

Live and learn

THE ETF MAGAZINE

December 2006, No. 6



Education gives growth and employment

***Jan Andersson, MEP and chairman of
the Committee on Social Affairs***



The European Training Foundation is the European Union's centre of expertise supporting vocational education and training reforms in the context of the European Union's external relations programmes.
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EDUCATION GIVES GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT

JAN ANDERSSON MEP ON EU SUPPORT TO HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

Praise for the virtues of migration and a passion for long-term thinking are not standard fare of every vote-conscious politician today. But then Jan Andersson received his mandate from a Swedish electorate that is not very likely to question his freedom of thought and expression.

Far away from his native Helsingborg, Jan Andersson is the Chairman of the Committee on Employment of the European Parliament. *Live and Learn* visited his offices in Brussels to sound him out on the future of EU external support to human resources development.

“Our work is more than just human resources and vocational training,” he warns us when we ask him what he considers the Committee’s main achievement during his time at the helm. “The best result of the past two and a half years for me is our contribution to the Services Directive. I was closely involved in that. As a group we stayed on the case until the end. I don’t just think it was the best result of our Committee. Perhaps it was even the most successful process for the European Parliament ever. There are lots of directives stuck at Council level at the moment, but we succeeded.”

The Committee’s success on the Services Directive isn’t all that irrelevant. It illustrates what influence it can exert. And this, together with a Committee chairman who has a permanent address in the camp of those who believe that education and training can change the world, holds some promise for the role of human resources development in the first critical years of the new EU

programmes for external assistance.

“But narrowed down to human resources development, I think I would vote for the Thomas Mann initiative about the European Qualifications Framework,” Jan Andersson adds, referring to German MEP Thomas Mann who submitted a report to the European Parliament commenting on the proposed EQF. It formed the basis for some essential changes made to the Framework, such as improvement and clearer distinction of its eight reference levels and a more concise and comprehensible expression of its descriptors. “This is ongoing and will keep coming back at us but it is clear that our views will be reflected in the final outcome.”

Mobility

Andersson’s fondness of the European Qualifications Framework stems from his passionate views on European mobility. “I have been involved in a lot of developments that involved mobility and I cannot stress enough the importance of it for growth and employment. We have less geographical mobility than in the US. And even when there is much mobility locally, there are big differences among countries and among different groups in society.”

This is where education enters the equation. “Mobility of people is related to their level of education. Education gives growth and employment. I just came back from a conference in Berlin that covered social strategies for the future.

Jan Andersson was born in Helsingborg in southern Sweden in 1947. He was a teacher in his home town until 1988. He entered local politics in 1979 and was a member of the Swedish Parliament from 1988 until 1995, when he moved to the European Parliament. Jan Andersson is the current chairman of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. He is also involved in the allocation of ESF funds in Sweden.



Photo: EUP-Images



Photo: EUP-Images

Jan Andersson has been very closely involved in the Services Directive

The central theme there was education, the lifelong dimension of it in particular. We discussed the new labour market, the role of change – how it dominates every aspect of our lives. If we want to compete we cannot do it on salaries. And in fact, from a more social perspective, we do not even *want* to compete on salaries. The only acceptable way for us to compete with the rest of the world is by being the best, but of course the great challenge is to keep the low skills in on this too and not just focus on high technology.”

“We have to link our work and views to demographic trends too. Less than 50% of the over-50s in Belgium are active in the labour market. The figure speaks for itself. We need these people. Getting them back has a lot to do with health and safety at work but in my view it has even more to do with lifelong learning. Most people of that age still don’t expect to have to learn again and that’s what we have to change.”

Find examples of good practice in the EU and use these to help countries develop long-term strategies

European neighbourhood

Moving the spotlight towards neighbouring countries that seek EU membership or partnership, Jan Andersson remarks that between Member States and the candidate countries there is often a gap in employment and growth, but also in education. “We have to start thinking of this at an earlier stage than we have done so far. We have to start in advance to make it easier for these countries to become members of the union. That means we need to help them further develop their education and training systems and we need to help them to prepare for the philosophy and practice of lifelong learning.”

“This applies not only to the countries that are preparing for membership but also to the broader group of neighbourhood countries that often face an even larger gap. We need to help them develop their education and training systems too, perhaps not so much with a view towards eventual membership, but rather focusing on peace, stability and indeed trade. Don’t forget that we are preparing free trade agreements and that this doesn’t just mean improved access to the internal market for them. It also means access to their markets for us so of course their prosperity is in our interest in all respects.”

To the question whether we are doing enough today Jan Andersson replies with a resounding, “No. We don’t do enough.” But he moderates this in an unexpected direction: “We do not even do enough ourselves in the European Union. The gaps among EU countries are still too big and I would dare to say that even in the Nordic Member States – which we always think of as very advanced in this field, not enough is being done yet. We need to start with ourselves.”

Does that mean we should keep a low profile in foreign assistance in this field while we are sorting out our own problems? Not according to Andersson, who thinks that ETF has an important role to play in,

for example, helping other countries develop the social structures that underpin a healthy lifelong learning culture.

“EU countries have made considerable progress in balancing the roles of state and social partners in human resources development. But social partners are still not very well organised even in many of the new Member States. People often still see them as a part of the ruling establishment. Social partners have various roles to play in education and training – in dealing with companies and in dealing with individuals – and they need to be prepared for that. Many are not today.”

“In Europe, we also need to find a solution to the problem that companies in tight competition for human resources are becoming afraid to invest in the training of their employees, lest they lose them to competitors. We have to find models of co-financing training among all partners. Lifelong learning accounts are an interesting option here that deserve further development.”

Role of the ETF

All of these issues are core business for the ETF and the next question therefore almost presents itself: while we are sorting out our own reform needs, what role should the ETF play in ongoing support to neighbouring countries?

“Find examples of good practice in the EU and use these to help countries develop *long-term* strategies. I stress long-term because human resources development is a textbook example of a policy field that needs long-term thinking.”

That doesn’t always go down well with politicians – not even EU politicians. In a constitutional democracy, politicians typically have a four-year temporary licence to act. But in the eyes of Jan Andersson, this leaves an important task to the agencies as the more permanent elements of the EU institutional infrastructure.

“They can and should provide more continuity and

promote the long-term vision. This is something the ETF must stress not only in its work with partner country authorities but also in its activities that involve social partners. Social partners too are often still over concerned with quick results when really they ought to take a more long-term strategic position.”

“As far as politics are concerned, short-term thinking is a serious problem and I do not subscribe to the idea that it is a necessity for political survival. Olof Palme was the man who made me go into politics. He is a shining example of how you can have a long-term orientation as a top politician.”

“Another important task for the ETF is to link strategies for lifelong learning in neighbouring countries to those in the European Union. This helps candidate countries prepare for membership and generally furthers the role of education in democracy development.”

Working with agencies

Jan Andersson believes the link between the agencies and other European institutions must be strengthened further but he is not certain how this could be done best. “In Sweden agencies are a normal partner on the political scene, so I am accustomed to working with agencies and I have learned to appreciate their roles. But although things have improved in recent years, I still ask myself how we, the European Parliament and the European Commission – can make better use of these resources.”

Jan Andersson has already hinted at the role he sees for education and training in growth and stability. But current ETF work, such as that for the *ETF Yearbook* to be published later this year, suggests that education and training might also hold clues towards solving other more politically sensitive issues in today's world, such as poverty and migration. Here, Andersson doesn't question solutions. He questions the problem: “I find it hard to make a clear distinction between migration and mobility.”

We need more mobility, *ergo* we need more migration?

“Well, people don't always like to hear it, but we need it. We need more free forms of mobility – getting people to where the jobs are and vice versa, because it is good for growth. As long as people are not ready to move, their chances of unemployment remain unacceptably high. Of course we need to be mindful of problems related to brain-drain but even brain drain isn't the plain negative thing it is often portrayed to be. Emigrants often return to their home countries with money, new skills and other associated benefits. And brain drain, or rather the spread of the notion that better educated people can move more freely to where the jobs are, can create pressure from within too, as more people will aspire to better education.”

Normally, European Parliament positions of influence are a game of musical chairs every two and a half years but because of unexpected changes in other committees, Andersson will be allowed to ride out a double term, giving him two more years as the chairman of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee. We wind our conversation down asking about his immediate ambitions – anything that in two years from

now can make him say: “Yes, that's what I have wanted to achieve.”

