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HIGHLIGHTS
THE ETF IN 2003

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.

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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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HIGHLIGHTS THE ETF IN 2003

Nikolaus van der Pas

**Director General
DG Education and Culture
European Commission**



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

Over the years, European Union Member States have built up a tremendous amount of experience in reforming education and training for economic and social development. But what relevance does EU experience with such reforms have for the European Training Foundation's partner countries? Countries that face very fundamental issues of staffing, equipping and organising their vocational education and training systems in a context of very limited resources and in some cases, of recent conflict and economic collapse.

One reason why EU experience may be of interest is of course the prospect of EU membership for some of the partner countries. Most of these already participate in European Community education and training programmes as well as in the wider policy developments in this field. However, enlargement has its limits and there is a need to ensure the strongest possible links with neighbouring countries that do not currently have the perspective of becoming EU Member States.

The European Union's response to this challenge is the strategy that European Commission President, Romano Prodi has described as 'a ring of friends.' Over the coming decade, the EU should work in partnership to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood with which the EU can enjoy close, peaceful and cooperative relations.

Within this new framework countries will be invited and encouraged to associate themselves more closely with the social and cultural, as well as the economic, development of the European Union. Through its capacity to promote employability and thereby social cohesion and economic growth, vocational education and training is a key instrument for achieving this wide agenda. With its proven track record in vocational education and training in the neighbouring countries of the EU, the European Training Foundation has an important role to play in this new policy context.

For almost eight years the ETF has spread the message about the importance of learning. It has

spread EU experience and practice across its 40 partner countries through advice to senior policymakers on restructuring education and training systems, and building the capacity of ministries. It has promoted dialogue with social partners and has kept the professional development of practitioners – the agents of change – in the limelight.

The ETF has helped European Commission services to identify better measures to drive the message home in the partner countries that learning matters, and it has helped the Commission to learn from these countries too. Most important of all, the ETF has encouraged partner countries to learn from each other.

The recent activities highlighted in this publication show that the ETF is also ready to take up new challenges arising from the increased focus on learning in policy development, while continuing to prepare the ground for targeted and effective Community support to the European Union's neighbouring regions.

Peter de Rooij

**Director
European Training Foundation**

2003 was the year in which pressure on the aims and promises made in Lisbon began to shake up policymakers around Europe. Three years have passed with little to show for them, and we must transform our good intentions into firm action if we are to avoid missing our own deadline.

Action is being taken across the EU now, and continuing globalisation makes close interaction with our nearest neighbours a matter of absolute necessity. The emerging 'Wider Europe' policy framework demonstrates a strong recognition of this need from the part of the European Commission. The combination of an increased focus on human resources development and a growing awareness of the need to involve our neighbouring regions means work for the European Training Foundation in the form of increased demands on our expertise – demands which, in 2003, we were happy to see ourselves prepared to take on.

The main theme of this publication, learning matters, was borrowed from what became our



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

absolute highlight of the year and, I think I can safely say, of our existence to date: the Learning Matters conference. Towards the end of the year, more than 250 colleagues and partners from the countries we work with joined us for a three-day meeting at the Lingotto in Turin to reflect on the progress made in VET reform in our partner countries to date, the role of foreign assistance in these reforms and, most importantly, the lessons we may learn from the past.

Reading this publication, you will find that many of the projects and activities portrayed have a strong reflective component. Learning from the past was an important theme throughout the year preceding our tenth anniversary in 2004.

Country reviews were drawn up in Ukraine and Moldova and stocktaking exercises took place in Central Asia. They inform us about where we stand, what has been done to date and how we can use recent experiences. A review of the basic use and usage of key indicators was carried out in Eastern Europe. A revision of the role of unregulated segments of the labour market led to new ideas on how to better exploit them.

Preparations were made for some large projects to be launched in 2004. Included in this publication are some examples involving countries such as Morocco, Tunisia and Syria. Preparations were also made for the transfer of networks and expertise in the acceding countries to our colleagues at Cedefop in Thessaloniki. We are very proud indeed to see the new and important role 'our' network of National Observatories in these countries has been assigned.

2003 has seen a sharp rise in the need for knowledge in our field of expertise – education and training in transition countries. Social and economic developments have been the core drive behind EU support to the Western Balkans since peace returned to the region. The focus of the Tacis Programme is now moving away from heavy infrastructural investment and towards human resources development. And the concern of the world is turned toward the Middle East where many today believe the key towards stability is social and economic development.

2003 has shown that the demands made on us are not only increasing, but also changing. In last year's Highlights, we touched upon the trend away from project administration and management, and towards identification, design, content monitoring and evaluation of European projects. The examples portrayed in this publication confirm a consolidation of this trend into a new role for our organisation – a role we are proud and prepared to take on.

LEARNING MATTERS

***Learning matters for economic and social development.
Learning matters for social cohesion.
Learning matters for social and political stability.***

*Nikolaus van der Pas,
Director General,
DG Education and Culture,
European Commission*

*ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003*

Learning matters. It always did, but in 2003 the significance of learning received increased political recognition, and true appreciation of why learning matters is steadily gaining a foothold.

Learning matters to individuals in a world which changes at a seemingly reckless speed. Their knowledge and skills need to be updated far more frequently than just a few decades ago. The skill to *learn* has become the core skill overruling all other skills that can be learnt. In modern economies, people who acquire a fixed set of skills and do not

learn how to acquire new ones efficiently are at great risk of losing their livelihood, not just their job, when their skills become redundant.

