEDA

Since 1996, the MEDA Programme has been the principal financial instrument of the European Union for the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The aim of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is to turn the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity. By 2010 a free-trade area should be established with the region. In November 2000, MEDA II (covering the period of 2000-2006) was adopted. The total funding of the new programme amounts to €5.35 billion.

CARDS

Since 1991 the European Union has committed, through various assistance programmes, €6.8 billion to the Western Balkans. In 2000, aid to the region was streamlined through a new programme called CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation). Through this programme €4.6 billion will be provided to the region in the period 2000 to 2006 for investment, institution building, and other activities.

BUILD-UP

DEVELOPING THE AGENCY 1994-1999

Origins

At a Strasbourg summit on 8 and 9 December 1989, and as a result of a meeting that had taken place in Paris a couple of weeks before, European ministers asked the Council of the European Communities 'to adopt, at the beginning of 1990, the necessary decisions for the establishment of a European Training Foundation for Central and Eastern Europe'. Just one month earlier the Berlin Wall had come down. Just ten days later the Phare Programme was adopted. Facing history in the making, European politicians were riding the fast track.

The blueprint for EU support to vocational education and training reform in Central and Eastern Europe was made at the Task Force for Human Resources¹. European Commission Secretary-General



David O'Sullivan, then a member of the Task Force, remembers the sense of urgency felt among his colleagues: "Basically, we wrote the proposals over Christmas. It was a very exciting time and people were extremely motivated."

European Council meeting, Strasbourg, 1989

¹ The Task Force for Human Resources was the predecessor of Directorate General XXII of the European Commission, known today as the Directorate General for Education and Culture.

The blueprint

In 1989 French President François Mitterand was the first to coin the idea of a European Training Foundation. However, at the time there was no clear idea yet of its scope and mandate. The division of European support to higher education and to vocational education and training in Central and Eastern Europe first emerged when a proposal to invite Poland and Hungary to join the Erasmus programme² was abandoned in favour of a separate programme supporting higher education in the region: Tempus.

The Task Force for Human Resources was given the job of designing the instruments of support. A member of the Task Force in those years was current European Commission Secretary-General David O'Sullivan. Recalling the rush to support the countries that had been thrown into political turmoil, he says:

"We burnt the midnight oil to devise two instruments: Tempus and the Training Foundation. Both were set to be launched right after the Council

adopted our proposals, but at the very last minute the Foundation got entangled in a political argument about the seats of institutions. There was absolutely nothing we could do. We launched Tempus and behind the scenes we did what we could to get the Foundation off that political battlefield, but in vain.

We had conceived Tempus and the European Training Foundation as part of a two pronged strategy. Training assistance was often tailored more to donor capacity than beneficiary needs. The ETF was designed to change that. We realised that a little money could only go a long way if efforts were coordinated, which is why you find references to non-EU countries in the original Council Regulation. The idea was to start with the definition of needs, then get partners together from both the EU and the G24 to cooperate in delivery. The delay in setting up the ETF meant that this integrated process never really got started."



Adopting the proposals of the Task Force, the Council established the European Training Foundation in May 1990. Its founding regulation stated that it had to work on 'the development of the vocational training systems of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe designated as eligible for economic aid by the Council [...]'³ by promoting 'effective cooperation between the Community and the eligible countries in the field of vocational training'.

The Council that approved the establishment of the European Training Foundation was the very same one that adopted the Tempus programme. The latter was launched within months. The projected European Training Foundation, however, became caught up in political bartering. It would take three more years for the ETF to find a home and another for it to begin operations.

The Erasmus programme was introduced in 1987 with the aim of increasing student mobility within the EU. Council Regulation (EEC) No 1360/90 of 7 May 1990.

By that time, the political landscape on both east and west of what was once the Iron Curtain, had changed dramatically yet again.

In Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union had collapsed, war raged in the Western Balkans, and Czechoslovakia had split into its two constituent parts. The Baltic States had regained independence and with the launch of the Tacis Programme, the scope of the ETF was broadened even before it had opened its doors.

In Western Europe, the Euro was still the virtual currency known as the ECU, and the Maastricht Treaty had been adopted – the European Community was now the European Union. Austria, Finland and Sweden were candidate countries.

Between east and west, the possibility of future EU membership of some of the former Central European countries began to be discussed.

A new start

By 1993 the European Training Foundation was on the list of agencies to be established outside Brussels in an exercise aimed at bringing parts of the EU civil service closer to EU citizens in the individual Member States. At the Edinburgh European Council meeting in October 1993, Turin's dedicated efforts to develop itself as the European capital of training were rewarded with the allocation of the agency.



Villa Gualino

The building

Is it a figure holding an open book? Is it a lion's head with his front legs stretched out? These are two of the suggested explanations for the unusual shape of the Villa Gualino, the imposing building on the hillside overlooking the city of Turin that has hosted the ETF since 1994.

It was originally built by Riccardo Gualino, a local financier and art collector. But after the stock market crash and his imprisonment on the island of Lipari in 1931 on accusations of anti-fascism, his business empire collapsed and Villa Gualino was left to fall into decay.

Abandoned for a long period after the Second World War, it was finally taken over in 1985 by the Regione Piemonte and restoration work began to turn the site into a hotel and conference centre, as well as a home for various small scientific organisations supported by the region. The work on the building was given a boost in 1994 when it was decided that the Villa would become home to the new EU agency that was being established in the city – the European Training Foundation. The refurbishment of the Foundation's offices was finally completed in spring 1997, and staff and Turin dignitaries celebrated with a garden party in June of that year.







Photos: ETF/A. Ramella

Capital of training

The choice of Turin as the home of the Foundation wasn't a finger pointed blindfold at a map of Europe. The capital of Piedmont was a welcome candidate when European ministers decided on the location of the first group of agencies in 1993. At the time, Francesco Panzica was Chief of Cabinet for the Mayor of Turin. He was part of the team that prepared the city's candidacy.

"We weren't just putting in a proposal for any agency. In fact, if there hadn't been a European Training Foundation it is unlikely that we would have become involved at all. It was precisely this agency we wanted because it had a mandate that clearly fitted the city's profile and ambitions. Turin has a history that is closely linked to labour – just think of the FIAT factories. But it is also the seat of some renowned international training institutions, such as the ILO's International Training Centre. The City Council took the initiative for Turin's

candidacy. They pushed the Mayor, which is how I got involved.

After the Edinburgh Council allotted the ETF to us, I was sent to Brussels for talks. We agreed to receive two architects who would check the various premises we could offer. We had it in mind to house the ETF at the Lingotto, the former FIAT headquarters, but the architects thought it needed too much work. Another building we had was an old noble building in the centre of town but there were parking problems and it was considered a bit too pompous anyway. Then the Regione Piemonte proposed to rent the ETF the Villa Gualino, which it owned, for a symbolic €1 a year over a 30-year period. The catch was the estimated €10 million restoration bill. In the end the local authorities and the European Commission split the bill for this."

In that same meeting, a decision was taken that the EC Tempus Office⁴ would become a part of the projected European Training Foundation; what many initially saw as a forced marriage was nothing but a reunion of two elements that had originally been designed to complement each other.

In the spring of 1994, the ETF's first Governing Board was appointed and convened by Thomas O'Dwyer, Director General of DG XXII, Education and Culture. In May of the same year, Peter de Rooij was made Director of the European Training Foundation.

Peter de Rooij moved into a temporary office in Brussels from where the initial group of 60 staff were recruited. His first appointed Deputy Director was Ulrich Hillenkamp, who had also been involved in developing the first blueprint for the ETF in 1989. Together they set out on the task of redrawing the original blueprint. Five years had passed since the collapse of communism in Europe. The landscape in which the European Training Foundation would operate had changed.

⁴ The EC Tempus Office was the technical assistance office responsible for assisting the European Commission in the implementation of the Tempus programme

But they found that vocational education and training reform was still largely ignored – implemented piecemeal and through isolated projects by national governments and multilateral donors who had little knowledge of each others' activities. Coordination, among international donors and even among the various EU initiatives in the region, was as badly needed as the original designers of the European Training Foundation had envisaged.

A new Foundation

In Turin, at the Hotel Concorde in September 1994, Peter de Rooij and Ulrich Hillenkamp gave the third meeting of the ETF Governing Board their view on how the ETF could best be employed, in support of the EU's efforts, to help countries in transition develop sound, labour market-oriented training systems on the ruins of their collapsed economies. However, before the ETF could commence work at the Villa Gualino, the city of Turin and all the builders it could muster had some engineering to take care of.

In November 1994, Livio Pescia, an Italian expert on training in enterprises, was appointed the ETF's other Deputy Director.