But Andersson is not easily lured into visionary daydreaming. A Swede throughout, he keeps both feet on the ground. “I have no such specific ambitions but that doesn't mean there isn't anything I want to achieve – quite the contrary. Still, I think my top priority is of a more general nature: not to lose sight – again through short-term thinking – of our overall aim of safeguarding what we can admire the Union for: its striving for balance between economic growth and social welfare. To guarantee this, we need to be effective in our legislation and processes. The Lisbon Process in particular must become more effective than it has been so far. The European Union is cooperation for people – people who through jobs and growth can create stability and prosperity. We must use our human capital in a sensible and sensitive way.”

Find out more:

Jan Andersson:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/members/public/geoSearch/view.do?id=2107>

Services Directive:

http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/services/index_en.htm

We need more free forms of mobility - getting people to where the jobs are and vice-versa...



Less than 50% of the over-50s in Belgium are active in the labour market.

ETF DIRECTOR WELCOMES NEW MISSION

We are ready to support policy development says Muriel Dunbar

As we approach the end of 2006 and the launch of the new EU instruments for external support, the European Training Foundation can face its future challenges with confidence. Years of thorough preparation, culminating in broad consultations with staff, partners and peers during the past twelve months, have yielded a new mission. A shift in emphasis towards policy support through policy learning; a more comprehensive approach to human resources development; a focused staff development strategy; a streamlined internal structure – from January 2007 the sum of these developments will translate into increased leverage for improving the impact of the ETF's work on the ground.

This new mission will allow the ETF to respond more effectively to new demands of the European Commission and other EU institutions. It also anticipates emerging needs from the partner countries and improves the ability of the ETF to help partner country authorities to respond to these needs pre-emptively rather than retrospectively. The new mission for the ETF has been under development throughout 2006 and was finally outlined in the ETF Mid-term Perspective 2007-2010 that was drafted this autumn. The new ETF mandate is awaiting Council approval in 2007.

Fading boundaries

Whether or not the mandate of the European Training Foundation should remain limited to vocational education and training *per se* has been a recurring topic of debate in the past years. Within the European Union, the ever broader adoption of the lifelong learning philosophy has gradually eroded the boundaries between the different forms and levels of education. And since one of the key activities of the ETF is to share EU principles and expertise in education and training with its partner countries, the strict focus on vocational education and training has lost some of its logic. A new mission

for the ETF has been under development throughout 2006 and was finally outlined in the ETF Mid-term Perspective 2007-2010 that was drafted this autumn.

"The most crucial change that we will see in the work of the ETF stems from the recognition that you cannot address vocational education and training in isolation," says ETF director Muriel Dunbar. "As such, the Mid-term Perspective anticipates that our new Council Regulation will move the focus of our work from strictly vocational education and training to a much broader skills development in a lifelong learning perspective. While vocational education and training will remain our core point of reference, our work will to a much greater extent than before include the areas of overlap with other educational sectors."

Policy advice

Muriel Dunbar adds that the Mid-term Perspective also foresees a decisive shift of emphasis of the work of the ETF towards policy advice. This has been in the making since 2003 and is not so much a radical break with past activities as a natural development. "In the past most of our field work has been at project management level," Muriel Dunbar explains. "As we developed our expertise, we increasingly moved the centre of gravity to the policy level. In 2006, we provided country analyses to DG Relex and DG Enlargement, assisting them in the programming for the new Instrument for Pre-accession and the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument. This confirms that we are now at a stage where we can employ our expertise to support policy development."

"Our progress along the spectrum pays off in both respects: we can now help develop capacity in the partner countries and be of more value to our colleagues in the European Commission and the European Parliament."

The Mid-term Perspective is firmly rooted in the basic ideas of the new EU instruments of external support. These will offer the framework for ETF assistance to the Commission and the partner countries

Photo: ETF/Alberto Ramella



ETF Director Muriel Dunbar anticipates a decisive shift of the emphasis of the work of the ETF towards policy advice

in the years ahead. In the phrasing of the draft perspective, during the 2007-2013 programming cycle "the ETF will [...] seek to improve human resources development in partner countries in the areas of education and training in a lifelong learning perspective, and related labour market issues."

The draft documents translate this into a five-pronged approach. Some of it is new. Other things remain unchanged. The ETF will continue its work in information analysis and dissemination but this work will be even more tailored to assist policy development than has been the case to date. It will help to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders in partner countries to develop more relevant education and training policies. It will step up its efforts in the field of donor cooperation. It will help to increase the effectiveness and relevance of EU assistance in human resources development to partner countries. And, crucially, it will help to transfer policy lessons between EU Member States and partner countries, as well as among partner countries themselves, through networking and dissemination activities.

The method, however, will likely change more drastically than the aims because in the years ahead the ETF will do more to engage its partner countries fully in the process of identifying priorities in the context of their partnership agreements with the EU. The ETF will particularly help partner countries to develop the capacity to use relevant EU policy lessons in their own contexts through policy learning.

New themes

“On the thematic front, two issues have emerged that we want to deepen our understanding of,” says Muriel Dunbar. “These are gender issues in education and training and the relationship between migration and skills development.”

“Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are areas that we feel have been underexposed in the work of the ETF so far, whereas they really should not have been. You could say that we have some catching up to do in this area. It may not necessarily become a focal topic but rather something that we will better integrate into all of our activities, both in-house and in our work in the partner countries. After all that is what gender mainstreaming is all about: normalising gender issues to the extent that they are issues no longer.”

“Migration and the way it relates to skills development is another matter. Our work in this field has only just started, mostly as an offshoot of our work on Skills Development for Poverty Reduction that was one of the themes of our Advisory Forum conference *Skills for Progress* this year. The 2006 *Yearbook* will contain a chapter researching literature on skills and migration. This work is rather groundbreaking, much of it is poorly charted territory. It is also groundbreaking in the sense that it has brought us new partners, such as DG Justice with whom we have never worked before.”

The new Mid-term Perspective opens the opportunity to better target the individual efforts of different countries. “All countries have the aim to train graduates that match the needs of the labour markets. In recent years, most have also come to recognise the value of vocational education and training as a tool for economic and social development. But still the priorities are different in each country and their starting points are different too. Therefore they need individualised support. Our new Mid-term Perspective allows us to focus our resources more efficiently by tailoring support and linking the intensity of support to the level of openness to change and reform in each country. There is no rationale behind evenly spreading limited support among countries with such different starting positions. We must reward and support countries that actively develop an environment that is conducive to change.”

Broad support

“The changes to the ETF mandate have been under preparation and consultation for a long time,” says Peter

Greenwood, Head of the ETF’s Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit. “The immediate trigger – other than the stock of experience that obviously gently guided us in this direction – was the latest ETF external evaluation that put words to many of the things we have long thought about. From here we took a participatory approach. The ETF management team produced a draft strategy proposal in early spring that was discussed in all ETF departments. In May a focus group redrafted the proposals and their ideas were presented for open discussion at the June Governing Board and Advisory Forum conference. The Advisory Forum more than ratified it – Advisory Forum members really confirmed that they felt this was the road ahead.”

Muriel Dunbar confirms the role that the conference *Skills for Progress* played in the development of the new Mid-term Perspective: “The whole conference was carefully designed to help us along. So getting overwhelmingly positive feedback from the conference was a wonderful confirmation that we are on the right track – that our partners want us to pursue the move towards policy advice.”

Future pillars of ETF activities

The Mid-term Perspective arranges future activities around three ‘pillars’ of activity:

The first pillar comprises its support to education and training reform in the partner countries. It covers five groups of activity:

- Contributing to the enlargement process by supporting the modernisation and reform of education, labour market and training systems in candidate countries and potential candidate countries.
- Contributing to prosperity and development in the European neighbourhood through cooperation and partnership in human resources policy development and implementation
- Contributing to economic cooperation and HRD development cooperation in Central Asia
- Supporting European Commission and partner country policy development through innovation and learning.
- Providing quality support in the implementation and finalisation of the third phase of the EU’s Tempus programme.

The other two pillars comprise corporate communication – to increase the profile of the ETF as a centre of expertise, and organisational learning – to strengthen the collective expertise of the organisation and develop the infrastructure through which this expertise can be best harnessed.



Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are areas that we feel have been underexposed in the work of the ETF

EUROPEAN YEAR OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The European Commission has designated 2007 the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All as part of a concerted effort to promote equality and non-discrimination in Europe. In this interview, the programme manager Brigitte Degen explains the objectives of the Year

Brigitte Degen does not expect the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All to change overnight how we treat and think about one another in terms of gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability, age and sexual orientation, but she does hope to see a shift in the level and direction of debate and behaviour.

Ms Degen, Brussels-based programme manager for the Euro 15 million budget for both EU and national activities, is a realist with a career background

that began at the sharp end of community work in France – “working in the suburbs”, as she puts it.

In conversation with a woman whose wit, enthusiasm and vigour reveal that she retains the visionary instinct necessary to work in such a challenging field, the dry words of the European Union’s laudable and far-reaching directives that provide for some of the world’s most extensive anti-discrimination legislation come to life.

“Globalisation, ethnic minorities and fragmented societies have made Europe an enormous jigsaw,” Ms Degen, who works in the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities’ anti-discrimination unit, says.

“There is a need for reconciliation and acceptance and looking for new ways of understanding and working together.”

Top level policy directives and treaty obligations – such as the European Year Against Racism in 1997 and the legal guarantees against discrimination on the six key grounds of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability, age and sexual orientation in Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty – give European Union citizens a level of human rights protection almost without parallel.

But people don’t always know about them and transposing these rights into national laws across the member states has, Ms Degen says, been “uneven, delayed or not totally satisfactory.”

The 2007 Year of Equal Opportunities for All will go about raising awareness of our rights

and prompting debate through a wide array of national, regional and local measures as well as a Europe-wide campaign, that will encompass 30 countries – the EU 25, plus new members Bulgaria and Romania joining January 1st 2007 and the three EFTA countries: Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

Activities will be based on its four key themes – rights, representation, recognition and respect.

Rights, according to the 2007 Year of Equal Opportunities for All official website, involves “raising awareness on the right to equality and non-discrimination and addressing for the first time the problem of multiple discrimination” - for example, as Ms Degen says, the sort that a disabled lesbian woman living in a deprived area may suffer.

As the website says – “*The idea will also be to show that being equal does not mean being identical. Implementation of the equality principle has to take into account differences and diversity so as to ensure that each individual genuinely enjoys equal treatment.*”

Representation is about “stimulating debate on ways to increase the participation of groups in society which are victims of discrimination, while ensuring a balanced participation of men and women.”

“*Women are in the minority in our parliaments and ethnic minority MPs are even scarcer. Disabled people tend to be sidelined in society...the Year will launch a series of debates on how to make it easier for under-represented groups to participate more in society, while ensuring a balanced involvement of men and women.*”



Photo: Brigitte Degen

The Year of Equal Opportunities for All will raise awareness our rights and prompt debate throughout 30 countries

Photo: ITCILO/M. Montesano

“Certain communities, such as the Roma, are so deprived that positive action might have to be taken for them so as to eliminate this inequality....taking positive measures to promote equal opportunities will give rise to debates and activities throughout the Year.”

Recognition – “facilitating and celebrating diversity and equality.”

“Action will be taken to involve the general public in an open debate on the meaning of diversity in contemporary Europe and ways of valuing differences in society.”

Respect – “promoting a more cohesive society.”

“Action will be taken to raise awareness [of] the importance of eradicating clichés, stereotypes and violence, and promoting good relations among all members of society, particularly young people. The European Year will strive to promote and disseminate the values underlying equal treatment and the fight against discrimination.”

“The Year is really very much needed because despite the efforts the EU has devoted to fighting against discrimination, there remains a need to raise the public’s awareness of their rights, as the Commission Green Paper Equality and non-discrimination in an enlarged European Union noted in 2004,” Ms Degen says.

By working through national implementing bodies in each of the participating countries, managers of the Year hope to see its aims translated into concrete projects that are relevant to people in communities throughout Europe.

National strategies – identifying individual challenges to equal opportunities for all and how they should be tackled, priorities and lists of actions to be funded – will be drawn up by mid-December 2006.

Although most countries will not individually receive much money, approved projects from individual NGOs, rights organisations, trade unions and other bodies will be eligible providing they fit in the desired national strategies and policies.

“Given the available budget for the Year, it’s not about funding big projects, but about providing seed money for initiating dynamics and awareness raising activities,” says Ms Degen.

Ireland – where the implementing body, the Equality Authority, receives an EU budget of just Euro 150,000 (Euro 300,000 when the national matching funds are added) – will concentrate on promoting solidarity and cooperation between various NGOs to help identify common solutions to issues that often pitch different charitable groups working in the field into a competitive scramble for scarce funding.

“The concern in Ireland is to work with NGOs that are obviously different, but where there may be a common solution to various problems,” Ms Degen says, which is about “promoting democracy and tolerance across society”.

Other activities such as writing competitions for schools about respect and tolerance, awards for companies with the best diversity promotion policies, or training for trades unionists on the impact of anti-discrimination measures in the workplace will become evident in countries throughout the EU following the Year’s formal launch late January at an inaugural “Equality Summit” in Berlin – under the chairmanship of Germany which will hold the EU presidency then.

Individual national launches for the Year will then roll out through February and early March. A closing conference under Portuguese chairmanship, probably in Lisbon, is scheduled for late November to allow conclusions and recommendations to be made in time for the last Council of Ministers meeting in Brussels under the Portuguese presidency in December.

Activities during the Year will not only be confined to national, regional and local initiatives, but will be visible across the EU through a range of community-wide measures.

The Berlin “Equality Summit” will bring together ministers, social partners and representatives from the NGO sector for the first time



Activities during the year will be visible across the EU through a wide range of community measures

to consider the challenges of non-discrimination and possibilities for widening and improving equal opportunities for all.

A Europe-wide media campaign will dramatically increase visibility of the Year’s issues across the participating countries through television media clips, posters, newspaper and radio announcements and the activities of national “Ambassadors of the Year” whose job will be to champion the Year’s themes, issues, findings and events.

“Faces of the Year” will celebrate diversity and highlight the experience of those who have had experience in different ways of discrimination and have overcome it.

“People will testify to their own experience, not only about discrimination but how they cope with discrimination,” Ms Degen says.

“But this won’t be done in an outrageous way rather it will be done with average people, with average experiences. The messages will be about how they are able to bring their own values to society; how they can be part of society with different roles and approaches. We’d like to show people that there are many different ways of succeeding in one’s own life.”

...despite the efforts the EU has devoted to fighting discrimination, there remains a need to raise public awareness

Photo: Guy Taylor



Photo: © European Community, 2006



Promoting diversity is an essential part of the year

A media campaign contractor will be on hand to develop the EU wide campaign as well as to assist national implementing bodies in tailoring their own promotional activities.

Another key instrument in helping to promote anti-discrimination policies and laws will be the launch of a new 'Eurobarometer' survey to discover Europeans' attitudes towards discrimination and opinions about positive action.

Initial findings will be disclosed during the Berlin Summit, helping to set the agenda for further research during the Year.

Many in Europe may question why, after so many years of determined action to combat discrimination and intolerance, such an ambitious project as the Year is needed now.

Or conversely, what chances of success does the EU have in tackling discrimination in the face of challenges such as the shocking French race riots of 2005 (and anniversary troubles this year) or the accession of a host of new member states, with the historic, ethnic and cultural diversity they bring.

Ms Degen does not hesitate for a second before responding with the authority of one whose

working life has been dedicated to the cause of combating discrimination.

"Media have a key role to play and the Year should allow opportunities to bring them into the debate and see how they can help in addressing the fight against stereotypes and prejudice, whether at EU or at national level."

The decentralised approach of the Year should allow us to take into account the different challenges in an EU of 27 Member States while at the same time see how we can learn from each other to promote the overall EU approach to non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all. For example with the two most recent enlargements, we have gained further diversity in terms of history, traditions, and ethnic groups such as the Roma.

There are already encouraging signs of how the Year can stimulate new developments at national level, she says: a Warsaw conference run under the aegis of Poland's Ministry of Social Affairs in October (2006) for the first time brought together 40 different groups a wide range of the minorities and others who suffer discrimination there. "This proves, she says, that it is possible to build tolerance and respect between different social actors, even in countries where such traditions are relatively thin".

Although gender inequality is not a minority issue in an EU with persistent inequality in employment rates – around 55% compared with 70% for men - and a pay gap of 15% between women and their better paid male colleagues, equality of opportunity for women and men is also part of the Year (as sex discrimination is part of Article 13).