Learning matters to the ETF partner countries, from Morocco to Mongolia¹, because learning is a key to economic and social development. Learning helps reduce illiteracy. It helps stimulate employment and tolerance. And with that, it helps reduce poverty and crime and build prosperity and stability.

Learning matters to the European Union too. Not least because economic and social development are as high on the political agenda in the European Union as elsewhere. But helping countries outside the EU streamline their capacity to improve learning also matters to the EU. In a global society, issues such as stability, tolerance and even crime are not confined by national or European Union borders. The EU has a very genuine interest in building stability in its periphery and beyond. It also has an interest in developing lucrative trade links across its external boundaries. And healthy labour markets with an employable workforce outside the European

¹ The ETF partner countries are those covered by the EU Phare, CARDS, Tacis and MEDA Programmes.



Photo: ITCILO/P. Siccardi

Union can help to alleviate the kinds of economic migration that have been witnessed in the past decades.

Learning also matters to donors and policymakers. Donors do not hold the exclusive rights to solutions. Most of the international organisations providing support to human resources development are well aware of this. In the context of foreign assistance to education reform, policy learning was a catchphrase that came to the fore in 2003 to counter policy copying. It was lent significance by an environment

that better appreciated the mistakes made and lessons learned from such mistakes. Stocktaking reviews of reform activity in the past decade, pioneered by the ETF, demonstrate that a discouraging percentage of reform initiatives falter when foreign support ends. In the past this was often explained as a consequence of sudden financial hardship, but current reviews indicate that the lack of a sense of local ownership over reform initiatives is far more disruptive than monetary constraints.

European Union policy in 2003, both internal and external, bore all the signs of a steadily increasing interest in social issues (including education and training), a deepening understanding of the long-term value of investment in people, and an increased commitment to get serious about the ambitious aim set out in March 2000 in Lisbon: to make Europe the most competitive knowledge-based society in the world by 2010.

Increasing focus on human resources development is having quite an impact on the work of the European Training Foundation. Since 1995 we have built the expertise to meet the requirements for skilled workforces, better access to knowledge, good practice, and innovative ways of developing learning. The demand is there now, and this compilation of last year's highlights features some examples of how we responded to it in 2003. It also shows how we learnt from past experiences.

Supporting reform

Regardless of how much money is involved, foreign assistance can never aim to fund a comprehensive reform of any country's education and training system. However, what foreign assistance can do is to supply the tools to help individual countries bring about reform themselves. This is exactly what the European Training Foundation does.

In the partner countries, we help to prime reform by gathering people from different segments of society

around the table, bringing them into contact with EU expertise and current practice, and helping them test innovation in vocational education and training on a small scale.

In the European Union we provide the European Commission and Member State governments with information and expertise to help them maximise external support to vocational training reform in the partner countries.



Photo: ITCILO/P. Siccardi

PROMOTING ACCESS TO EUROPEAN EXPERTISE AND PRACTICES

For almost eight years the ETF has spread the message about the importance of learning and spread EU experience and practice across its forty partner countries.

*Chris Patten,
EU Commissioner for External
Relations*

*ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003*



Photo: ETF/A. Ramella

To keep pace with evolving demands from society, all EU countries are engaged in a continuous reform of their education and training systems. Many of the problems faced in our partner countries have been faced at one point or other somewhere in the European Union. Offering partner countries access to experience accumulated in the EU can help them avoid having to 'reinvent the wheel' and can speed up the process of reform. Sharing expertise is one of the main threads in the work of the European Training Foundation. The ETF maps examples of good practice available in the European Union and partner countries, and helps other partner countries use them for their own benefit. Such good practice may come in the form of Member State experiences, but also in the form of flagship projects from European Community programmes, such as Tempus and Leonardo. A particular effort was made in 2003 to disseminate results of the latter to the Mediterranean region, where Tempus was launched that year and where the accumulated body of Leonardo experiences has much to offer.

Sharing Leonardo results

In November 2003, in conjunction with the ETF's Learning Matters conference, the Lingotto complex in Turin played host to a conference on innovation in vocational training. The main objective of this important event was to enable participants from the European Union and non-EU Mediterranean countries to exchange experiences.

The 120 participants included high-level representatives of the ministries of education and training, as well as training centre managers, grass-roots actors, experts and representatives of the academic world in North Africa, the near Middle East and the European Union.

Organised by the Directorate General for Education and Culture in collaboration with the European Training Foundation, the conference was intended as a first step for the European Commission in establishing regular dialogue and more systematic cooperation on vocational training with current and future Mediterranean neighbours of the European Union.

Discussions were held on four themes selected for their strategic importance: training aligned to the needs of companies, e-learning, the quality of vocational training, and teacher and trainer training. The discussions were supplemented by the presentation of various case studies including Leonardo projects.



Directorate-General for
Education and Culture
European Commission

Policy seminars

Where some projects address local partners and authorities, others address the core of national decision-making. For example, in the Russian Federation the ETF organised a series of policy seminars for high-ranking officials. These seminars aimed at familiarising top policy management with current issues in Europe. As an example, one seminar organised in Moscow covered the

Copenhagen Process on enhanced cooperation in European vocational education and training.

From pilot projects to comprehensive reform

Because the ETF contributes to many stages of the process – from identification to evaluation – of EU projects, it is in a particularly good position to fill the



Photo: ILO/J. Maillard

inevitable gap between the identification of needs and the actual launch of support programmes responding to these needs. We initiate and manage trial projects on a small scale, aimed at keeping the momentum while future programmes are being designed. We then feed the lessons learnt through such exercises back into the system to increase the efficiency of later interventions. One 2003 example of where we helped prepare the ground for larger scale support is in Syria.