Preparations for the move from Brussels were made by the EC Tempus Office, which was fully functioning and had staff available to oversee the logistics. Its IT staff helped set up the network, and its technical services staff worked in close collaboration with the local authorities to convert (in record time) the crumbled 'arms and fists' of the Villa into the modern office space it became.

Ulrich Hillenkamp, Peter de Rooij and Livio Pescia



A decade at the helm

Peter de Rooij took up the post as Director of the ETF on 1 July 1994. He led the ETF from its inception in 1994 through a decade that was turbulent at times and never void of challenges. He faced the task of building an EU agency from scratch; the Turin-based ETF was to be developed into a knowledge and support base for vocational education and training development in the regions surrounding the European Union.

"I started my job on 1 July, six months before we moved into the Villa Gualino," he says today. "I'm a geographer but I didn't know exactly where Turin was. I remember I came home and found an atlas even before greeting my wife. Small surprise she was curious what I was up to.

It was a hot summer and in Brussels we had a daunting task ahead of us. We had a cupboard with 1,400 applications for the 60 jobs we were to launch the ETF with. At least we started our work with one ongoing operation: Tempus.

This year, I blew the dust off my personal archive to find evidence of how we embarked on the job in 1994. It made for fantastic reading. I was amazed. I found the minutes of that Governing Board meeting from September 1994. All the important people that were involved in the start-up phase of the Foundation were there when Deputy Director Ulrich Hillenkamp and I presented the Work Programme we had written, burning the midnight oil, to cover the first year of the ETF. It was peppered with all the issues we still talk of today: expertise centre; demand-driven approaches; networking key people; partnerships; 'east-east cooperation' – the way we referred to it before the Mediterranean region came into view; National Observatories – well, they were there as 'observatory function', but still. It was all there in autumn 1994."

What a mess

In 1994 Yassin Belakhdar was Coordinator of Technical Services for the EC Tempus Office in Brussels and the man appointed to oversee the logistics of preparing the move to Italy. Excited about the move, he nonetheless recalls that the operation ran into "plenty" of trouble:

"The first time we came to Turin was in mid-1994. I just remember we stood there thinking, 'oh my God, what a mess,' and 'they are never going to make it.' The main building of the Villa looked good but the parts that were meant to be our offices were in a shambles. I think it had been empty for more than 30 years. It looked bombed out.

I didn't return until two months later and the transformation was amazing. It was only then that I regained my belief in the operation. They had restored the nerve centre – the computer rooms – and it began to look like a place where you could set up a PC. The shop front by that time was OK too. It needed paint but at least they had taken down the trees that grew in the rooms. The Italian authorities were doing everything they could to get the premises ready by the end of the year.

Still, we had very little time to get everything done. In early January some 60 people had to move in and the biggest challenge was to get everything to work in a very short time in a new city, a new culture, a new language.

But in December all was set. Well, except that we had only two weeks because we couldn't start until the office in Brussels closed for Christmas. It was a huge move with ten trucks or so. There had been heavy snowfall and everything was delayed. But we got it done with no interruption of work."



The blueprint adapted

Before describing the projects with which the ETF was launched, it is worth taking a moment to return to the original proposals Peter de Rooij and Ulrich Hillenkamp put to the Governing Board when it convened at the Hotel Concorde in Turin in September 1994.

Their plans borrowed heavily from the original blueprint but there were some notable changes. The European Community had become the European Union. It was preparing for enlargement from 12 to 15. Quite understandably, the emphasis on G24⁵ cooperation had lost its prominence. It no longer made little sense to pursue complementarity with the Tempus programme, which was in its fifth year of operation and had entered its second phase.

However, what was particularly interesting was the appearance of a number of themes which would soon all but disappear from the agenda, then reappear again around the turn of the millennium.

Peter de Rooij and Ulrich Hillenkamp wrote that ETF staff would not primarily administer projects but would engage in the design, monitoring and evaluation of them. Most notably, they made reference to the ETF functioning as a 'centre of expertise'. Both concepts were soon consigned to the shelves by the day-to-day worries of a young organisation trying to find its course in a tumultuous environment. But after five years of gathering dust they re-emerged in 1999; expertise became the central theme in the most challenging years of the first decade of the ETF.

⁵ The Intergovernmental Group of 24 on International Monetary Affairs and Development (G-24) was established in 1971. Its main objective is to concert the position of developing countries on monetary and development finance issues. It consists of 24 countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

A rough start

In 1989, ETF Deputy Director Ulrich Hillenkamp worked in the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research. In charge of negotiating the original Council Declaration for Germany, he was closely involved in the earliest beginnings of the Foundation. He recounts excitement about the idea in the early 1990s, and a surprising similarity between the original ideas and the ETF of today.

"The idea of a European Training Foundation came from French President François Mitterand. His idea, in 1989, to create an institution to initiate and support reform in education and training in Central and Eastern Europe was conceived by us as both fascinating and great.

The Council Regulation itself didn't really reflect this. It was not very clear in vision and rather bureaucratic in nature. What was far worse, however, was that the idea lost its momentum by not being brought into force immediately. Decisive years were lost there. We all went our own ways.

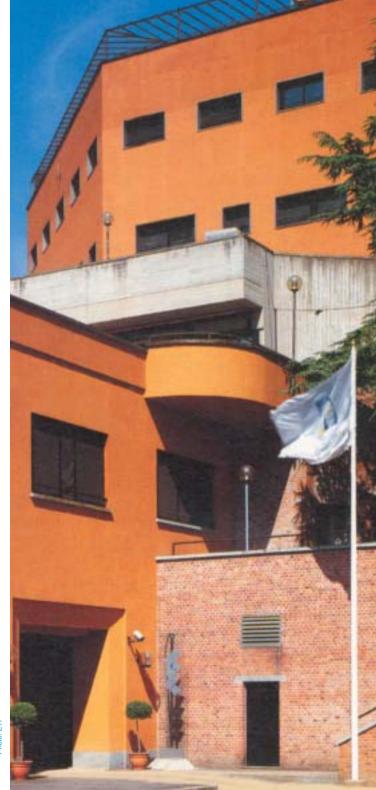
Peter de Rooij and I tried to set much straight in the first Work Programme we presented to the Governing Board. It is in surprising agreement with what today are seen as the main priorities for the ETF. The concept of a centre

of expertise was there, complete with its acknowledged three parts: expertise in VET in its broader setting, expertise in reform processes in our partner countries, and expertise in the ways and means of European Union external support.

In the first years, however, the reality would be quite different. The Foundation was predominantly used as an administrative body for EU projects. It was a rough start."



ETF staff, 1995



Members on board

As every other agency of the European Union, the European Training Foundation is governed by a Board comprising one representative from each of the EU Member States and relevant European Commission services. Candidate countries are represented by observers.

The ETF Governing Board meetings are chaired by the Director General for Education and Culture. At the moment this is Mr Nikolaus van der Pas.

The Governing Board convenes twice a year, normally in Turin. It is responsible for adopting the draft annual Work Programme of the ETF and its budget, subject to the approval of the European Parliament in the context of the overall European Union budget.

Most Governing Board meetings are accompanied by seminars allowing Board members to acquaint themselves with different aspects of the work of the Foundation. In the past such seminars have covered topics such as lifelong learning and the accession process.



Governing Board meeting, Turin, 1994

The Advisory Forum

From the outset, as described in the original Council Regulation of 1990, the ETF was to be steered by a Governing Board and guided by an Advisory Forum.

The Advisory Forum was established together with the ETF to discuss and provide input for its annually revised Work Programme. It was made up of vocational training experts – two from each partner country and EU Member State, and representatives of the European Commission. Organisations such as the ILO, the OECD and the World Bank were also represented.

Metaphorically speaking, the Forum's annual plenary was to become the ETF's parliament; all work programme proposals passed through the Forum's

plenary for critical review before being presented to the Governing Board for approval. Also metaphorically speaking, the Advisory Forum's individual members became the Foundation's ambassadors.

At its first gathering in October 1994, the Advisory Forum pushed for the establishment of a number of thematic subgroups. Four such groups were established; each had ten members and concentrated on a specific theme. Subgroups convened independently and reported back to the plenary with comments and advice.

The groups' themes could change each year, and so could their members. Themes addressed in the first year included: management of education in a decentralised structure, the role of the private sector

in VET, standards in VET, and strategies for continuing training.

Originally, the entire Advisory Forum met in plenary each year. Subgroups met on separate occasions to discuss specific priority subjects.

Almost ten years later, with the mandate of the Foundation extended to a total of 40 partner countries, the Advisory Forum counted 120 members. Full Forum meetings are only organised once every three years. However, regional groups still meet annually.

First projects launched

The spirit in which the first ETF-administered projects were launched was no longer the mix of plain solidarity and the sense of opportunity for new partnerships that had characterised the first years of university cooperation through Tempus. This would become one of the cornerstones of its later success.