"After 30 years of feminism and the women's lobby the issue is not yet solved and it remains difficult to find sustainable solutions," Ms Degen says, adding that the approach the Year takes on this issue is to raise awareness of the need to promote equality of opportunity for both women and men – who

may also find themselves suffering gender discrimination in some situations and environments. The Year also wants to assess the different ways in which men and women are affected by the other 5 grounds of discrimination, what we call gender mainstreaming of all grounds.

Separately from the Year – and in recognition of the persistence of gender inequality – a new Euro 50 million European Institute for Gender Equality is due to be set up in 2007 as part of the Commission's 'Roadmap for equality between men and women 2006-2010.'

The potentially damaging economic impact of discrimination is a key part of the message the Year will try to get across, says Ms Degen.

"Promoting diversity – particularly in the business sector – is an essential part of the Year; we are keen to demonstrate the possibilities that promoting diversity offer to both individuals and the economy as a whole. In France, for example, despite the press over the race riots, we actually have many examples of young people from the ethnic minorities who have been promoted by the education sector," she says, drawing on knowledge from her native land.

"Whatever the people may think, the diversity of European society is a fact of life. In a globally competitive society you cannot afford to exclude groups of people from the economic workforce or from society at large."

Asked to sum up what the difference the Year will make, Ms Degen pauses for a while before saying simply: "Of course, we shall not make a revolution in one year, but we hope to shift the level and direction of the debate and increase awareness of the rights that everyone has. Once you are using your rights, you also start behaving differently."

Find out more:

European Year of Equal Opportunities for All
<http://equality2007.europa.eu>

Whatever people may think, the diversity of European society is a fact of life



IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES FOR YOUNG WOMEN IN TURKISH ORPHANAGES

Landing that first job is a challenge for any young person, but imagine what it is like when you are a young woman who has lived most of your life in an orphanage. You probably lack the useful network of social contacts a family can provide and which many people in countries such as Turkey rely on heavily in order to help them find work. Years of institutional life may have toughened you up or taught you to live by the rules, but they may not have kept you in touch with the realities of life outside the orphanage. They are in any case unlikely to have equipped you with the kind of skills you need for job-hunting.

When in 2005 the Turkish authorities decided to do something to improve the life-chances of the young women in their care, they turned to the ETF for help. Together they designed a series of one-month intensive training courses designed to provide job-seeking skills, information and empowerment. The success of this pilot has since encouraged the Turkish authorities to introduce vocational guidance for all the young people, male and female, living in Turkey's orphanages.

There are currently around 20,000 children living in 200 state orphanages throughout Turkey, run by the government's directorate general of social services and child protection. Until recently, the Turkish employment agency ISKUR would generally help both male

and female orphans get a start in life by providing jobs in the public sector. However, since the late 1990s pressure from the IMF on the Turkish government to reduce the size of its public sector has made this practice difficult to continue.

Outside the public sector, employment prospects for Turkish women are not encouraging. While better-educated professional women have made great progress in recent years, overall only 26% of Turkish women are employed and most of this work – around 65% - is unpaid. The employment rate actually decreased for women during the last ten years – down from 31% in the mid 1990s to just 24.3% in 2004. This is mainly due to the decrease in women doing unpaid work in agriculture as many Turkish families have migrated from the countryside to the cities. "The European Commission has made improving the position of women one of its priorities in Turkey," says Milena Corradini, the ETF's country manager for Turkey, "employment figures for Turkish women are still very low, especially if you compare it to the 60% participation rate EU countries are aiming for under the Lisbon Agenda."

ISKUR and the ETF came up with an intensive four-week course designed to help bridge the transition from orphanage life to the world of work. It included modules on information technology, sales techniques, public relations, but also covered

women's rights and empowerment, communications techniques, family law and working relations.

First courses

A list was drawn up of all the young women living in orphanages who had completed their secondary education but had not managed to find work. Staff from ISKUR then set out to convince the young women, unused to participating in this kind of course, to sign up. They organised seminars in regional capitals all over Turkey and 72 young women decided to attend the first courses in July and August 2005.

The training was given by ISKUR staff, aided by specialists from local NGOs. Personalised job counselling was provided by the Ministry of National Education and input was also provided by business people from the private sector. "They met with the girls, talked to them about working life in their companies and used this opportunity to dispel their fears about working for the private sector," says Corradini. With the accent very much on active participation, the young women were encouraged to talk about their personal histories and their hopes for the future. Individual interviews were also carried out with each of the participants and provide a fascinating insight into lives often lived in tough conditions.

The European Commission has made improving the position of women one of its priorities in Turkey

...there is a widespread conviction that work empowers women and can give them freedom and a sense of dignity

The reasons that had brought the young women into state care were varied; not all had lost one or both parents. Divorce, domestic violence, poverty, migration and the chances of a better education were also cited. Some girls had been told why they were being placed in an orphanage, whereas others had simply been abandoned by their families in a public place. Some had spent most of their lives in care and could not remember any other surroundings, others could still remember, at times with anger, life at home with their families.

The young women believed that growing up in state care gave them “the chance to get better food, clothes and to go to school,” but being “children of the state” meant there were no relatives to be concerned about their future. Those who were still in contact with family members did not see them as a source of future support. Rather they saw them as entailing the risk of future obligations such as taking care of children or the elderly. They generally felt themselves to be in a weak position in society. Most of them believed that as women, the alternative to the orphanage would have been no education, hard manual work in the fields, an early marriage and lots of children who would then grow up to be in the same weak position as their mothers.



Photo: ETF

Divorce, domestic violence, poverty and migration were amongst the factors bringing women to the orphanage

Most said that although orphanage life had taught them a lot, it had not given them any sense of normal daily life outside. They did not feel ready for a more independent lifestyle, including further education or finding a job when they reached 18. A very small number already had some work experience, usually in small businesses in the informal sector. Some had experienced sexual harassment at work and they believed their orphan status had made this kind of persecution more likely to happen.

Sense of dignity

In spite of all the problems, there was a widespread conviction that work empowers women and can give them freedom and a sense of dignity. However the overwhelming preference was for public sector jobs – a “desk job” in a government institution or teaching, seen as providing a more secure work environment than the private sector, although most were aware that this option is fast disappearing. None of the participants had received any career guidance at school. None had any idea of alternatives to working in the public sector or options for career development.

For many participants, attending the course was new in more ways than one. Travelling long distances by bus, staying in a hotel and moving in this unfamiliar environment made some initially uneasy. However as the course progressed, the professional skills of the project staff allowed many to “feel special and important” for the first time in their lives. The programme of social activities

laid on at weekends, including trips to museums and the theatre, also helped to create a constructive and supportive working environment.

The participants appreciated the contents of the training they received, particularly the units on human rights, empowerment and job-hunting and communication techniques. When the month came to a close, many participants said they felt themselves to be “better prepared” for adult life. Attitudes towards job options had also shifted as many were now prepared to entertain the idea of looking for work in the private as well as the public sector.

In March 2006, ISKUR contacted the original participants to find out where they were now. Of the 72 young women, 30 were now in work and a further eleven were either enrolled in some form of higher education or preparing to take the university entrance exam.

Encouraged by the success of this pioneering initiative, ISKUR and the Ministry of National Education, have since developed more training courses based on this original template. As a result regular courses and careers guidance are now provided to both girls and boys living in Turkey’s orphanages. “This group of people really need some kind of bridging course between their life in the orphanage and an independent life outside,” says Corradini, “this project has acted as a catalyst and has helped the Turkish authorities understand that they need to do something for this category of people.”

Find out more:
Turkihs Employment Agency, ISKUR - <http://www.iskur.gov.tr/>



Photo: ETF

Women in the orphanage showed a preference for the public sector - a “desk job” being the most popular option

ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ALL: TUNISIA SHOWS THE WAY

A book by Tunisian author Tahar El-Mili throws new light on how to promote effective entrepreneurship learning.

Tahar El-Mili is convinced that teaching people how to be entrepreneurs calls for a lot more than simply showing them how to draw up a business plan. The process should begin much earlier by teaching people generic skills and entrepreneurial attitudes from nursery level. It should continue for some time after a new business has been set up, by providing support to the entrepreneur during those vital first few years. This is one of the main messages he aims to put across in his new book entitled *We are all entrepreneurs; enterprise skills and training*.