Last year's *Highlights* included a detailed account of the Syrian pilot project which provided support to the Damascus Chamber of Industry and the Ministry of Education to tackle the country's skills mismatch by starting Syria's first apprenticeship scheme. The scheme was carefully designed according to Syrian specifics. Part of the ETF support has involved acquainting the Syrian authorities with European examples that have proven their worth. The project closed in 2003 but its very promising results will be closely linked to the new Meda II programme in the

country. For the latter, the ETF carried out identification and feasibility missions, resulting in a project design agreed by the European Commission and local stakeholders. The Meda II programme will be approved and launched in Syria in 2004.

National Qualifications in South Eastern Europe

National Qualification Frameworks are powerful tools for integrating different learning pathways available in education systems. This integration and the creation of links and leaning opportunities among different training routes is still developing in many of our partner countries. In South Eastern Europe vocational schools have been actively revising curricula for some years but have struggled to link these reforms to general and continuing education. In 2003 ETF introduced the concept of national qualifications frameworks through a series of activities.

The ETF's project on Developing Strategies for National Qualification Frameworks provides a regional forum in which the countries of the region can come together to discuss their progress on qualifications, access information about recent developments elsewhere in Europe and identify their needs for the continuing development of their qualification frameworks. All countries of the region were engaged in the project through a series of seminars and country reviews. The project will continue in 2004.

Reflection through observation

Many professionals agree that looking at how other countries solved a problem teaches them more about their own situation than about the country they are actually being introduced to. In this, rather than in gathering ready-made solutions, lies the real strength of study visits. Study visits are an important part of many ETF projects. One 2003 project where study visits formed a crucial part of the programme was the LEEDAK project. LEEDAK stands for Local Economic and Employment Development in Albania and Kosovo. The project, in which the ETF cooperates with the OECD and the Italian government, aims at showing local communities in the two countries involved how they can work together to make training respond better to local needs. Participants to the project headed for Ireland and Sicily to look at examples of how partners at municipal level can collaborate to develop a local development plan, identify skill gaps and link these to training provision.



Photo: ITCILO/G. Brandi

THE TEMPUS PROGRAMME

The Tempus Programme focuses on the development of the higher education systems in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and since 2002 the Mediterranean countries, through cooperation with institutions from the Member States of the European Community. The programme is based on the understanding that higher education institutions are of particular importance for the social and economic transition process as well as cultural development.

The ETF assists the European Commission, and in particular Directorate General for Education and Culture, with the technical implementation of the programme.

Important Tempus developments in 2003 included the introduction of a new type of project activity, the Structural and Complementary Measures (SCM). The specific nature of Structural and Complementary Measures lies in the fact that they provide a framework for short-term responses to particular national reform needs that the partner countries have identified as their priorities. They

aim, amongst others, at the enhancement of capacity building for strategic management and institutional development of higher education institutions at university or faculty level, the support of sustainable cooperation actions, and the preparation of a national strategy in a given partner country to develop specific aspects of higher education.

A first call for Structural and Complementary Measures applications was launched in October 2003. The outcomes of the selection and award procedure will be known in early 2004.

2003 also saw the number of calls for Individual Mobility Grants (IMG) increased to three calls throughout the year with application deadlines in February, June and October. Applicants were extremely interested in using this new opportunity, and this was demonstrated by the high number of applications received for all three calls.

For the Tempus Mediterranean partners, 2003 was the first year of active Tempus participation and

project implementation. The deadline for Joint European Project applications expired in mid-December 2002. The Joint European Projects selected could start their activities after the summer 2003. Furthermore, partners from the Mediterranean region have also actively used the February and October 2003 calls for Individual Mobility Grants, and the October call for Structural and Complementary Measures.

The European Commission actively supported and promoted the introduction of the Tempus Scheme in the Mediterranean region and organised a regional conference on 'Higher Education Cooperation and Intercultural Dialogue across the Mediterranean' in Alexandria, Egypt from 13-14 October 2003.

European cooperation in higher education

One of the Tempus Joint European Projects that started in 2003 in Central Asia addresses the improvement of regional cooperation on Environment and Water Resources Management and the development of an internationally recognised MSc programme.

Universities in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are working together with counterparts in Austria, France and the Netherlands. The project consortium has been assessing existing curricula and training needs, started developing distance learning methodologies and organised short intensive courses for Uzbek and Turkmen university teachers.

The project deals with an important issue that can only be addressed at a regional level. The idea of a joint Masters Programme between four universities proves the determination of the project partners to establish a sustainable cooperation from which all institutions will benefit.

The creation of a Euro-Lebanese Centre for Mediterranean Intercultural Studies is the main objective of another Tempus Joint European Project in the Mediterranean region. The St. Joseph University of Beirut will host the new centre and will offer a Masters course in cultural mediation. The European Union partners involved in the project are institutions from Germany, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

The development of teaching materials and training of teaching and administrative staff in the first project year will then be complemented by student mobility in the second year. The Masters degree awarded will refer to the partnerships with the four European universities involved and it is planned to make use of the model of the European diploma supplement.

PIONEERING NEW IDEAS

The significance of the informal sector, of public and media support and of information and communication technology, has been underestimated, as has the need to promote entrepreneurial spirit, not least within education institutions.