By the end of 1994 association agreements had been signed with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

In Essen, in December 1994, the European Council adopted its pre-accession strategy. From the outset, ETF activity in these countries took place against the emerging backdrop of European integration.



Think-tank

The Advisory Forum survived the test of time and for good reasons. For the ETF, it was and still is a great antenna for picking up current developments and political moods in its partner countries. But over time, it also became a think-tank in its own right, developing new ideas for projects and advising on key areas for support.

Subgroups continued to address frontline issues in VET reform. Over the years, they have come to address topics such as standards in VET, the role of the private sector in VET, social partnership, quality assurance, core skills, and many others.

Their composition – with both Member State and partner country representatives – allowed them to address these issues with the benefit of both EU expertise and a thorough knowledge of the situation in the partner countries.

The challenge

The challenges facing VET in countries moving from a centrally-planned economy to a market-based economy were enormous.

Links between industry and training, vital for the responsiveness of the training system, were severed when central planning was abandoned. A dialogue had to be established among partners that had no history of direct communication and that were fully occupied with keeping their respective heads above the water.

Training in most countries had traditionally been based on very narrow specifications. Economic transition brought new jobs for which no such specifications existed, it brought mass unemployment with a resulting need for mass retraining, and it brought a volatile labour market which demanded, above all, flexibility.

Public funding dwindled. As a result, education suffered. VET – generally at the bottom of the pecking order and even more so in countries ruled by academics plucked right out of the lecture halls – suffered perhaps more than any other sector. In some countries, funding plummeted to levels that were insufficient to pay even basic maintenance and teachers' salaries.

Adding insult to injury, the countries that set western European practice as their norm for reform were chasing a moving target. Since 1990 VET in the EU has gone through changes that amply deserve the label 'reform'.

In most formerly communist countries, VET reform was an issue of low priority. This is partly because VET was (and still is) often seen as a last resort (education for those who cannot achieve anything else), and partly because reform of the system was a daunting task.

Under communism the vital dialogue between industry and the training sector had been channelled through central administrations whose multi-year plans defined the input and output of both. However, with the disappearance of central course-plotters, vocational schools across the region were left to their own devices – underfunded, understaffed, underequipped and unable to respond to the dramatic changes in the labour markets surrounding them.

VET reform programmes

One of the first tasks the Commission earmarked for the ETF was to administer a pack of eight broad VET reform programmes for the countries supported by the Phare Programme. The management of these was transferred to the ETF in spring 1995.

In their first phases, the eight programmes were very similar in structure and content. Most programme activities were limited to a select number of pilot schools. Their aim was to prime reform by setting examples. Emphasis was on curriculum reform, in-service training of teachers, developing

partnerships across Europe, and upgrading equipment.

Programme management units were established in each of the eight countries to support the implementation of the programmes locally.

Funding was made available through each country's Phare budget and ranged from €4 million for the programmes in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia to €25 million for the Romanian VET reform programme.

The Staff Development Programme

Another high profile project launched in 1995 was the Staff Development Programme. The programme aimed at supporting a large number of key individuals in the countries eligible for the Phare Programme. High profile people involved in VET, and therefore potentially in VET reform, were handpicked to take part in an extensive training programme. Participants were selected from both the private and public sectors.

The programme aimed at strengthening the skills of the individuals involved, building networks among them and between them and their counterparts in the EU, and developing a resource of personal contacts for the ETF. Around ten key policymakers from each of the 11 Phare partner countries participated in the programme. A further three or four training policy advisors were selected from each country with the specific aim of disseminating programme results.

The programme had a duration of one year and a budget of €1.4 million.

Stocktaking in the Tacis countries

The newly independent states of the former Soviet Union all gained independence after the ETF was designed but before its launch in 1995. They received support through the EU's Tacis Programme, but, with the exception of a number of management training initiatives, the involvement of Tacis in human resources development in those years was minimal outside Tempus.



VET image building

In 1992 Dita Traidas worked in the National Tempus Office in Riga. From there she became involved in the establishment of the Phare VET reform programme's programme management unit. The unit has since changed name and legal status, but Ms Traidas is still its director. She recalls how the ETF helped put VET on the political map in Latvia.

"The ETF helped build the image of VET in this country and helped turn plans into policy implementation. In Latvia a lot of things never happened because they were inconvenient and too complex. Civil servants tend to avoid work that generates more work. It was a daunting task and no surprise people were scared to handle it.

Take for example college level education. That was, and still is, a sensitive and hot topic for the higher education society. We would have never been able to open that field for debate without the backing of the ETF and ETF experts. The normal procedure for us became to identify the most topical issues, then plant these into the VET reform programme together with the ETF. Once the authorities had approved the programme they would have committed themselves. There would be no way back and the issues would start to be gradually elaborated nationally. Other than in this complex way, I don't think our agency would have been able to start the preparations for college level education.

In the end, endorsement of the ETF helped us to take the first steps in the development of a national qualification structure, a unified framework for the elaboration of occupational standards, institutional arrangements for working with social partners and a unified methodology for using occupational standards in the development of study programmes. All of these issues are critical to VET in a free market environment, but it is uncertain whether and when they would have been tackled without the backing of the EU."

Managing management

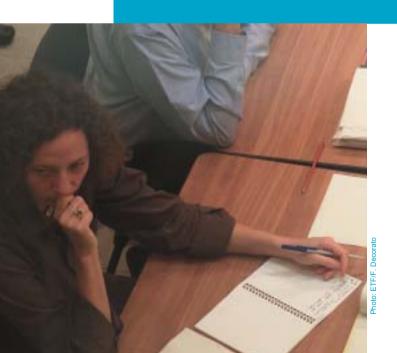
In July 1996, a year before President Boris Yeltsin issued his famous decree on management training, the European Commission asked the Foundation to review 20 of the earliest Tacis projects in the field of management and technical business training. The job, for which the ETF mobilised a dozen external evaluation experts, took ten months to complete and was coordinated by Deputy Director, Livio Pescia. In December 1997 the results of the exercise were published in a clear report, which was flattering where appropriate, but not afraid to crack the whip where necessary.

The central question in the report was whether Tacis has been correct in its judgement that the training of managers would prove to be an effective form of support, providing enough leverage to move the reform process forward. In other words: had the programme addressed fundamental business problems rather than promoting merely cosmetic reforms?

Interviews with individuals who were seen as leading advocates of the reform process showed an overwhelming consensus that a shortage of well-trained

managers had been – and continued to be – a serious obstacle to the reform process. There had been a need for managers who could move beyond their specialisations in order to handle commercial and strategic issues which they had not needed to consider in the past. The relevance of management training was not in doubt. However, the extent to which the projects had been able to realise their full potential varied widely from project to project.

Presenting the study in Moscow in February 1998, Foundation Deputy Director Livio Pescia expressed particular admiration for the way in which the report had commented on the issue of safeguarding proper use of the available funds: 'The study very openly identifies this problem and gives recommendations on how conditions can be established that are likely to result in real change and not a reinforcement of old practices. This, I think, is a courageous step which I appreciate very much.'



The Tacis partner countries excluded the Baltic States (they received support through Phare) but included Mongolia. From 1995, EU support to vocational education and training in these 13 countries was channelled through the ETF.

ETF involvement in the Tacis countries was quite different from what it was like in the Phare countries. Information on the state of vocational education and training in the region was so scarce that the first ETF

activity under Tacis was a plain stocktaking exercise. In 1995, three subsequent and complementary activities were projected. First, the ETF would set out to take stock of existing training provision and the reform initiatives in each country. On the basis of the gathered information it would produce in-depth studies. Finally, it would help translate the main conclusions of these in-depth studies into reform strategies in three countries.

As it turned out, the first of those activities – stocktaking – would keep the ETF busy for the better part of its first decade of existence. Information was, and would remain, the most sought after commodity in the struggle to reform vocational education and training.

The three countries selected for further involvement were Belarus, North-West Russia and Uzbekistan.

The North-West Russia project

With Minsk falling into discredit and Uzbekistan both physically and culturally far removed from the EU, North-West Russia would turn out to become *the* model region for EU involvement in vocational education and training reform in the former Soviet Union.



Around the table

A good part of the ETF's early work in the Tacis countries amounted to mapping the territory. Nascent National Observatories helped to collect the necessary data, while members of the Advisory Forum pointed out current trends and priorities.

However, much was also gained from putting stakeholders in VET (including those that perhaps traditionally never saw themselves as stakeholders in VET) around the table and giving them the often unprecedented opportunity to simply talk together.

In the three regions that were marked for pilot support, partnership conferences were organised. In Tashkent, Uzbekistan, this partnership conference focused on continuing training.