The book, published in French, adopts a holistic approach which shows how entrepreneurship learning can be introduced at all levels and branches of the education system. It puts forward a new way of teaching entrepreneurship, based upon encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning, transforming the role of teachers into facilitators and using a project-based approach.

This 232-page volume is the fruit of El-Mili's thirty years of experience as a teacher, trainer of trainers and consultant on entrepreneurship learning in his native Tunisia and further afield. "Everything in this book is backed up by experience," he says, "this is not a work of theory, it is based upon observation in the field."

Entrepreneurial skills must start early

The first section of the book describes FORTI, a joint Tunisian-German project on

promoting entrepreneurship learning which ran from 1995 until 2005. FORTI began as a modest initiative aiming to help young people from the impoverished Kasserine region of Tunisia to set up their own businesses. An impact study after the first four years found a reasonable degree of success in fostering new businesses but also highlighted the shortcomings of just sticking to the business plan approach. "We realised that providing support to someone just before they set up a business is fine, but it is not enough," says El-Mili, "if someone has no liking for taking risks, he may be able to come up with a very impressive business plan, but he will never make a success of his business. Similarly, someone who has no communication skills will not be able to sell and so will not find a market."

This realisation led El-Mili to take a closer look at the education young people had received before they came to him for entrepreneurship training. He came to the conclusion that there is a generic set of entrepreneurial skills which people start developing very early on – these include a sense of initiative, being aware of your surroundings, a willingness to take risks, the acceptance of difference and a positive attitude towards other people. Attempting to teach these skills to people aged 20 – 24 may well be a case of too little too late. "Entrepreneurial competences can be developed above all at nursery and infant school age," says El-Mili, "this is not common practice right now and this is why we are trying to push the government and primary

schools to integrate these skills at an early stage." His experience with FORTI has shown there is also a need to provide support and advice to entrepreneurs during the period after a new business has been set up. "This is the time when entrepreneurs start to come up against the real problems of running a business so there is still a need for intervention," says El-Mili.

Over the following few years, FORTI was expanded to take in five new regions in Tunisia and the scope of the project was broadened to encompass training before and support after setting up a business. The second impact study provided two positive results. The survival rate for new enterprises after three years had improved. And, more significantly, people completing the training claimed it had helped them develop in more ways than one. "People said they had developed a more positive attitude to life and a more co-operative approach," says El-Mili, "they said that even if they hadn't managed to set up a business, they had still gained a lot in terms of their general behaviour." However the study picked out one weak point – the lack of a coherent model of how to teach entrepreneurship skills.

Spelling out which skills when

The second section of the book is devoted to the El-Mili Matrix – a grid pattern that spells out which kind of skills are required before, during and after setting up a business.

Entrepreneurial skills can be developed above all at nursery and infant school age

Photo: ETF

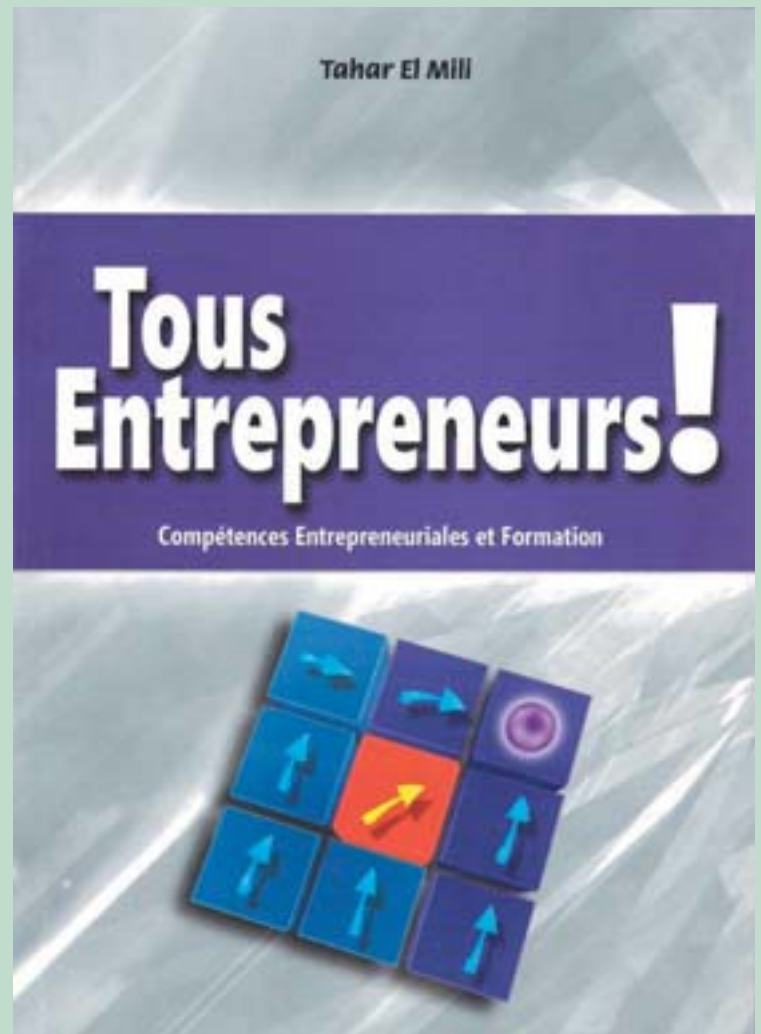
Tahar El-Mili, author of the book *We are all entrepreneurs; enterprise skills and training*



The basic set which should be developed from an early age breaks down into four categories; personal qualities, collective or social competences, competences to do with an individual's surroundings and certain techniques. These competences begin to develop in the family, at school and in the general environment and continue to evolve after completing education through a person's experience of life. The second set, which an entrepreneur needs at the time of setting up a business, includes skills such as the ability to identify opportunities or the ability to sell the project to others in order to get funding. The third set, known as consolidation competences, are those which will contribute to the long-term survival and health of the business over time. These include operational skills, strategic skills, support skills and leadership skills.

The third section of the book is El-Mili's answer to the need for a methodology for teaching and learning entrepreneurship skills. In these pages, he argues for some very different ways of teaching and learning from traditional methods. First an effort must be made to motivate learners and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. This can be done if the teaching content is very firmly rooted in the local context and if the teacher concentrates on giving learners tools to learn for themselves rather than merely passing on information. "You are aiming to provoke a cultural change in learners, making them adapt, become resourceful and able to search out the information they need, as well as developing a capacity for self-criticism and seeking feedback," says El-Mili. As well as this form of learning which is based upon action and the learner's own experience, he proposes using a project-based approach with a clearly defined set of goals. The learning should be completed by a process of evaluation in which the learner is encouraged to participate by looking at how far he or she has come and what has been achieved.

...an effort must be made to motivate learners and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning



Tous entrepreneurs! Compétences Entrepreneuriales et Formation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, ISBN: 9973-789-22-9

Tous entrepreneurs! Guides à l'usage des acteurs de formation, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, ISBN: 9973-789-23-7

Big changes for teachers

Using this new methodology means big changes for teachers. When it was introduced in Tunisia via FORTI, El-Mili found most teachers were reluctant to join. "All the trainers were against it as they thought it would mean more work," he recalls, "but when they tried it out, they found it much more enjoyable. The teacher becomes a facilitator, someone who gives support, and the teacher-student relation is no longer an authoritarian one of superior and inferior, it becomes something much more positive." Tunisian teachers are now actively demanding training in the new methodology.

So far 1,000 Tunisian teachers have completed the training. As part of a new Tunisian-Canadian project called Espace Métiers, the methodology will soon be made available to many more. Tahar El-Mili is keeping busy. Apart from his involvement in Espace Métiers, he is about to embark upon a new project providing training in the new method to lecturers in business studies at Al-Manar University in Tunis. He has also recently published a second book, entitled *We are all entrepreneurs; a user's guide for all involved in training*, which provides guidelines, resources and other practical information for everyone involved in helping entrepreneurs and introducing entrepreneurship learning into education and training systems.

ETF JOINS NEW CAMPAIGN ON EU AGENCIES

“WHATEVER YOU DO, WE WORK FOR YOU”

This new slogan will launch the first joint campaign to inform European citizens about the activities and services of the decentralised EU agencies in December 2006.

From Stockholm to Crete and from Lisbon to Warsaw some 28 EU agencies including the ETF have been established to provide service, information and know-how to the EU Member States and their citizens.