ETF Learning Matters conference,
Final Statement, November 2003

The informal sector

The needs of the informal sector in developing and transition countries have been advocated by organisations such as the ILO for years. Yet, to date, few donors have dared to address the issue head on. From a Western legal (and fiscal) perspective, the informal sector is a grey zone, bordering the criminal domain. For a Western donor, it can seem hard to defend engagement in this area.

However, recent years have brought a steadily increasing acknowledgment of the role the informal sector plays in many societies outside Western Europe and North America. More importantly, it is becoming better understood that moving economic activity from the informal into the formal sector cannot be achieved by ignoring or criminalising the former and the millions of people who can only find their livelihoods through informal employment. The vast majority of these people are bona fide workers whose often limited skills and social status bar their entry into weak formal labour markets.

In some countries in Central Asia the formal labour market is so weak that the informal sector employs up to 50% of the active population and provides the livelihood of even adequately trained and educated people. The Tacis Programme's shifting focus towards social issues and the consequences for economic transition, poverty alleviation and local development is moving the informal sector into the spotlight in this region too. A research project taking

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stock of current skills development activities in local development projects in Central Asia found that in the past decade relevant vocational training had moved almost entirely away from the public education sector, towards non-governmental institutions and, indeed, back into the informal sector.

International donors, though by no means everywhere yet, are beginning to realise that addressing the skills needs of the informal sector makes more sense than ignoring them.

Together with the World Bank, in 2003 the ETF carried out a series of studies which, among other themes, analysed the issue of skills acquisition and development in the informal sector in Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and Egypt. These studies and the broad cooperation received towards them mark an internationally changing attitude: simply abolishing the informal sector is not an option. What is needed is research into how skills are generated and developed in the informal sector, and what can be learned from that to the benefit of formal training systems to better match the needs of a segment that plays a large role in the economy of countries in the region.

Gauging the impact of continuing training



Better trained workers can make your company more productive – and a new ETF project in Morocco aims to measure just how much in economic terms. *The impact of continuing training on the competences of human resources, productivity and competitiveness of Moroccan companies*, is a joint project of the Moroccan Ministry of Vocational Training and the ETF, for which preparations took place at the end of November 2003 at a conference held in Casablanca.

The project will look at in-service training in tourism and textiles – two key sectors of Morocco's economy. It will carry out a survey of

what training is currently taking place and how this affects company performance. Tourism and textiles are industries which will experience increasing competition in the very near future. Morocco is gradually removing tariff barriers and opening up its markets in the run-up to free trade with Europe from 2010. 'Experience has shown us that the companies that don't take an interest in training their workers and managers simply won't be around in five or six years time,' says Rachid Chadili, Head of Training at the Textiles Federation AMITH.

With this pioneering study, the aim is to go beyond a simple mathematical equation (so much spending on training boosts productivity by so much) and to provide a periodic snapshot of in-service training in Moroccan industry, for example which companies provide training in-house and what do they get out of it? 'This tool will allow us to measure the impact of training and to what extent it provides a real boost to the productivity and competitiveness of companies in general, but also to see how we can avoid wasting scarce resources,' says Abdelhak Mounir, head of the Metallurgical, Mechanical, Electrical and Electronic Industries Federation.

Continuing training has come a long way in Morocco in recent years. Moroccan companies

pay 1.6% of their wage bill towards financing vocational training, but until the 1990s the money was used mainly to pay for initial training. Little continuing training took place. Today, 2,000 companies undertake in-service training and up to 80% of the cost is reimbursed by the state. The levy paid by companies accounts for 20% of the training budget and the aim is to reach 30% by 2007.

With expansion underway, attention has now turned to quality. The Moroccan government is keen to encourage more smaller and medium-sized companies to participate and to ensure it gets value for money. 'The state spends US\$15 million every year on vocational training – a lot of money, but we do not know what impact this training has. Does it help companies develop their know-how? Does it boost productivity and competitiveness?' asks Khalid Alaoui, director of vocational training at the Ministry of Vocational Training. And the project does not stop there. It is being designed from the outset to be applied elsewhere too. In the future the ETF hopes to be able to put it into practice in neighbouring Algeria and Tunisia.

Key indicators

Key indicators on vocational education and training are published regularly in regional publications, one covering Central and Eastern Europe and another covering Eastern Europe and Central Asia. They are exactly what the title describes and as such the international resource for current data on education and training in these regions. The collection and use of data in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, however, had run into increasing difficulties in recent years. They were mainly used for cross-country comparative analysis especially in the acceding, candidate and South Eastern European countries, and to a lesser extent in the individual countries themselves. Delving into the problem, we found that the value of key indicators was poorly understood. As a result they were hardly used. What was even worse, because people failed to see their importance, their collection and even reliability was brought into jeopardy too. Therefore, we decided to allocate this year's resources to advocating their use rather than to actually publishing them.

We took a step back and launched a campaign to inform people on what key indicators really are, why they should be collected and how they can be used. The initiative was soon dubbed 'Back to Basics' and its highest profile activity was the publication of a new *Handbook on Key Indicators* (available in English, French and Russian). High demand for the handbook showed that the campaign struck a chord.

The broader picture

In the first line of this publication, we wrote that true appreciation of why learning matters is increasingly gaining a foothold. This is not because we have learned so much more about the process of learning in recent years, but rather an indication that we are learning to step back, look at the broader picture, find the role of education in it and shape our support on the basis of what we find.

Taking the broader picture into account rather than just addressing isolated problems, has significant consequences for the way in which support is delivered. Internationally, we can see a shift away from isolated projects that result in islands of reform, towards systemic approaches.