After years in which all dialogue was channelled through the government apparatus, many participants were unaccustomed to direct communication with representatives from other sectors of society. Yet, within days, they reached a consensus, which just goes to show how universal the main issues in continuing training are.

They set the scene for future international cooperation by identifying priority areas that are still high on the agendas today, such as standards and the training of teachers and trainers.

The North-West Russia project was a project involving different EU Member States. Launched in June 1996 and coordinated by the ETF, it became a classic in all respects, not least because it struggled to get off the ground; doubts about its continuation persisted right up until the end of its first phase. But when it finally gained speed its momentum was fully exploited, and today the model produced in North-West Russia is eagerly copied and adapted throughout the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Go on, this is unsustainable

Timo Kuusela worked for the Finnish Education Authorities when he first heard of the North-West Russia project. From there, he helped develop the Finnish input into the project. When he moved to the ETF in 1996, he was given responsibility for the programme. That turned out to cover a lot more than he had bargained for.

"The project covered VET reform in four sectors: telecommunications, tourism and hospitality, transport and wood processing. The idea was that the countries were responsible for sectors, while the ETF did the horizontal issues. My first job was to tender out the management of the project, but the tender procedure ran into problems. We lost time. After six months and no solution in sight, the ETF decided to take the management into its own hands. I became the project manager.

I knew from my time with the Finnish authorities that there were communication problems among the EU teams and indeed, the first meetings were very difficult. The teams simply couldn't agree on anything. It taught us an awful lot about communication, and that was what we found ourselves focusing on in the first years.

Towards the end of 1997 the project was evaluated externally. The main conclusion of the evaluators was that we had better continue because as things were they were totally unsustainable. So in the second phase we really took matters into our own hands. We led the project design, developed the framework and organised a two-week visit to the region with 20 people from the participating teams. From there on things were clear and all went well."

They all want North-West Russia

"The North-West Russia project hit the system so comprehensively that all sorts of spin-offs emerged, and its results are in high demand today both within the country and abroad," says Galina Borisova, Head of the International Department of the St Petersburg Education Committee and project steering committee member.

"The results of the project were greatly improved by the national authorities. We had eight regions participating in the project, but the last years were devoted to dissemination and another eight regions were added. In addition to that, the documentation was distributed to all regions in Russia. Of course, it could have landed on a shelf and gathered dust, but no, they actually use it! We recently participated in an exhibition in Moscow and from the feedback we received there we could tell that people from all over the country had read and started using things.

Some of the most popular results of the project are what we did with social partnership development. We published manuals devoted to the subject and those are in demand. Also our publications on the training of people, the development of personnel, are bestsellers. Institutions throughout the country that are carrying out this kind of training are using our publications. They ask for it, and they invite our local experts to deliver courses at their institutions.

New international projects have also created an opportunity to build on some of our work. A recently launched World Bank project has a VET component, and the regions that participate in this project are using our materials. Our results are also being used in the current phase of the Delphi project. Delphi has a VET component and includes five regions that did not participate in our project. We had a



couple of joint conferences and thematic workshops, for example on adult training and labour market assessment.

Even other countries make use of the results of the North-West Russia project. They receive their information through their own National Observatories. In conjunction with the 'Learning Matters' conference in Turin in 2003, the National Observatories discussed what project results should be disseminated. They all wanted North-West Russia."

National Observatories

In social as well as in economic terms, the level of effectiveness of a training system can be measured by its degree of responsiveness to labour market developments. In the recent past, proper planning could do the job. However, today's fickle labour markets demand flexibility. Responsiveness requires forecasts and good forecasts require reliable information.

Already early in the 1990s the lack of centrally collected information on labour market developments proved to be one of the Achilles' heels of education and training development in most of our partner countries.

Even before the launch of the ETF in Turin, Ulrich Hillenkamp and Peter de Rooij realised that its ability to collect, compile and disseminate such information would be one of the fundamental factors determining the success of the European Training Foundation. In their 1994 proposals, they therefore provided for the development of an 'observatory function'.

Because it was both impossible and undesirable for the ETF to gather such information from Italy, in 1995 they started to establish a network of 'intelligence' units. They became known as the National Observatories and were eventually established in 24 of the partner countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union and Mongolia.

The ETF helped these units develop the capacity to gather, analyse and disseminate targeted information relevant to education and training reform in the partner countries. The information they collected and analysed was used to: assess national policies and developments; monitor the progress of ongoing activities; measure their impact; identify needs and priorities facing each country; provide recommendations to address these; and facilitate the coordination of donor activities. The information provided by the Observatories is a key source for the analytical country reports and cross-country studies published by the European Training Foundation.

The Observatories came to represent the Foundation's principal operational network in the partner countries. They were, and are still, a focal point for ETF initiatives in these countries.



Trend-spotting

Cesar Birzea is one of the longest serving directors on the network of National Observatories. He has headed the Romanian Observatory since its establishment in September 1996. Asked whether his unit would survive if core funding would be cut today, he doesn't hesitate:

"Definitely, yes. We are more needed than ever and our principal customers today are fully aware of this.

Throughout the years, the ETF has gradually shifted its mode of investment in our Observatory from lump sum funding to contract funding, and that helped us prepare for the day when the umbilical cord would be cut. Put in plain commercial jargon, it taught us not only how to collect and compile information but also how to market and sell it, not least by raising awareness within our own countries on the significance of the work we did. The ETF provided contract work, but also brokered it.

Today, we work for a host of different customers and we manage some Leonardo projects. A current World Bank project in Romania has national indicators as one of its components. We provide these and break them down to regional and local levels. And we got a lot of work out of our host organisation, the Institute of Education Sciences."



Towards accession

In 1995 accession was still the subject of much speculation. In 1998 all there was left to speculate about was its timing.

Preparations for accession had a strong impact on the work of the ETF in the candidate countries.

Agenda 2000, the strategic plan for admitting new Member States, was presented in 1997 and confirmed

the 'new' Phare orientation which the Commission had announced earlier that year. The new Phare orientation added a catchphrase to the vocabulary of everyone involved in EU projects: *acquis communautaire*⁶. What it boiled down to was that Phare priorities for each country would be determined by unfulfilled accession requirements. However, the lack of EU regulations in vocational education and training meant that the Commission made no explicit demands on training reform in the candidate countries, so the news caused a bit of a stir.

Accession timeline

1993: The Copenhagen Council invites countries in Central and Eastern Europe to apply for EU membership.

1994: Poland and Hungary apply for EU membership. The European Council held in Essen, Germany, agrees on an overall strategy to bring the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe closer to the Community.

1995: The Commission adopts a White Paper on preparing the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe for integration into the European Union internal market. Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Bulgaria (in that order) apply for EU membership.

1996: The Czech Republic and Slovenia apply for EU membership.

1997: The European Council held in Luxembourg takes the decisions needed to launch the enlargement process.

1998: A ministerial meeting in March launches the accession process for the ten Central and Eastern European applicant countries, and Cyprus. Accession negotiations start with Cyprus, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia.

2000: Accession negotiations start with Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Bulgaria.

2002: In October, the European Commission recommends the conclusion of accession negotiations with Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. It considers that these countries will be ready for EU membership from the beginning of 2004.

2003: In April, the European Parliament approves accession of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia to the European Union.

2004: In May, the above ten countries enter the European Union.

⁶ Acquis communautaire is the term used to describe the entire body of European laws, which candidate countries are expected to adopt, implement and enforce before joining the European Union.

Tempus II bis

Tempus entered two 'top-up' years in its second phase. They were announced at a conference in Slovenia in 1997 to a less than enthusiastic audience. Tempus funding would be increasingly allocated to projects that helped support the accession process, most notably through what was described as *Institution Building*. Academics are not fond of being forced to serve the public authorities, and few among those present in Slovenia enjoyed the prospect of having to set up programmes to retrain civil servants. (Interestingly, today *Tempus II bis*, as it became known, is widely acknowledged to have been the most successful period of the programme.)

Concern

Among the ETF's partners in vocational training there was possibly even more concern. Candidate country representatives present at the February 1998 Governing Board meeting feared that just as the Phare VET reform programmes had started striking a chord with the authorities back home, their funding would be cut. "If vocational training reform is not a priority in Phare there is a risk that national governments will not see it as a priority anymore either," said Jana Hendrichova, Head of Department at the Czech Ministry of Education.

Their concerns proved unfounded. Indeed, VET might not at that stage have been a priority.

However, employment was *the* priority in European policymaking. And as Peter de Rooij would remark just two years later: "To most policymakers, training issues are not very exciting, but link them to employment and unemployment and you'll get a lot more interest."