The agencies are involved in many and varied activities. Improving the environment, protecting health, contributing to food safety, making transportation safe, processing trade marks, supporting training and education, strengthening and consolidating multilingualism, ensuring security and justice and looking after fundamental rights.

Each agency is unique and fulfils an individual function. Some answer the need to develop scientific or technical know-how in certain fields others have the role of integrating different interest groups and thus facilitating dialogue at European and international level.

With more than 2,500 staff and significant budgetary resources, the agencies and their activities have become central to the operations of the European Union and they play a key role in the implementation of EU policies.

President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, underlined the central role of the decentralised EU agencies at a meeting earlier this year:

“The agencies are our satellites – picking up signals on the ground, processing them, and beaming them back and forth. Through their activities the agencies contribute to making “Europe” closer to the European citizens and hopefully easier to understand, and I consider this as being of utmost importance”.

The December campaign has two elements: An advertising campaign in a number of in-flight magazines Europe wide and a joint publication on the activities of the agencies across Europe.

Find out more:
<http://europa.eu/agencies/>



BULGARIA AND ROMANIA ENTER THE EU

WE GOT THE BEST VALUE FOR MONEY IN ASSISTANCE

In all likelihood, Romania and Bulgaria will join the European Union on the first of January 2007. Their accession was preceded by a decade and a half of intense preparations. Since 1995, the ETF has helped the two countries to get their education and training systems ready for an internal market in constant flux. According to Cesar Birzea, Director of the Romanian Institute of Education Sciences, ETF methods were often unconventional but constituted some of the best value for money in international assistance, "The ways of the ETF left a lasting impact on education and training development in Romania," he says. "Its persistent drive for partnership bore fruits that can be harvested in the years ahead."

ETF cooperation through Phare started in 1996 with the Phare VET Reform Programme that operated in parallel in all countries participating in the Phare Programme. Although it was quite different from the types of support which followed, it already showed elements of what would later become the hallmark of ETF intervention: the lack of intervention. In the words of Birzea: "the partnership approach."

The Phare VET Reform Programmes pushed regional exchanges of information among staff of the Programme Management Units while introducing them to some of the basic elements of vocational education and training reform, occupational standards development and social dialogue. But from the outset it became clear that one of the great hurdles to be overcome in the years ahead would be stakeholder involvement and interministerial cooperation.

"Direct support to Romania and Bulgaria started in 1997,"

says Birzea, "with the establishment of the national observatories. The whole idea of a national observatory monitoring developments in vocational education and training and collecting labour market statistics was novel. The initial capacity for it had to be developed from scratch and the ETF took the lead in that."

Enormous symbolic contribution

Birzea headed the Romanian Observatory and retains his belief in the value of the initiative: "The direct financial support may have seemed insignificant in the face of some of the foreign assistance pumped into the country at the time but the symbolic contribution was enormous. In Romania in 1997, simply inviting partners from the different ministries with a stake in vocational education and training around one table amounted to entering uncharted territory."

"The ETF championed networking and working together in this field in Romania and the value of this cannot be

overestimated. The community spirit that was developed laid the foundation for a whole range of joint reform activities that followed."

"The Key Indicators project was a highlight, not just because we gathered some data that had never been collected before but also because it launched a whole debate about which statistics actually *are* vital and *why*. It forced people to think and rethink. We discussed the key issues with different authorities. It seems a trivial matter today, but it wasn't at the time. To gather representatives from different ministries in the steering committee of the Observatory was an achievement. Ministries weren't always good partners."

The promotion of stakeholder cooperation became an increasingly structural element in the work of the ETF in its partner countries.

"All of the strategic documents we developed with the help of the ETF in those years are highlights for me too, not only because of the importance of their contents, but also because they incorporated and promoted this spirit of partnership," says Birzea. "The

The ETF's persistent drive for partnership bore fruits that can be harvested in the years ahead



Cesar Birzea has followed the ETF's interventions in Romania for over a decade

Photo: ETF/Alberto Ramella



National Strategy for Human Resources Development that we developed with the support of the ETF became fully integrated into the *Romanian National Development Plan* of 2000. Later on, drawing up the *National Employment Plan* was yet another one of those exercises in working together.”

Work very often spilt over into other domains. Vocational education and training cannot be seen in isolation from labour market issues and social affairs. “The Special Preparatory Programme for the ESF helped Romania and Bulgaria anticipate co-funding mechanisms of the type that the European Structural Funds use and that we enter into competition for from 2007. In Romania, we started out with capacity training in preparation for the Social Funds. This was badly needed. We then developed a national contest for ESF-type projects, and ran small-scale projects at the 20 winning schools.”

Working on sectoral partnerships

Finally, in the last few years, working together was taken to its most literal level with the work on sectoral partnerships in

education, training and qualifications. Today, one of the most critical issues on the road towards true lifelong learning is securing the involvement of employers and social partners in the development of their own sector by strengthening its human resources. Romania has made impressive progress here and is now an example for other countries working on these issues.

Birzea sticks to his belief in the working philosophies of the ETF: “The thing you have to give the ETF credit for is that it never sends a contingent of experts to tell us what to do. Instead it offers partnership, expertise sharing and later on policy learning. We learned from and with our peers in the European Union, but also in countries such as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. With Moldovan and Ukrainian colleagues we engaged in a mutual evaluation of continuing training. This work resulted in a manual that is used in all three countries today. It is this working method that has been so particularly helpful and that the ETF must continue to refine and operate in other countries.”

Of course, this is not to say that there aren’t any drawbacks to the methods of ETF

involvement. “The smaller budget for direct support has its limitations,” Birzea concedes. “Projects may provide a good foundation for further development but if the funding to follow them up properly is lacking, there is a risk that the effects do not reach the critical mass required for substantial change. But this is not something within the control of the ETF. Potentially more damaging is the risk of raising false expectations – a risk the ETF must be constantly aware of in its work.”

“But even if more money could be made available, I doubt if the ETF ever should get involved in further implementation and financing of it. Instead of extending the work of the ETF to beyond where it has proven its added value, it should try to encourage follow-up activity by getting other donors more closely involved right from the outset. The ETF can then fully concentrate on the long-term implications of human resources development and retain the incredible value for money it offers.”

Find out more:

Romanian Institute of Education Sciences: <http://www.ise.ro/en/>

The thing you have to give the ETF credit for is that it never sends contingents of experts to tell us what to do...

Cesar Birzea

Cesar Birzea is the director of the Romanian national Institute of Education Sciences. He holds a teaching chair at the University of Bucharest where he teaches education policy and European policy. He currently chairs the Education Committee of the Council of Europe, of which he has been a member since 1993.



Photo: ETF/Alberto Ramella

SOUTH EAST EUROPE FOCUSES ON THE DUAL ROLE OF TEACHERS

by Søren Nielsen



Photo: ETF

Participants at the sixth annual VET teacher training workshop in Belgrade, 14-16 September 2006

Teachers have a dual role in any VET reform. They are professionals working at the rock face of the education system, but at the same time they are stakeholders in the system and therefore have an interest in the success of any attempts to improve it. All too often, VET reforms tend to focus on this first role to the exclusion of the second. However, there is a growing recognition that failure to fully engage teachers and trainers as active participants in the reform process is one of the main reasons why many educational reforms the world over have gone wrong in the past. This is why the dual role of teachers as both working professionals and vital stakeholders in the VET reform process was chosen as the main theme of the ETF's 2006 annual conference on VET teachers and trainers in South East Europe.

This, the sixth event of its kind, brought together members of the ETF's VET teacher training network in Belgrade from 14 – 16 September 2006. The three-day programme consisted of plenary sessions, workshops and visits to key institutions and

schools. Some 30 VET specialists, typically a small group including representatives of the ministry of education, teacher training institutes and schools, from each of the 11 countries invited, attended. The network is made up of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Several EU countries, including new EU member Slovenia, as well as candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey also take part.

The conference is part of an ongoing dialogue which aims to stimulate and share good practice in VET teacher training, with a particular focus on the role of teachers in VET reform in the countries of South East Europe. Throughout this region, radical VET and labour market reforms are underway which affect the role of teachers and trainers and call for new skills. These include the increased autonomy of schools, student-centred learning, a competency-based approach to programme design and the policy of adapting VET schools to the needs of local

labour markets and communities and of all students, including adult learners.