One of the countries where the European Commission is launching sector-wide support to education and training is Tunisia. The European Training Foundation has been asked to design proposals for a VET sector policy support programme in Tunisia in 2004. This is the first time the ETF has been involved in an intervention of this kind, although some of the principles behind the sector approach are well embedded into ETF practices (country ownership, support coherent and within country sector policies, and so on).

POLICY ADVICE

The ETF is an important EU resource in the area of education and training, as well as a centre of expertise with a high profile.

Maria Grazia Siliquini,
Undersecretary of State for
Education, University and
Research, Italy

ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003

The European Training Foundation helps the European Commission increase the effectiveness of its support to vocational education and training reform in the partner countries. We offer policy advice, identify issues that are particularly pressing and offer recommendations on how they are best addressed. We also help monitor and evaluate current support measures. The number of requests from the Commission for ETF information, research or assistance has risen sharply in recent years.



Photo: ETF/F. Decorato

Focus on social issues

Part of this increase can be attributed to the fact that the ETF has considerably raised its profile in its partner countries as a centre of expertise on vocational education and training. Another reason why ETF expertise is increasingly in demand is the shift that is taking place in EU external assistance from structural support towards social issues.

Entirely in line with policy developments aimed at the development of a knowledge society in Europe, priorities for development assistance to countries outside the European Union are moving away from the material support given through large infrastructural projects. Activity in the Tacis Programme in particular is marked by this shift. In the CARDS and Meda Programmes there has been a stronger bias towards social development from the outset, while all the support provided through the Phare Programme aims at preparing acceding countries and future Member States for entry into the European Union.

Poverty alleviation and new bottom-up approaches

The Tacis Programme has been through quite a change recently, and the issues addressed today have much more overlap with the ETF areas of expertise than Tacis priorities did just five years ago. We mentioned earlier that the informal sector is increasingly becoming a recognised force in social development and this is partly a result of a desire to get serious about poverty alleviation. The latter is an issue of which it is now generally acknowledged that heavy so-called 'top-down' reform measures have yielded insufficient results. Today, the focus in projects confronting poverty is therefore turning more towards local development.

Of all Tacis funds allocated to Ukraine, €50 million is now earmarked for local development projects, and even in the Russian Federation new EU initiatives include projects with considerable ETF involvement addressing, for example, youth at risk. Poverty alleviation through bottom-up approaches, mainly in rural areas, is now one of the three Tacis priorities in Central Asia, while it is becoming an important focus in the Caucasus as well.

A broadening role

In current EU projects, the ETF can be involved in all stages, from needs identification, the preparation of project proposals and the writing of terms of reference, to the monitoring and evaluation of projects that are underway or in their final stages.

As regards monitoring activities, the demands on the ETF are moving away from the administrative control that characterised much of our work some years ago, and towards content monitoring – again a clear sign of recognition of the expertise developed in Turin in recent years.

The breadth of our involvement in the different stages of European projects has placed us in an excellent position to respond to the demands arising from the sector-wide approach to human resources development support that is now beginning to emerge in the external assistance policy of the European Commission.

Enterprising VET

A culture of enterprise and initiative is spreading throughout vocational education and training in Russia and Ukraine following a three-year ETF transnational project promoting entrepreneurship in the field.

At the closing conference on Entrepreneurship in Education and Training in St. Petersburg in early December 2003, ETF programme manager Bernhard Buck praised participants for their commitment and willingness to learn and take forward lessons essential to the economic, social and political development of their countries.

'It's been three years of curiosity – in the beginning not even really knowing how entrepreneurship should be defined, but you've taken a stake in this project and it's up to you now,' Bernhard Buck said, urging project teams from the eight pilot VET schools in Russia and Ukraine to 'keep the work up' and use it in their schools as well as their private and professional lives. He added that he saw evidence of a significant shift in ways of thinking among all participants in the project and was confident work would continue to disseminate and build on the foundations laid.

The project, which was designed to embed entrepreneurial thinking and action at all levels of VET activities – in school management, curriculum delivery, relations with enterprises and social partners and contacts with policymakers – proved so popular among VET professionals that experts from nearly a dozen other regions, including Kazakhstan and Belarus, sought involvement as observers.

Leading policymakers, including Nikolay Berizko, senior consultant on humanitarian issues of the Ukrainian Presidential Administration, and Evgeny Boutko, head of the initial training department at the Russian Federation Ministry of Education, both gave the project their support.

Nikolay Berizko, who asked the 90 delegates at the conference to stand for a moment's silence as a mark of respect for Vitaly Timoshenko, the Ukrainian Deputy Minister of Education who died in late November 2003 following a road accident, said although the project had lost a keen advocate its work would continue to form an important part of the national economic strategy.

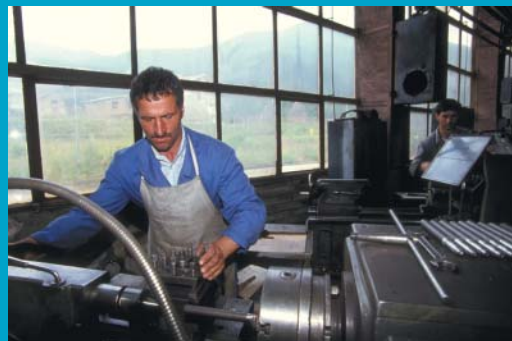


Photo: ITCL/OP. Siccardi

'One third of Ukraine's gross domestic product in 2002 was based on entrepreneurial activities – self-employment, family businesses and other activities. Training and education strategies much change to reflect this. It is now an axiom in Ukraine that the VET system should not only turn out personnel for salaried employment, but also entrepreneurs for self-employment and business,' Berizko said.