European Social Fund preparations

This comment was made at the closing conference of a special preparatory programme for the European Social Fund (ESF-SPP) which, in the years between, had become one of the ETF's main contributions to the accession process in the candidate countries. The project helped these countries prepare for access to the European Social Fund. It set up National Training Institutes in each of the countries and provided for the instruction of some 3,000 staff at NGOs and national, regional and local authorities.

Leonardo

The European Social Fund was not the only pot of EU money that ETF partners in the candidate countries would soon gain access to. The inclusion of the group in the Leonardo and Socrates programmes was scheduled to commence well before accession in 2004. Importantly, Leonardo seemed to provide the only means of financing activities in the periphery of project activities that were fully aimed at accession preparation.



A daunting read

When Dimitar Matev, Head of the Department of International Activities of the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, asked Anthony Tyrell of the Irish ESF Evaluation Unit to send him whatever information there was on Irish ESF experience, he received a true flood of books and other publications for weeks on end. "Finally, Anthony called me and asked whether I had received and read everything. I replied that I needed a sabbatical to do that."

Speaking in November 1999 at Bulgaria's First Local Seminar on the European Social Fund, Matev used this example to illustrate the tasks Bulgaria faced informing its citizens on the theory and practice of the European Social Fund.

With support from the Special Preparatory Programme for the European Social Fund, Matev had travelled around Europe in 1998 and 1999. His newly gathered knowledge of ESF practice in Spain and Portugal put him in an excellent position to identify the most urgent needs in Bulgaria and share these with the participants to the seminar.

Even Finland could inspire Matev: "The Finnish GDP per capita is 15 times higher than the Bulgarian, but we can nevertheless learn a lot from Finnish experience, such as how to survive in the EU with an incomprehensible language."

Indeed, some of the programme management units – which by then had developed into key centres of expertise in EU project management in the candidate countries – only survived the period between the end of the Phare VET programmes and the moment of accession as a result of successful bids for Leonardo projects.

Already in 1996 the ETF had co-organised a conference in Berlin on candidate country participation in the Leonardo programme. After the Berlin conference, national Leonardo workshops were organised throughout the region to support preparation for participation in the programme.

Extension, expansion...

The geographic scope of the ETF was extended with almost every year that passed. Activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina were started in 1996 and the other countries that had emerged from the smoke of the Balkan wars followed in the years after.

In July 1998 the Council of Ministers amended the ETF's regulation to extend its geographic scope to the non-EU Mediterranean countries. ETF work in the region would take place in the framework of the European Union's MEDA Programme. As a hotch-potch of countries, the MEDA region was dramatically different from anything the ETF had previously worked with. Starting up in the region was widely and rightly perceived as a crash test for the

generic value of VET reform expertise developed in Turin. Cooperation with the MEDA countries is therefore discussed in the last part of this publication.



130 staff

As an organisation the ETF went through a period of rapid growth. Within three years it grew from the



original 60 staff to its peak of 130. Although this greatly increased the Foundation's capacity to perform its duties, indirectly it also put the organisation slightly off course. For the ETF to develop into the envisaged centre of expertise on vocational training reform in its partner countries, experts needed to be recruited. However, the nature of the most pressing tasks required the recruitment of staff with a different profile.

In the words of Deputy Director Ulrich Hillenkamp: "In the first years, ETF intelligence about the inner logic of reform processes and the interdependence of VET and other parts of the education system was limited – partly because this was not what the European Commission asked from us, and partly because our staff profiles were restricted in those years. The ETF body of staff was largely made up of young people who were highly motivated but lacked, at the time, in-depth knowledge. They were, by necessity, more administrators of projects and procedures than experts in VET reform."

Towards the end of the 1990s, a string of unrelated events would quite suddenly change all of that. They cast the agency into a period of turmoil, but they also presented the ultimate opportunity to change tack and realign the course – back towards the original blueprint.

Policies or chairs?

In the middle of the 1990s, Bosnia and Herzegovina was in tatters. Together with the World Bank, the ETF set out in 1996 to assess what would be needed to get education and training in the country on its feet again.

They found that virtually all schools had been badly damaged and were severely lacking in equipment and facilities. However, they also found that the immediate need to rebuild facilities was matched by the need for a training system that could cater for a country whose demography had changed drastically within a few years. The war had left behind groups of people with very particular needs: demobilised soldiers, disabled people, internal and returning refugees, widows and their families, and so on.

It was an exercise that touched some core dilemmas of foreign support to education and training, and that marked the beginning of a period of reconstruction that forced international donors to focus on issues such as partnership and social inclusion without ignoring the immediate needs of the people. The words of one of the experts working on the report described the immensity of the tasks faced. He wrote: "No amount of policy sophistication and fine-tuning of the labour market will compensate for students not having seats to sit on nor roofs over their heads or equipment to work with."



DEVELOPMENT

RE-PLOTTING THE COURSE 1999-2001

In March 1998 accession negotiations were opened with the first candidate countries. Their move towards the EU spelt a gradual reduction of ETF activity in the countries that, until that moment, had been the main working territory of the Foundation.

In March 1999 allegations of fraud led to the resignation of the entire Santer Commission. The decentralised management of large sums of EU money had been under scrutiny for some time already, but the allegations brought it centre stage and forced the new Commission to take convincing action. It did. The ETF could no longer be called upon to manage large EU programmes.

In March 2000, in Lisbon, a special European Council embarked upon an ambitious strategy to make Europe the world's most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy within ten years.

Over time, this would put investment in education, both within the EU and in its periphery, at the top of the agenda.

These three developments would become the main determinants of the fate of the ETF in the first years of the new millennium.





The first two because they resulted in massive budget cuts and the loss of a future perspective in what had inadvertently become its main activity: project management and administration. The ETF was forced to rethink its course and carve out a new role for itself. Being an agency of the European Union it could not just go its own way, so with the Commission it engaged in what would become known as the 'structured dialogue'.

A new role

Through the structured dialogue, ETF and Commission representatives held high-level talks about the role of the ETF in the EU project cycle. A lead role in this process was taken by Deputy Director General Catherine Day of DG RELEX, the Commission's DG for external relations. Supported by Domenico Lenarduzzi (Director General for Education and Culture at the time who played a crucial role in the preparation of the Lisbon summit and the development of the EU approach to lifelong learning), she would be the one to blow the dust off the original idea of the ETF as an expertise centre.

There was no longer a role for the ETF in the administration of projects. Participants in the structured dialogue agreed that the ETF should reorient its course, trim back its capacity to administer projects and instead, exploit and expand the rich knowledge it had gathered on VET reform policies and practice in transition countries.

In the partner countries, the European Delegations would become the main fund managers of the Commission. The new role for the ETF would be to provide expertise to the Delegations and Commission services in Brussels at their request.

Italian Trust Fund

Although core funding for the ETF comes from the European Union, its know-how can be called upon by individual EU Member States. The Italian government, for example, is increasingly tapping ETF expertise to support its work in the Western Balkans.

It all started with an agreement to run a project on the development of small businesses in Albania. This €515,000 project was launched in 2001 and its successful implementation earned the ETF a three-year framework agreement.

Under this agreement, the Italians committed themselves to supporting projects in the area of overlap between the ETF Work Programme and the objectives of Italian international assistance. In the years that followed this led to a number of activities launched in close collaboration with the Italian authorities.

In 2002, four projects were launched. The Leedak project aimed at promoting local employment and economic development in Albania and Kosovo. An e-learning project for human resources development experts targeted professionals in all partner countries. A series of preliminary studies examined the potential of a network of observatories in the Mediterranean countries. Finally, a tool for training needs analysis in enterprises – which the ETF had developed in Russia – was adapted and tested in Albania, Bosnia and Serbia with the help of funding from this Italian Trust Fund.

In 2003, under the same agreement, additional funds helped the ETF disseminate the results of the Copenhagen process in the Western Balkans and carry out a project on labour market intelligence in the region.

Reorganisation

The ETF embarked on a process of change and reorganisation to better be able to fulfil this new mandate. Departments were organised along geographic lines, providing a one-to-one partner structure with DG External Relations. The staff profile was gradually shifted to fit a new set of tasks. Experts were recruited rather than hired for ad hoc tasks. The logo, house-style and slogan were changed to reflect the new course.

The trouble was, requests from Brussels and the Delegations were slow to materialise. Tasks in the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region increased on the credit of the ETF's excellent pioneering work. In these regions, the Foundation had a chance to demonstrate the generic value of the expertise developed through its work under Tacis and Phare. But partners with whom the Foundation worked in these regions continued to eye the ETF

with suspicion; the reputation it had built up as a body of programme administrators proved hard to shake off.

Put somewhat bluntly, the bricks were in place to relaunch the concept of the expertise organisation but the Commission was largely unaware of what the ETF could offer. To be fair, the ETF was largely unaware of what the Commission wanted too. Therefore, in the first six months of 2000, Olivier Ramsayer, former Head of the Tempus Department and at the time Head of the new Meda Department was sent on secondment to DG External Relations to work on a solution to these problems.