Teacher training needs more attention

However, in an environment of rapid change, the reform of teacher and trainer education has lagged behind VET curriculum reform in many countries. Moreover curriculum reform is typically interpreted narrowly as content while neglecting its implications for methodology, such as how to organise new learning processes. All of the countries are currently designing and implementing VET reforms, to a considerable extent driven by foreign donors – but they are often undertaking the same activities but without learning from each other. It is in response to these challenges that the ETF has established the VET teacher and trainer network in South East Europe. The aim is to help people share innovation and best practice across the region.

It is hoped that each participating team will take home fresh ideas from the conference which can then be used as inputs to national policy development and to upcoming CARDS (soon to become IPA) and other projects. They may also conduct teacher training development tasks inspired by the conference to promote this dialogue and networking in terms of policy, training provision and practice. The conference discussions raised several key questions; what can be done to help schools become learning organisations and mediators of VET learning policy? How can national policy initiatives benefit from the innovations that individual teachers and schools are undertaking? How can teacher training and development be brought closer to schools and enterprises?

...in an environment of rapid change, the reform of teacher and trainer education has lagged behind VET curriculum reform

Difficult questions for the ETF

There were also tough questions for the ETF. If teachers are to take on more of an active role in the reform process, this will oblige the ETF in turn to adopt a radically different approach to its work. It may find itself shifting from being the controlling taskmaster that provides knowledge and solutions to the partners to more of an enabling role as a broker of information and a learning facilitator. But the question remains – how should this new function fit in the VET teacher training network?

The conference discussed the on-going transformation of VET systems and the changing role of VET teachers. A particular form of policy learning became a most innovative, albeit unintended, part of this genuine learning conference. The key questions above were discussed in a panel discussion chaired by Ms Donka Banovic, chair of the standing committee on education in the Serbian parliament in the Serbo-Croat language. The discussions turned out to be so lively, informative and to the point that it was decided to continue the panel discussion by having questions from and an open debate with all plenary participants. It turned out that the excellent chairing of the panel by Ms Banovic is no coincidence. The conference learned that the Serbian parliament regularly invites key actors, academics and professionals to similar

preparatory events on educational policy to help policymakers shape policy options. This experience made clear that the ETF may be underestimating the quality and breadth of ongoing national educational policy debate in the partner countries. This may mean that initiatives for policy learning can be established on existing learning platforms, at least in some countries. The ETF will look into this possibility in the near future.

Looking to the future of the network

The VET teacher training network has already achieved a great deal as a platform for dissemination of EU as well as local policy developments and as a forum for stimulating joint initiatives. But delegates stressed the need to anchor network activities in national institutions to give it more sustainability. New national VET centres in Albania, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia are already members of the network. Institutions covering education but not solely dedicated to VET also exist in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. The next phase could support these new institutions within the broad framework of the network. This could be done by linking the ETF's ongoing activities in the fields of policy learning, development of teachers as professionals and stakeholders in VET reform with

SOUTH EAST EUROPE FOCUSES ON THE DUAL ROLE OF TEACHERS



Photo: ETF

Looking to the future of the teacher training network

a sharpened focus on how international assistance can better contribute to sustainable reform of national education systems. Experience has shown that educational reforms will only succeed if local stakeholders are in the driving seat. So local knowledge and initiative must always be the starting point for change. For this reason, the next phase will take a peer learning approach, focusing on how to organise policy learning platforms and environments in and between the countries involved.

The network will thus use this knowledge-sharing approach to help decision-makers, staff from VET schools and the wider VET teacher training network learn about VET reform experiences from elsewhere when formulating their own reform objectives. The network will test the principle of participating in 'Communities of Practice' as the best way to achieve certain learning outcomes, to measure the professionalism of VET centre staff and to make them stakeholders in reform. The ETF will support a development project over the next few years with a focus on key areas. Knowledge about action at an operational level should also lead to action at tactical and strategic levels in the internal organisation of participating VET centres. Knowledge sharing will be integrated into work processes that create value for the VET centres.

Søren Nielsen is the ETF team leader for the organisation of learning processes and teacher training in the Western Balkans

The VET teacher training network has achieved a great deal as a platform for EU and local policy developments

Photo: ETF



Conference participants discussing the on-going transformation of VET systems and the changing role of VET teachers

WOMEN IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN 2010: FROM A WOMAN'S POINT OF VIEW

By *Evgeniya Koeva*

"You must study" – these were the words that echoed in the Woman's ears while she was sitting on the veranda and having a cup of coffee after a heavy morning. These were the last words of her grand-grandfather that he whispered to her grandmother before he was executed by the communists for some unknown reason. He was sentenced by the "people's court" which was formed by the governing communist party with the horrible purpose to get rid of those that had served the king or been suspected of opposition activity against the new regime. No one told her then 10 year old granny and her mother on what grounds the head of their family was murdered – there had been no trial process, no publicity and no respect for human rights. There were only a decision of an illegal court...and a wish of a desperate father who tried to formulate his best fatherly advice in just a sentence. Unfortunately, the Woman's grandmother could not completely follow the advice, as she was not allowed to continue her studies at university. The same restrictions applied to all children of "the people's enemies" no matter how bright, ambitious and potential they seemed to be.

"Thanks God it is different now", the Woman was thinking. In 2010 you were not likely to witness a brutal murder like her grand-grandfather's in Europe, nor be deprived of your right of education. Bulgarian society had long ago condemned the destructive role of communism and recognized democracy as the only legitimate form of governance. Bulgaria was now a member of the European Union that had never before been so close to its Lisbon goal of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Vocational and life long training and education had long ago been promoted as

major values of modern European society and more and more European citizens were benefiting from various related programmes on local, national and international level. The Woman herself had passion for education. It was more than 15 years ago when she graduated from university with a Public Administration major as one of the top 10 students of her class. The Erasmus programme gave her the chance to complete her M.A. in France where she could establish contacts and strike friendships with a number of native and international students. "It seems that people come from different planets", she thought at the beginning of her first experience abroad as she was curiously exploring the cultural diversity that surrounded her. It did not take her a lot of time to realize that people actually shared much in common, and freedom of mind was the most important thing you needed to fit in. Countries were also different. And France was different. From her home country. The Woman was surprised to find out that access to vocational education and training was rather facilitated, and citizens were encouraged to enroll in vocational courses under various training programmes. Bulgaria was still a step behind at that time. Provision of such training and education was mainly a priority of high schools and universities. Middle aged and even younger Bulgarians were not particularly willing to enhance their professional qualification or add another value to their higher education by enrolling in a vocational training course. "I will not get promoted, because I can't possibly cope with the new accounting programme", the Woman's cousin once complained. "Well, why don't you sign in a course and get a certificate?", the Woman suggested. "I've already graduated from university. Enough is enough. And besides, I don't have the time", her cousin replied. She never got the promotion though.



Photo: ETF/Alberto Ramella

Evgeniya Koeva, author of the essay on Women in Education and Employment in 2010

Things changed a lot over the last ten years. It was due to the new way of understanding vocational education and training that was promoted through the pre-accession instruments and initiatives, and later – through the structural funds. A lot of training programmes were launched and a lot of projects with VET components were implemented in Bulgaria to fight unemployment and social exclusion. Provision of VET, on its part, was greatly decentralized and a good number of organizations with adjoining VET centres established themselves as quality training providers. The role of experts increased. Human resources management gained popularity in the country and companies began to identify training needs in their fields of activity and hire VET bodies and institutions to organize relevant trainings. Investment in human capital was not only a proclamation of the European Union, but also a real priority of almost every business in Bulgaria.