Natalia Mashukova, head of the legal provision unit of the Russian Ministry of Labour and Social Development, noted that increasing entrepreneurial knowledge and attitudes was an important part of Russia's aim to enter the World Trade Organisation.

The €360,000 project began with intensive training sessions at the pilot schools for senior management 'change agent teams' – four in Russia and four in Ukraine – before wider school participation in self-evaluated entrepreneurial projects were devised and implemented.

Schemes ranged from the relatively simple – a Ukrainian construction work college project refurbishing a shabby conference room which involved a student design competition and support from local building firms – to curricula level programmes introducing entrepreneurship as a business skill in the teaching timetable at institutions in both Russia and Ukraine.

Joining efforts internationally

Donor cooperation and coordination – much needed, yet still underdeveloped – has been one of our top priorities throughout the years. We actively seek involvement from other international donors (such as the World Bank) and international organisations (such as the OECD) whenever the situation allows for it. An example of such collaboration from 2003 was our analytical work towards defining models for the modernisation of vocational education and training in Yemen working together with the World Bank. Another is the joint regional studies developed between ETF and the World Bank on five key issues for vocational training reform in the Mediterranean region.

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 not infrequent 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 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 through sharing expertise, to increase the capacity for vocational education and training reform policy analysis in the individual countries in the region. 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, covering for example, the development of adult learning in Bulgaria and the role of social partners in Turkey.



Photo: ETF/F. Decorato

SHARING INFORMATION

Policy learning is about learning which policies can be developed locally by reflecting on other countries' policies. Policy learning... can only happen when there is information and knowledge available and shared.

*Peter Grootings,
Expertise Development
Coordinator,
European Training Foundation*

*ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003*

Access to reliable information is a key condition for sound policy planning. Until 1995, comparable information on labour market developments in what would become the ETF partner countries was scarce. Major sources of such information, like the OECD, the Economist Intelligence Unit and the ILO, were scrambling for data and statistics that, more often than not, national governments in the countries concerned could not even provide. For us to carry out our mandate we had to collect such information.

Observatories

As early as 1996, we started the establishment of a network of 'outposts' in our partner countries. These small units whose main task was to gather and analyse information on training reform and labour market developments became known as the 'Observatories'. We needed the information they provided to carry out our tasks but, at the same time, were well aware that it could also be used for policy planning by the national authorities. In the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, changes to the composition of the labour market occurred in rapid succession and their unpredictability appeared to take national authorities by surprise. Developments in the labour market and vocational training needed to be monitored more systematically, and related statistics used more effectively in strategic planning. So as we helped set up the Observatories as monitoring units, we started advocating the use of their output in national strategic planning.

Transition of National Observatories in acceding countries to Cedefop's ReferNet

The efforts we put into the network over the years were richly rewarded in 2003 with the invitation addressed to the National Observatories in the acceding countries to put forward their applications to become members of Cedefop's Network of Reference and Expertise (ReferNet) as leading partners of wider national partnership platforms. They will be working towards this in the first quarter of 2004.

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 we started to operate in the Western Balkans, where all countries now have their own National Observatory.

Observatory functions in the Mediterranean

The situation in the Mediterranean region differs considerably from that in Central and Eastern Europe in that many countries in North Africa and the Middle East already had functioning market economies when they started structural cooperation with the EU and when the ETF commenced its work in the region. The challenge to most countries in the region is not to establish labour market monitoring mechanisms but to put existing, often fragmented monitoring systems to good use. Different

authorities often *do* have access to parts of the information needed for efficient labour market monitoring but the information is barely shared among different actors involved. In this region the challenge for the ETF is to bring these different actors together and get them to share their information sources for an obvious common benefit. No offices are established in the region and the work processes are referred to as *Observatory Functions*. Work in this area is ongoing in Algeria, Jordan, Syria and Morocco.

In cooperation with Medstat, the ETF is working on the development of a key indicators database for the non-EU Mediterranean countries. The database will contain key vocational education and training, and labour market statistics for the region.

Stocktaking reports and in-depth studies

Stocktaking exercises – mapping current activity in vocational education and training reform – and background studies, are essential tools for avoiding duplication and maximising as well as multiplying project results. The European Training Foundation has secured itself a reputation as a reliable supplier of such reports, and 2003 yielded quite a few new publications in these areas.

Background reports were written in the framework of, among others, the aforementioned development of a VET modernisation strategy. We have already

mentioned the publications on the Maghreb and Mashrek regions, but thorough background studies were also written on VET and the labour market in Moldova and Ukraine. All of these reports can be downloaded from our website at www.etf.eu.int.

Also in thematic areas a number of important studies saw the light of day in 2003. Of these, the *Lifelong Learning Report* was perhaps the most eagerly anticipated. The report assessed answers to a questionnaire on the implementation of the European Commission's lifelong learning policies in all countries, 'old' and 'new', that will be members of the EU in 2004. The ETF analysed the national answers and produced a synthesis report to publish their results.

November 2003 was the publication month of the retrospective *Thirteen Years of Cooperation and Reforms in Vocational Education and Training in the Acceding and Candidate Countries*. In particular the report draws on the findings of the country monographs on lifelong learning and employment services that were produced at the request of the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs between 2000 and 2002. Most of the monographs were finalised in 2002 and received due attention in last year's *Highlights*. However, the monographs on Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia were finalised in 2003 and are due to be published in 2004.