Resource to be used

The real turnaround came in December 2000. Acknowledging that a free resource lay underused, Catherine Day circulated the ETF Work Programme to all relevant Directors and Heads of Units and to all Heads of EC Delegations in the partner countries. In the accompanying letter she explained that the ETF was paid for from the operational budgets of the EU assistance programmes and that, therefore, its services could be used by all at no extra cost. She encouraged her colleagues to start using the ETF for such tasks as needs assessments, project identification, and following up on programme results.

With that, the ETF was launched into its new role.

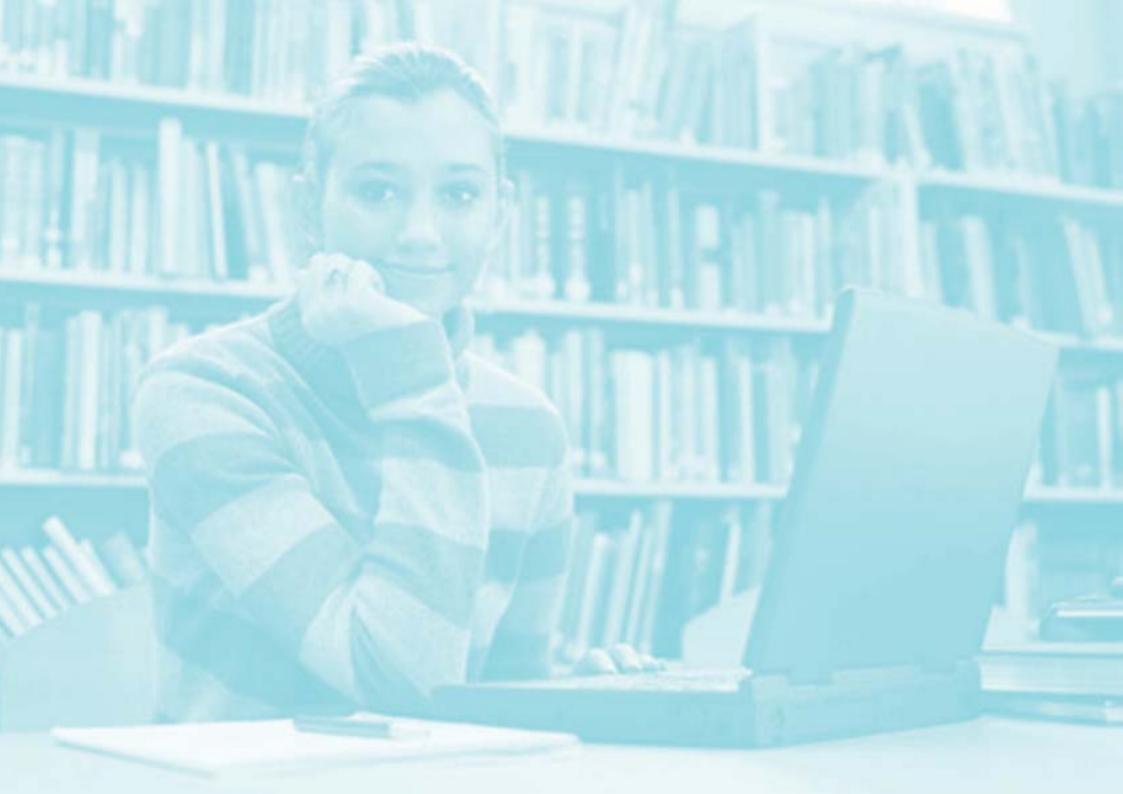
Vitruvian mark

A square, a circle, a rectangle and a line make up the simple, but striking design that is the ETF logo. The design takes its creative inspiration from the famous Leonardo da Vinci drawing, Vitruvian Man, showing the proportions of a human figure inside a square and a circle, but here the elements tell a different story.

Apart from the fact that the letters 'ETF' can be discerned from the pattern of shapes, the circle is a two-dimensional globe and the vertical rectangle indicates the division between east and west. The horizontal line represents the bridge between the two that lent the ETF its first slogan: 'Building Bridges in Training'. The colours of blue and yellow were not only chosen because they are the same as those of the EU, they also happen to be the traditional colours of the city of Turin.

As the ETF developed into a centre of expertise, the logo was updated to keep pace. Many staff felt the links with the EU were not explicit enough so the EU flag was added. The organisation had become known more by its initials than its full name, so it was decided to reflect this in the logo, and add a new slogan to better describe its function:





SHARING EXPERTISE

TOWARDS THE EXPERTISE CENTRE

Focus on human resources

In the previous chapter, we made a brief reference to a third development that would gravely impact the work of the European Training Foundation in the first years of the new millennium: the 'Lisbon process'.

Although bold, the ten-year plan for making Europe the strongest knowledge-based society in the world wasn't an isolated stroke of genius: over time, a number of contributing factors had come together. The most important was the advance of technology, which in the last decades of the previous century had made increasingly clear how vocational skills would rapidly become outdated in a modern society.

Employment had long been a top priority in European politics. Social issues rose rapidly on the agendas as a result of, among others, migration



opean Union photo library

The Copenhagen Declaration

Over the years, cooperation at European level within education and training has come to play a decisive role in creating the future European society... Strategies for lifelong learning and mobility are essential to promote employability, active citizenship. social inclusion and personal development. Developing a knowledge-based Europe and ensuring that the European labour market is open to all is a major challenge to the vocational educational and training systems in Europe and to all actors involved. The same is true of the need for these systems to continuously adapt to new developments and changing demands of society. An enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training will be an important contribution towards ensuring a successful enlargement of the European Union, and fulfilling the objectives identified by the European Council in Lisbon.

The Copenhagen Declaration, 30 November 2002



confirmation of the acknowledgement that no economic or infrastructural interventions could impact employment and unemployment (and as a result welfare and stability) as much as human resources development.

Lifelong learning rightly became the catchphrase, and investment in the development of continuing training rose. This was the case both within the European Union and in the external support it provided. As Phare shifted focus towards preparation for accession, support to the Western Balkans through the new CARDS Programme came to concentrate on social development. Under the Tacis Programme, large infrastructural projects fell from grace and attention moved towards human resources development too.

pressure and instability on Europe's doorstep in the

Western Balkans. The Lisbon objectives were a

If that wasn't enough to secure demand for the services of the European Training Foundation, two more developments pushed the value of its expertise even further.

On 30 November 2002 the education ministers of 31 European countries and the European Commission adopted the Copenhagen Declaration on enhanced cooperation in European vocational education and training.

In March 2003 the European Commission's *Communication on Wider Europe* marked the starting point of what would soon become known as the 'European Neighbourhood Policy', which aims to 'strengthen stability, security and well-being' in the EU and a 'ring of countries sharing the EU's fundamental values and objectives' through 'greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation'.

In short, Lisbon cemented the priority position of human resources development on the EU policy agenda, Copenhagen promoted the role of VET in this, and the Neighbourhood Policy demands increased cooperation with the ETF's partner countries. At the ETF Advisory Forum conference in November 2003, Nikolaus van der Pas, Director General for Education and Culture caught the emerging spirit when he said: "Learning matters for economic and social development. Learning matters for social cohesion. Learning matters for social and political stability."

If the ETF had not been developed in 1990 and if it had not been established in 1995, it would have been established in 2003. Within the framework of EU policy, its expertise had become more topical than ever before.

Meeting of ministers of education, Copenhagen, 2002

Pioneering in the Mediterranean

Its slate clean, the ETF's Meda Department, had an excellent starting position. When the department became operational in 1999 there were no running projects that had to be phased out, and new activities could be planned entirely in line with the anticipated new role of the Foundation. Perhaps more crucially, in the years following the establishment of the department, staff could be recruited according to a new set of specifications.

Cooperation with Syria got off the ground after Deputy Director Ulrich Hillenkamp visited Damascus

Photo: ETF.

in 1999. At a UNESCO conference, the Syrian Deputy Minister for Vocational Education and Training asked him if the ETF could help with the development of an apprenticeship scheme. A first seminar on the topic took place in 2000 and pilot activities were launched in the country in 2001.

An identification mission to Syria took place in February 2003. The Commission accepted its recommendations and made the necessary preparations for a large VET reform programme which thus directly builds on the results of ETF involvement in the country.

In Algeria, the ETF followed a similar path. A VET country report was published in 1999 and spearhead activities focused on the establishment of an observatory function in the country. In response to a direct request from the Commission, an identification mission was launched in 2001. This mission also resulted in detailed feedback to help the Commission set up larger scale support to VET reform.