"Not like in communist times", the Woman sighed with relief, recalling her grandmother's stories about her unfulfilled dreams to study Economics at university. The government did not allow her granny to reach out for a brighter future, but it also did another thing – it deprived society of what an individual could have contributed to its development if access to education had been free for everyone. The world was full of sadness. The Woman had a sad story too. She had a fight with her husband in the morning. It was not an unusual thing to happen, but this time they did lose their nerves over each other and both agreed that a divorce should be arranged. Her husband was very drunk and started nagging at her about her "career obsession" and "painful ambitions". He reminded her that she was not as intelligent as she considered herself to be and that she could never make it without him by her side. The Woman frowned. Was it her mistake to have

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married this man, or married at all? Was there any truth in what he said? What was the "perfect family" formula? It was as if yesterday when all her close friends and relatives assured her that she was too young to settle down and encouraged her ambition to study and acquire professional skills and knowledge. On the other day she found herself with a husband and two little kids, and on the verge of breaking down. At the beginning she was full of enthusiasm and absolutely sure that she would be a perfect wife and a perfect mother. It was shortly after she returned from a traineeship at the Committee of the Regions when she met her husband and fell in love. She felt blessed to experience professional and personal life success like that. She was one of the few young European citizens that were invited to a traineeship period at the Committee of the Regions after a long selection process. The Committee's officers were impressed by her educational background and professional experience which were quite indicating to the Woman's interests in regional policy and development. Strategic Planning for Regional Development and Local and Regional Management were main courses of the Master's programme that she attended in France and that inspired her to initiate her professional experience in a relevant field. Her two year experience at the Ministry of Regional Development in her home country provided her with a practical approach to tackling regional disparities and implementing measures in accordance with identified needs. The Woman soon

proved to be one of the most successful young experts working in the ministry and was appointed a leader of an expert team that needed to complete research and analysis assignments. "I am just fully taking advantage of what I've studied", she told a co-worker who was astonished by her competence of regional policy. "And you need to have the passion". She could notice that many of her colleagues did not actually enjoy working at the ministry. Some of them were just happy enough to have a job in a state institution and never asked themselves if the position they held matched their education and talents. The Woman found the answer to this question as soon as she was offered the job. The ministry funded her participation in two vocational training courses – one in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, and the other – in Business Administration that further enhanced her knowledge of regional policy. Then a new opportunity followed and she won a scholarship for the Regional Administrators and Managers Programme that was offered by the US Georgetown University. She could design an impressive business plan that indicated the reasons for her visit and results she intended to achieve. Her study tour to America proved to be experience of a lifetime. American approach to education was somewhat different from the one she had already known, but it had its specific flavour and provided her with the opportunity to look at regional development from another perspective. Besides, the Georgetown University was one of the most prestigious higher



educational institutions in the United States and the Woman could indeed appreciate the quality of courses performed and professionalism of lecturers involved. The best thing of it all was comparison between Europe and America. She was fully aware of the competition that existed between the two continents. But even at the end of her training programme she could not tell which one of the two was better. They were unique and charming in their own special way and they both excelled with VET provision.

France had once astonished her with a diversity of cultures and nations, and the States had more to offer her. She met a guy from Syria, Walid, with whom she had a heated debate over women's status in Arab society. "I'll never let my sister come here and study at university", her Syrian friend said. "A woman's place is at home. She should raise her children and be a faithful and decent wife. She needs no education to do this." The Woman was shocked. Walid spoke so confidently of the matter, as if it were the most natural thing the world had ever known. The Syrian told her just as calmly that his neighbour had beaten his wife to death several years ago, because he had suspected her of adultery. "I don't blame him. A woman that's unfaithful doesn't deserve to live".



Photo: ITCL/OM, Montesano



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The Woman tried to overcome her horror and explain the Western understanding of genders and that men and women were treated on an equal basis. She told Walid that attitude to women in his country was obviously more than cruel and that no other definition but “slaves” could be attributed to poor Syrian women. Her friend did not seem to bother much. He just smiled and said that every Western citizen would respond this way. “Western women are as much slaves as ours. At least we respect and love them. We don’t make them keep diets and look like skeletons. We don’t make them look younger and undergo surgeries. We like women as they are.”

Walid was one of the many interesting persons the Woman met in the States. While contemplating on the various characters she came across during her stay overseas she felt satisfied to have learnt so much about the others. Not that she liked most of it, but it helped her a lot to define her own position and recognize her true identity. The Regional Administrators

programme, on the other hand, turned out to be a perfect supplement to her background in the field. She returned home as confident as she should be and soon afterwards applied for a traineeship at the Committee of the Regions.

The woman smiled as she remembered the special atmosphere this period of her life had. If only she could turn back time – she would gladly experience these several months over and over again. No family commitments, no fights, no concerns about children, no competition at the working place. It was so much easier to be a diligent trainee and acquire skills and knowledge in areas she had come to love and chosen for her future realization. Things did not alter much over the coming years. Successful career and personal happiness were two sides of a coin – the Woman could not simply have them together.

Her personal misfortunes began when her second son was born. From that moment on time was the hardest thing to manage and use rationally. It was impossible to pay attention to your little kids and husband, see to all exhausting housekeeping and progress in your job. Especially when you had invested so much in your education and wanted to contribute to the development of your community. Lack of time and weariness made the Woman and her husband nervous and provoked frequent scandals and fights that seemed to scare love away. It had been almost an year since she moved to a place of her own with her two sons.



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“Men hate it when women are better educated than them”, a friend of hers told her when troubles in the family started. Maybe she was right. Maybe the Woman should have concentrated more on her private affairs, than spent so much time in gaining knowledge. And then she thought of it again. She thought of all the happy moments that education and training had brought around. The latest success she had was her promotion at the national Agency of Regions where she was currently holding a post. As a member of the voting commission told her, no one could resist a CV like hers. She was appointed a head of the Structural Funds department, and her salary – almost doubled. For the first time, in 2010, she

Photo: Farf



could feel independent. The Woman poured herself another cup of coffee and lit a cigarette. She contemplated over independence - she could have never been able to understand its true meaning if she had not struggled for it over the years. "I can't afford to leave him just for economic reasons", this same friend said. She had to bear her husband's love affairs, as she was entirely dependant on his money. It was not the case with the Woman. No matter how hard life sometimes was and what hardships she needed to overcome, no one could force her to live a life that she disliked. The Woman was relieved to know that she was able to provide for her children's needs and maintain a decent life with what she earned. Independence – the word had never before had such a sweet flavour to her. That was the role of education and training and the Woman knew she owed her independence to the skills and knowledge she had acquired during the years of training at home and abroad. She did not have any idea of what would become of her marriage and whether a divorce would be finally agreed with her husband. She searched for any trace of love somewhere deep in her heart and thought that maybe her marriage deserved a second chance if both parties worked out a compromise. In any case she was comforted to know that no matter what destiny would bring she would stay on her own. Not every woman had an opportunity like that. Her cousin who once was unwilling to raise her qualification, her friend that needed to tolerate a husband she disliked and many other women around her were still dependant on someone else and scared of initiatives. At least no one had restricted their access to education. But there were different countries and different customs. The Woman recalled Walid-her Syrian friend. Was it possible that even now, in 2010,

some women were still kept uneducated and taught that raising children was their primary and utmost obligation? The Woman definitely preferred to keep a diet. She felt sorry for all women around the globe that were treated as lower than men, like that woman that had been beaten to death by her husband. She was sure that most of them had never had access to education, as well as the opportunity to display their potential and talents. Vocational training and education had granted the Woman recognition by her community. She was SOMEONE at her working place and the promotion would further bring respect to her career way. She knew who she was and what she wanted. Her international experience had taught her how to approach various mentalities and she had never been in conflict with her co-workers or those she contacted every day. Training and education helped her to take efficient decisions and implement well sustained measures that were mostly orientated to tackling regional problems. It was due to the efforts of people like the Woman that her home country was currently experiencing an economic boom and leveling with other West European countries.

"You must study"... The Woman tried to picture the painful goodbye meeting of a father and a daughter. He was only 35. The Woman recalled his face from the faded black and white photos she had seen – he had been such a strong and handsome man. How must he have felt to know that he was leaving his young wife and little kid all alone? But now the Woman was sure that her grand-grandfather could not have provided his daughter with a wiser advice. Some truths are universal and eternal...And she knew that from her own experience.

Bulgarian Evgeniya Koeva, 24, submitted this essay as part of a competition related to the ETF Conference on Women in Education held in March 2006. This contribution won her a prize and she is currently carrying out a practical placement with the ETF in the Externazi Communication Unit. Prior to this she worked as a project consultant and coordinator for a consultancy company on issues related to PHARE project management and as an expert in international relations and translation with the Municipality of the city of Varna. With a bachelor's degree in European Studies from the 'St. Clement Ohridsky' University of Sofia, she is now following a Master's degree course in European Research at the same institution. Ms Koeva is also president of the Youth for United Europe NGO and is a volunteer in its Graffiti and Youth for Europe projects.



Photo: ETF/Alberto Ramella

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Publications Office

Publications.europa.eu

ISSN 1725-9479



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