Taking stock to expose needs

Kyrgyzstan, like the other new countries of Central Asia, has faced severe difficulties adapting to a market economy. GDP per capita was around €260 in 1999 and 60% of the country's 4.7 million people are below the poverty line, the majority of whom live in rural areas. Unemployment has grown significantly in recent years, particularly among the young. State run vocational schools have failed to adapt their courses and approach to the new economic context and the needs of the most vulnerable layers of the population. This has meant that when community leaders have wanted to develop new initiatives and new skills they have frequently bypassed the formal vocational training systems and worked directly with NGOs, which are better equipped to meet the needs of the poor.

However, while there have been many successful projects set up by grassroots movements and NGOs, most later collapse when financial support is withdrawn. Can this pattern be broken? A unique stocktaking exercise in Central Asia by the European Training Foundation suggests that it can. The ETF's work shows that active partnerships between NGOs, local authorities and vocational schools, coupled with the widespread replication of models of good practice, points the way forward.

One outstanding example of bilateral partnership found by the ETF was provided by GTZ, a German government-owned corporation for international cooperation with worldwide operations, and a vocational school in Tokmok, Kyrgyzstan. The school, which provides training for tailors and mechanics, was suffering severe underfunding. GTZ invested in new equipment, worked to update the curriculum and suggested new teaching methods. The school is now considered a beacon of good practice with its graduates in high demand. With a view to the future it has started selling training courses for the unemployed to the state at market prices.

Another vestige of the past is a lack of individual initiative and self-confidence at village level. As one project worker said: 'In Kyrgyzstan every villager is literate. However...not all are able to express their ideas regarding their own problems.'

An initiative that meets this challenge is the Land Reform Project, funded by USAID. Following the transition, around three million people in Kyrgyzstan were given ownership of their own plot of land. However, the worker's lack of knowledge of private property meant they were easily cheated and abused by civil servants. To combat this, the Land Reform Project worked with rural workers to design a practical and empowering course backed up by attractive materials. Over 10,000 farmers have now had the training, which has led to a boom in the sale of land for business development.

'No-one had looked at training at grassroots level before the ETF stocktaking exercise,' explains Programme Manager Claire Morel. 'We found that a parallel education system existed that even the authorities were not aware of. The results of our mapping activity can convince the education and training authorities that they need to be more flexible in meeting local needs. It can teach voluntary organisations that, instead of relying on just their own staff and materials, they must seek active involvement of local partners they largely ignore, such as the vocational schools. Both need to work together if they are to develop sustainable projects that address the skills needs of the poor in the long term.'

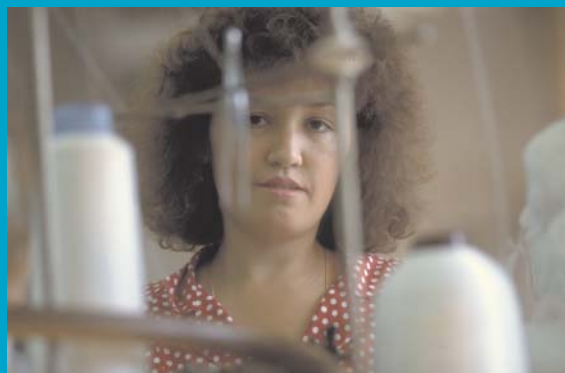


Photo: ITCILO/A. Ramella

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

...it is essential today that dialogue and cooperation between different cultures exist at all working levels

*Pat Cox, President,
European Parliament*

*ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003*

The ETF is not just a centre of *expertise* in the sense that it is the home base of some of the most knowledgeable experts on vocational education and training reform in transition countries. It is also a *centre* of expertise in the sense that it is a clearinghouse for cutting edge research and latest practice in VET reform worldwide. Its mandate is not just to develop expertise, but also to mediate between the demand and supply of such expertise between the European Union, international organisations and the partner countries.



Learning Matters conference

In terms of networking, the biggest single event in 2003 – and in the history of the European Training Foundation for that matter – was the 2003 ETF Advisory Forum conference, Learning Matters.

In early November the European Training Foundation convened 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 in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Mediterranean region were invited to the conference, which took place in Turin.

The conference title not only highlighted the value of learning in the individual, but also the importance of learning in VET policy development. 'VET reform policy development can best be considered as *VET reform policy learning*,' the conference organisers argued.

The title 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. The lively debates during both the plenaries and the workshop sessions yielded new tools for improving future international assistance in the field of VET.

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.

The Final Statement issued at the conference underlined the need for lifelong and life-wide access to education and training for all, with particular attention given to disadvantaged groups. In addition, it highlighted the need for a mentality change on the importance of lifelong learning, skills and competences and human resource development.

Further details about the conference and its conclusions can be found on the ETF website: www.etf.eu.int

Networking, through the Advisory Forum, conferences, and personal contacts, has from the outset proven to be one of the great strengths of the ETF. Networking activity has continued uninterrupted also throughout 2003.

We mentioned the Russian policymakers seminars earlier in this publication. On a very different level, we pointed at the central position of study visits in ETF projects. Even in developing local partnerships – which has become such a central issue in countries with a past of central command – bringing together people whose lines of communication were interrupted has proven to be a key ingredient of reform.