Reconstruction

Although operations in the Western Balkans had started as early as 1996, here too there were few precedents that had allowed an image to develop of the ETF as an agency administering reform programmes for the European Commission.



Paving the way

ETF support to the launch of an apprenticeship scheme in Syria has made a difference. Between 2001 and 2004 almost 400 apprentices completed training in the capital Damascus in four trades: garment-making, automation, mould-making and mechanical handling. The scheme was extended to Syria's second city Aleppo, and discussions are now underway concerning Homs and Latakia.

Teachers in three participating schools in Damascus had their skills updated and improved. Several went on to become trainers themselves. The Syrian government spent around €0.7 million on upgrading equipment, and a brand new school dedicated exclusively to the apprenticeship scheme was set up on the outskirts of Damascus.

In its three years of operation, the ETF project built bridges between education ministry officials, industrialists and heads of schools, and between teachers and company supervisors. In the long term, the pilot activities are set to lead to the development of a training system that is much more responsive to the needs of industry. For this, the strong involvement of industrialists was paramount.

The project produced a Green Paper that proposes introducing a dual system throughout the country. Industrialists and the government have also begun negotiating the future financing of such a system.

Last but not least, the success of the apprenticeship scheme paved the way for the subsequent, much more ambitious, €21 million MEDA project aimed at overhauling the entire VET system of Syria.

In fact, in this region, close collaboration with the EC Delegations was good from the outset, and the ETF played a constructive role in other initiatives aimed at reconstruction in the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

Much of the information collected in the Western Balkans was used to compile progress reports for the EC Delegations in the region. Other information collected by the ETF was used in planning activities by the Agency for Reconstruction.

The OECD used ETF assistance in the preparation of thematic reviews of individual education systems and policies as part of its programme of cooperation with the Stability Pact for South East Europe. As a follow-up to this exercise, in 2002 the ETF carried out a series of peer reviews focused on reform policies in vocational education and training in the countries concerned. The results of these were used in the development of EU assistance through the CARDS Programme.

Changing responsibilities

The consequences on the ground of the changing role of the European Training Foundation were particularly clear in the countries that received support through the Tacis programme. As projects came to an end, programme administration was gradually phased out. However, ETF involvement was not. Its nature changed from administrative to

advisory. The new orientation of the Tacis Programme made the demand for expertise in education and training reform higher than ever before.

Reflection

From its new perspective, the ETF also had a chance to review its past activities and their impact. A renewed need for stocktaking surfaced and resulted (with strong support from the National Observatories) in a series of publications that were far more detailed in nature than those of the 1990s.

Another example where review led to revision was the *Key Indicators* series. Published regularly in regional publications, these are exactly what the title describes, and as such are *the* international resource for current data on education and training in these regions.

Good neighbours

Foreign experts are often strangers to VET professionals in the partner countries. Even if the expertise of such consultants is up to scratch and their ability to transfer it is fluent, local project partners may find it hard to accept their advice. Neighbours can be even harder to take opinions from, but this is often because they experience similar problems and know all too well what they are talking about.

The peer review exercise walked the fine line between these two approaches and capitalised on the common history of the Western Balkans and the will to rebuild regional links. Through the peer review project, experts from different countries in the region drew up assessments of VET in their neighbouring countries.

The results of the peer reviews were used as input for European Commission assistance under the CARDS Programme for each



In 2002, the ETF discovered problems with the collection and use of these data in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Looking into this, it found that the value of key indicators was poorly understood. As a

country, and within a common regional framework. They had the potential to greatly improve regional cooperation among policymakers and experts in vocational education and training, and to increase the capacity for vocational education and training reform policy analysis in the individual countries in the region through the sharing of expertise.

The 2002 peer reviews were a success. In fact, so much so, that in autumn 2003 the exercise was extended into the remaining South-Eastern European countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey. In these three countries the peer reviews were strictly thematic, and covered, for example, the development of adult learning in Bulgaria and the role of social partners in Turkey.

result they were hardly used. What was worse, because people failed to see their importance, their collection and even reliability was brought into jeopardy too. In response, the ETF decided to use that year's *Key Indicators* budget on advocating their use rather than on actually publishing them.

Learning Matters

The process of reflection on lessons from the past found its culmination in the 2003 Advisory Forum conference 'Learning Matters' – the largest single event in the history of the European Training Foundation.

Transfer

Delphi is short for Development of Educational Links and Professional and Higher Education Initiatives. The first phase of this Tacis project focused on five key regions of the Russian Federation and consisted of components which in parallel addressed policy development, teaching reform, standards development, and the improvement of Russia's open and distance learning system. Under the guidance of the European Training Foundation, Delphi explored ways to re-establish the dialogue between authorities, companies, training providers and others with a vital stake in training.

Delphi is a project where the ETF had the opportunity to display one of its great strengths: linking expertise available within the European Union to regions that stand to benefit from its application. Mr Talonov, a key member of the Russian ministry's team that will help deliver the second stage of European support, believes that the value of these ETF brokered links should not be underestimated. "The process of reform in Russian education is a very complex one, and it is very important to have some kind of external view or monitoring of this," Mr Talonov says, adding that the Russians regard Delphi as a "bridge between western European experience and expertise and Russia's reform process."

The Delphi project exemplifies much of what the ETF stands for today. First, it is a comprehensive programme that aims at addressing all angles to the critical issue of linking industry and training in a young market economy neighbouring the EU. Second, it illustrates how the ETF can link expertise available in the EU with specific needs in the partner countries. And third, because it is an initiative where the ETF delivered the primers, helping groundbreaking activities onto the tracks of sustainability, and gradually reducing its involvement to advisory and monitoring activity.

Learning Matters

In early November 2003 the ETF convened a large number of experts to discuss the results of more than a decade of education and training reform in its partner countries, as well as the role of external assistance in the reform processes. Some 250 Advisory Forum members and experts from international organisations, EU institutions, Member States, and partner countries, were invited to the conference which took place in Turin.

The conference title not only highlighted the value of learning for development in the individual, but also the importance of learning in VET policy development. It was also a stern reminder of the benefits international donors can reap from reviewing their past activities and applying the lessons learnt to future policies and projects.

In many ways the conference was not just a review of recent experiences with VET reform in transition countries, but also an introspective return to some of the low-level issues that have guided education reform policies in recent years, as well as an honest and open debate on what can and should be done differently in the years ahead.

All conference materials, including the final statement can be found on: www.etf.eu.int.

From 'policy copying' to 'policy learning'

The final statement of the Learning Matters conference underlined the need for lifelong and life-wide access to education and training for *all*. It asked for all providers of international assistance to learn from past experiences, with particular reference to the issues of local ownership, institutional fit and sustainability of reforms.

Through its statement, the conference warned that "progress in VET reform in the partner countries has not fully realised its potential," and that "policies formulated have not always been implemented." Issues that, according to the conference, have been addressed insufficiently in the past include "the

links between VET and labour market needs; the capacity in institution building related to public-private partnership and social dialogue; investment in education and training; and the role of teachers and trainers."

Throughout the conference, the dangers and even failures of 'policy copying' received much attention and the final statement reflected this. It therefore asks for foreign assistance to be "firmly based on knowledge sharing and organised in policy learning partnerships."

The final statement concludes with 12 challenges for VET reform in the time ahead, stating that these challenges "should be addressed in context-specific approaches and include consideration of both the formal and informal sectors. The need for more and better investment in high quality education and training is even more pressing in difficult times. Its contribution to national economic performance, local development and poverty alleviation, stability, and democratisation should not be underestimated."



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Evolution of the National Observatories

Transition to ReferNet

Ten years of effort put into the network of National Observatories were richly rewarded in 2003 when Cedefop invited all National Observatories in the acceding countries to put forward their applications to become members of Cedefop's Network of Reference and Expertise (ReferNet)⁷ as leading partners of wider national partnership platforms. The ETF supported their transition to a new role in the first quarter of 2004.

National Observatories in the Western Balkans

The success of the units in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union merited a repetition of the exercise when the ETF started to operate in the Western Balkans. Existing National Observatories in the candidate countries were mobilised to support the development of new units in this region and all countries now have their own National Observatory.

Observatory functions in the Mediterranean

As mentioned earlier, many countries in North Africa and the Middle East already had functioning market economies when cooperation through the MEDA Programme started. As a result, a variety of labour market monitoring systems were already in place when the ETF commenced its work in the region. The main challenge in the region was to put existing, often fragmented monitoring systems to good use. Different authorities often had access to parts of the information needed for efficient labour market monitoring but the information was barely shared among different actors involved.

In this region the ETF faced the challenge of bringing these different actors together and getting them to share their information sources for an obvious common benefit. Work in this area has only just commenced. No special units have been established in the region; the work processes are referred to as Observatory Functions. These are under development in Algeria, Jordan, Syria and Morocco.

In cooperation with MEDSTAT⁸, the ETF also started working on the development of a key indicators database for the non-EU Mediterranean countries. The database will contain key VET and labour market statistics for the region.

Connected

Originally through the North-West Russia project, but today also through her seat on the editorial board, Galina Borisova has almost a decade of experience of working with the ETF. She saw the organisation overcome its teething problems and grow into the expertise centre it is today. For her and many of her colleagues in the partner countries, the greatest pleasure of working with the Foundation was always the fact that the ETF 'speaks their language'.

"I realise that at the beginning the ETF faced all sorts of problems: concept development, bilateral work. But I saw how they progressed in that. Their new mission clearly shows that they have started to work as a centre of expertise. They have moved from project management to true experts. For me that became particularly obvious in Ukraine when we were involved in a VET study for the European Commission. I could notice the reaction of the authorities and the people we worked with: they got a tremendous lot out of the information the ETF brought them. The coordinators in Ukraine also got really practical help with papers, training and meeting arrangements.

I am now also a member of the editorial board and see how they are developing their internal structure and their concepts. I also finally get a chance to get acquainted with much of the other interesting work they are engaged in. I think that the ETF is of great use to the countries it works with. They are helpful, and they can find a common language both with people on the ground and with the authorities. They are connected. People recognise what they say. There is trust between the ETF staff and the people working in the countries."

⁷ Cedefop is the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Education and Training and is a sister agency to the European Training Foundation.

⁸ The EU MEDSTAT programme aims at developing the information systems of 12 Mediterranean countries' statistical systems, such as National Statistical Offices and other institutions involved in the production of statistics

From faction to function

Former minister Dr Munther Masri has been an ETF Advisory Forum member for Jordan since 1999. He now heads the National Centre for Human Resources Development in Amman. Although ETF work in the country has only just got off the ground, the critical work on labour market information monitoring is already bearing fruit, he says.

"The strength of ETF involvement in labour market information analysis in Jordan is in the way it goes beyond just collecting data. The ETF helps us develop not just the capacity to collect information, but also to manage and use it.

The collection of labour market information itself is not an easy task. In Jordan there were seven different sources which published information on different segments of the labour market. They had different aims and different interests and little vision about the usefulness of putting their heads together. Of course, their information sources were all but incompatible. With ETF support, good progress is now being made in terms of adapting all of these to fit one system.

Simultaneously, however, the ETF helps us find the expertise to start utilising these data in a meaningful way. Contrary to common practice, we don't just get access to the limited expertise of an organisation or country. In fact, the ETF functions as a conduit to whatever expertise there is available in the European Union. The links established with peer organisations in, for example, Ireland and Spain are invaluable to us."



Accession

On 1 May 2004, ten of the European Training Foundation's partner countries became full members of the European Union. For the ETF their accession marked the end of a long process of networking people, piloting reform, brokering expertise, and finally, building the capacity to deal with European processes, policies and institutions.

Preparing the education and training systems and the labour markets of the ten acceding countries for EU membership had been an immense operation, and one in which the ETF came to play a role that would quash the gloomy forecasts uttered at the Governing Board meeting in 1998.

In the run up to accession, much of the work in Central and Eastern Europe focused on issues which were also topical in the EU, such as the development of lifelong learning systems, innovative teacher and trainer training, and the development of appropriate qualification systems. Each year, DG Enlargement drew up regular reports, detailing the current state of affairs in the future Member States with regard to a number of EU policy hot spots. The ETF provided input into these through its annually published Reviews of Progress in Vocational Training Reforms.

In 2002 the ETF compiled a series of country monographs for the future Member States. These reviews of the current state of vocational education and training and employment were produced to help DG Employment and Social Affairs monitor the

progress made towards meeting the targets outlined in the Joint Assessment Papers on employment prioritie.

In the process, a wealth of information mapping reform progress, activities and stakeholder structures was compiled at the ETF. Close cooperation between the ETF and Cedefop in the period leading up to accession ensured that none of these resources were wasted. The ETF handed over country files with all main publications and a 'who's who' in vocational education and training in each country. As mentioned earlier, it helped the National Observatories prepare for participation in Cedefop's Network of Reference and Expertise (ReferNet), and it helped stakeholders in the new Member States prepare for participation in other Cedefop networks.

The outlook, ten years on

As far as the new Member States are concerned, the time ahead will be no less exciting than the past decade. Their performance will have significant implications on the work of the ETF in the years to come. "The first round of enlargement will provide some important clues about how we should proceed with EU support to human resources development in other future Member States," says ETF Director Peter de Rooij. "We have worked hard to help the acceding countries prepare for accession, but only since the Lisbon Council has vocational education and training development moved to the position it

really deserves on European policy agendas. Now there is broad agreement on the importance of adapting education and training to the needs of a knowledge society. There is also a detailed agreement on stepping up European cooperation in vocational education and training through the process that was started in Copenhagen in 2002. As a result, today we have an excellent opportunity to even better prepare future Member States for accession."

"One challenge for the ETF in the years ahead will be to support education and training in a lifelong learning perspective. This could mean extending our work to cover the areas of school and higher education. Another challenge will be to anticipate new EU policy directions," Peter de Rooij says. "The EU is reflecting on its physical limits. A future EU is likely to include the Balkans and the current candidate countries, but it is unlikely expansion will continue much further after that. This makes the currently emerging neighbourhood policy more than just a staging post. The policy will be different from what it was like when the new members were the main target for support and the end of that line was accession. The new policy will be to help countries in the 'Neighbourhood' region become more prosperous and stable, without the final aim of including them in the EU. So, the European Training Foundation must use all the experience it has built up with the first wave of accession countries to prepare the next wave. Then use what can be taken from that for the development of a good neighbourhood."

Graphic accounts

In a large coordinated exercise that spanned most of 2001 and 2002, the ETF carried out the research for a series of country monographs on current developments in vocational education and training and employment services in the future Member States. These reviews were produced to help DG Employment and Social Affairs monitor progress made in the future Member States towards meeting the targets outlined in the Joint Assessment Papers on employment priorities. They also helped the European Commission better target Phare and future ESF support to the countries concerned.

Key issues addressed in the monographs included:

- the responsiveness of the countries' vocational education and training systems to labour market needs;
- the contribution they made to social and labour market inclusion:
- measures implemented to promote entrepreneurship and equal opportunities;
- measures implemented to promote lifelong learning; and
- the range and quality of services provided by employment services.

In a broader context, the monographs sought to map developments in legislation, policy development, target setting, stakeholder involvement and the allocation of human and financial resources to vocational education and training.

Production of the monographs involved field visits, desk research and the analysis of data from a large variety of sources by ETF, EU and local experts, as well as staff of the National Observatories. The monographs reconfirmed that the differences among the education systems in the future Member States and their level and directions of reform were easily as striking as the differences among EU Member States, and that enlargement, also in this respect, would be a challenge not only to the partner countries concerned but also to the European Union as a whole.



FACTS AND FIGURES

Council regulations

No. 1360/90 establishing the ETF

No. 2063/94 extending the geographical scope to the countries eligible for support from

the Tacis Programme

No. 1572/98 extending the geographical scope to

the countries eligible for support from

the MEDA Programme

No. 2666/2000 approving the extension to the

Western Balkans

No. 1648/2003 including rules concerning access to

documents and amending the ETF's

budgetary procedures

Budget and staffing

| | Budget | Temporary agent staff in post on 31 December ⁹ |
|------|------------------|---|
| 1994 | ECU 5 million | 40 |
| 1995 | ECU 11 million | 95 |
| 1996 | ECU 16.5 million | 127 |
| 1997 | ECU 15.4 million | 122 |
| 1998 | ECU 15.4 million | 115 |
| 1999 | €16.2 million | 120 |
| 2000 | €16.2 million | 110 |
| 2001 | €16.8 million | 102 |
| 2002 | €16.8 million | 94 |
| 2003 | €17.2 million | 99 |
| 2004 | €17.6 million | 95 |

Mission

As a centre of expertise, we contribute to sustainable socio-economic development by enabling our partner countries to reform their vocational education and training systems mainly through the EC Phare, CARDS, Tacis and MEDA Programmes.

Governing Board Chairs

| Thomas O'Dwyer | 1994-1998 |
|----------------------|-----------|
| David O'Sullivan | 1999 |
| Domenico Lenarduzzi | 1999-2000 |
| Nikolaus van der Pas | 2000- |
| | |

⁹ These figures refer to the actual number of temporary agents in post. The establishment plan, approved by the Governing Board allowed for a total of 130 temporary agent staff from 1995 to July 2003, when it was reduced to 104.

¹⁰ as of 31 May 2004

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