Networking formed a core part in last year's activities in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. Many of these share a common language, and although their labour markets and training systems all have unique characteristics, they also have a lot to gain by sharing experiences and building on each other's achievements.

Teacher and trainer training continued to be a focus of our work in 2003. Building on the analytical work done over the past two years, activities in 2003 centred around the dissemination of the findings.

Promoting Adult Learning in the Western Balkans

The difficulties facing the countries of the former Yugoslavia are broadly similar: economies devastated by the effects of transition and war, inappropriate education and vocational training systems, and a lack of recognition of the importance of adult learning. Only in Croatia do prospects appear a little less bleak. The funds to address these difficulties are extremely scarce. 'The problems we face are grave,' commented Radica Berishaj from the Kosovo Ministry of Education, Science and Technology at the ETF workshop Adult learning strategies in the context of lifelong learning in Zagreb in early January 2004.



At the request of the European Commission the ETF is assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo to develop country-specific adult learning plans, seen as key to regenerating their battered economies and reducing poverty levels and social exclusion. The strategies are being developed in partnership with major stakeholders in each country or region, as well as drawing on experience with neighbouring countries.

The ETF is guiding the process by organising a series of workshops with the support of external experts, encouraging the application of proven methods and initiating small pilot schemes. The objective of the Zagreb workshop was to help transform each country's stocktaking exercise into a dynamic strategy with measurable outcomes.

Like the problems faced at macro-level, the different countries' adult learning profiles were found to be strikingly similar. Those charged with researching the current situation commonly reported a low priority given to adult learning in companies and government institutions, difficulties in collating data, a shortage of qualified adult trainers, inappropriate content and a lack of flexibility in the delivery of courses. Training providers have not adapted their programmes to meet the needs of entrepreneurs in small companies where, for example, there is believed to be most potential for growth in employment. In sum, training is not yet focused on the needs of the learner.

The process of getting stakeholders on board, developing strategies and identifying funding sources is slow and painstaking but workshop participants were able to benefit from the experiences of colleagues from countries that are more advanced in the development of their strategic plans. These local case studies were in turn supported by contributions from invited EU experts. When participants shared their frustrations at the lack of stakeholder support to adult learning, for example, UK expert Madeleine Gunny changed the mood of the meeting by recommending that 'filling those gaps by arranging multi-stakeholder structures and events needs to be included as an objective in your country plans.'

Representatives agreed that the stocktaking exercises and related strategies and plans will have the potential to raise the profile of adult learning in each country, and that the tensions and difficulties experienced were an inevitable and important part of the development process.

Participants concluded by identifying their own training needs for future workshops. 'We've done the stocktaking exercise and put the strategy together,' commented Dukagjin Pupovci, Executive Director of the Kosovo Education Centre, 'now the hard work really begins.'

A GLIMPSE AHEAD

The ETF has reached a new level of effectiveness and quality. The ETF has become much more focused over the years and has become more relevant for the European Union, for the European Commission, and certainly also for the work in all of our partner countries. ETF is now an outward-looking, learning organisation and we are grateful for the continuous support that Advisory Forum members and experts have given and will continue to give in the future.

*Peter de Rooij, Director,
European Training Foundation*

*ETF Learning Matters conference,
November 2003*

Through several publications and high profile speeches, in 2003 the European Commission confirmed an increased commitment to strengthening links with what is now generally referred to as the 'Wider Europe' – comprising the

EU and its neighbouring regions. One of the key objectives for increased cooperation with these regions is the promotion of economic and social development. Vocational education and training plays a key role in this field, and today it is clear that VET in the region will stand to benefit from increased EU support. Our main objective for the year of our tenth anniversary will be to enhance the impact of such support.

To this end, we will continue to develop our expertise and knowledge in human resources development in transition countries. We will develop our analytical capacity in the fields of social inclusion and active labour market policies for the benefit of the European Commission's regional and country strategy papers, and we will help the European Commission prepare the implementation of its Wider Europe policy.

One of the great challenges of 2004 will be to successfully complete the transfer of accumulated knowledge on VET development in the acceding countries to Cedefop. An 'Exit-Entry Strategy' has

been devised and agreed with Cedefop and the European Commission to streamline this process. The strategy comprises three main aims: to integrate the National Observatories in Cedefop's existing network of reference and expertise; to prepare the stakeholders in these countries for participation in other Cedefop networks; and to transfer the information and knowledge accumulated at the ETF in the ten years of its existence.

In parallel, a reinforced process of internal knowledge sharing has started with the aim of capitalising on the considerable ETF investment in the acceding countries to use it as a valuable resource in our activities in the remaining countries that prepare for accession, as well as in the other ETF partner countries.

Improving access to ETF expertise

A new approach to human resources management aims at breaking away from departmental boundaries and introducing sector wide approaches

for the ETF as a whole to the benefit of every country and region we work with. Thematic groups within the ETF have yielded, and continue to yield, thematic experts that can be flexibly employed across the board.

We will work hard to deepen our relationships with other organisations working in our field. It is neither possible nor desirable for the experts available within the ETF to cover all types of expertise required to carry out our mandate. Similarly, in-house expertise needs be more flexibly available outside the European Training Foundation.

Last but not least, specific attention will be given to increasing the quality of ETF publications. A smaller number of top quality publications will be the envisaged result of the appointment of an excellently accredited editorial board that will review publication proposals and drafts for publication.

Important changes indeed, that will yield a better European Training Foundation still, and that prove that learning matters to the ETF too.

EUROPEAN TRAINING FOUNDATION

HIGHLIGHTS

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